

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING/VILLAGE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 12th May 2026 – 7.00pm

Litton and Thorner's Community Hall

MEETING NOTES

1. Introduction – Julia's House requests a moment of your time.

Cllr Firrell welcomed residents to the Annual Village/Parish Assembly and introduced Natalie, Lead Nurse at Julia's House, as the guest speaker. Natalie thanked the community for its ongoing support through events such as the annual Duck Race and Christmas carol singing collections, noting that 92% of the charity's funding comes from donations. Having worked at Julia's House for 16 years and now serving as Lead Nurse, she explained that donations help fund a range of services, including sibling support, counselling, and family support programmes, all of which are experiencing increasing demand.

Natalie explained that a new extension at Julia's House has recently been completed to enhance end-of-life care services. The charity supports children and young people from the antenatal stage through to age 17 and provides care across Dorset, including in-house day sessions for families throughout the county.

She also outlined the origins of Julia's House, which was inspired by a community nurse from Poole Hospital who recognised that children receiving palliative care still needed opportunities to play, enjoy life, and spend quality time with their families. Her vision was to create a respite centre where children and families could receive support during difficult times. Although she sadly died from breast cancer, her friend Mike and two fellow community nurses established the charity in her memory, and it has grown steadily ever since.

Natalie explained that Julia's House now operates two children's hospices, one in Dorset and another in Devizes, Wiltshire, two of 53 children's hospices in the UK. The charity provides a wide range of support services, including meals, complementary therapies, and care for siblings, all funded through donations and community fundraising.

The hospice also runs a preschool programme for children with complex needs who are unable to attend mainstream nursery settings, as well as after-school clubs where children receive care, meals, and bedtime support. These services provide valuable respite for families while ensuring children receive specialist care.

Families can link in with Naomi's House, in Winchester, and also Charlton Farm, in North Somerset, for longer term respite.

Natalie explained that Julia's House offers both short-term respite stays and longer residential periods for children, alongside a range of support services for the entire family,

including counselling and sibling support activities. She described the hospice in Corfe Mullen as a refurbished house with shared living spaces, four bedrooms for children requiring care, and a garden maintained by volunteers. Following a question-and-answer session with residents, Natalie thanked the village for its continued fundraising efforts and support for the hospice.

2. Dorset Council – Ward Councillor Sally Holland

The Ward Councillor thanked residents and reflected on her second year serving the parish, highlighting the positive working relationship with Litton Cheney Parish Council. She acknowledged the challenges of progressing projects through local government processes but noted that progress is now being made at the Ford Farm/Cheese Factory site.

She provided updates on several transport and infrastructure issues, including ongoing efforts to improve safety on the B3157 Coast Road through additional warning signs, increased police enforcement, and proposed 20mph speed limits. She also advised that the A35 will be subject to overnight closures throughout the summer as part of a major maintenance programme before responsibility for the road returns to National Highways when the current contractor's agreement ends in October. Information on closure dates and diversion routes will be made available through the Parish Council.

The councillor also highlighted the introduction of new speed limit changes and speed cameras on the A35, as well as ongoing work relating to the Foundry Lea/Fiveways roundabout and developments at Rowden Farm. She concluded by thanking the Parish Council and residents for their support, while the Chair expressed appreciation for her commitment, regular attendance at meetings, and assistance to the parish over the past two years.

3. Your Parish Council – Chairman John Firrell.

Litton Cheney Parish Council Chairman John Firrell reflected on a relatively uneventful year for the parish compared with previous years, noting that while issues such as potholes remained a concern, there had been fewer major controversies. Improvements had been made to address dog fouling through the installation of additional bins, although residents were reminded of the importance of responsible dog ownership, particularly during the lambing season.

The Chairman thanked volunteers who regularly carry out litter-picking around the village, noting that much of the litter is found on roads approaching the village. He also acknowledged the inconvenience caused by heavy goods vehicles travelling through the parish and indicated that measures to address this would be discussed later.

An update was provided on the stalled Bride Place (formerly Charity Farm) housing development, where progress remains uncertain following the developer entering administration. Dorset Council has also been unable to provide clarity on the site's future.

