

Shimpling Parish Meeting
Minutes of Annual Assembly of the Parish
Monday 12th May 2025, 6:00pm held at Shimpling Village Hall

Present:

Councillors: Liz Brunwin, Gerry Shrimpton, David Dunkley (Chair), Laurance Rooke, Mark Milhench

Clerk: Natasha Byford

Public: Six members of the public attended

1. Minutes of last annual meeting:

The minutes of the last Parish Assembly on 13th May 2024 were confirmed.

2. To receive reports for representatives of the parish:

1. Chair's Report:

Chair David Dunkley gave the following report:

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

For those of you who don't know me, my name is David Dunkley, and I am the Chair of the Parish Council.

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. Most of those people do so as volunteers, i.e. unpaid, a situation some villagers occasionally fail to appreciate. But without those volunteers Shimpling would be a less pleasant village.

So let me start by thanking my fellow Councillors for their help and assistance during the year. We have had some long meetings, due to the number of items up for discussion, but the hidden side of the work is the considerable background reading and co-ordination meetings, with other councils and service providers, that are needed.

Our clerk is Natasha Byford, and the Parish Council could not run without her hard work and persistence throughout the year. Parish Clerks do an essential and important job providing continuity, legal and procedural expertise and advice to councillors and we are extremely lucky to have Natasha. This year has been a particularly challenging one for Natasha as she has had to deal with all the usual work, significant extra work with grant applications as well as an addition to her family, Oliver. So, a big thank you to Natasha.

Alongside the Parish Council are many individuals and organisations, some represented here tonight so I will let them tell you of their activities, all working hard to keep the village clean and looking pleasant, providing useful information to residents and delivering companionship, fun and entertainment. My apologies now if I do not manage to include everyone who has helped.

Litter pickup day is an annual event which is well supported by the village. This year, for the first time, it was organised by Gail Singfield. Throughout the year Steve has also provided an ongoing rubbish and tidy up service on his regular walks around the village.

Setting up the Christmas tableau and generally helping fix and put things up has been done by Laurence Rooke, Ted Pine, and Matt Brown amongst others. With this year's Christmas tree being generously donated by Mark Milhench.

Thanks also go to Chris Cooke from Lark Valley Landscapes and his employees for their efforts in keeping the village grass looking good.

The WhatsApp group, the email group, the village website and, not the least, the village newsletter, guide people to our key hubs of activity; St George's Church, the Bush public house and the Village Hall. Many thanks to Sarah Smith for all her hard work in putting such a professional looking and useful village magazine together.

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

Whilst the configuration of the new local government structure is still to be determined for our region, it is almost certainly going to change the relationship the Parish Council has with the higher tiers of government. This makes it all the more important to thank our County and District councillors for the help and support they have given over this year and previous years.

Richard Kemp, Stephen Plumb and Michael Holt, we thank you for always being responsive to our requests for help; it is much appreciated.

We have seen the successful completion of some important projects throughout the year. The new Village Hall lease has been signed giving tenure on the land around the Village Hall for the next 21 years. Many thanks to the Richards' family for agreeing to this.

The solar panels on the Village Hall were installed and have been working well to provide a reduction in energy costs. Although the cost of the project was over £13,000 the net cost to the parish was zero, due entirely to the great work done by Natasha in getting a range of grants.

Other projects are progressing well, such as the introduction of Electric Vehicle chargers at the Village Hall. This is awaiting a revised survey prior to implementation. Gerry Shrimpton has been instrumental in getting us this far. Gerry has also been working to get extra buses for the village. This year saw an additional service introduced, but we are hoping for more.

The Neighbourhood Plan is on track. The resident survey produced some very useful information from the over 100 replies. The responses were fed back at an open day attended by 61 residents and will inform the remainder of the process to generate a plan to go Babergh later this year. The team is me, Jane Wall, Mark Beaver, Mike Fahie-Wilson and is very ably led by Claire Douglas-Hughes. A lot has been achieved by there is still a lot to do.

Finally, I would like to add. The Parish Council occasionally make donations for specific causes we believe important to our village heritage. We were offered the opportunity to provide a plaque by the friends of Lavenham Airfield. In WWII the airfield used land across Lavenham, Cockfield, Alpheton and Shimpling.

