



NRS&NMHPC

Newton Regis, Seckington and No Man's Heath Parish Council

Three villages, one community

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – No. 232b.

Tuesday 22nd May 2018
Newton Regis Village Hall

Present: Cllr D Waithman (DW)(Chairman)
Cllr D Cox (DC)
Cllr S Wilson (SW)
Cllr R Thirlby (RT)
Cllr M Ruston (MR)
Cllr G Hunt (GH)
Mrs N Allton (Clerk)
4 x Parishioners

The meeting commenced at 7.19pm

1. Apologies for Absence

None.

2. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Assembly

Minutes of the last Annual Parish Assembly, held on 9th May 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. Chairman's Annual Report

As in previous reports 2017/2018 has been a mixture of good and not so good, we have lost the services of two Councillors, one through work pressure and one through moving away, both sadly missed, but have acquired two new Councillors, Cllr. Mike Ruston from No Man's Heath and Cllr. Richard Thirlby from Seckington and welcome them both to this Council.

A week after the end of our financial year, we were lucky enough to co-opt another new Councillor, Gary Hunt, to give us a full Council, welcome to the Council, Cllr. Gary Hunt.

Various Councillors and the Clerk have attended Training Courses provided by the Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils. These particularly important at this time due to Governmental changes made to not only our Audit regime but also the changes being made to the Data Protection and the Freedom of Information Acts, the latter something that affects every organisation.

Finance

Once again our Clerk, Mrs N. Allton, has guided us safely through the rigours of External Audit with no adverse or advisory comments. This will be the last time that we go to External Audit as the Government has completely changed the rules and from 2017/2018 we will only need to have a more vigorous Internal Audit but we are still waiting for the complete instructions..

In addition to all our regular expenditure this year we have purchased a powered roller to use on the playing field. This is to replace our old hand controlled powered roller. It is our intention to sort out the problems on this old machine and get it back into working order so that it can be sold to recover most of the cost of its replacement. More on this in the Playing Field section of this report.

I'm happy to report that the Council Finances are in excellent health with a reserve slowly building towards the recommended 12 month level. Over the last few years the Government has given a grant towards our precept that has been on a reducing scale, we have always set our Precept at £10,100 less this grant. This year the Borough Council decided not to pass on the grant so we are on the basic figure. We have therefore not increased our precept but without the grant it will cost each of us more.

We have purchased new flower tubs for Hangman's Lane at Seckington and will fund the compost and plants to fill them but they will be maintained by a Seckington resident. One of the flower tubs around Newton Regis has been replaced by one donated by Newton Garden Store, to whom we offer our grateful thanks, and they also provided compost for the others. These tubs are all maintained by residents who we thank for helping to keep our Village looking good. We also purchased a few more daffodil bulbs to go along the wall in front of St Marys Grove and Granted £100 to Newton School's Sensory Garden.

DRAFT ONLY - NOT YET AGREED

We have always supported the three churches in our Parish, St Mary's in Newton, All Saints in Seckington and St Mary's churchyard in No Man's Heath, not necessarily because they are churches but because they are focal points in each village and if they look good, the village looks good. These include a grant to each to help towards the cost of maintaining the churchyard, the maintenance of the church clock in Newton Regis and to help out in any other way we can. Unfortunately someone, somewhere in this country has dug up an Act of Parliament dating from 1894 that expressly forbids Parish Councils from financially supporting churches or their property. Apparently this Act was put in place when Parish Councils were first formed and took over some of the non-secular financial aspects that the Church had historically held and was to prevent mis-use of Parish funds and whilst it has been modified over the years, the core point has been deemed to be still legal. Sadly this Act has forced us to comply as the penalty for mis-use of Public Funds is now a criminal offence and any Council taken to court over this and losing could result in every Councillor getting a criminal conviction on their personal record. Hopefully at sometime in the future the Government will get some sense and let all Parishes get back to what they have always done.

