

Norton Lindsey Parish Council Annual Open Meeting held in the Village Hall at 8.00pm on 12 April 2016

Present: Cllr J Stobart (Chairman); Cllr Miss A Birch (Vice Chairman); Cllr R Mann; Cllr M Neale; Cllr K Sparkes; Cllr Mrs A Mace-Leska; WCC Cllr L Caborn; WDC Cllr P Philips; Mrs J Bendall (Clerk); and 24 members of the public

Apologies: None

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made by the Councillors and Clerk.

2. Minutes of the Open Meeting held on 14 April 2015

The Minutes of the Open Meeting held on 14 April 2015 were discussed, confirmed and signed.

3. Matters Arising

None.

4. Chairman's Report

I'd like to start by expressing our thanks to Nick Burns and Arthur Fowkes, who both retired last May after many years of serving on the Parish Council. Nick was chair for 23 years and Arthur had been vice-chair for about 10 years. Also last year, Tim Fowler and Jill Lawton-Smith stepped down from the PC. The result is that we have an almost entirely new set of parish councillors.

Whilst much of what we do remains largely unchanged, we have made some changes in the last year about the way in which we organise our meetings and the matters that we discuss.

Perhaps the key innovation is the introduction of an annual Action Plan, which identifies priority areas and identifies what activity is necessary to achieve our objectives. This, we hope, will make the PC a bit more proactive.

The priority areas identified in the Action Plan are drawn from the Parish Plan, produced in 2014, which charged the Parish Council with taking action on a wide range of issues. Some of these are beyond the scope of what we can achieve - things like bringing mains gas to the village, ensuring a joined-up transport policy, and building more tennis courts. We therefore picked out four things that seemed particularly important and were identified in the Parish Plan as priority concerns.

The key issues are: producing a Parish website, addressing traffic problems (especially speeding), improving awareness and quality of footpaths, and decreasing the incidence of dog fouling. There is a report on our progress against these objectives later in the meeting.

Apart from this new modus operandi, there are two things that continue to occupy much of our time at PC meetings.

The first are road issues.

Over the last year, we've seen problems with flooding at the bottom of the track by Blacon Farm (and more seriously just beyond the parish boundaries), and concerns over car parking, and overhanging trees and overgrown hedges down New Road. The last of these has been resolved, but road flooding remains an ongoing concern.

There has been work to improve the road surface by Littleworth Farm, which has at least temporarily raised the quality of the road. On a larger scale, work on resurfacing Warwick Road involved its closure and the diversion of traffic along Brittons Lane, despite us pointing out the lunacy of this route. As a result, considerable damage has been done to the verges and the edge of the carriageway along this road - problems that we are still trying to redress.

The second are planning applications.

These have included major schemes for remodelling houses as well as smaller modifications and extensions. We're pleased to be able to say that Horsley House Farm is finally receiving the attention that it needs, but elsewhere we've noted that WDC are being especially strict, with several schemes being refused permission despite support from the PC. We'd certainly encourage those thinking of putting in planning applications to come and talk with us beforehand.

We have also monitored and passed on reports of progress towards having Superfast Broadband in the village. Others might have more definite information on this, but my understanding is that, following work last month and the installation of a new box at the corner of Curlieu Lane, SFB should be with us by the summer.

Finally, we have discussed on several occasions the merits of producing a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish. This is a document with a much stronger basis in planning matter than a Parish Plan and would operate within the District Council's Local Plan to shape any planning and development within the parish. At present, we are not minded to produce a Neighbourhood Plan because: [a] the parish is washed over by the greenbelt, affording us a large degree of protection from any unwanted, large-scale development (so we are not convinced of the need) and [b] the village of Norton Lindsey being split between three parish makes the production of a plan (which would need to mesh with both WDC and SDC Local Plans) extremely complex and we are not aware of anyone willing to take on such a large and complex task. We will, of course, keep this matter under review.

5. Treasurer's Report

Following the investment of £30,000 in a 2 year fixed term bond, which earned over £2,000 in interest and which matured in the autumn of 2014, we managed to find another higher interest account which was open to parish councils. We transferred £30,000 into a 1 year fixed rate account with an interest rate of 1.80%, and £16,000 was transferred into a 90-day account with an interest rate of 1.740%.

As always, we are keeping our eyes open for alternative bonds into which we can transfer money from our Capital Fund for when this fixed rate account matures. However, as reported in previous years it is difficult to find a suitable account that will allow us to invest "public money".

For your information, the Capital Fund is made up of £47,584.76, which is the "depot" money, and £3,500 which is retained for contested elections.

