

The Doorstep Green and Redlingfield Village Amenities Ltd

Redlingfield Doorstep Green was created in response to requests from villagers who wanted somewhere safe for children to play and a wildlife-friendly recreation space to hold events or play sport or just sit and enjoy the view.

Russell Kerry found out about the Doorstep Green scheme, whereby the Countryside Agency gave grants to villages to help them create new village greens. The Doorstep Green is protected by legal agreements and it must remain a recreational amenity for the village for a period of 80 years. Purchase and initial set up costs were in the region of £80,000 and villagers put in over 2,000 volunteer hours on the project, digging, planting weeding etc.

As part of the agreement for getting the grant from the Countryside Agency, we had to set up a separate limited company to own and manage the Doorstep Green – this was to protect it from being owned or controlled by any of the local Councils or the Parish Meeting (as cash strapped Councils have been known to sell of any land they own).

The Not-for-Profit community-based company that was set up is called **Redlingfield Village Amenities Ltd** (Company number: 05134030). Current directors are:- Drew Abbott, Katie Abbott, Mike Ager (Secretary), Allan Chapman, Pat Kelly, Janet Norman-Philips (Managing Director) and Alison Smith. The original directors were selected by the village. Previous directors have included:- Hazel Abbott, Manday Miller and Chris Tringham (now Stanford). Future potential directors are chosen by the Company and invited to join the board.

The role of the directors is to keep the Doorstep Green safe and ensure it serves the people of Redlingfield as a wildlife-friendly space for recreation. It pays for and maintains its assets:- shed, mower, play equipment, trees, paths and fencing etc, applying for grants to improve the Doorstep Green and its facilities and seeking donations and volunteers to achieve this.

The Doorstep Green belongs to the Company not to the individual directors. It not an asset for the purposes of individual directors' tax affairs or for their wills, so it cannot be "inherited" by their heirs. As a limited company, directors financial exposure is limited to £1.

Activities of the company are reported to each Annual Parish Meeting and Village Committee meeting under the "Doorstep Green" report section. Any major purchases are discussed prior to purchase and the Village Committee and Parish Meeting help with fundraising for these purchases as does the Parish Church group (the PCC). Suggestions for improvements or issues are also discussed at those meetings and where practical, legal and affordable are adopted or investigated to see if they are possible.

The accounts for the company are prepared by an accountant (Jeanette Brierley) and published at Companies House and are open to full public scrutiny. The vast majority of the monies raised on the Doorstep Green are given directly to the Parish Meeting (Pub on the Green, Summer Fayre & BBQ etc). The Doorstep Green is the primary fundraising venue for the Parish Meeting.

In its terms of reference, the company is required to work with and co-operate with other village organisations (such as the Church PCC and the Parish Meeting). There is an agreement that the Parish Meeting helps with the maintenance and upkeep of the Doorstep Green and insures it under the village insurance policy.

The Doorstep Green was extended by two acres some five years ago – to provide increased play, wildlife and recreation areas, as well as parking for the church and visitors to the Doorstep Green. Costs and work involved have been far more than anyone anticipated and are ongoing. The car parking and fencing have yet to be installed.

The play areas need expanding and improving as do the paths, recreation and wildlife areas.

Notes: The powers of a Parish Meeting are quite limited and less than that of a Parish Council– so it is not legally allowed to own recreation areas such as the Doorstep Green. Any such assets would automatically be "owned" by Mid Suffolk District Council.

The Minutes of Redlingfield Village Amenities Ltd AGM 2021 are attached to this report.

The Annual General Meeting of Redlingfield Village Amenities Ltd 05134030
Redmill, Redlingfield, IP23 7QU. 5pm, Wednesday July 14 2021

Current Directors: Andrew (Drew) Abbott, Hazel Abbott, Mike Ager, Allan Chapman, Manday Miller, Patricia (Pat) Kelly & Janet Norman-Philips

Nominees: Katie Abbott (nominated by Hazel), Alison Smith (nominated by Manday)

Attendance:

Pat Kelly (was unable to attend as she was taken to hospital on Tues July 13 but gave her vote in the presence of Janet, Katie and her carer Amy and asked Janet Norman-Philips to inform the meeting).

Manday Miller (who has mobility issues attended and voted by phone).

Katie Abbott acted as proxy for her husband Drew Abbott who was unable to attend.

1. Resignations of directors:

Hazel Abbot and Manday Miller are standing down and have nominated Katie Abbot and Alison Smith to be their replacements.

2. Appointment of new directors (nominated candidates need to be seconded and then remaining directors need to vote to agree/disagree): Voting is by a simple majority.

2.1 Katie Abbott - nominated by Hazel Abbott.

Seconded by Allan Chapman.

Vote: Unanimously in favour.

2.2 Alison Smith - nominated by Manday Miller

Seconded by Mike Ager.

Vote: Unanimously in favour.

The meeting thanked Manday and Hazel for their work and welcomed Katie and Alison to the board.

3. Discussion on possible selection criteria for potential new directors: It was decided that any new directors should aim to give the board a “more diverse and broader representation of the community” and that it might be sensible to look for younger people possibly with children and/or a strong connection to the village.

