

MONKS ELEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Monks Eleigh Village Hall at 7.30pm
on Monday 28th April 2025

Present:

CLLrs– Alan Braithwaite Chairman, Angela Forrest, James Hodges, and Rupert Perry
County Councillor Robert Lindsay and District Cllr Bryn Hurren

In Attendance:

Mrs L Rogers - Clerk
36 members of the public attended

1/25 Apologies

Clare Symes, Carl Mudge, Elaine Thom, Diana Reynolds, Alan Line, Patti Derry, Pat Braithwaite, Christine Nichols, John Naylor, Simon and Jan Kelsall

2/25 Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on 25th April 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and were duly signed.

3/25 County Councillor Robert Lindsay

Locality and Highways discretionary budget spending - I have used up my locality budget for the past year and highways budget which was a lump sum for the past four financial years. I understand I am to be allotted an annual budget for both from April 1. Of relevance to Monks Eleigh in the past year was £250 towards the cost of a flashing speed sign. I also funded a storyteller to visit Bildeston Primary and Hadleigh High to encourage young storytellers of the year. Motions during the year - Of note was my Green, LibDem and Independent group's motion in October to ask for a cross party panel of councillors to look at lowering the bar to intervening for pavement repair (currently they will not repair if the pavement is less than 2cm above the level). The administration voted this down but promised that they would review the criteria they used. We have fed in our request but we have yet to hear whether they will change things. In December 2024 We also got unanimous approval for a motion calling on the government to adopt policies of prioritising "roofs before rural" when it comes to the roll out of solar panels. There is no real reason why solar panels cannot be made compulsory in new builds and planning barriers to solar on existing rooftops can be eased.

Buses including a daily bus between Hadleigh and Stowmarket? I was pleased that in the first round of funding for bus routes, the bus from Sudbury via Lavenham to Bury St Edmunds received funding for extra capacity. I know one or two households in Monks Eleigh area have had problems getting students to college on that bus. I was also pleased to see that the county council are looking again at funding for a daily scheduled bus between Hadleigh and Stowmarket, after rejecting applications that Hitcham, Bildeston and Finborough parish councils made the year before. It makes no sense that there is no regular bus that can get, for example, students or employees to our mainline train station at peak times. I have been told that if the current operator (HCT) does not want to run the service, the council can put it to tender.

Scrips Cross Bridge- There is some silt under the bank side arches of this bridge and residents upstream were concerned that a future storm could flood their gardens/properties. I had attempted to arrange a meeting with Suffolk Highways and the Environment Agency to see what (if anything) could be done. Highways are of the belief that the silt will be washed away if the river

becomes more powerful in a storm. EA were unable to say whether this was the case or not. So Highways is leaving it there.

Local Government centralisation – putting in place a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk and scrapping local districts and county council. It is becoming clear that introducing the Mayoral tier of government will add a new layer of costs, likely eliminating any hoped for savings from merging district and county councils.

The election for the Mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk will happen in May 2026. The current schedule is for elections for a “shadow” unitary council to be elected in May 2027 and the new unitary council(s) will commence May 2028, at which time county and district councils will dissolve. But there are doubts whether the Govt can meet this timetable. Districts are asking for two and preferably three unitaries in Suffolk; the county council wants one. Larger does not necessarily mean cheaper, since many services – such as bin emptying – are already delivered by district councils collaborating in partnership and other services eg public toilet maintenance - are often more cheaply serviced using local contractors and more efficiently provided by those staff and councillors with more local knowledge.

Suffolk Libraries to be brought in house - On Tuesday 18th March the county’s cabinet approved a recommendation to take the Suffolk Library Service in house after they failed to agree a renewal of the contract with the charity that has been running them since 2012. There were no other bidders. Our group attempted to “call in” the decision – giving it another chance to be scrutinised at the scrutiny committee but our call in and that of the Labour group was rejected.

Council Budget 2025-26 - In February 2025, the council budget for the 2025-26 year included approved the maximum rise in council tax of 4.99%, including the 2% social care precept for adult care. The budget does not include borrowing from the council’s reserves, which was a concern last year. Instead, it relies on delivering £28.4m of savings across many council services. The Schools Grant, SEND and adult social care are providing much cost pressure.

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.

There is still not much sign of improvement in Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND). Following the poor Ofsted/CQC inspection report published in January 2024 last year, the council has been trying to improve SEND services. It spent an extra £4.4m to recruit more staff and approved £9.1m over three years to clear a backlog of care plans. But in January 2025, the council’s Public Health team reported that delays in EHCP (care plans) assessment, ADHD and autism assessment and support, and access to mental health services for young people were still unsatisfactory. In some cases, like speech and language therapy, they were getting worse.