The Precept was increased slightly to £5,100 for 2015-2016, and the sum we received for Concurrent Services and the Council Tax Grant was £699, a £70 drop from last year. We received the grant of £1,200 from Warwick District Council towards the cost of the Jubilee Memorial which should have been paid to us in the previous financial year, and this sum has been added to the Capital Fund. We were also in receipt of a grant of £311 from the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils, which was for the sole purpose of purchasing a computer and scanner to enable the Parish Council to be compliant with the legally binding Transparency Code which came into force for smaller councils during 2015. This Code governs how the smaller parish councils publish their information, and requires that councils upload all their information to websites as well as traditional noticeboards.

Insurance costs for the year remained the same, and there was a very slight increase in the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils subscription.

Staffing costs increased as the Clerk's salary was brought in line with the Local Government Services NJC salary scales at point SCP18, and administration costs were much higher this year compared to the year before, due in main to the purchase of a laptop, printer, software and accessories, and relevant training for the newly elected councillors.

The Parish Council once again made a donation towards maintenance of the Church Clock / Chimes, the defibrillator, Millennium Green and the Churchyard, and supported our local village clubs. We would like to remind the Clubs that all donations must be acknowledged in writing, which is a requirement of the audit.

6. Action Plan Update

The Parish Action Plan for 2015/16 identified four areas where the PC would focus its efforts.

1. To establish and populate a Parish/village website

This is up and running, thanks to the efforts of Jenny and Amy. It contains the documentation that we are legally obliged to publish online (agendas, minutes, accounts and the like) but also parish news and links to other websites, especially those of WDC and WCC. I'm sorry to say that is not used very much at all, so we will need to think about how to raise awareness and usefulness.

2. To decrease incidents of speeding through the village

This was an area that was raised at last years' annual meeting as well as via the Parish Plan. We are consulting with WCC about a number of small schemes that aim to slow traffic as it comes into the village. These include gateway signs, roundels on the road and improved signage. The cost will, we hope, be covered by the WCC, but we will need to decide where the money is best spent – both in terms of location and the nature of the infrastructure.

We have tried to set up a Community Speedwatch group in order to monitor and provide evidence of the problem, but very few people have volunteered to help with this. After a number of requests in the parish magazine, several people came forward, but most have dropped out leaving only three people prepared to undertake the training. If this is an area that you people do care about, then we need volunteers - otherwise, there is very little that we can do.

3. To improve the maintenance and increase the use of footpaths in the parish

A map of footpaths has been posted on the website, as have links for reporting issues to the CC. Please use these. We are also engaged in an ongoing dialogue with farmers and other landowners about keeping paths clear and ensuring clear signage, especially at stiles.

4. To decrease the incidence of dog fouling

We've monitored the scale and geography of the issue. Although both of these are rather variable, the village field is particular problem area. We're also encouraging people to comply with the law by putting notices in the parish magazine and notes through doors. At present, we are exploring the possibility and cost of putting additional bins. But we think it's more a question of getting people to use them rather having ever more bins.

For 2016/17, we'll carry on monitoring (3) and will continue with (4) and with (2) but only if we get more support in terms of volunteers. We'll also add a new action, probably to do with improving engagement with safer neighbourhoods and community policing.

7. Report from WCC Cllr L Caborn

Clr Les Caborn combined report for Bishops Tachbrook division.

BUDGET

In the autumn statement the government announced that it had changed the way councils were to be allocated their funding, without consultation. The net effect is that WCC has £10 million less in 2016/17 and 2017/18 per year. As the announcement was too late for this years' budget setting, we took money out of reserves. The roll on effect will mean an extra £25 million will have to be found in 2017/18. In addition, the public health budget was reduced by £1.4 million in year plus 3.9% in real terms each year until 2020. We increased council tax by 1.9% plus 2% for adult social care.

SAND AND GRAVEL

The work is nearly complete in processing all responses to the first consultation and putting them on line. An additional member of staff is being recruited to assist. A number of new sites have been submitted so these will be consulted on shortly, following which there will be a second consultation on the proposed final list of sites based on all sites (new and old) in the Autumn. It is then planned to submit to inspectors in 2017.

SOLAR ENERGY

Three sites in council ownership are being investigated and costed with a partner to deliver income and balance energy usage with generation. One of these is Glebe Farm, Wasperton - possibly 6 acres around Glebe Farm itself, facing south towards Wellesbourne.

SMALLHOLDING ESTATE

The Council has agreed to maintain our small holding estate at 5000 acres. Where land is sold for development out of this estate, the Council has agreed that 5% of sale price will be reinvested in land to maintain the total acreage.

