

Shimpling Parish Meeting
Minutes of Annual Assembly of the Parish
Monday 11th May 2026, 6:00pm held at Shimpling Village Hall

Present:

Councillors: Liz Brunwin, Gerry Shrimpton, Mark Milhench, Jen O'Reilly-Turner

Clerk: Natasha Byford

Public: Three members of the public attended

1. Minutes of last annual meeting:

The minutes of the last Parish Assembly on 12th May 2025 were confirmed.

2. To receive reports for representatives of the parish:

1. Chair's Report:

The Clerk read out the report that Chair Dunkley had written gave the following report:

Good evening, everyone and thank you for joining us tonight at the Annual Parish Assembly.

This evening is an opportunity to thank the people who have helped to keep the village running and in good order throughout the past year and to highlight some of the work done by the Parish Council.

So let me start by thanking my fellow Councillors for their efforts during the year. There have been some long meetings along with the considerable background reading that informs those discussions. Also, attending co-ordination meetings, meetings with other councils and service providers, especially due to local government reorganisation, has been a growing requirement.

Our clerk is Natasha Byford, and the Parish Council could not run without her conscientious efforts throughout the year. Parish Clerks do an essential and important role, providing continuity, legal and procedural expertise and advice to councillors. We are extremely lucky to have Natasha.

But our village needs many other individuals and organisations, some represented here tonight, working hard to keep the village clean and looking pleasant, keeping residents informed and delivering companionship, fun and entertainment. My apologies now if I do not manage to include everyone who has helped.

Highlights of the year included:

Litter pickup day, an annual event, which was again well supported by the village and organised this year by Liz Brunwin. It also included some back breaking work in re-levelling the stones in the village hall carpark. Throughout the year Steve, and others, have also provided an ongoing rubbish and tidy up service on their regular walks around the village.

The "Village Library" needed some TLC to bring it back to its best and this was gratefully undertaken by David and Linda Campan. It's good to see that it is so well used by the village and well managed by Mandy.

One of the highlights of the year is the Christmas tableau. This alongside re-siting of the bench and generally helping fix and put things up has been done by Laurence Rooke and Ted Pine with others assisting as necessary. We must also thank Sue and Graham who provide the free electricity every year.

In January a Thermal Imaging Camera was made available to residents to see how well their houses were insulated and helpfully was linked to potential improvement grants. Jen O'Reilly-Turner organised the sessions which were enlightening.

As always, thanks go to Chris Cooke from Lark Valley Landscapes and his employees for their efforts in again keeping the village grass looking good.

As ever the village newsletter provides an invaluable service to the village, guiding people to our key hubs of activity; St George's Church, the Bush public house and the village hall as well as sharing important local information. Many thanks to Sarah Smith for all her hard work in putting such a great looking magazine together.

The Village Hall Committee continue to do a wonderful job of introducing new events to our community together as well as continuing with ones which are already popular. You will hear more about their work later. The Parish Council is pleased in its continuing support of the village hall to ensure its continued success.

Much of what the Parish Council does is with the grateful support of our County and District Councillors, Richard Kemp, Stephen Plumb and Michael Holt. We thank you for always being responsive to our requests for help; it is much appreciated. I should say, by this time hopefully Richard has finally been allowed to retire, and we wish him well in his future endeavours.

Some multi-year projects are moving forwards, albeit in some cases slowly. I reported last year that the Village Hall lease had been signed. Unfortunately, it has taken a further year to get all the paperwork dealt with satisfactorily, through no fault of the Richard's family or the Parish Council.

The introduction of Electric Vehicle chargers at the Village Hall has also seen delays. In this case it is because the initial company doing the installation decide not to go forward with the work. A new company is taking on the responsibility but as expected, they are starting from scratch so there is still no go-live date. Thanks to Gerry Shrimpton for getting us this far.

Some people will have noticed that we now have an improved bus service to the village. Throughout the year Gerry has worked with the various transport organisations to get the extra buses even in these difficult financial times.