4/25 District Councillor Bryn Hurren

Firstly, my sincere thanks to the many who have enquired and wished me well with my knee replacement operation, three weeks last Friday and all going brilliantly well and, hopefully soon, pain free.

On the local government front, the biggest bombshell to be sprung upon us in years arrived just a week before Christmas, with the government white paper to revamp and re-align the way we are governed. The intention is to streamline local services with unitary councils and a mayoral upper tier to cover the Counties of Suffolk and Norfolk with a soon to be elected mayor. In other words, a different two-tier system. As it turns out, the mayor will have far-reaching powers with staff and a budget to match and will work directly with national government. The new unitary councils will do the spadework of running local services and

delivering them to residents, businesses, towns and parishes alike. Will this provide contact down to the lowest level? We will see, it probably depends on your local elected councillor. I've come to rather suspect the motives of national government and its politicians, but this could draw more finance and better services into our area. I am just not sure that having a mayor across two very different Counties is the best way to achieve this.

Babergh District Council continues to punch way above its weight and size on green issues, such as bio-fuel on our vehicles, power generation from council house solar panels, waste reclamation, power from waste and encouragement of wildlife, flora and fauna and general diversity. Also, there is now a slackening on rules for listed buildings, re solar panels and double glazing and encouragement now for solar panels on business units and commercial buildings.

We are now having, as a nation, to provide a million and a half new houses in this parliamentary term of 5 years. In local terms this means 775 houses for BDC per annum, up from 446 last year. My main concern is that most of these really need to be smaller houses that enable people to downsize from bigger properties or move up from smaller homes and the shelter of family providers. Also, can we find the building workforce and materials to keep up this rate of expansion?

Nearer to home I am pleased to see the considerable upgrade of the Causeway area to Back Lane which provides a valuable link between the two parts of Monks Eleigh Village. Also the continuing running of the 112 bus service from Sudbury through to Bildeston village that runs twice weekly.

I have been very happy to help out again with monies from my locality budget, that this year went to help fund the refurbishment of the playing field gate and railings.

So much more going on in Monks Eleigh than I have time to put in my report today but happy to answer questions now, after the meeting or at any time in the near future.

Just remains now to thank our clerk Lucinda and all Councillors who work hard to achieve the very best for our lovely village. All Love and Best regards to all who live in and around the village of Monks Eleigh,

5/25 Chairman of the Parish Council - Alan Braithwaite

In preparing this report I looked back to last year and see that we have made good progress in many respects. So, it is a pleasure to stand before you and explain what we have achieved and our plans for the coming year.

Before I do that, I must extend my thanks and that of the councillors to Robert Lindsay, our county councillor and Bryn Hurren, our district councillor. Both make themselves readily available to give advice and support on issues we encounter and in our relationships with their respective tiers of government.

I must also express my personal thanks to my fellow councillors who have served the village diligently and are a pleasure to work with. Last year I noted that the council does not run at its full complement of 7. We were 3 short but that is now just two as we have been joined by Sarah Bennett. She has proved a great addition, and this is an opportunity to welcome her formally. It still leaves us with 2 vacancies! We will welcome applicants who we can co-opt without election. It really is that easy.

Finally, in the thanks section, I want to recognise Lucinda, our wonderful clerk, who keeps the whole council on the straight and narrow with metronomic efficiency. She is a pleasure to work with and, as you will hear, she has some significant achievements to her name this

year. With her support the role of chair is manageable, and I think we make a good team. Thank you, Lucinda.

Last year I divided my comments into 4 areas: Achievements, Disappointments, Finances and Future Plans. This year I am going to use slightly different headings: External Challenges, Achievements, Finances and Future Plans.

External Challenges:

Parish Councils are the lowest level of government. We have quite limited scope of authority but mostly are left to get on with things. At our March meeting and a special meeting in early April we have been learning that that is changing. The government is fast tracking the introduction of a Mayoral Combined County Authority to cover Norfolk and Suffolk together with a Local Government Re-organisation that will see one or more unitary authorities for Suffolk. We have done some research and analysis; there is a report that can be accessed via the web site and the Facebook page. I won't expand on the detail here apart from the two following points:

1. As part of the government driving for growth, housing targets are being set at Parish Level. We are expected to have an additional 100 houses here within 20 years – an increase of c. 40%. There is no corresponding narrative as to where those people will work, how they will travel, where their children will be educated, the provision of surgery and medical capacity, water and waste and the rest.
2. The local government reorganisation will see our county and district councils merged and we will have a single representative. All the signs are that our representation will be more than halved as wards are made bigger.

