



## PARISH OF GROUVILLE



<b>Minutes</b>	
<b><u>Minutes of the Parish Assembly</u></b> <b><u>Held in Grouville Parish Hall on</u></b> <b><u>Tuesday, 20 December 2022 at 19.00</u></b>	
<b>PRESENT</b>	Connétable Mark Labey – Chairman Bernard Rebours - Procureur du Bien Public Albert John L’Amy - Procureur du Bien Public Daryn Cleworth – Parish Secretary and Minutes
<b>Open Meeting</b>	Connétable Labey opened the meeting by welcoming everyone in attendance and apologising for the lateness of the Rates Assembly.
<b>1. Apologies</b>	Apologies were received from the following:  Rev Helen Gunton, Stanley Payn, Peter Le Cuirot, Deputy Steven Luce, Jason Lees-Baker (Auditor), Christine Willing, Bruce Willing
<b>2. Approval of Minutes</b>	The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 17 October 2022 were proposed by Anthony Powell and seconded by Robin Hamilton-Howes and duly approved unanimously.
<b>3. Present the Audited Accounts</b>	<p>In the absence of the Parish auditor, The Connétable presented a report submitted by him outlining the audit update.</p> <p>The Connétable then introduced Mr Rod Amy who provided an overview of the revamped accounts. Mr Amy made the following points in his address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The parishes are generally conservative by nature but Grouville particularly has lagged behind in recent years.</li> <li>• The new Connétable and Parish Secretary have had a baptism of fire but the issues stem from some years back.</li> <li>• Accounts are supposed to convey information but the previous set was poorly presented and strewn with typographical errors. As such, a revamp was essential.</li> <li>• There had previously been confusion surrounding the Maison Le Maison (MLM) fund, including whether there had been a transfer of funds from the general account. Mr Amy advised that he is satisfied they are now properly presented and questions have been answered.</li> <li>• Mr Amy paid tribute to the Connétable for taking the comments and criticism on board.</li> <li>• He added that, whilst the accounts were very different aesthetically, the end figure remained unchanged.</li> <li>• There had been little change in the rate since 2003.</li> <li>• Estimates may be rounded off but this should not be interpreted that little attention has been applied. The Parishes are often not given the credit they deserve for their estimates.</li> <li>• Much better to have an underspend rather than a deficit.</li> <li>• When introducing the Roads Account, Mr Amy highlighted an erroneous £103k that had been carried over year on</li> </ul>

year, and whilst this sum didn't affect the bottom line as it was shown as a credit elsewhere, it did illustrate the poor presentation of the accounts.

- Roads Account is notoriously difficult to estimate.
- Surplus is required by all parishes to see them through the months after year end where there is no rates revenue coming in.
- Building reserves enables the Parish to avoid widely fluctuating rates in the future.
- The Connétable has assured the Assembly that there will be a wide ranging review, which will focus on, amongst other things, the reserves and its use.
- Also to be included in the future review is depreciation and the MLM is an example of this. The presentation may not be incorrect but reviewing is good practice and MLM should be subject to a rolling review over 3-5 years to avoid rates fluctuating.
- Finally, Mr Amy thanked the Connétable and Parish Secretary for their work.

The Connétable thanked Mr Amy for all his hard work in revamping the accounts and estimates and presented the following oral report.

**Parishioners,**

**As the Constable's Report had already been published before the last meeting I thought it preferable to give a verbal update instead as has been suggested by some Parishioners.**

**I am committed to undergo an objective and extensive review of our Parish Accounting Policies and Procedures.**

**These are to include Fixed Assets, Reserve policies, including the Maison Le Maistre Fund, depreciations, charitable trust funds, budgeting policies and planning, the constitution and terms of reference of the Accounts Committee and anything else deemed necessary to review.**

**This is hopefully to be undertaken by drawing in, as and when appropriate, external professional advice.**

**This will be comprehensive and will be subject to the scrutiny of a Parish Assembly.**

**Once this review is complete, I am hoping to be able to announce that the largest capital project undertaken in our Parish history, namely the new Parish Hall roof, can be completed without burdening the rate payer with the expense. I cannot promise this at the moment until the tenders from the builders have been received and the expenditure has been ratified by an Assembly.**

**At this time I would like to explain the underspend that occurred in the previous year. This was over £187K and I would like to highlight a few of the significant ones.**

**The underspends have allowed the Roads Reserve to build up to the point at which we will be able to complete one of our overdue projects before the financial year end.**

**It is important to remember that the General Account left at the end of the year must be sufficient to cover the four months expenditure (Note 7 page 11) that follows the Financial Year end 30<sup>th</sup> April to take us through to the period when rates are normally paid. The estimates are showing £287,002 (Page 3 and 19) and the 4 months expenses can be estimated at £287,911 so this shows no room to manoeuvre and the use of the funds in the General Account would place the Parish in a vulnerable position. During such uncertain times I think it prudent to enhance our Reserves**