The Chairman highlighted the need to repair the village flagpole on St Mary's Church tower, which serves as a community symbol and flies flags on national and local occasions. A

fundraising appeal will be launched through local channels, including the Bride Valley News and village website.

He also outlined the Parish Council's involvement with local government networks, including the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils and the Bridport Local Area Partnership, which facilitate collaboration and information sharing between communities. A regional parish council event was due to be hosted in the village.

Cllr Firrell thanked Debbie Hollings, the Parish Clerk, for all her excellent work over the past year.

Finally, the Chairman thanked fellow councillors for their commitment and support over the past year before promoting a forthcoming event at the Bride Valley Vineyard to mark the anniversary of the 1976 "Judgment of Paris" wine tasting, which helped establish the reputation of New World wines. The event will be hosted by Bella Spurrier and include a picnic in the vineyard.

4. Portfolios

Cllr Bill Orchard. Planning.

Cllr Orchard outlined his role in monitoring planning applications, liaising with Dorset Council, and keeping the Parish Council informed of planning matters affecting the village. He noted that there had been relatively few planning applications during the year, although several significant developments remained ongoing.

An update was provided on the Bride Place (formerly Charity Farm) development, where the developer entered administration after encountering financial difficulties. Before doing so, an application had been submitted to remove the requirement for three affordable homes from the six-house scheme. Dorset Council is still considering this request, although the homes continue to be marketed as six open-market properties. It was noted that the affordable housing element had generated limited local interest, partly because even discounted prices remained beyond the reach of many first-time buyers.

An appeal relating to Whitethorn Cottage, where a proposal to replace an existing cottage with two semi-detached dwellings had been refused by Dorset Council due to concerns about the historic character of the building and its location within the village. The applicant has now taken this to appeal.

Regarding the two large properties behind Barges Close, the Parish Council did not formally object to their development but commented that the style and scale of the houses were not ideally suited to the village. Both properties remains on the market despite price reductions.

Cllr Orchard noted that there have been wider changes to national planning policy, particularly the government's drive to increase housing delivery through the Planning and Infrastructure Act. Dorset Council currently falls short of its required five-year housing land supply and annual housing targets, which may create a stronger presumption in favour of

development. However, Litton Cheney is considered an unsustainable location for major housing growth due to its limited public transport links and distance from employment centres, which may provide some protection against inappropriate development.

An update was also provided on discussions with Wessex Water regarding flooding around Baglake. The issue has been linked to operational problems at local boreholes, requiring water discharges into the winterbourne, which in turn contributed to flooding when drainage systems were already under pressure. Wessex Water is now closely monitoring discharges and working with Dorset Council to identify a longer-term solution, potentially involving improvements to the drainage infrastructure before similar issues arise again. Wessex Water will also liaise with the Parish Council with a view to explaining more about the functions of the company within the village, possibly involving a visit to the water works.

Cllr Andy King. Playground and Allotments.

Cllr King reported that the playing field continues to be well maintained by Dorset Council and is being regularly used for football, which is encouraging. While rabbits, badgers and moles continue to cause some damage to the field and football nets, these issues are being managed.

The allotments remain popular and are functioning well. Previous concerns about excess water have been resolved following drainage improvements and storm drain clearance. Two half-plots are currently available for anyone interested in taking up an allotment.

At the playground, occasional issues with litter and dog fouling have been reported, while the mole continues to cause some disruption. During the year, the Parish Council progressed plans to install new play equipment. Following a tender process, local children were invited to help choose from a selection of designs, and two new pieces of equipment were selected. These will replace the deteriorating front section of the existing galleon play structure, which has become unsafe and uneconomical to repair.

The new equipment has been manufactured and is awaiting installation. It includes a balance-based climbing and walking feature and a small swinging play structure designed for multiple children. Volunteers will assist with removing the old equipment and preparing the site, helping to reduce project costs.

The councillor thanked local volunteers for their ongoing support and acknowledged the financial contribution from the Litton Cheney Trust, which helped make the playground improvements possible. Overall, the playing field, playground and allotments continue to be well used and maintained for the benefit of the community.