The airfield was used by the US 487th Bomber Group and there is a memorial there honouring the 233 aircrew who died on missions from the airfield between 1944 and 1945. We are proud to be able to add to that memorial.

Given we have just remembered the 80th anniversary of VE day, it seems poignant that we have a particular example of the sacrifices made in achieving it.

2. Finance Report for 2024/25

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 2025/26.
2. **Finance Report:** Total income for last financial year 2024/25 was £35,617.71 including the precept. £991.78 in receipts from recycling, bank interest, newsletter advertising and grants of £21,198.00 for the solar panels and neighbourhood grant. The Parish Council made payments to a total of £37,009.60. Funds of £20,490.74 were carried forward this year as follows:

Treasurers Account: **£2,289.12**

Business Account: **£18,201.62**

Total Reserves: **£20,490.74**

This includes £3,061.56 of CIL money, leaving the PC actual operational reserves of £17,429.18, slightly more than the start of the year.

This is a much better position than was budgeted for, mainly due to the grants we have received. There was an underspend on this year's budget.

The PC also received £409.73 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.

	31/03/2025
VH Maintenance	£ 3,250.00
New Laptop	£ 1,500.00
Play Equipment	£ 2,250.00
Lease VH Renewal	£ 1,500.00
WIFI	£ 3,188.25
<hr/> Total Earmarked	<hr/> £ 11,688.25
CIL	£ 3,061.56
<hr/> Total General	<hr/> £ 5,740.93
Total Reserves	£ 20,490.74

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 £9,037.50 made to the council for 2024/25. CIL spending anticipated in the 2025/26 financial year is £0 currently.

Budget for 2025/26: A Budget was approved in November 2024 of £14,390.00. The precept was set to raise an income of £13,790.00. Total income for year estimated at £14,390.00 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 22nd 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

Cllrs Holt and Plumb couldn't make this meeting but the Clerk read out his report which is summarised below:

It has been confirmed that the new Food waste collections for Babergh residents will start from 2026, Funding to begin the new food waste collections in Babergh has been agreed, as part of a nationwide requirement by central government.

During the past 12 months Babergh has continued its work to improve the standards of all its housing stock, this is a long-term commitment which will continue over the next few years.

In November Babergh announced - 'A significant investment in Hadleigh's future' – as the former council offices that are being converted into homes went on the market. The first homes developed at Babergh District Council's former Corks Lane offices in Hadleigh have gone on the market – with the properties hailed as a significant investment in the town's future. Though there is a Forecast loss of £3.4m from the development.

In January, Babergh announced it had 'no option' but to review Joint Local Plan after Government's huge housebuilding hike.

Subsequently, Babergh suspended its Joint Local Plan Part 2 and announced it would work on a completely New Joint Local Plan. This work is now underway.

In January, Babergh removed all Free Parking in its Car Parks and introduced new parking tariffs across the district. We are waiting for the first report to come from the Cabinet to understand the impacts of this change to retailers within our two main towns of Sudbury & Hadleigh and on any uplift in passenger numbers regarding residents using buses instead of cars.

In February the Government launched a public consultation on Suffolk and Norfolk devolution, this was a public consultation on proposals to create a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk.

Both Stephen Plumb and I have again worked together in distributing our Locality Grant money across the whole of Chadacre. (7 Projects)

Stanstead Village Hall £800,

Stanstead PC £280,

Coldham FC £600,

Friends of Glemsford Library £300,

Lawshall Little Saplings Pre School £1000

Hartest Institute £750

Glemsford Friday Café £250.

The LGR & Devolution debates continue at pace, we await more information which will be widely shared with residents when available. Babergh have submitted an initial response to with proposals for Local Government Reform (LGR) which was for two or three unitary authorities. Suffolk County Council submitted a response with a preference for one single unitary authority.

I'm pleased to report that CIL money continues to support community projects throughout the district, several projects within our Chadacre Ward have benefitted from this.