Playing Field

We have again had the pleasure of cricket every Saturday through the season. Tamworth 3rd team play on alternative Saturdays to Tamworth 4th team and we also have Austrey & Newton Regis Junior Cricket Club for juniors that field teams of various ages from 9 through to 16 who play games on irregular days throughout the week. Last season Tamworth 3rds had a great season and gained promotion to the next division. This means that as promotion brings requirements for some ground improvements we could be gaining a few items we have always lacked from Tamworth C.C. It would be really nice to see a few more residents turning up on a Saturday to watch the cricket, why not bring a picnic and sit out in the sun. For some time we have desperately needed a powered roller to level the square as it is starting to get ridges that could be highly dangerous. At the start of last season Mr. S. Allton kindly loaned us his which allowed us to take the worst out but things are back to where they were again. Our old roller is extremely temperamental to start and somewhat unwieldy and we have been looking for an electric start ride-on roller to replace it, happy to report that we have bought one late last year. This is good news all round as it means that we can use it for other things such as rolling the patching to the potholes in the car-park. We have looked at surfacing this but with costs in excess of £40,000 it is beyond our capabilities as a Parish Council and needs outside assistance to make happen. The signs in the car park have all been renewed and the hedges have been trimmed, the hedge down to the Tennis and Bowls Clubs has to be hand-trimmed as the hedge cutter can't access that bit. Every year we try to have the hedges checked for rabbits as if left alone they tend to dig small holes all over the place, including the cricket square, but weren't able to do part of it last year as the far side of the hedge was so overgrown. This year I'm pleased to say that Mr. P. Abbott has kindly had his cut so that our contractor can now get to the warren. You may remember that a few years ago one player did break his ankle in a rabbit hole so you can see this is a necessary action. Chris Wilson has done his usual fantastic job of preparing our equipment for this coming season. This year our only problem has been the wicket mower that has needed a new bottom blade and the cylinder sharpened the rest has just been oil, filters and adjustment.

ANRJCC have recently installed a bench on the field near the car-park in memory of their late Chairman, Gary Ward, and have also placed a storage shed at the end of their nets.

Unfortunately we have had to close the children's playground due to the actions of moles. The first mole has proved very difficult to catch, partly because of the weather. When it was finally caught it was felt that the ground was too dangerous due to the fantastic number of runs it had made, again due to the weather, these runs are very shallow and can easily damage someone's ankle. This was compounded by the arrival of a second mole but that one doesn't appear to have stayed. When the weather improves we intend to use the new roller in the playground to flatten out the runs and make the place safe again.

We have been asked if we could provide a toddlers seat to replace one of the swings. We are not against this but are investigating whether we can afford a completely separate swing frame so we can keep the double one.

Duckpond

Our plans to clean out the Duckpond have, unfortunately, had to be put on hold due to the cost. To clear the pond and comply with all the necessary legislation is quoted to us at £5,000 and if we can't dispose of the dug out silt locally and have to dispose of it through landfill, this could double. As can be seen elsewhere in this report the initial cost is just about half of our annual income and with some fixed costs such as Insurance, rent and salary taking up most of the remainder, to take this on could mean that we do absolutely nothing else for at least two years. We are always looking for funding possibilities, or reduced quotes, but, as with the playing field car park, this is looked on as Maintenance and Grants are almost always for Capital Projects. By now the overgrowth on the pond wall should have been cut back to a reasonable level so that it provides cover for our ducks but doesn't harm the stone work. Due to the snow and heavy rain the pond has overflowed on more occasions than normal this winter. Whilst removing the silt would provide a slightly larger volume to contain the excess water we think that we should really concentrate on the drainage from the pond, if that is blocked then the flooding is worse. It should be remembered that the pond is fed by run-off from local fields and with heavy rain the flooding is more or less instant unlike on a stream or river where the water comes more slowly from up-stream and gathers its water from sources such as our pond. The worst flooding came when the drain at the church end of the pond became blocked by debris brought down from the fields. Now this is clear we are as only bad off as before as the two pipes are mostly blocked somewhere under the highway. We have been in touch with County Highway's who have said they will come and jet them but it is our opinion that it is more serious and the road will have to be dug up. When these pipes are clear the pond level should be about 8" lower.

Planning

DRAFT ONLY - NOT YET AGREED

There has been quite a lot of Planning Applications through this past year and Your Council has responded to every one, occasionally we will support and equally occasionally we will object but in the main we will respond with "No comment". This is where we see nothing detrimental to our villages and are content to allow North Warks. Borough Council's Planning Dept. to decide on planning issues. One item that we have been pursued is the application to build houses on the field opposite Seckington Lane. The houses at the field was turned down by the Borough Council, including an objection by this Council as the field is outside the development boundary of the village, went to Appeal (for the second time) and the Borough's decision, we are happy to say, was (again) upheld.

Speeding

For some time we have been concerned at the speed that some people drive through the village, especially parents fetching children from school, and also the complete lack of awareness of what is happening on the road in front of them resulting on several occasions in the deaths of several of our ducks walking across the road to the farm. Through our County Councillor, Cllr. Dave Parsons, we have gained the funding to do something about it. You will have seen that the entrances to Newton Regis on Main Rd, Austrey Lane and Kings Lane are being revamped, the white lining renewed and some new signs installed, especially new Duck signs. Again thanks to Cllr. Parsons we have been given the funding to purchase a second Defibrillator, this one to go on the No Man's Heath Village Hall, providing access for emergency treatment to the residents of No Man's Heath.