In summary we are having these changes imposed on our village over the next 3 to 5 years. We must be ready both to challenge such proposals and adapt where we cannot influence. I am personally disturbed by this, as are the current districts. However, I am not optimistic that their counter proposals will be successful.

Achievements:

Last year we included as disappointments, the 17 vacant houses on the old school site and the dreadful state of the roads with potholes. While we can take no credit that either of these issues have been fixed, it is good to see the houses have been made ready for occupation, being let and occupied and that the roads have been patched.

Your council was surprised and delighted that the outstanding CIL payment on these houses landed in our account early in the year. We had not expected it and believe that we have Bryn and the whole Babergh team to thank for the negotiation with the company that bought the site out from the receiver.

Next year's precept will reflect around a 7% uplift in base once all the houses are lived in. That will mean a pause in any increase in the MEPC precept.

We look forward to getting to know the new occupants and hopefully they will join in with village activities; they are welcome.

The normal business of the council carried on without any remarkable events.

- Grass was mowed
- Bins were emptied
- Play equipment was maintained
- Streetlights were lit

- Local organisations were supported, including the church, shop, food bank, village hall and 112 bus service
- Planning matters were considered and commented
- Litter was picked
- Communications via the Facebook page continues to be appreciated
- The council passed audit and was regulatorily compliant – thanks Lucinda

The big achievements came late in the year.

1. We arranged for the hedge on the A1141 around the pathway exit from Millenium Green to be heavily cut back. This has definitely improved sight lines for traffic but is not the whole solution to how traffic and pedestrians move in that part of the village
2. The Causeway has been completely made over with a new surface and raised so that it should be walkable when it used to be impassable with flooding.
3. Arrangements are in place to put footpath lighting on Church Walk – the work has started and will be finished by SCC in the coming months
4. Both the Causeway and Church Walk projects have been grant funded in the sum of £33,000 by Babergh due to our vigilant clerk and a great relationship with the Babergh Officers. That means that the CIL funding we received for the Friars View development remains unused and available for other projects. We will come back to those options later.

In summary we have two important priorities completed / in progress and the funding to do more.

Finances – Looking back on the actual expenditure vs budget for last year we ran with a balanced budget +/- £500 subject to the audit that will be available for the May meeting. Savings in streetlighting during the 24/25 year, and no need to use the contingencies were offset by additional items elsewhere across the budget lines.

We decided to increase the precept by £1,000 or c. 2% for the year 25/26. It is important to note that CIL and grant money cannot be spent on routine expenditure.

Due to the grant success noted earlier and the CIL receipts, we have cash in hand for future projects not earmarked for Church Walk of around £45,000! That is a good war chest for the future.

It is a statutory obligation that our full income and expenditure, with transactional detail, is available to parishioners for inspection. We will be making those arrangements shortly and Lucinda will advise.

I hope you will agree that we operate professional control.

Future Plans

Subject to our council meeting in May 2025 when these priorities will be considered, I think there are 3 areas that will form our priorities for the coming year.

1. Neighbourhood plan completion

As you will hear, we have been making progress with a Neighbourhood Plan 'lite' – called a 'People and places plan'. In the light of the housing targets imposition of an additional 100 houses, we need to accelerate our village planning and upgrade this to a full Neighbourhood Plan. Unless and until we have this as a basis for discussion and representation, the village could easily find things being imposed on us. It seems to be the way of the world. We will be

ensuring that the appropriate resources are put in place, and we collaborate with nearby parishes including Kettlebaston.

2.A1141 Traffic calming and pavements.

Villagers at the west end of the street continues to be very concerned about traffic speed and footway access. The council recognises their concerns and has been trying to set up a process to raise this in a way that SCC cannot simply ignore. This process has not gone as fast as I would have liked due to all sorts of time pressures. We are close to being able to follow this plan as follows:

- Complete the van/lorry count – we have a camera set up – it just requires the time to capture the video and do the analysis; vans and lorries are the biggest hazard to walkers where the pavements are narrow or non-existent.
- Consolidate the SID /Lorries and all the previous work into a formal proposal to SCC – written in such a way that it will be difficult for them to fob us off (it is how you put the question that makes the difference).
- Changing the footpath or introducing traffic calming is likely to be hugely costly so we must ask them for costs broken down so that we understand and can talk to the options.
- Discuss / negotiate over the costs / practicality

I think the minimum position is that MEPC put in ‘gates / 30MPH and village sign’ and take over painting road markings and rumble strips. With the CIL cash available, I think we can afford that, and I will be proposing that at the next meeting. However, I have been warned that SCC may then refuse to maintain it on their schedules.