The big conversation in the coming months will revolve around Devolution and Local Government Reform and the implications it will have to the residents of Babergh, by September a final submission and business case must be submitted to Government with Babergh's preference on how many unitary authorities we would like to see.

As has been the case I will endeavour to keep the Parish Council and residents informed through my monthly reports.

I would like to thank the Parish Council for its continued hard work and cooperation throughout the past 12 months.

4. County Councillor Richard Kemp

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

Devolution and local Government Reorganization

Since the publication of the government's White Paper in December, Suffolk councils have been scrambling to develop their proposals for reorganizing local government.

Under the new system, Norfolk and Suffolk will have a joint mayor (with elections held in May 2026) leading a mayoral authority, with two tier government (county councils and district/borough councils) replaced by unitary councils – single councils that undertake all local services like education, adult care, waste collection, housing and highways.

Suffolk County Council's administration have been clear that they would prefer a single unitary council for Suffolk, and they ratified this decision by voting for it in the council chamber on 13 March and at Cabinet on 18 March. Opposition councillors, like my group and the Labour group,

are less convinced that one massive council would bring decision-making closer to the communities, which is what devolution is supposed to enable.

Councils have to submit interim plans to the government by 21 March, then detailed proposals in September, with a decision from government by the end of the year on what will happen. It is likely that councillors for the new council/s would be elected by Suffolk residents in May 2027, a year after the mayoral elections.

Council Budget 2025-26

In February 2025, the council voted to adopt its proposed budget for the 2025-26 financial year. This included approving a maximum rise in council tax this year of 4.99%, including the 2% social care precept for adult care.

The budget this year does not include borrowing from the council's reserves, which was a concern last year. Instead, the budget relies on delivering £28.4m of savings across many council services. Cost pressures for the council include care purchasing for adult social care, Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and placements for children in care.

There is still a lot of concern about the level of debt the council is carrying from the Designated Schools Grant (DSG), a debt which is due to increase this year by £62.175m. Councils are allowed by the government to hold this 'negative reserve' until March 2026. The government is yet to come up with a solution for this issue after that date; many councils are holding enormous levels of this debt which they would not be able to pay off if they had to. In addition, the councils have to borrow money to cover the interest on the debt which affects their finances every year: over 2025-26, the debt will cause a £6.8m cost pressure for the council. The rising DSG debt is mostly for council services for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The council is also forecasting that in the next few years, it will have budget 'gaps' that will only grow: £33.1m for 2026-27, and £96.2m in 2028-29. The council has lobbied the government for better funding – my group proposed a successful motion on this in May 2024. The council hopes that Local Government Reorganization (see above) will make enough savings to improve the medium and long term picture for local services.

Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

In June 2024, the council was subject to an Ofsted inspection of its social care services for children and young people, known as an ILACS inspection (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services).

These inspections are undertaken approximately every three years to judge how the council are performing in their function to support children who are vulnerable and in need of protection. Previously, in 2019, the council had been rated as 'Outstanding', but in 2024 it had dropped two grades and was assessed as 'Requires Improvement'. This meant that the council had to prepare an action plan for improvement, which was submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education. The council has recruited extra staff to and has organized peer reviews with other local authority to learn how to improve practice. It has also established a new Strengthening Services for Children and Families Board chaired by the council's Chief Executive, Nicola Beach. The council particularly needs to improve services for care leavers and ensure that young people leaving care are aware of the support they can access until they turn 25.

Improving Services for Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

Following the poor Ofsted/CQC inspection report published in January last year, the council has been trying to improve SEND services.

In May last year they produced and submitted a SEND Strategy, and in June they produced a Priority Action Plan for improvement, including extra funding of £4.4m to recruit more staff, including Educational Psychologists. In July the council approved an additional £9.1m over three

years to increase capacity to clear the council's backlog of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Annual Reviews. This was funded from council reserves.

In January 2025, the council's Public Health team presented a SEND Needs Assessment for the county at the Health and Wellbeing Board, which forecast that SEND demand in Suffolk has risen sharply in recent years and was likely to continue to rise. It also found that delays in EHCP assessment, ADHD and autism assessment and support, and access to mental health services for young people were unsatisfactory, and in some cases getting worse, like speech and language therapy.