I have left one of the most important projects to last. Again, I hope people have noticed and been involved with the development of our Neighbourhood Plan. This is important because it will help define how our village goes forward. The open day in January gave an opportunity to see the draft plan and make comments. These comments, alongside others from other interested parties have been reviewed and the plan amended accordingly. Once approved by the Parish Council the plan will go to Babergh for consultation and examination after which there will a referendum so the village can vote on the final version. Hopefully that will be late this year or early next. Suffice it to say there has been considerable work in getting this far and a well-done is deserved. The team was ably led by Claire Douglas-Hughes and consisted of Jane Wall, Mark Beaver, Mike Fahie-Wilson and me.

2. Finance Report for 2025/26

The Clerk gave the following report:

1. This is the end of year report of the Parish Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer (RFO), closing the last financial year accounts and opening new accounts for 2026/27.
2. **Finance Report:** Total income for last financial year 2025/26 was £14,713.75 including the precept. £923.75 in receipts from recycling, bank interest, newsletter advertising. The Parish Council made payments to a total of £15,107.26. Funds of £21,717.52 were carried forward this year as follows:

Treasurers Account: **£3,392.18**

Business Account: **£18,325.34**

Total Reserves: **£21,717.52**

This includes £3,061.56 of CIL money, leaving the PC actual operational reserves of £18,655.96, slightly more than the start of the year.

This is a much better position than was budgeted for, mainly due to recycling credit received and budget underspend. There was an underspend on this year's budget.

The PC also received £375.03 from recycling revenue, which is not included in the budget as it is a completely unknown income.

Reserves: We have already allocated most of these reserves when the budget was created at earlier meetings.

	31/03/2026
VH Maintenance	£ 3,750.00
New Laptop	£ 1,500.00
Play Equipment	£ 2,750.00
Neighbourhood Plan	£ 1,726.78
Total Earmarked	£ 9,726.78
CIL	£ 3,061.56
Total General	£ 8,929.18
Total Reserves	£ 21,717.52

We are in a healthy financial position. We can now operate in a crisis, for example, if Babergh were unable to forward our precept payment.

There was no borrowing last year. No tenancies entered into. The lease on the Village Hall runs to April 2044. There were CIL receipts of £0 made to the council for 2025/26. CIL spending anticipated in the 2026/27 financial year is £0 currently.

Budget for 2026/27: A Budget was approved in November 2025 of £15,725.00. The precept was set to raise an income of £15,205.00. Total income for year estimated at £15,725.00 from the precept, bank interest and newsletter advertising.

3. **Internal Controls:** All finance practices follow the Financial Regulations adopted by the council and published on our website. They are managed by the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and supervised by the members of the council. The accounting software Scribe and online banking with the two signatories are still working well for the Council, being a secure process and allowing suppliers to be paid faster.

4. **Audit:** The Audit for last year commenced on 18th April, once again, Suffolk Association of Local Councils is to be appointed. PFK Littlejohn LLP have been appointed to carry out the external audit of small local councils.

The Clerk invited questions, there were none.

3. **District Councillor Michael Holt and Stephen Plumb**

Cllr Holt and Cllr Plumb couldn't make this meeting and there was no annual report.

4. **County Councillor Richard Kemp**

Cllr Kemp couldn't make this meeting but Cllr Milhench read out his report which is summarised below:

Personal Message from Richard Kemp

After 33 years serving as your County Councillor for Melford Ward, the time has come for me to step down as I retire from public office.

Looking back, it has been a true privilege to serve our parishes and to work alongside so many dedicated people who care deeply about their communities. I have always done my best to represent your interests, to listen, and to support you through both the challenges and the successes we have shared over the years.

I am deeply grateful for the kindness, trust, and friendship that I have been shown throughout my time in office. It has meant more to me than I can properly express. As I step back, I do so with great pride in our communities and confidence in their future. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your lives for so long.

With my very best wishes to you all *Richard Kemp*

Council Budget 2026-27

In February 2026, the council set out and voted on its budget for the coming financial year, including its intention to take the maximum 4.99% increase in council tax.