3.The Bus Project

In my report last year I reported that we had been successful with a proposal to SCC for what we called the Brett Valley Digibus. The big idea is to provide connectivity to Hadleigh, Stowmarket, Lavenham and Sudbury with an on-demand service using an App or phone booking. The research phase was completed during this last year and SCC are keen to move to the proposed pilot process but are taking a long time to write the contract with the selected software provider. The key conclusions so far are (1) that it will not work unless it is integrated with and run by our local community transport operators in Hadleigh and Sudbury (they are on-board with this). (2) the service will not be totally ‘on demand’ – it will be more a question of people negotiating their ride with the system. We will press on with this as soon as we can.

In conclusion

That concludes my remarks, and I will be pleased to take questions. We will also have the opportunity later for people to raise issues. This report will be available on the Facebook page and the website.

Finally, we do hope you will join the village for two key celebrations in May and June: the VE day party (5th May) and the Village Fete and Dog Show (June7).

6/25–People and Place Plan

Cllr Hodges introduced the work of the team to prepare a People and Place Plan. The document is very nearly complete. The Parish Council have noted there are important issues facing the village and will post the plan on the website and Facebook for parishioners to review. There will then need to be a meeting to get their feedback. Following that and

incorporating any amendments, the parish council need to adopt the People and Place Plan at a meeting and then pass it to Babergh for approval. We need to be clear that a People and Place Plan only gets us so far in putting the villages views forward about the increased need for housing. We will need a Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that the village's views are registered by the authorities in an enforceable way. Monks Eleigh needs to do this in collaboration with the village. Preparing a Neighbourhood plan is an onerous procedure to meet the statutory requirements to enable the plan to be adopted by Babergh. It can take between 18-24 months and cost between £10,000 and £15,000. The parish council will consider this when the People and Place Plan is adopted. The parish council will appreciate feedback from the village.

7/25 Speedwatch/SID - Chris Eames

The meeting took a report from Chris Eames. The data is reproduced below.

SID and CSW summary – 2024 for MEPC

SID - Speed Indicating Device; CS- Community Speed Watch

Summary table

	2018/19 Average	2020/21 Average	2022 Average	2023 Average	2024/H1 Average	2024/H2 Average
Average Speed	29.4 mph	29.4 mph	28.8 mph	28.4 mph	28.6 mph	28.4 mph
85 % percentile	34.4 mph	34.5 mph	33.8 mph	33.2 mph	33.4 mph	33.3 mph
% Speeders from Lavenham	14.2 %	15.2 %	11.7 %	8.0 %	8.3%	8.0%
% Speeders from the East	8.2 %	8.5 %	5.7 %	4.9 %	5.6%	5.2%
Average Vehicles per day in one direction	1,852	1,440	1,673	1,855	1,818	1,805

Note: A speeder is someone travelling at 35 mph or more

Busiest hours: morning 07:00 - 08:00, afternoon 16:00 - 17:00

Speeds slightly reduced over time

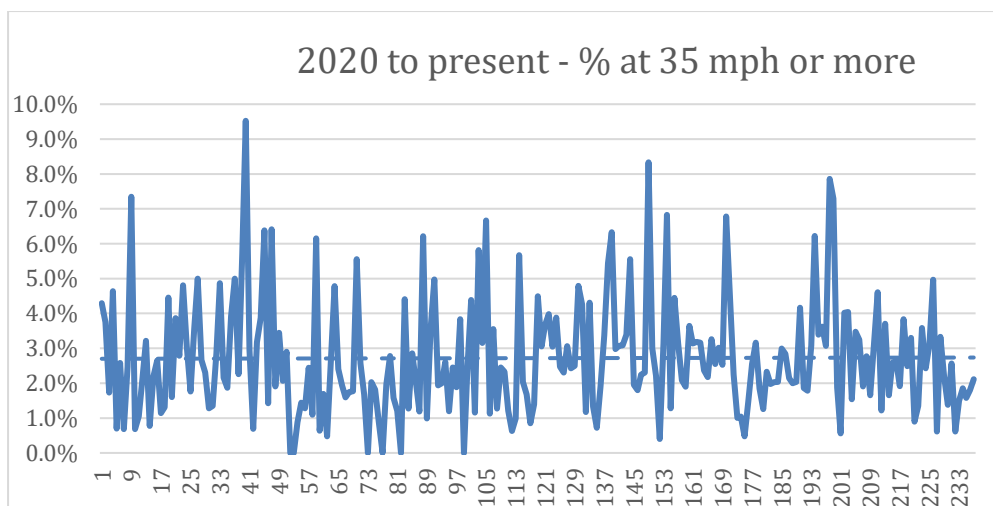
SID belongs exclusively to Monks Eleigh, delivered in March 2023

CSW - Community Speed Watch

55 sessions carried out in 2024

12,181 vehicles monitored in 2024 (i.e. number of drivers reminded of the speed limit)

Average speeders in 2024 = 2.7% (compared to 2.9% in 2023)



There were no lorries caught speeding

10 qualified volunteers of Monks Eleigh CSW team, though a couple of extra volunteers would be most welcome.