State of Suffolk's Roads

In July 2024, a report was brought to Scrutiny Committee which looked into the condition of Suffolk's roads, the amount spent by the council to repair them and how repair works were prioritised.

The findings were that amount of funding available for repairing highways was around £17m per year, but £50m per year would be needed for an optimal programme of resurfacing. Works are prioritised by the council's Highway Maintenance Operational Plan, which sets out the parameters for repair work and the order of priority repairs. Unsurprisingly, main roads and roads which have a lot of traffic are prioritised over quieter roads which do not.

Having said this, the council is currently undertaking a scheme of resurfacing residential roads which have fallen into disrepair, having announced an additional £10m of funding for this project in May 2023.

Update on Flooding

Following the Storm Babet flooding in October 2023, the council announced it was investing an extra £1m in investigating the causes of flooding and taking action to prevent further floods. As the lead local flood authority, the council undertakes investigations into flooding in the county regularly, but the level of flooding in autumn 2023 meant that far more investigations would need to be made than in other years.

A year later, in November 2024, the council announced it would be allocating a further £1.5m from its reserves to deal with recommendations made in the 10 investigation reports published so far. A further 38 investigation reports have been commissioned by the council relating to Storm Babet flooding. The council also announced it would be writing to the government to request £20m to protect Suffolk from flooding, given that extreme weather will become more likely due to the effects of climate change.

In October 2024, Cabinet agreed a £2m contribution from the council towards protecting the A12 from flooding at Benacre, south of Lowestoft. Erosion of the coast meant that road would likely be flooded at that location at nearly every high tide within a couple of years. The total cost of the works, which includes two new pumping stations, clay embankments and a new saltmarsh, will be many millions, with the Environment Agency committing over £30m and Sizewell C agreeing to fund the rest.

Since then, it has been revealed that the cost may be higher than expected, and the council has agreed to allocate and put aside an additional £2.7m contribution in case it is needed later in the construction period.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Inspection

In February 2025, the government published a report following its recent inspection of Suffolk's Fire and Rescue Service. Inspections for fire services are relatively new, with the first ones undertaken by the Home Office in 2018.

The inspection report was not complimentary; it found that the service was good at preventing fires, protecting the public and that it met requirements for responding to major incidents, but also that it

needs improvement in several areas, including improving culture and morale, and behaviour of senior leaders, who it advised should act as role models and show they are committed to the values of the service through their behaviour, improving communication with fire service employees and making sure they felt confident about raising concerns.

This report was followed shortly afterwards by allegations in the press by the Fire Brigades Union that Suffolk County Council had made mistakes processing firefighter pay and pensions for years and has not addressed them properly or listened to employee concerns about the errors. The council

subsequently announced additional investment of an extra £1.6 million over two years to improve the service.

Suffolk's Library Service

At Cabinet in March 2025, the council administration voted to bring Suffolk's libraries back in-house at the end of the current contract for the library on 31 May. Suffolk Libraries, who have held the contract since the service was divested in 2012, were the only bidder for the contract, but negotiations broke down and the council felt it had no alternative but to bring the libraries back under council control.

The proposal to do this was passionately opposed not just by Suffolk Libraries, but also Suffolk residents and the many volunteers and Friends groups who work for and raise money for libraries in their communities.

Warm Homes in Suffolk

This year saw the end of the Warm Homes Grant fund, in which £5m of government money intended to improve insulation and make houses more energy-efficient was returned to the government unspent by the council.

The reason given for this was that the criteria for the scheme, which was set by the government, was too stringent and meant that many Suffolk families who needed help were unable to access the funding.

There are still schemes available to help with making homes more energy-efficient though; The Suffolk Loft Insulation Offer is funded by the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (which includes Suffolk County Council) and this scheme will only close once the allocated funding has all been spent.

Suffolk County Council is also running a new scheme to offer residents interest-free loans to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes, that includes insulation but also solar panels, glazing and heat pumps. Loans are from £2k to £15K to be repaid over a maximum of seven years at 0% interest, but in order to be eligible, properties must have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band below C. Increasing insulation and making homes more energy-efficient will not only save people money on their heating bills, it is also helping the environment as less fuel will be consumed to keep homes warm.