4. Doorstep Green: Update on access road, parking and fencing. Janet presented a number of options for the parking and roadway area (see attachment). After examining the samples and much discussion the “Mesh” options were discounted entirely and option 5 was unanimously approved.

The product is Grounfrax’s CellPave GP, 900m2. Option (6) the hit and miss trackway was considered but the meeting concluded that it was more likely that, with more edges, vehicles would damage it.

There was a strong feeling we “should do it properly” and that we only want to do it once...

The CellPave GP product is approx. £12,000 plus installation. The Parochial Church Council has £5,000 specifically set aside for this. Redlingfield Village Amenities agreed to contribute £3,000-£4,000. Peter Gould, our councillor on Mid Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council, has been approached by Janet for a contribution of up to £3,000 [he will make a decision on what if anything he can grant by the end of July].

Alison believed the church (PCC) could afford to make up any shortfall and should consider paying for the installation. Alison stated that we needed to pay someone to install it otherwise it would just sit on pallets for months as the majority of abled-bodied people in the village, who would be the “volunteers”, all had busy lives and already had more work than they could cope with.

Fencing and other improvements to both the old Doorstep Green and new extension will form part of ongoing discussions. The company will be left with approx. £2,000 after contributing to the parking and roadway so funds need to be built back up to help with expenditure and match funding for future projects and improvements to the Doorstep Green.

5. Scheduling future meetings of the company and distributing minutes of meetings: A meeting will be scheduled for winter 2021 (or sooner if needed) details to be arranged nearer the time.

6. AOB:

6.1: Alison agreed to become a signatory for the company’s HSBC account. (Two needed for cheques).

6.2: Janet agreed to update details at companies house and the bank.

Redlingfield Parish Meeting and the Village Committee

We have a **Parish Meeting** here in Redlingfield – not a Parish Council. Each year we have an Annual Village Meeting (Annual Parish Meeting), normally held in May, at which the Parish Chair person, clerk and treasurer are elected.

The **Village Committee** are also elected at the Annual Village Meeting, they are a group of around 14-18 people (it varies) who volunteer to work on behalf of the village organising various activities and fundraising eg Pubs on the Green, litter picking, Summer BBQ, Race Nights, various other events. They also help maintain the Doorstep Green and church, as well as planting trees, installing play equipment and generally helping out. In addition, many other villagers volunteer and give their time to help carry out these activities.

It's an inclusive group and they also have other roles, acting as a sounding board for the Parish Meeting Chair – making suggestions about how things can be improved, or identifying new fundraising ideas as well as being a contact point for the wider village community – to answer questions about what's happening or funnel ideas in to the group about what needs to be improved or issues that arise:- flooding, speeding traffic, play facilities on the Doorstep Green etc.

In the past, they have also carried out surveys to find out what people want improved in the village and what they enjoy about the village. The Village Committee includes volunteers from the Parochial Church Council (PCC), Parish Meeting and Redlingfield Village Amenities Ltd.

Volunteers also maintain the village website and produce the village magazine, the Athelington, Horham & Redlingfield news, which is printed in full colour, produced quarterly and distributed free to some 350 local residents and businesses. Copies are also on the website www.redlingfield.suffolk.gov.uk.

The Village Committee and all the other volunteers are one of the things that make Redlingfield such a great place to live, a community coming together to do good stuff. The activities of this group of people normally raises £2,000-£3,000 a year.

Neither the officials (Chair, clerk or treasurer) nor any of the Village Committee receive any payment at all for carrying out these voluntary activities and duties.

Redlingfield Parish Meeting is a local authority (though with fewer powers than a full Parish Council – for example a Parish Meeting cannot reclaim VAT whereas a Parish Council can). It has to be consulted on local government matters such as new planning applications; it is also legally entitled to raise a local Council Tax to pay for things that the village wants done. However, the Annual Village Meeting voted overwhelmingly to not have a local Council Tax – instead they voted to hold fundraising events. So that's what we do.

The Parish Meeting is able to access grants specifically for local authorities and/or act as the grant recipient in order to redistribute grants to community initiatives such as the "Bags of Cheer" project, run by volunteers during the Covid lockdown. It can also provide match-funding to projects such as the £1,000 grant it gave to the church PCC to enable them to get a grant of £9,000 to repair some of their windows.

The Parish Meeting also successfully campaigned to get fibre Broadband in to Redlingfield via fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) and it was one of the first rural Suffolk villages to have fibre to the premises (FTTP), enabling speeds of up to 900MB.

Parishes (originally relating to Manors in the Middle Ages) are one of the oldest forms of "local government" in the UK.

The **Annual Village Meeting (Annual Parish Meeting)** is the decision-making body for the village. At this annual meeting of the Parish anyone and everyone is free to speak their mind, to propose things that we should be doing or should not be doing. If people have negative views about what is happening or have ideas for projects they would like to see happening, they are encouraged and very welcome to voice them. Proposals are voted on by everyone from Redlingfield at the meeting and the Chair then takes responsibility for carrying out those wishes (provided they are lawful) to the best of their ability. For radical or contentious proposals, the entire village would be consulted.