	<p><b>not deplete them. One of the strongest recommendations of The Fiscal Policy Panel, the financial advisers to the States, is to bolster reserves at this time to stave off more unexpected situations.</b></p> <p><b>My recommendation for the rate this year is 1.11p.</b></p> <p><b>We are hoping to undertake many projects in the years to come Solar panels on the shed roof, electric vehicles, electric heating in the Parish Hall, 16 Green Lanes and other speed restrictions to make our roads safer for cyclists and walkers, and more tree planting. Another site for a cemetery needs to be found and I would also like to continue maintaining our properties regularly so that they don't fall into an expensive state of disrepair.</b></p> <p>The Connétable then presented the Accounts and asked for questions from the floor.</p> <p>Mr Bruce Burnett asked if the reserves were required for the replacement of the roof. The Connétable replied the reserves in the MLM fund would be utilised for that project but only after a review. He is satisfied, however, that the Parish can legally utilise those funds for that purpose. Mrs Linda Houze asked for clarification that MLM funds will be used for the roof and not, specifically, those held in the General Account. The Connétable replied that he was hopeful this would be the case. Mrs Houze then stated that any rise in the rates would not, therefore, be as a result of any work on the roof project and the Connétable confirmed that was the case.</p> <p>The Connétable then asked if there was a proposer to approve the accounts, to which Mr Duncan Page duly did so, with Mr Leslie Norman seconding. The accounts were duly adopted by the Assembly with just one vote against.</p>
<p><b>4. Present, and Approve, the Estimates for the Current Financial Year</b></p>	<p>The Connétable presented the estimates and asked for questions from the floor.</p> <p>Mr Julian de la Cour asked for an explanation on the fluctuating costs on the IT expenditure. The Connétable explained that the previous PAYG contract with the engineers had now been replaced with a contract based on the number of devices and equipment the Parish had, which had represented a good saving. The increase in the estimate was due to the till expenses now being amalgamated in the IT costs as well as the requirement to replace the PC's in the office and the purchase of two new laptops for the Procureurs.</p> <p>Mr Norman asked if the refuse contract had been signed yet and whether it was a like for like contract. The Connétable replied that it was like for like but it had not yet been signed. If the estimates, including those for refuse collection, are approved by the Assembly this evening then the Procureurs will be happy to sign it.</p> <p>Mr Mark Houze started by adding his thanks to the Parish Officials for the assistance he has had since the last Assembly in clarifying many of the queries previously raised, before then asking for an explanation on the Connétable's Fund, previously referred to as the Frais de Bureau. The Connétable replied that the funds are used for:</p>

- Flowers to be sent at appropriate times, for example bereavements.
- Dinner for staff as a thank you for guiding the Parish through three months without a Parish Secretary
- Gifts for long serving municipality members.
- The Connétable emphasised that he does not receive payment or an honorarium and that the fund is used exclusively for third parties.

Mr Houze asked for an explanation on legal and professional fees. The Connétable advised these costs went on lawyers and Court fees as well as fees for the Data Protection Officer.

Mr Houze referred to the forthcoming review and stated that he hoped this would contribute to greater transparency in the Parish accounts and policies going forward. However, he noted that there had not been a provision made for any review and asked how the Parish would be funding it and whether the Connétable intended to bring the results of the review back to an Assembly. The Connétable replied that it was essential to have proper scrutiny and confirmed that he would indeed be bringing the outcomes of any review back to the Assembly.

Mrs Caroline Anderson made the suggestion that the review should go before the Parish's Accounts Committee initially and prior to any Parish Assembly. The Connétable confirmed that this was the intention.

Mrs Anderson then asked, as we were already three quarters of the way through the financial year, if the Connétable could provide reassurances that there will be no underspend this year and that finances were being appropriately monitored. The Connétable advised that both the Procureurs and the Roads Committee inspect the journals every month and monitor the expenses carefully.

Mr Peter Hargreaves brought the subject back to the refuse contract and suggested that it was improper for the Constable to state that the Parish Assembly would be deemed to be approving the contract by approving the estimates without the contract being a specific item on the agenda and without this implication of approving the estimates having been made clear to Parishioners. The estimates only covered a year, not the five years of the contract and if the contract was indeed to be approved by the Assembly, there should have been a separate briefing note about it. As such, he wouldn't be voting in favour of approving the estimates.