Even raising council tax to the maximum, it will still have a budget 'gap' of £5.9m this year which it will have to fund from council reserves. It set a £46.5m target for savings across the council, with more planned in further years to keep the council financially sustainable. The main cost pressures are for social care in adults and children's services, which the council has to provide by law whatever the cost. Future savings will need to be made to service the council's predicted budget gap for 2027-28, which it estimates will be £23.4m.

The council also has an enormous debt for provision of services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities held under the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is described as a 'negative reserve' as the council is allowed to hold the debt, with the government recently providing an override for it until the end of March 2028 and an agreement to fund 90% of each council's DSG debt later this year.

This will still leave the council with many millions of DSG debt though, and it will keep rising until the council is dissolved in 2028. The council predicts that its DSG deficit will be -£356.4m by 31 March 2028. It also spends millions on interest costs for the DSG debt which affects the council's borrowing ability and its financial resilience.

The government hopes that the spiralling costs for councils everywhere will be mitigated by the Local Government Reorganisation process. This means that from 2028 there will only be three councils in Suffolk to fund rather than six.

Net Zero Financial savings

In January 2026, the annual Net Zero Carbon Budget report was brought to Cabinet to assess the progress of the council towards its carbon reduction goals. Previously the council had an ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030, although as the council will cease to exist in 2028 it has adjusted its target to 63% of carbon emissions by 2027-28. The Cabinet agreed that any new measures for

carbon reduction during the remainder of this term would have to provide in-year financial savings for the council to be considered.

The council's Net Zero work has so far provided £4.8m of savings by reducing electricity and gas use, which is incredibly important at a time when the council is struggling to remain financially resilient. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability, which is the UK professional body for accountants in the public sector, judges that a council has healthy financial reserves if the amount in its Unallocated Reserves fund is at least five per cent of the year's net expenditure budget, and if the reserve did drop below this threshold, the finance officer for the council (Section 151 Officer) would require remedial action.

For 2026-27, five percent of the council's budget is £42.499m, with the amount in Unallocated Reserves being £44.436m. This means the threshold has been met, but only just: the difference is only £1.937m, which means the £4.8m of savings made by the council's carbon reduction initiatives have been critical for financial survival.

In terms of the savings made, these include changes to heating controls in Endeavour House in January and February 2025 where gas use was reduced by over 42% without impacting electricity use, reducing energy costs for the council by £30k each year, and a car park solar array established at Beacon House, comprising three solar canopies with bifacial panels and batteries to capture excess power for use in the building, this is expected to save more than £50k a year.

Council Motions

At council meetings throughout the year, my group passed two motions successfully:

- In May 2025, we proposed that the council ban the giving pets as prizes on council owned land and writes to the government requesting an outright ban on live animals as prizes on both public and private land. The motion referred to animals intended as pets, and excluded farm animals which may be given as prizes by farmers and farming businesses
- In March 2026, we proposed that following the revelations in the media about the 'Epstein files' and the indication that there would continue to be a high volume of press coverage on the subject, that the council release a statement of support for victims of sexual harm and exploitation, and launch a social media campaign so that survivors in Suffolk would know where they can access local advice and support via Ipswich charity Survivors in Transition

My group also proposed several other motions throughout the year which were voted down by the Conservative councillors in the chamber:

- In March 2025, we proposed that Suffolk County Council gain accreditation as a 'Council of Sanctuary' to welcome refugees and displaced people, ensure that services work together to provide support to them, and to establish more 'Schools of Sanctuary' in the county to teach children why people come to UK and how to treat them with kindness and empathy. Currently there

is only one school of sanctuary in Suffolk, whereas Norfolk has thirteen. This was voted down by the Conservative councillors on the basis that this would create extra cost for the council

- In July 2025, we proposed that the council change its procedures to make it easier and simpler for residents and communities to adopt safer speed limits, including 20mph speed limits. The Conservative administration rejected the motion on the grounds that it was preparing a review of this process already (see details below)

- In December 2025, my group tabled a motion proposing that the council recognise the Rights of Rivers in Suffolk, including to be protected from pollution, to flow freely, and to recover from environmental harm, and that the council should work with districts, boroughs, local communities and national agencies such as the Environment Agency and water companies to advocate for healthy rivers and improved water quality. The administration voted this down on the basis that rivers flowing freely suggested that flooding should be enabled, which was not really what the motion was proposing.