Fundraising for village projects and village expenditure

Throughout the year various events and activities take place to raise funds for the village. In addition, external funding (grants and donations) is sought for projects where possible.

All the grants and donations we have received over the years have been for specific projects.

The main village expenditure each year relates to insurance and grass cutting and purchases to sell at the various events – these events make a profit. The village magazine covers its costs from advertising revenue.

At various times the Annual Village Meeting has agreed to make contributions to projects from its funds. e.g. in 2009 there was a £1,000 contribution towards new play equipment on the Doorstep Green, from 2009 to 2011, £500 per year was donated to church repairs and in 2017 £2,000 was contributed to the cost of the highway access for the Doorstep Green. In July 2017 two 10ft by 15ft pop up tents/gazebos were purchased at a cost of £438 for use at village events.

Most recently, Ian Winter, our Parish Meeting Chair, has raised over £3,000 in donations to install our defibrillator in the old telephone box and look after it for years to come.

The Doorstep Green

The creation of the Doorstep Green came about in 2006 following an Annual Village Meeting, where residents said that a safe place was needed for children to play and for us to hold events such as the annual village BBQ. Prior to the creation of the Doorstep Green, we had to close the road to hold our annual BBQ and children played in the street (skateboarding and football), people were convinced, given how fast traffic moves through our village, that sooner or later there would be a serious accident or fatality.

The Annual Village Meeting agreed and we were fortunate to get a number of grants to create the Doorstep Green. The entire village was informed and agreed and the project moved forward with the help of just about everyone in the village. Around 2,000 volunteer hours were recorded on the project.

Redlingfield has a Parish Meeting rather than a Parish Council – and is unable to own recreational land – we set up a not-for-profit limited company to own the Doorstep Green on behalf of the village (**Redlingfield Village Amenities Ltd**). The original grant also required that a separate company was created to protect the Doorstep Green from being sold off in future by a cash-strapped local council. The area continues to be looked after and maintained by volunteers and has turned out to be extremely popular.

Belatedly, we realised that it was far too small. In a more recent questionnaire sent to everyone in the village and asking what we should do next, 97% of the village

asked for the Doorstep Green to be improved and made larger. The same questionnaire asked if people wanted to see the village church restored and updated to make it a useable community space (loos, a kitchen, better heating etc), the number who said “yes” was only slightly lower at 95%. The questionnaire was sent to every person in the village and there was a 98% response.

We raised more than £25,000 in donations and purchased an additional two acres to enlarge the original Doorstep Green.

Since then, a further donation of £10,000 was received and fundraising continued to create highway access and the bridge. Tony Rose Freitas’s incredible walk along the Suffolk Coastal path raised over £2,000. The new bridge has now been installed and it also has side railings, thanks to the welding skills of Will Kerry.

Currently we are focusing on creating the internal access road and parking for the Church and visitors to the Doorstep Green to share. Fundraising events have been held, Tom Smith cycled and Phoebe Smith rode her elderly pony 36km raising over £5,000 and more funds are being sought. After that we plan to purchase and install fencing so that children and dogs can’t run in to the access road or main road or in to the farmers field behind.

We are also doing minor repairs to the equipment on the original Doorstep Green along with sprucing it up. We plan to substantially improve the play, wildlife and recreation facilities on the green.

The Church of St Andrew

The “Redlingfield Parish Meeting” was originally created in 1977 in order to come together as a village to support and save the village church.

The Church of St Andrew is a significant historic building, it is of Anglo-Saxon origin, recorded in the Domesday Book (when this was a Viking village called Radinghefelda), Grade 2* listed and on the site of a Benedictine Nunnery, which is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Nunnery’s mediaeval fish ponds are largely intact, Heritage England have said that they are “of national significance”.

The church is the responsibility of **Redlingfield Parochial Church Council (PCC)**. This is a separate organisation from Redlingfield Parish Meeting. The PCC is a Charity and as such can add Gift Aid to the funds its donors have raised. It is also able to access grants designed to support religious groups, heritage buildings and those designed to allow updates to churches to include use by the community.

The PCC organises fundraising to maintain and improve the church e.g. Cheese & Wine evenings, quizzes, Flower Festivals, Dog and Produce Shows.

In 2016-2017, then local vicar, Michael Womack, asked the Redlingfield Annual Village Meeting for help with a project to get the church roof repaired. The meeting agreed to do everything they could to help secure funding and repair the church.

We raised over £6,000 locally, including a race night and cake sales and more than £1,000 was raised with a Swing Dance at the Red Feather Club in Horham.

The Parish Clerk project managed the work on behalf of the PCC. The project was successful, the new roof and rainwater goods cost some £95,000, with external funding (Government grants) being obtained for some 90% of the expenditure and the PCC contributing the rest. Bishop Martin Seeley celebrated the reopening, he was the first Bishop to visit Redlingfield in over 500 years.

Our new Priest in Charge is Eleanor Goodison and she and the PCC have plans to deliver on the village’s ambition to have the church also function as a community building – with loos and kitchen facilities etc.