Mr Duncan Page said he disagreed with Mr Hargreaves comment. Mr Jerry Collins also voiced his disagreement with the comment and suggested that it was the role of the Procureurs of the Parish to approve such contracts and he has never heard of a Parish Assembly being asked to do so. Mrs Anderson added that the matter was very confusing and if the question had never been asked, how would the Assembly even been aware that it hadn't been signed and, furthermore, asked why it had remained unsigned.

Mr David Cummins, member of the Roads Committee, confirmed the contract was like for like and advised that it was the responsibility of the Roads Committee to approve the contract. He continued that the original contract had proved to be inadequate

	<p>for the contractor and the Parish had found itself in a position where we either agreed a new one or we don't get our refuse collected. He confirmed the contract was like for like. The Connétable added that the contract in place is the right one for Grouville. Mr Cummins added that the Roads Committee had done their job but hadn't been supported by the Procureurs.</p> <p>Mr Bernard Rebours, Senior Procureur du Bien Public, replied that he had written advice from the Attorney General that, due to the length of the contract, that being 5 years, it was right that it be approved by the Parish Assembly and if the Assembly didn't object to it then it would be signed.</p> <p>Hamish Scott stated that the contract is like for like with a weekly refuse collection and monthly glass collection. He then queried why every other contract isn't put before a Parish Assembly if it was indeed necessary and argued that it wasn't a requirement.</p> <p>Mr Dennis de Gruchy asked whether there had been a review on where savings could be made throughout the Parish. The Connétable replied that this would form part of the forthcoming review.</p> <p>With no further questions from the floor, the Connétable asked for a proposer to approve the estimates for the financial year 2022/23, to which Mr Julian de la Cour duly proposed. Mr Duncan Page seconded and the Assembly voted in favour by a vast majority with just 2 votes against.</p> <p>Mr Peter Hargreaves tried to speak again and said that what was being done was procedurally incorrect. The implications of what was supposedly being done by approving the estimates hadn't been explained to Parishioners nor on the agenda. The Connétable replied that he had heard already about this from Mr Hargreaves.</p>
<p><b>5. Approval of Rate</b></p>	<p>Connétable Labey asked for proposals on setting the rate per quarter. Mr Chris Parlett proposed the recommended rate of 1.11 pence. He added that the Island Wide rate has risen by just 5%, which in real monetary terms ratepayers can expect a rise of 9.1%. The proposal was seconded by Mr Eric Gavey.</p> <p>Mrs Anderson introduced herself and provided some insight into her accountancy background. She went on to make the following points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No explanation given on rate increase.</li> <li>• This was exacerbated by the lack of explanation on the underspend.</li> <li>• She was disappointed that her advice on providing a detailed report for parishioners in advance of the Assembly had not been taken and the Connétable could have saved a lot of parishioners a lot of time had he of done so.</li> <li>• Reminded the Assembly that the reserves were £185k better off.</li> <li>• Legally the accumulated fund can be used.</li> <li>• If the previous years' rate of .99 pence is maintained, it would equate to £87k be taken from the reserves.</li> <li>• The forthcoming review should devise a policy on use of the reserves, but this evening is not the time.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a cost-of-living crises and noted there had been a request from a parishioner for help with school shoes.</li> <li>• Ratepayers will have to pay twice in 2023 due to the lateness of setting the rate this year.</li> <li>• Mrs Anderson asked for the Assembly not to vote in favour of increasing the rate this year due to the lateness and the previous underspend.</li> </ul> <p>Accordingly, Mrs Anderson proposed to maintain the rate at .99 pence. The proposal was seconded by Mr Hargreaves. Mr Philip Barber made the point that the Rates (Jersey) Law required the Parish to set a rate that covered the annual expenditure. He added that, whilst the reserves were there, it should not be utilised as a piggy bank. The rates had previously been kept unrealistically low and that it was a fool’s economy not to raise the rate this year.</p> <p>Mr Collins replied that the Assembly can approve a deficit if it approves use of the reserves.</p> <p>Mr Amy replied that, technically, the rate has to cover expenditure. However, there is flexibility to approve use of the reserves but Grouville does not have sufficient money available to do so. As such, it would not be prudent to go against the rate of 1.11pence. Grouville has previously lagged behind with the rate and, even considering a potential rise to 1.11pence, there would still be 7 other parishes with a higher rate. He continued that it was important to build up reserves to stabilise future years’ rates and that, to put things in perspective, a £500 bill in 2021 would only represent an increase of £45. Mr Amy added that the Parish would regret it if the rate did not increase this year.</p> <p>The Assembly went to the vote, commencing with the amendment of .99 pence. The Assembly rejected the proposal by a majority, with 18 votes only in favour.</p> <p>The proposal of 1.11 pence was put to the vote and approved by a vast majority.</p>
<b>6. Meeting Closed</b>	The Connétable closed the meeting at 20:48.