Local Government Reorganisation

This year has seen a number of developments in terms of council structure and plans for the future. Following the announcement of Local Government Reorganisation in December 2024, councils in Suffolk had to submit plans to the government in September 2025 stating how many unitary councils should be set up in Suffolk after county councils, district and borough councils are dissolved in 2028.

This means that the services provided by different councils in Suffolk would all be provided by one council for a specific area. Suffolk County Council submitted a proposal to the government for one unitary council for the whole of Suffolk via their 'One Suffolk' campaign.

District and borough councils in Suffolk worked together to agree a proposal for three unitary councils in Suffolk: Western Suffolk, Central and Eastern Suffolk and Ipswich and Southern Suffolk, which includes the county town and Felixstowe.

At the end of March 2026, the government announced that this was the option they wanted to go forward with. The next step will be for elections to the new councils, which will be held in May 2027. The new councillors will then 'shadow' existing councillors for a year until the new authorities are 'vested' from 1 April 2028.

Devolution and the Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Authority

Concurrently with rearranging the councils is the process of devolution in the region. The government announced in December 2024 that a mayoral authority would be set up for Norfolk and Suffolk, with mayoral elections held in May 2026. The mayor and mayoral authority would have responsibility for strategic planning, transport and economic growth for the region and would

include some members from local councils, but with the mayor having the deciding vote on decisions.

In December 2024, the government announced that the mayoral elections would be delayed until May 2028. Following the announcement in February 2026 that the county council elections in May 2026 were back on, the leader of Norfolk County Council announced publicly that devolution was 'off' in Norfolk. However, the reinstated county council elections means it may be a completely different set of politicians in Norfolk and Suffolk taking this forward. Currently, the plan is for the mayor to be elected in May 2028 and everyone in Norfolk and Suffolk will have a chance to vote.

Suffolk Roads Rated Red by UK Government

As you may have seen in the press, the government recently released RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings each county based on how effectively they use the government's highways maintenance funding and the condition of their roads. Suffolk's road maintenance was rated as Red, the worst category.

This has struck a chord with residents in the county, who have been clear that they agree and want the quality of Suffolk's roads to improve. Suffolk County Council's administration, however, has denied that the rating is accurate, saying that overall the condition of Suffolk's roads are rated Amber, with the overall Red rating being arrived at because the Department for Transport did not include in its assessment £10m of highways funding that it brought forward from the 2025-26 financial year and invested early in a resurfacing programme in 2024-25.

The council has met with the Department for Transport to press for the Suffolk rating to be raised to Amber, pointing out that Department for Transport shows that only 3% of the county's A roads is in poor condition, which is better than the England average.

In addition, in December the council received £2.9m from the Department for Transport's Incentive Fund, which rewards authorities with a record of good performance in highway maintenance. The wet weather since Christmas has caused a lot of damage to roads in Suffolk and the council has been active on social media to provide updates to residents and information on how they make their decisions on which potholes and defects they prioritize.

The council's Highways Maintenance Operational Plan is published on the SCC website and details the size and depth of potholes and the number of days it will take to repair them, based on size and depth. If the council has repaired a defect in line with its published criteria, then claims made for damage to vehicles are not likely to succeed.

You can find this document here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/highway-asset-management/highway-maintenance-operational-plan>

New 20mph Policy

You may recall that last summer, my group proposed a motion at council to make it easier and simpler for local communities to reduce speed limits, including 20mph areas. The Conservative administration voted down our plans, claiming that they were already planning to review their processes and would bring this back for agreement at a later date.

At Cabinet on Friday 9 January, the new 20mph speed limit policy was tabled and approved and is now in place for speed limit change requests. The aim of the new policy is to make the process for communities to apply for a 20mph speed limit easier and more streamlined. From now on, any application for a new 20mph limit in an area where recorded average traffic speeds are 28mph and under is likely to be approved by the council.