Cllr Rob Matthews. Roads, Transport, and IT

Cllr Matthews reported that roads and flooding issues had dominated the year. Significant water-related problems affected several areas of the village, including flooding on Main Street, water emerging through the road surface near the Snicket, overflow at The Rocks, and flooding around Baglake linked to discharges from Wessex Water's borehole

operations. While much of the problem resulted from exceptionally wet weather, some issues were associated with water management activities undertaken by Wessex Water.

Residents were reminded that temporary road closures and protective barriers installed by Dorset Council during flooding events were necessary safety measures designed to prevent vehicle damage and reduce liability risks.

An important development during the year is the proposed introduction of new weight restriction measures on White Way. Cllr Matthews thanked former councillor Andrew Price, for his long-standing efforts to secure improved signage on the A35, plus the bringing in of the TRO (Traffic Regulation Order). The new arrangements are expected to reduce the number of heavy goods vehicles using unsuitable village roads, although occasional infringements by drivers ignoring signs or sat-nav instructions may still occur.

Concerns about anti-social driving were also discussed. Residents were encouraged to continue reporting incidents directly to the police rather than confronting drivers themselves.

Openreach's fibre broadband rollout continues within the village and all residents should now have access to full-fibre broadband services if they choose to take them up.

During questions, concerns were raised about whether HGVs diverted from White Way might instead use Chalk Pit Lane. It was explained that designated routes for large vehicles serving local businesses should avoid unsuitable roads, with updated signage and sat-nav routing expected to reinforce this. Councillors acknowledged that some inappropriate HGV movements still occur and encouraged residents to record and report instances where possible.

Cllr Quentin Blacke – Footpaths and Rights of Way

In Cllr Blacke's absence, Cllr John Firrell provided the report. He highlighted a generally positive year for the parish's footpaths and rights of way, with only occasional issues arising from blocked paths and instances where electrified fencing had been placed across public routes. These incidents, which resulted in concerns for walkers and dogs, were reported to Dorset Council for investigation.

Particular attention was given to a group of mature ash trees located along the footpath from Chalk Pit Lane towards the vineyard. Originally established as a laid hedge over 30 years ago, the ash trees have grown substantially and are now affected by ash dieback disease. Following inspections by Dorset Council's Ranger and arboricultural team, the trees have been deemed unsafe and will likely require removal. Some branches are also overhanging power lines, potentially requiring intervention by SSE. The main outstanding issue is determining ownership of the land on which the trees stand, as responsibility for any removal works will fall to the landowner.

Cllr Firrell also addressed the deteriorating bridge on the public footpath across Rowden Farm between Litton Cheney and Long Bredy. The bridge is in poor condition and requires

replacement to ensure public safety. Discussions are ongoing between the Parish Council, Long Bredy & Kingston Russell Parish Council, Dorset Council, and local stakeholders regarding funding. Dorset Council is expected to contribute towards the cost, but additional financial support will be required. The Parish Council may assist with funding and could seek donations from residents and other interested parties, including the new tenants of Rowden Farm.

Cllr Firrell. Village Fabric/ Maintenance

Cllr Firrell reported that regular meetings continue with the local Police Community Support Officer, who provides monthly crime updates covering the wider area. He noted that Litton Cheney consistently records very low levels of crime, with few, if any, incidents reported compared with neighbouring areas. While anti-social behaviour remains an issue elsewhere, the village continues to benefit from being a relatively safe community, and residents were encouraged to help maintain this positive situation.

An update was also provided on the long-running Ford Farm enforcement and landscaping project. Following years of discussions regarding enforcement action, an agreed plan is now being implemented. Significant landscaping and earthworks are underway to screen the site and reduce the visual impact of vehicles, parking areas and commercial activity when viewed from the village and the A35.

Cllr Firrell acknowledged the considerable efforts of former parish councillor Andrew Price, who has worked on the issue for many years, and praised the support of Dorset Council's enforcement officer, Ash Osborne, whose proactive approach has helped move the project forward. While work remains ongoing, there is optimism that continued progress will lead to a satisfactory long-term outcome.