Other Items

As usual we have supported the Annual Goosewalk, providing the organisation and the Insurance Cover. This year the weather was better than last (just!) and with a good turnout I think everyone enjoyed themselves. A lot of people to thank here, Arnold Walsh for organising a highly successful Raffle, to Georgina for cooking the soup and allowing us the use of the Queen's Head carpark and providing an undercover area for serving the soup, to Cllr. Dilys Cox for organising another effective litter pick and all those who helped in any way in its success. The magnificent sum of £308.74 was raised, £175 from Arnold's Raffle and was donated to St Mary's Fabric Fund. From earlier in this report you can see that as a Parish Council we can no longer donate money to the church and as the only way we can get Insurance cover for the Goosewalk is if it is a Parish Council run event, next year we will step back from anything to do with the money raised at the event and leave it to those good people who collect it to donate to where they wish. If it is St Mary's that is chosen then it is nothing to do with us.

A new event this year, organised by Cllr. Dilys Cox, was the switching on of the Christmas Tree Lights. The weather was cold with snow and we weren't expecting much of a turnout but you fooled us! There were a lot of villagers, a lot of children and their parents from the school, several other people and last, but by no means least, the Rev. Stephen Banks, our Vicar. Stephen led us all in some carols and then Georgina had invited us all down to the Queen's Head for mince pies and mulled wine. We are indeed fortunate to have such lovely people as the tenants of our village pub. Unfortunately during the high winds since Christmas a fairly large branch was broken off the tree and managed to tangle up the lights so badly we are going to have to take them down and re-set them. Any help here will be greatly appreciated. Cllr. Cox also organises the regular village litter pick, dates for which can be found on the Village Noticeboard, our Facebook page as well as our website.

One thing that is continuing to mar our village is the failure of some dog owners to clear up after their animal(s). We know that these people are a small minority of the dog owners in the village but they bring the rest into concern. Please would the guilty owners **clean up** after their animals and any of the responsible owners **report it** if they see it happening. You can report it to any Councillor, the Dog Warden or the Borough Council, all in total anonymity, any of us will sort it out from there.

Newton Regis Bus Shelter is causing us some problems. It did have a tree overgrowing it that Thorpe Estate cleared away exposing a lot of rotten wood. We have had a quote for just over £1,000 to repair it and are trying to get further quotes. If this figure is on a par with any others we get, we have a quandary, do we spend that much money or do we just scrap it? We will be asking residents in the future and will abide by whatever you say.

We have recently had a visit from representatives of HS2 who came to introduce themselves as the access for us to the railway and its building. They have left a copy of the plans of the nearest section of HS2 nearest to us, route 2B, and outlined the compensation plans together with a goodwill fund that we may be able to get funding from but not really until building starts. The Council expressed concerns regarding construction vehicles using our narrow village roads and they say that this will be taken into account but on top of that we have been advised to contact Warwickshire County Council who have a department set up to cover things like this. HS2 have promised to keep in touch.

There have been issues with the lay-by on the B5493 at Seckington including ill manners by HGV drivers parking there, blocking the entrance to the house whose drive exits onto it and its use as a toilet. Since the Borough and County Councils accepted that there was a problem, it does appear to have eased.

Finally I would like to thank all the Councillors, past as well as present, for helping maintain this Parish and also to our Clerk, Nicola Allton, so much of what we do is down to her efforts and without whom so much of what we do would be far more difficult.

4. Audited Accounts 2016 / 2017

The Clerk reported that the external auditors, Grant Thornton, had successfully passed the annual accounts of the Parish Council for 2016/2017. These were available for viewing.

DRAFT ONLY - NOT YET AGREED

5. Any other Parish affairs

Ms Mutch and Mrs Ulliott thanked the Parish Council, Councillors Wilson and Thirlby for their help in installing the Seckington flower tubs. The Parish Council thanked them for growing plants to fill the tubs.

Ms Mutch reported that Mr Ulliott had helped to contact Craig Tracey MP about the B5493 lay-by and that it would be closed in September. Ms Mutch is still collecting rubbish in the lay-by. Clerk to get confirmation of closure from WCC.

Concerns about the speed of traffic through Seckington and at the junction of Hangman's Lane and Ashby Road were raised. GH to contact the MP about the speeding.

DW to speak to Jane Pritchard about the need to cut back the grass verges near the cross roads in Seckington.

GH noted that the tree in front of St. Mary's Church needs to be cut back.

The Chairman closed this part of the meeting at 7:35 pm.

Chairman
Cllr D Waithman

Date