The local county councillor must also be in favour of the change, and there should be majority support from residents.

My group pointed out that the new requirement to prove majority support for the new speed limit was likely to make the process more onerous for town and parish councils rather than less, as the new process states that local engagement should be carried out to gauge support, for example a survey or consultation of residents living in the area or along the stretch of road where on the change is proposed.

Any new 20mph limits will also still need local funding to be in place, unless the scheme aligns with a council programme as part of the Local Transport Plan. The new policy is based on recording speeds as follows:

- Below 28mph – likely to be accepted, with a speed limit sign only, although signs warning that a 20mph zone is ahead may be required
- Between 28 - 32mph - unlikely to be acceptable with signing alone. Gateway signing and traffic calming throughout the area may be required
- Above 32mph - Unlikely to be acceptable without extensive traffic calming measures such as road humps, plus night-time lighting. It would also be subject to a Road Safety Audit

You can read the new 20mph speed limit here on the council website:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/traffic-management-and-road-safety/speed-limits>

New Funding for Buses and Sustainable Travel

In June 2025 we heard that the council had been given a grant of £8m from the Department for Transport for improving bus travel in the county during 2025-26, of which £2.8m was for service improvements and £5.2m of capital funding for improving bus stops, priority measures for buses on busy streets or upgrades to vehicles.

In December 2025 we heard that Suffolk had been awarded £27m of funding for bus services from the government's Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG), this can be used for routes, ticketing or

improving infrastructure like bus stops and shelters. Previously known as the Bus Services Improvement Grant, communities and parish councils in Suffolk will be able to suggest improvements in their area and 'bid' for funding via the Suffolk on Board website:

<https://www.suffolkonboard.com/>

The council has also been awarded just over £12m from Active Travel England to promote sustainable travel in the county. This can be used to invest in footpaths, cycle lanes and other infrastructure. Examples of how this funding has been used recently include pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich waterfront, and improved cycle routes including from Ipswich Hospital to the waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town's current active travel project.

Libraries Brought Back in House

Following last year's report, the county's library service was brought back in-house at Suffolk County Council from 1 June 2025. Cabinet agreed to put aside £1.8m for the transition period, with the service expected to be back within budget by the second year.

As at December 2025 it had spent £0.6m of this fund, with most of the remaining funds already committed. Since taking the service back into SCC, the council has also undertaken a restructure in the libraries 'central team' which has made savings of £340k per annum in staff redundancies. Front line staffing and volunteering numbers remain the same, with most library users stating when surveyed that they had not noticed a difference in the service provided. Library 'Friends' groups continue as normal, with all funds raised by the Friends being used to benefit their local branch. Those working in libraries have had to undertake the annual training modules which all Suffolk County Council employees have to complete, and also learn how to use the council's HR and finance processes, which is a lot of change initially. In addition, although the council initially honoured all terms and conditions of employment, from April 2026 employment terms and pay will be harmonised with council standards and pay scales.

The transition was reviewed at Scrutiny Committee in March 2026 and during the meeting the libraries team also laid out their volunteer recruitment plan and governance systems for the new service (how it will be overseen). The library service is now part of the council's Public Health and Communities directorate with oversight from the Suffolk Community Libraries Strategic Group which has members from the council and the libraries service.

Suffolk Minerals and Waste Plan

In December 2025, preparation arrangements were agreed at Cabinet for the county's updated Minerals and Waste Plan, which is now five years old and due for renewal. The plan looks at the county's needs and decides what planning measures need to be taken to meet them – for example, aggregates such as sand and gravel which are necessary for housebuilding.

As the government has announced high targets for housing in Suffolk, the county will need more of these materials in future. As the Local Government Reorganisation process means that Suffolk County Council will likely not exist by the time the plan is due to be adopted, the decision made by Cabinet was to undertake all the preparatory work for the new plan and gather evidence for it, so that the new authority/ies who have to publish the plan will be well-placed to put it in place later.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy Approved

In September 2025, the council's Cabinet voted to approve the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which was produced following a public consultation on the draft strategy between April and June 2025.