5. Stepping up to the Plate – In recognition of those who do.

Cllr Firrell paid tribute to the many individuals who make significant contributions to village life, beginning with Freddie and Diana Spicer, who have recently moved away from the village. Freddie was particularly recognised for his long-standing dedication to the community through activities including service on the parish council, LATCH, Litton Cheney Trust, Premier Crew, maintaining the churchyard, and caring for the church clock, remaining active well into his late eighties.

Special recognition was also given to Ron Davidson, who has stepped down after around 20 years as Chair of LATCH, the organisation responsible for the community hall. The Chair highlighted Ron's leadership and persistence in helping turn what was once an empty site into the successful community facility enjoyed today. Thanks, were also extended to Andy King and Sarah, who have now taken on the roles of Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.

The Chair acknowledged the work of many other volunteers and community groups, including the Premier Crew, litter picking volunteers, the BV Gardening Club, the Book Club, and numerous residents who contribute to village activities throughout the year.

Particular praise was given to the village school, which continues to thrive and attract strong demand due to its reputation and success. The school is expected to have more than 100 pupils following the summer term.

Pete and Beverley Dennis were thanked for maintaining the village book exchange in the former telephone kiosk at the bottom of White Way. Residents were reminded to use the facility responsibly by exchanging books rather than depositing large quantities at once, helping to keep the service manageable and accessible for everyone.

Finally, the Chair expressed gratitude to David Hearn for his many years of work managing the village website. He was especially thanked for helping restore the website and parish council email services following recent technical problems.

Parish Plan

Cllr Firrell explained that the parish is due to begin work on a new Parish Plan, the first since 2005. The previous plan helped shape key developments in the village, including the creation of the community hall and other community initiatives, as well as earlier discussions around restoring a village shop through the “Vital Villages” initiative.

He noted that the Parish Plan is an opportunity to set out a long-term vision for the village over the next 5–15 years, starting with a blank canvas and gathering ideas from residents. A steering group is now needed to lead this work, and residents interested in contributing are encouraged to volunteer by contacting the Parish Council.

The Chair emphasised that the steering group would be community-led rather than administered by the Parish Council, with nominated Councillor, Andy King, only providing liaison support.

6. The Floor is Yours – Any questions or points you wish to raise.

Question 1. A resident raised concerns about a recurring beeping alarm coming from the Wessex Water site behind their home, noting it occurs periodically and questioning its purpose and whether it is a fault notification or monitoring system requiring public reporting.

Councillors advised that generally the issue should be reported directly to Wessex Water, as the organisation is generally responsive to such enquiries. It was suggested that the resident provide details to the parish council who will discuss the matter with Wessex Water and it can then be investigated further.

Question 2. A resident requested an update on the future use of Rowden Farm from Dorset Councillor Sally Holland regarding its future use. Cllr Holland advised that discussions have taken place with Dorset Council’s Farming Committee due to concerns raised locally, including from Long Bredy.

It was confirmed that the farmhouse is required to be occupied as part of the tenancy conditions, with a six-month period allowed for occupation. Although the house is currently in poor condition, the expectation is that it will be refurbished and lived in.

The holding is intended to operate as a working farm, though it is not expected to include dairy operations. Possible uses include sheep or beef farming, with the tenant also connected to a neighbouring farm. It was noted that some livestock arrangements may involve nearby holdings depending on operational needs.

The tenancy was confirmed as meeting the relevant council policies and procedures, but it will be monitored to ensure compliance, particularly regarding occupancy of the house and progression of refurbishment works.

Question 3. A resident asked how many volunteers had put themselves forward to be on the Parish Plan Steering group.

Cllr Firrell confirmed that there were currently six residents who had volunteered to be part of the group. This is below the preferred number, as the previous group had around 12–15 members to ensure a good cross-section of the community.

Work on the new plan will begin once a few more volunteers are recruited, ideally another four or five, at which point an inaugural meeting can be held. The Chair also stressed the importance of involving younger residents to ensure the plan reflects the whole community

Cllr Firrell thanked all those who attended.

Finally, a resident thanked the parish councillors, on behalf of the village, for their ongoing hard work throughout the year, noting that their efforts are highly appreciated even if not always fully recognised.

Meeting closed at 8.16 pm.

Debbie Hollings
Clerk/RFO
Litton Cheney Parish Council