Please signpost people to these schemes using the links below:

- For the Suffolk Loft Insulation Offers, residents should visit <https://highloft.co.uk/pages/suffolkcouncil-200-loft-insulation-contribution> and fill in the form to receive a discount code
- For the interest free loan scheme, homeowners can check to see if their property has an existing Energy Certificate with an EPC band and record of their property size at gov.uk/find-energy-certificate. They can apply for the vouchers by visiting suffolkenergyassessment.co.uk. This scheme started in November and vouchers are being distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Norwich to Tilbury Pylons

At Cabinet in May 2024, the council voted to object to the proposed Norwich to Tilbury 400kV grid reinforcement and call for a pause until alternative options had been explored.

The proposals which were reviewed included 183k of pylons, with four sections of underground cabling through and near the Dedham Vale National Landscape (the new name for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Waveney valley.

The council were keen that more underground cabling take place in the Waveney valley than proposed, and it was agreed more generally that energy projects in the county needed to be coordinated better to reduce the impact on residents and the local environment, particularly as so many of them are due to be under construction at the same time.

Other councils in the area have also objected to the plans. Since then, the National Grid has confirmed it will not be proposing any further underground cabling in the plans, holding several consultations with local residents which have been largely negatively received.

Motions

My group passed three successful motions at council over the year:

1. In May 2024, we proposed that the council lobby the government for proper, long-term funding for local councils and support policies to address the long-term funding of adult social care. We tabled this motion as the Local Government Association had recently estimated that councils in England will have a funding gap totalling £4bn over the next two years.

Suffolk County Council is predicting a 'budget gap' of £33.1m for 2026-27 so this is a very real concern for Suffolk and will affect Suffolk's local services.

2. In July 2024, my group tabled a motion that the council would do everything it could to avoid delays with local infrastructure funded by developer contributions. We were aware that a lot of local projects that are due to be paid for by developers are very overdue, in some cases for years – for example, new pedestrian crossings for roads where there is new housing. Sometimes these works are due to be undertaken by the developer and the delay is caused by them, but our motion acknowledged that the design and programming of works by Suffolk County Council was also often delayed.

3. In December 2024, my group successfully proposed a policy for the council of 'Roofs before Rural' regarding solar panels. The motion noted that the new Labour government was proposing to triple the amount of solar power in the UK by 2030 and set out the council's position that rooftop solar was preferable to 'solar farms' which are becoming an increasing sight across the county.

The council agreed to write to the government to seek assurances Suffolk's best quality agricultural land would be protected.

My group also proposed the following motions which were voted down by the Conservative administration at council:

1. In October 2024, my group tabled a motion to revise the Highways Maintenance Operating Procedure so that repairs to footways and pavements would be prioritized in areas with heavy footfall, or where a recent fall had been reported. This motion was rejected by the Conservatives.

5. Police Report – Steven Coughlan

Steve Coughlan was unable to attend of behalf of the police and no report was sent. Chair Dunkley added that it is increasingly difficult to get their attendance at any events.

6. Village Hall Committee – Carol Squire

Carol Squire gave the following report on behalf of the VHC:

We have had another productive year resulting in the maintenance of a healthy bank balance despite not having any income from the annual Pantomime which had to be cancelled (insufficient cast members available). This was also having taken on the costs of running the hall e.g. WiFi and annual PAT & firefighting equipment testing

Regular Classes have not fared so well with both YOGA and DANCE CLUB failing to attract enough interested people to make them viable for the tutors, and both have ceased to be available. On a positive note, PILATES classes have started on a Wednesday evening and with attendance from other villagers boosting numbers, these have mainly been well attended.

Carol has continued to engage with Fit Villages lead to secure another evening exercise class, but this has been slow to come to any conclusion. In March we heard that it is still something the lead is pursuing and Henry Lane has also acquired Short Bowls equipment which means SVH will be able to start a short bowls club.

We are also continuing to secure a Table Tennis Coach who will be available to work with young people interested in improving their skills in the school holidays.

Monthly film nights have also continued, showing some great films, but attendance needs to improve to help make a profit on these sessions.