The strategy is a new requirement for the council, and sets out priority species and habitats for nature conservation in the county, giving advice on how different habitats can be improved by landowners to protect and encourage nature. Most of the area mapped out for Suffolk's nature priorities is private farmland, and the strategy does not make habitat improvement mandatory, but the officers who have produced the strategy will now work with farmers and landowners to support them and work to find investment for the measures outlined in the strategy.

Landowners can use areas mapped in the strategy to produce 'units' of biodiversity for purchase by developers, as developers will be required to meet the government's new Biodiversity Net Gain requirements which state that all development should be increase biodiversity by a minimum of 10%. The units of biodiversity do not need to be on the site of or near the development.

The new strategy should also help Suffolk County Council to improve the land it owns in the county, for example County Farms, and local planning authorities will have to take account of the new strategy when development is considered. In the future, mayoral authorities like the one currently planned for Norfolk and Suffolk will be in charge of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their area.

Following Cabinet approval, the strategy was shared with neighbouring authorities, Natural England and local partners like district and borough councils and the Broads Authority for their feedback.

You can read Suffolk's final and published Local Nature Recovery Strategy here, including an executive summary, which is a much shorter read: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/local-nature-recovery-strategy-lnrs>

Councillors all expressed their thanks to Cllr Kemp for all his work and assistance to Shimpling over the years.

5. Police Report – Steven Coughlan

Steve Coughlan was unable to attend on behalf of the police and no report was sent.

6. Village Hall Committee – Carol Squire

Cllr Brunwin gave the following report on behalf of the VHC:

Finance - It has been another positive year resulting in the maintenance of a steady bank balance. This was assisted by the reduction in electricity bills - the solar panels having generated and exported power to the national grid, offsetting costs.

Changes to the H&S rules has meant some additional expenditure was incurred on testing & maintenance of the fire alarm system - this is required to be completed every 6 months where previously it was annually.

There are still maintenance projects that it is hoped will be underway this coming year, the external render needs attention and redecoration, and the PC are negotiating the installation of an electric car charging point outside the hall so residents and visitors can charge their cars.

Hall Usage and Activities

Regular Events

PILATES classes continue Monday mornings and a Wednesday evening when sufficient people are available.

ZUMBA continues on Friday afternoons.

A new YOGA tutor has been trialled; feedback is being gathered and if positive -she would be asked to deliver regular sessions.

The decision to allow villagers to use the hall free of charge during school holidays was agreed with the hope it would encourage younger members to use the facilities. During February half term the hall was booked by 4 families.

Monthly film nights have also continued, showing some great films, but attendance drops in the winter. Showing films in the afternoon was trialled and positively received. This will be offered again in winter 2026/7. At Christmas, a live streaming of the pantomime from the New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich was shown for families.

The Rural Coffee Caravan visits have also continued, coming to the village hall every 4th Thursday supporting the distribution of invaluable help, information and advice. Babergh Customer Services have been sending a rep to the event and attendees have been able to discuss council related issues and, in many cases, sort out the problem.

Utility Health (now managing Glemsford and Long Melford GP Practices) have also attended - invited by Liz Brunwin and answered questions on the future running of these practices.

Ad Hoc Events -

In August a Barn Dance was held at Shimpling Park Farm with Alpheton VH which was a success. The talented Ceilidh band Catch the Pidgeon played and have been booked again by the PCC this autumn for a Barn Dance to raise funds this time for the Churches.

Arts and Crafts activities continue to be organised and run in the VH.

A Silver Jewellery workshop was held in September where participants made beautiful rings and earrings and a Christmas decorations Pottery Workshop held in November. In March a

Spring Wreath workshop was held and the tutor has been approached to run another in the autumn.

There continues to be occasional private bookings of the hall for local children's birthday parties.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone on the VHC and supporters for all their hard work this year.

Jenny added that the Village Hall electricity bill has come down 48% since the Solar Panels were installed at the Village Hall. There were no further questions.