MENTAL HEALTH

Our mental health contracts (CAMHS) has been redesigned to concentrate on early help and intervention and is being re-let this year. In addition, we have won £17 million additional funding which will be used to eliminate waiting time.

MASH

The multi-agency safeguarding hub will open for children on May 3rd and adults on Sep 1st. This brings together on one site in WCC social workers, police, health, education, priority families, youth justice and child sexual exploitation teams to safeguard all our vulnerable people.

SMART START

This is our 5 years redesign to ensure every child is school ready. It involves health, education, children's centres, nurseries, nurses to deliver the best start for every child and parents across the whole county. It is about changing ours and our partners' services and engaging local communities to assist and help.

FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

Policy now completed and will be coming your way.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

The additional 2% council tax has enabled WCC to ensure all care workers alongside all WCC staff receive the living wage. We continue with our programme of delivering independent living for the elderly and disabled. We are redesigning all our social care contracts to deliver improved service with a reduced number of suppliers with new performance targets.

FIRE AND RESCUE

We continue our work with Worcester and Hereford fire and rescue but are waiting the Home Secretary to give details of the announced collaboration with police.

OLD SHIRE HALL

After competitive tender, the Council has accepted an in-house bid to manage this venture. It is proposed to do this via an arms length company.

Thanks to all Chairman, Councillors and Clerks for their support throughout the year.

Clr Les Caborn

8. Report from WDC Cllr P Phillips

WDC Cllr Phillips discussed the emerging local plan, which is currently in the final consultation stage, and talked about the allocation of housing throughout Warwick District. He confirmed that in the local plan Norton Lindsey will be subject to limited infill. He advised that the key issue was soundness of the local plan, and one of the greatest areas of concern within the local plan is infrastructure – schools, roads, medical facilities, etc – and that WDC and WCC are working together to resolve the issue. Solutions are to be found within the next 18 months before house building starts.

Another area of concern which doesn't directly affect Norton Lindsey is that WDC still doesn't have a gypsy site. A decision is to be reached shortly.

With regards to the Budget, WDC has had to increase Council Tax for the first time in 7-8 years due to support from central government decreasing faster than WDC can make savings. Overall, WDC is still delivering all its services without cuts.

Cllr Phillips briefly discussed the organisation of local government, and advised that the West Midlands Combined Authority is still under discussion. He confirmed that WDC will not be joining the West Midlands Combined Authority, and that MP Chris White is pressing for WDC to question the whole structure of local government. He confirmed that we are likely to hear more about this in the future, and that it is a way of saving quite a lot of money if all services are under one council's authority.

9. Any Matters Causing Concern

One member of the public questioned a point made during the discussions on traffic calming and speeding, that of national GPS monitoring (speeding, location, etc). WCC Cllr Caborn and WDC Cllr Phillips advised that officers can obtain information from GPS engine monitoring systems which is stored centrally. It was felt that this is the future of intelligent communications.

10. Open Discussion

Q. Are we at risk if we don't have a Neighbourhood plan?

A. The Local Plan, when passed, only allows for infill development. The WDC representative who addressed the Parish Council didn't feel it was necessary. If a Neighbourhood Plan is put into place the village would have to specify that we didn't want any developments above a certain level, and it would be "belt and braces". However, the risk seems very small.

Q. There are rumours of a potential development off Curlieu Lane. Is this true?

A. The Parish Council has not received any planning applications, and WDC Planning Department has not seen anything. There have been representations made to the Parish Council by a company who have an interest in a development on that site. The Parish Council feels it could be useful to have conversation with them, but stresses that it does not necessarily support a development.

The Curlieu Lane site would not be considered infill.

Q. How does it fit within the WDC need for housing? Can we be told that this site has to be built on?

A. The Local Plan identifies Norton Lindsey as liable for infill only. WDC Cllr Phillips advised that he has not heard of any development within Norton Lindsey. Norton Lindsey is greenbelt, and it will be very difficult to build such a development when the Local Plan is in place. Until the new Plan is in place there is a slight risk.

Q. Any potential developer is more likely to speak to WDC. What is the time scale of Local Plan because until it is in place there are going to be speculative approaches?

A. The consultation ends at the end of April, the Local Plan will go to the Inspector in October, and the public inspection will be finished before Christmas with a report coming out around February 2017. It will be formally adopted during March/April next year. The delay has been caused by too many windfall sites and overspill from Coventry.

General discussion also took place concerning the speeding, and lack of volunteers to join the Community Speedwatch Programme, etc.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Meeting closed at 21.18 hrs.