Conclusions:

The degree of speeding is in slight decline. SID indicates more speeders than CSW, so CSW does change behaviour!

The Chair thanked the Speedwatch team for their work.

8/25 Table Tennis – Brent Eleigh Spinners - Claire Symes

We play every Tues evening from 6.30 to 8. Our numbers have been gradually dropping so we are keen to welcome new players. We have four tables available and play singles and doubles. The cost is £2 per session and there are bats to borrow if needed. During the year we organise friendly competitions with a local business. Twice a year we have a social event. The benefits of table tennis are to keep you active, improve balance and coordination and socialise with others. Do come along and try for yourself.

9/25 Carpet Bowls – Diana Swansborough

We are still going from strength to strength, with a membership of 19 at present. Of course we would always welcome more members.

We mostly play roll ups on Monday afternoons from 2.30 to 4.30pm and occasionally friendly matches with other local teams.

If anyone is interested in joining our happy band for a social afternoon of light exercise please ring Diana 01449 740070 or just turn up on Monday afternoon.

Please note there will be no bowls on Monday 5th May as it is VE Day celebrations in Monks Eleigh Hall.

10/25 Monday Lunch Club – Cllr Angela Forrest

Monday Lunch Club is held on the 4th Monday of the month in the village hall. Monday was chosen as Corn Craft and the Swan are closed. The meal is two courses, preceded with a soft drink and finished with tea or coffee. Generally, around 25 people come to eat but 30 is the maximum number that can be catered for. The purpose of the lunch is to provide a good meal where members of the community can socialise, all are welcome so please consider coming if you would like a day off from cooking and doing the washing up.

Tickets are available at the village shop and are £8.00 each. The cooks and helpers are all volunteers, and any excess money goes to the charity Cystic Fibrosis Trust. I would like to thank Janet Mackie, Teresa Pryke, Wendy Paris and Chris Eames who all help to make the Lunch Club run smoothly. A really good team whose help is greatly appreciated.

11/25 Millennium Green – Cllr Patti Derry

The Green was officially opened on 14th October 2000. A group of Trustees is charged with providing and maintaining this village space known as “Monks Eleigh Millennium Green” for the benefit of the residents and to be used forever as an area for leisure activities and the prosperity of the natural environment and its wildlife. The current group of Trustees have concluded that despite their best efforts and commitment they can no longer carry out all the physically demanding tasks of maintaining the Millennium Green to a standard that enables trees and shrubs to flourish and to ensure the open space is safe for members of the community to enjoy in their leisure time. Valiant and repeated efforts to motivate and involve the wider village community have not proved successful. All but a very small number of volunteers support the Trustees in the tasks of clearing, trimming and removal of branches and vegetation; tasks that need to be regularly carried out for the reasons already explained. As the average age of the Trustees is around 75, it is with regret that they have had to seek help from the Parish Council who have the ultimate responsibility for the Millennium Green. The concerns of the Trustees were raised with Parish Councillors at a PC meeting in 2024 and the response of the PC was both positive and understanding. As a result, money was allocated from the precept in order that essential maintenance activities could be carried out by a professional organisation. This was in addition to the money for the Insurance of the Green that the Trustees receive each year. The Trustees are very grateful to the Parish Council for this support and it is hoped that similar financial assistance will be forthcoming in the financial year 25/26.

The Trustees would like to take this opportunity to encourage more residents of Monks Eleigh to visit the Millennium Green and enjoy this lovely tranquil space and perhaps then step forward to join them to help ensure its future by becoming a Trustee or simply turning up on work party days. This memorial to the Millennium 2000 is an important part of the history of the village and must be cared for as such.

12/25 Knit and Stitch – Jean Gatewood

We are a friendly group meeting once a month to catch up, enjoying tea & biscuits, chatting and working on our own project ... more chat than work done! We have n=been involved in a number of charitable events. Our talented people do a number of various crafts – I usually make the tea! This evening I have brought some of the excellent quilting work done by our member Sheila Brown helped by her friend Debbie who has heard of our project and wanted to get involved. The idea was to give a special quilt to each baby in the Neonatal ward at Ipswich hospital on their return home. Since the start in January 2023, 80 quilts have been donated with another 28 or so ready to go. Parents choose their quilt to keep as a memory of a special time at the beginning of their child’s life.

Jean’s presentation due a bi round of applause.