7. WI – Marion Argent

The Clerk read out a report on behalf of the WI as below;

We have had a successful year, and our membership has remained at the same level. We have had a very varied programme from 'Burlesque, me and the WI' to 'Handbells'. Which all members enjoyed and some took part.

We have also had two of our members give workshops this year. One member showed everyone how to make two simple Christmas cards and the other one taught us how to do Origami which everyone enjoyed, and we got to take our animals home.

We have had a couple of tours this year, one being a tour of 'GB Cocoa' where everyone came away with samples of the chocolate they make and 'Porters Lodge' where they have beautiful gardens. We have also been continuing with our monthly coffee mornings touring the area which has been great fun.

We have a full programme and visits planned for next year which will help us to have a successful year.

We look forward to this next year with your continued support.

8. Halifax Trust – Jenny Pine

Jenny Pine gave the following report on behalf of Halifax Trust:

Objectives

The Halifax Trust was founded in 1863. It provides grants and bursaries prioritised as follows: -

- a) The primary school serving the Parish of Shimpling for special benefits of any kind not normally provided by the local education authority.
- b) Bursaries for people under the age of 25 who either attended the Primary School serving Shimpling, Alpheton & Bridge Street or whose parents live in Shimpling.
- c) If there are funds in any year not required for the above, they may be used for charitable purposes for the general benefit of the residents of Shimpling.

Two meetings were held during the academic year 2025/2026

14th October 2025 and 11th March 2026.

Current Trustees Chairman – Richard Weller-Poley, Treasurer – Mark Haselhurst

Jenny Pine, Darren Hickey, Stuart Palmer & Tina Campan

Distribution of 2025/26 Bursaries & Grants (Autumn Meetings)

Lawshall Primary School

Katie Haslehurst, Vice-chair of Governors, Lawshall School was invited to the meeting to discuss ongoing support. Katie reported that Shakespeare workshops were successful and if possible, they would like financial help to repeat this activity. The school also needed help towards the cost of sending all the children to the pantomime, so that no pupils miss out. £3000 in total was approved for payment to the school.

Bursaries

Twelve bursaries were awarded during 25/26, three more than last year. Seven students studying away from home, and five living/studying from home were awarded the same as 25/26. We are always pleased to receive new of special awards from students and this year Fionn Milhench was awarded a Senior Class Medal by Edinburgh University – School of Physics and Astronomy, Fionn spent a year abroad studying at the Antimatter Factory in Cern on the Swiss border.

Shimpling Village

Help with running costs of two events were made during the year. Nest box building with the greening group was popular with parents and youngsters. A summer dance at Shimpling Park Farm was well attended and raised funds for the village hall and the church.

Finance & Governance (Spring Meeting)

The trustees welcomed Mark Haselhurst as a new trustee and takes on the role of treasurer from Jenny Pine who stands down following 30 years of service to the Trust.

The trust also has a new administrator, Shelley Moore who takes on the role from Claire Wilson. Mark and Shelley both have young families and live in Shimpling.

The Parish Council approves trustees every four years. The accounts and activities are audited annually and regulated by the Charity Commission. Investments are managed by CCLA (specialists

in investments for charities). The performance of their funds continues to be above average and risk to capital below average. Annual income from investments is currently i.r.o £15K. Applications for grants should be received by 30th September, in time for the October meeting. Notices appear in the village newsletters, but please tell anyone you think may be eligible for a grant about the Hallifax Trust. **Application Forms can only be downloaded from via the Parish Council**

9. PCC of St Georges Church – Charlotte Blyth

Cllr Milhench read out the following report on behalf of the PCC:

It's been another busy year in the Chadbrook Benefice, including Alpheton and Shimpling.

Our pattern of traditional Holy Communion services each week at Melford, and monthly at the smaller churches is well established now, and in addition to these there are a great variety of services and informal gatherings happening week by week, involving all ages – the church community in our benefice is definitely growing.

'Connect' toddler group continues to offer a great service to the community, as somewhere for children and parents to meet each week, to play or support one another.