The Rural Coffee Caravan also continue to come to the village hall every 4th Thursday offering their excellent range of home-made cakes savouries and supporting the distribution of invaluable help information and advice.

Ad Hoc Events - The VHC continued the tradition of Shimpling Celebrates on the May Bank Holiday, with the annual cart race and fun and games for all at Hallifax place.

There was a climbing wall, axe throwing, bouncy castle, tug of war and a new event – Egg Throwing Competition. Although this doesn't bring in any revenue it's a fun event for the village. Unfortunately, we are not able to hold the event in 2025 but hopefully can do so again in 2026

August saw us hold a Rock n Roll Dance at Shimpling Park Farm with Alpheton VH which was a success. This year, for a change, we are going to hold a Barn Dance on the 9th August. The highly talented Ceilidh band Catch the Pidgeon are playing and calling. It promises to be a great evening.

At Christmas, we had a live streaming of the pantomime – Sleeping Beauty from the New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich which was tremendous fun and we even had our own Aurora in the audience – its certainly something we will plan to do again this year.

Following feedback from the Neighbourhood Plan Survey, residents said they would like Arts and Crafts activities available in the VH.

A very popular Bird Box making session was held in February and then a Pottery Mug Making Workshop held in March. Unfortunately, a Terrarium workshop and Glass Mosaic Workshop were cancelled as insufficient people booked onto them.

More Pottery and other sessions are planned for 2025.

The village hall has been used by the PCC spring and Christmas markets & wreath making.

We have also been fortunate to have had grants secured by the Parish Council to install Solar Panels and this will help with the rising cost of electricity and bring in income as we would (should) use less than we generate – if the weather is sunny!

There are still a few maintenance projects that we hope will be underway this coming year, one of them is the installation of an electric car charging point outside the hall so residents and visitors can charge their cars.

Finally, I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone on the VHC for all their hard work this year.

7. WI – Marion Argent

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

We have had a successful year and have increased our membership, having had a very varied programme from British sign language to Blood Runners, which is a service run by emergency response volunteers.

We have also had two of our members give talks this year. One member gave a talk on the community nursing team which she works for, with demonstrations on how to treat ulcerated legs by wrapping and giving injections to help. The other talk was on 'Wicked Genes' where Pauline spoke about 'Sanfilipo Syndrome', a rare inherited and lifelong genetic disease that affects the brain and spinal cord which we all found very moving.

We have been on several tours this year, the most memorable being a tour of 'Yum Yum Tree Fudge' which was excellent. Everyone who came to the tour came away with several yummy bags of different fudge. We have also been having monthly coffee mornings touring the area which has been great fun.

We have done some fundraising this year, with members coming together to sell things on Vinted, which has raised around £146 and one member sold table decorations which raised £45.

This was our 75th anniversary year, and we held a celebration for this with our Suffolk West Federation Chairman and our advisor in attendance. During the celebration we had music from a mandolin group which was wonderful, and some superb refreshments provided by our members.

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

Thank you.

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.

Three meetings were held during the academic year 2024/2025

16th October 2024. 20th November 2024 & 26th March 2025.

**Current Trustees Chairman – Richard Weller-Poley, Treasurer – Jenny Pine
Darren Hickey, Stuart Palmer & Tina Campan**

Distribution of 2024/25 Bursaries & Grants (Autumn Meetings)

Lawshall Primary School

Katie Haselhurst, Chair of Governors, Lawshall School was invited to the meeting to discuss ongoing support. Katie outlined theatre workshops in connection with the Shakespeare Festival that the Theatre Royal organize for Bury schools and how much the children had enjoyed and benefitted from this experience. She also requested support for ongoing creative sessions with the children – art has been a strength of the school who have been awarded Gold Arts Mark. Trustees were in agreement these projects should be funded in full as they form an important part of children's development and awarded £2700 an increase of £700 on the previous year's grant.

Bursaries

There were nine bursaries awarded during 24/25. Six students studying away from home, and three living/studying from home. An increase of four on last year, payment amounts were kept the same as 23/24.