13/25 Whist Club – Angela Forrest

Sheila Beckett and I started the Whist Club 13 years ago in the old Village Hall, initially it was only during the winter months but the last two years the club has run through the year. At its peak we have had five tables (20 people) but unfortunately the numbers have declined recently and sadly I have decided to stop running the club. The people who have played have enjoyed the social aspect of a game of cards and the chat over the refreshments and I would like to thank all of those who have supported the Whist Club over its duration.

14/25 Film Club – Carl Mudge and Elaine Thom

2024/25 Season screenings

22/9 - Wicked Little Letters (29)

20/10 - Back To Black (14) Hall event night before

24/11 - Where The Crawdads Sing (45)

NO FILM DEC

12/1 - The Critic (54)

9/2 - The Notebook (32)

9/3 - Conclave (81)

6/4 - Maria (44)

Total-299 attendees

Average attendance per film 43. One extra local interest film will be shown on the 18th of May. The Indian Queen (2020). This film documents the journey by Monks Eleigh villagers Alan & Pat Braithwaite across India in a Morgan three-wheeler car. All profits from screening to charity (nominated via Alan).

Other than the screening on 18th May, Licence fees per film via Filmbank Media at £104.40.

Conclave licence via Black Bear Productions £60. Accounts to be finalised for 24/25 season with all profits to village hall. Slight issue with equipment for last 3 films losing visual for a brief moment during film which needs to be looked at prior to new Season in September.

15/25 MESCAL –Chris Drew

Progress

The committee are pleased to report a year of more than satisfactory progress: -

- Takings continue to hold steady at approximately £10,000 per month.
- Profit margins have improved significantly.
- At the same time, we have managed to keep operating costs well under control.
- Consequently, we made a small but significant trading profit in the last full financial year (to November 2024) of several thousand pounds.
- This relative success continues into the current financial year.
- In addition, the shop has benefitted from the generous financial support of various benefactors: notably, Babergh District Council; our own Parish Council; indirectly, the Village Hall trustees; and a number of exceptionally generous individuals and local businesses.
- As a result, we have been able to make the following important investments: new chillers and freezers; a new till and EPOS system; replacement of the shop's signage; and, new shelving in the storeroom
- On the financial front, our capital base and cash reserves have improved hugely.

Acknowledgments

- The first and foremost debt of gratitude must go to all the wonderful volunteers who have made the progress mentioned earlier possible. The shop would, quite simply, not be able to

keep going without their generosity and dedication. This, of course, includes all those who serve in the shop (allowing it to stay open seven days a week), but also those who work unseen in the background doing vital jobs such as ordering stock; replenishing the shelves; keeping the shop clean; coordinating the volunteer rota; organising necessary repairs and maintenance; and putting together the shop magazine “Shop Talk”; to name just a few. This is all the more remarkable now that we are entirely volunteer run. To put this into context, out of 433 community shops in the UK, we are one of only 52.

- We also owe a huge debt of gratitude to our financial sponsors and supporters, as mentioned earlier.

Challenges

Notwithstanding the progress described above, the Committee has identified a number of challenges that the shop continues to face, of which I shall highlight 3 key ones: -

- Volunteers – we always need new volunteers! Any fresh faces will be welcomed with open arms – not necessarily serving at the till. Anyone interested can enquire in the shop, or contact our volunteer coordinator, Sarah Hodges, at mecsal.volunteers@gmail.com. Also, our AGM is coming up on the 22nd May. All are welcome provided you are a shareholder, or bring £1 to become a shareholder!
- Two resignations from the Committee this year, have meant that we are operating with the minimum of four committee members. We have capacity to enlist three new members. This is vital to spread the load and provide fresh impetus.
- Although sales have been holding steady, this is not enough to compensate for inflation. To keep the shop viable, we really need to get more footfall and spending in the shop.

And finally...

Chris Drew handed over to Mandy Coll, our postmaster. She advised the meeting that she would be retiring in December after many years’ service. She noted that she has to give formal notice to the Post Office in September but wanted the village to know now so that a start can be made to find a replacement. The Chairman thanked her for her sterling service to village over many years and this was endorsed by the whole meeting through a round of applause.

16/25 History Group

Monday 6th October 2025 – My Family and Other Irises – by Lucy Skellorn

Lucy will talk about her Great, great grandfather, Sir Michael Foster, an eminent physiologist and binomial author of many iris species. She will then fast forward to her own involvement with the project to restore the gardens at Benton End, the home of Cedric Morris.