The '4 O'clock Community' meets practically every Sunday afternoon around the villages, with 'Wild Church', 'Messy Church', 'Café Church', 'Shine' informal worship, and more recently with the new initiative 'Sing Lawshall' – a lovely new collaborative venture between Lawshall Church and All Saints Primary School, which is a church-funded initiative, supporting young people singing in our churches. (I think that there were as many as 30 children at the last gathering, with their grown-ups too.)

As if these weren't enough things to fit in at 4 O'clock on Sunday afternoons, there are also some purely social gatherings too, offering people a chance to get to know other in our churches a little better.

I think that our church communities are open and inviting, but the times and nature of some of the traditional services don't necessarily suit everyone, perhaps particularly young families, so it's great (I think) to really open up the church, with these alternative services.

The 4 o'clock Wild Church gatherings that took place in Shimpling and Alpheton this last year included a Dawn Chorus Walk and Apple Day, whilst other 4 o'clock Community events and services happened in Lawshall, Melford and Foxearth.

'Fusion' youth group that meets monthly continues to thrive, with some of the young people attending Youth Alpha this year, and being confirmed as a result!

All these groups: Connect, the 4 o'clock community, and Fusion are led by Nicky, Pam, and Matthew along with input from volunteer leaders, organisers, cooks, and general helpers from our churches.

As ever, children and families are welcome at all the services across the benefice, but there is a dedicated family service at Holy Trinity Long Melford on the first Sunday of each month, and children have been involved with the more formal services at the big feast days of Christmas and Easter too, with a young contingent of singers joining the church choir at Melford for these special services.

The Easter-Day service was again an absolute joy this year, with people from across our four villages worshipping together – it felt like a real family, with all ages, and different church traditions represented, and a pretty-much full church!

Our monthly Evensong Service (on the first Sunday of the month) at Holy Trinity, is going from strength to strength – with a flourishing choir. Do come along for a beautiful, reflective service using the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

The team of Lay Elders in the benefice continues to help with leading worship and some pastoral visiting. It's a real privilege for Richard and I to take a monthly service at The Willows care home, where we see several much-loved familiar faces from our villages.

On to the matter of the fabric of our beautiful churches – the Quinquennial (5-yearly) report on the fabric of the building always brings up a long list of jobs to be done and things to be monitored.

We have not undertaken any big projects since the restoration of the east window at St George's, although the organ at St George's was recently completely dismantled, cleaned, and treated for woodworm, and some parts were renewed. We're appreciating its clearer tone as a result, and it's good to know that it's now in good shape for years to come.

We are currently in the process of appointing a new architect, ready to embark on the replacement of some stonework, and any necessary associated work needed on the south aisle at St George's.

The PCC helps the Rector to keep things ticking over at Alpheton and Shimpling Churches, and we are supported by kind volunteers who maintain the churchyards beautifully.

Particular thanks go once again to Ted Pine and Mike Fahie-Wilson, and also to Mark Jay at St George's, all of whom are very generous with their time and skills.

At the recent churchyard tidy at St George's we once again had a great team of volunteers who made a real effort to make the place look particularly well cared for, something which I'm sure is much appreciated by all those who visit the graves of loved ones, or who come to reflect in the church and in its beautiful setting.

As well as being able to celebrate some growth in the local church this year we had some sad partings – not least the loss of our dear friend 'Father' Henry Heath, whose presence was so very special.

We were so fortunate that he chose to continue leading services and keeping in touch with parishioners so very long into what could have been a very-much quieter retirement, and I think he leaves a big hole in the heart of our Christian community.

That leads me to say a huge thank you to Rev'd Matthew and all of the Ministry Team from all of us, for everything they do leading our worship, giving us food for thought, taking the many special services – the baptisms, weddings and funerals in the benefice, and for caring for those in need, as well as the vast amount of work that goes on behind the scenes.

I always like to take this opportunity to remind folks that the churches are for everyone in the villages, not just the regular worshipers.

They are there for the christenings, weddings and funerals as well as for regular services, Wild Church meetings, and for anyone to sit and reflect – any time – they are regularly open to welcome you.

Cllr Millhench closed the Annual Parish Assembly by thanking everyone.

There being no further business the assembly concluded at 6:57pm.