Shimpling Village

The 50% balance of the £10,000 towards repairs to the East Window in St Georges Church was paid in November 24. Trustees were pleased to hear that the project was completed in time for the Christmas Eve Service and within budget. Another popular event supported was Nestbox building organized by Green Shimpling in February 2025.

Only 50% of the grant towards pantomime 2025 was claimed as the event was cancelled. Trustees agreed to support a joint village summer barn dance again this year.

Finance & Governance (Spring Meeting)

The Parish Council approves trustees, we have five trustees and an administrator. Our accounts and activities are audited annually and regulated by the Charity Commission. Our 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. Our annual income from investments is i.r.o £14,500K. 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 Halifax Trust. **Application Forms can only be downloaded from via the Parish Council website, suggestions for more effective communication with young people in the village are welcome.**

On behalf of the Trustees of Halifax Trust

It was confirmed that the grant was not means tested. Jenny asked that everyone spreads the word about the grants and that it covers apprentices too.

9. PCC of St Georges Church – Charlotte Blyth

Charlotte read out the following report on behalf of the PCC:

In the benefice (which is Alpheton, Lawshall, Long Melford and Shimpling) there's been lots going on over the last year.

As well as traditional Holy Communion services each week at Melford, and monthly at the smaller churches, there's a great variety of services and informal gatherings happening week by week, involving all ages.

The weekly 'Connect' toddler group offers a great service to the community, as somewhere for children and parents to meet and play or support one another;

The '4 O'clock Community' meets on Sunday afternoons around the villages with 'Wild Church', 'Messy Church', 'Café Church', 'Shine' informal worship and some purely social gatherings too. It's church, but not-as-you-know-it.

Wild Church gatherings that take place in Shimpling and Alpheton include a Dawn Chorus Walk, Apple Day and Dusk Walk, whilst other of the 4 O'clock Community events and services happen in Lawshall and Melford.

Partly thanks to the connections forged in these groups over the last 5+ years the 'Fusion' youth group that met one Friday per month has now got so many young people attending that it's had to split into two meetings, on two different evenings!

The flourishing of these groups wouldn't of course happen without the hard work of the leaders, organisers and volunteers.

Nicky Lawson who is currently training to be an 'Ordained Pioneer Minister' has led and organised many of the activities along with Pam Tonks (the children and family worker for the church) and a band of willing volunteers.

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 getting involved with the more formal services lately too, with a new, young contingent of singers joining the church choir at Melford for the special services at Christmas and Easter.

The Easter-Day service was a real joy, with people queuing to get into what became a pretty-much full church!

There was celebratory music – both informal and more traditional, with the augmented choir and fine organ and trumpet playing. It was a wonderful coming together of all the different groups of people, of all ages, and different church traditions, from around the benefice.

On the subject of music can I draw your attention to the Evensong service at 6.30 pm on the first Sunday of most months (except the depths of winter) where the choir is at full strength to accompany the worship in this beautiful service which uses the traditional language of the 1662 Prayer Book.

There is a team of Lay Elders in the benefice who help with leading worship and some pastoral visiting. It's a real privilege for us 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 are hugely grateful to Rosemarie Sadler (assisted by Liz Brunwin) who took on the massive task of raising around £54,000 to completely restore the east window and surrounding stonework at St George's.

After many lengthy grant applications, several generous donations, and much fundraising we could afford to go ahead with this major project, ably overseen by Rosemarie and Liz with our church architect.

Please do visit the church (it's always open) to see the stunning east window – it was fragile with some small panes missing, but has now been skilfully restored to its former glory.

The PCC helps the Rector to keep things ticking over at St George's, and we are supported by kind volunteers who maintain the churchyard beautifully.

Particular thanks go to Ted Pine and Mike Fahie-Wilson who are hugely generous with their time and skills.

At a recent churchyard tidy we had a great team of volunteers who made a special 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.

We always remember that the church is 'our' church – that is for **everyone** in the village, not just the regular worshipers.

It's 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 – it's always open to welcome you.

It was noted the window looked beautiful.

Cllr Dunkley closed the Annual Parish Assembly by thanking everyone.

There being no further business the assembly concluded at 6:50pm.