Monday 3rd November 2025 – A History of Bildeston in 13 Objects by Sue Andrews

Sue Andrews is a renowned local historian writing and publishing ‘The Hadleigh Historian’ and ‘Tales from Suffolk’s Brett Valley’. Sue moved to Bildeston in 1968, so she is uniquely positioned to talk about its history using a number of local items including an old village sign, a seal, a map, a memorial and many more.

Monday 1st December 2025 – The mystery of Gestingthorpe Villa and Roman East Anglia by Ashley Cooper

Discovered in the 1940’s, Gestingthorpe Roman Villa still has a number of unsolved mysteries. Basing his talk on the villa and the craftsmen’s settlement around it, Ashley also places it in the wider context of Roman East Anglia. Ashley is the author of six local history books including ‘The Long Furrow’ and ‘Our Mother Earth’ whilst also being involved with numerous other local history and archaeological societies and projects.

Monday 5th January 2026 – ‘From Bondage to Freedom’ The Decline of Serfdom in

Medieval England by Professor Mark Bailey The ever popular Mark Bailey returns to our group to give a talk on his book of the same name. Mark applies a new methodology for establishing the chronology and causes to thousands of court rolls from 38 manors from the Midlands and East Anglia. It presents a ground breaking reassessment , challenging many of the traditional interpretations of the economy and society of late- medieval England

Monday 2nd February 2026 – Cardinal Wolsey – by Dr Phil Roberts

Thomas Wolsey, Ipswich's Greatest Son was England's leading Statesman, Churchman and Patron of the Arts in the service of King Henry VIII for over fourteen years. Wolsey had extraordinary diplomatic and administration skills helping him to fulfil governmental roles. Phil, a lecturer for the Mary Rose Trust since 2002 has written a book titled 'Cardinal Wolsey – For King and Country' and brings his own insight into this extraordinary man.

Monday 2nd March 2026 – Royal Connections – by Jennifer Antill

Many people know that the British and Russian Royal families were closely connected by marriage, but the relationship goes back much further. Stretching back to Ivan the Terrible and Elizabeth I and to Nicholas II and George V, Jenny will give a lively and beautifully illustrated talk. Jenny has a degree in Russian Studies and is a published author.

All meetings start at 7.30pm, at Monks Eleigh Village Hall. Annual membership is £10.00, £3.00 for admission to a single meeting. For more information contact Jan Kelsall (07855 035896) or David Mills (01449 744918)

17/25 St Peters Church – Mike Birt

1. Services; the established pattern continues (Sunday Services rotate each week to a different church in the 5 Church Benefice of Monks Eleigh, which means that a main service (usually Holy Communion) takes place almost every fifth week at St Peter's Monks Eleigh). Other services in the year included the Easter Sunrise service on Easter Sunday morning, a Benefice service to commemorate the coronation of King Charles, a Harvest service in the autumn, the Benefice Remembrance Day service in November and a Christingle Service and the main Christmas Day service, with full congregations, during December. We also had a choral Evensong in April and several other evening services during the year.
2. Children's Work; 4 events for children and families were held during 2023; a David and Goliath themed fun activity afternoon in February, followed by an Easter Egg hunt and Easter crafts afternoon. The remaining events were an Exodus and Travelling themed afternoon followed in the winter by a Christmas themed afternoon of crafts and activities, the latter ably assisted by the participation of the Monks Eleigh Knit and Stitch group. All these events took place in the church and thanks go to all the helpers, participants and supports for this very important area of church and community work.
3. Fund Raising; the Monks Eleigh Fete and Dog Show took place in the year, with great success; thanks to Pat Braithwaite and all on the organising committee for all their hard work. A Brass Band concert was held in the church in October and in November a Jigsaw 'Fest' was held in the Village Hall in November. The church was represented at the Bridge Barns Christmas Fair in November, with publicity and sales to promote the work of the church and the Christmas services and events. The Suffolk Historic Churches Trust (SHCT) 'Ride & Stride' event in September was supported by St Peter's, with half the

sponsorship money raised being returned by Suffolk Historic Churches Trust (SHCT) to the church to go towards fabric maintenance work. The Lent Lunch for St Peter's, held in the Village Hall, raised money for the East Anglian Air Ambulance.

4. Church and Churchyard; the church continues to look beautiful, and much admired by visitors and village residents, thanks to the ongoing presence of flowers; the careful weekly cleaning and the decorations set out for Easter, the Coronation, Remembrance Sunday and Christmas. The Churchyard has been carefully maintained to a high standard, with new fencing and a gate installed at the rear of the church during the year. We are about to install a new Notice Board. At some point the bells need to be re-hung and one of the walls is beginning to crumble – which will need structural repairs.

Conclusion; This was a very successful year for the church in terms of services, events and church attendance levels – with a real emphasis on increasing engagement with the village and residents. There were highs and lows in terms of funerals and weddings and a baptism, all very much part of village and church life and an essential part of the church's ministry and outreach into the community. The continuing and very audible presence of a strong bell ringing team is vital in announcing services and special events and their work is much appreciated by many – thanks are due to Paul Haskell and his team. All at St Peter's look forward the coming year with renewed enthusiasm and energy as we seek to maintain and extend the worship, ministry and profile of St Peter's within the village and Monks Eleigh Benefice communities. We are looking for more people to come and join us on the management team of the church – the Parochial Church Council (PCC) – we have a number of vacancies on our strength and to keep the church going we need people to help with the administration and running of the church in year; 4 meetings a year plus an annual meeting are the main commitments and unless we can maintain a healthy level of PCC members the work and continuing numbers keep a full team going the church will suffer in terms of its future ministry, worship, profile within the village and its longer term future. Please join us!

18/25 Village Hall – Patti Derry

I would like to start my report by thanking all the Trustees and the caretaker for their hard work and commitment over the last year. This commitment has played no small part in the great success of the village hall once again this year. The hall continues to be used regularly and appreciated by local groups and people from outside the community.

The range of activities in the hall continues to offer opportunities for sport, culture, hobbies, entertainment and social interaction to all sections of our community and bookings for people outside Monks Eleigh are growing especially at weekends for weddings and parties. Feedback from all of these groups has been very good and as always the cleanliness of the hall is a major feature of that positive endorsement. Thanks must go to Julie for her care to ensure everything is perfect for each booking.

Financially the Village Hall is in a healthy position thanks to the fees from the high volume of lettings, the income from Flicks in the Sticks and the annual grant from the Parish Council precept. We are very grateful to all those contributing to our funds. The Trustees regularly review all bills from suppliers and contractors and endeavour to find the most economically favourable for the benefit of the Village Hall. The hall's solar panels help to offset some of the cost of electricity so that once all running and upkeep costs have been met any surplus can be ploughed back into the continued improvement of the hall facilities,

Currently there are 9 Trustees appointed in line with the Village Hall constitution. All trustees are elected or appointed at the Annual General meeting. At the AGM we are saying goodbye to our Richard Warner who has been treasurer since the opening of the hall. We would all like to thank him for the efficient and thorough work he has put into this role and wish him best wishes for his future life. Moving on, we are pleased to announce we have found a replacement for this role and welcome Paul Haskell to the team.

To conclude -well done Monks Eleigh Village Hall! Our Trustees, who are all volunteers, have given their time and energy on behalf of the village to provide a vital community amenity we can all be proud of. Thank you.

19/25 Shaun Moffat from Bildeston Foodbank (Bildeston Community Support)

Shaun is the leader of Bildeston Community Support and there are 14 people running it. They have plenty of volunteers, half of whom have used the support and have moved on and want to contribute in return. This covers Bildeston and the surrounding villages including Monks Eleigh. It started five years ago but Shaun feels it is disgraceful that it even needs to exist and his measure of success would be that it would no longer be needed. They now look after 100 families giving out £5,000 of food every month; it is a sad reflection of society. One in five households in Suffolk are in poverty – measured by having to pay more money out than they get in each week on a continuing basis. They work by helping people to find work, increase their income by referring to other agencies to maximise their incomes. We need communities to look after each other as there is little help elsewhere. The shop in Monks Eleigh regularly collects for the group and Shaun thanked Monks Eleigh shop customers and team for this. They do accept garden produce when people grow extra. They have never had a grant and are solely supported by donations. People can make financial donations. When people find themselves in financial difficulties it often feels very hard to ask for help but its there at Bildeston Support Group so please encourage people to come forward for support

20/25 Village Person of The Year

Cllr Braithwaite announced that this Community Award for 2025 goes to Sue Abrey for her outstanding contribution to the village shop. He and the whole meeting thanked her for her enormous support to the village shop. Sue was not able to attend the meetings so, as well as the certificate, a bunch of flowers will be taken to her home.

21/25 Public Forum

The parish council agreed to investigate the possibility of installing yellow lines at the junction of Church Hill and The Street. Also it was agreed to look at parking problems for residents. The junction from Highlands Hill onto The Street can also be difficult. In response to a question about reviving the traditional 'Beating of the Bounds', the Rector confirmed that this will take place on Rogation Sunday (May 25th) . Look out for information soon. It was pointed out that reports did not include the village Wildlife Group or the Walking Group. With apologies for the omission, it was confirmed that will invite them to next year's Annual Parish meeting.

The Chair thanked all for attending especially those who had put together and delivered presentations to the meeting.

The Chair closed the meeting at 9.30pm.

Chairman..... Date.....