

## **NORTH NEWNTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING SAT 7<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022**

### **PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Before we start, can we please pause and reflect for a moment on those in Ukraine. Fellow Europeans, people like us whose lives have been turned upside down. 3 hours away by air but living in Hell right now.

My name is Tom Ellen, and I'm speaking to you today as the newly-elected Chairman of the Parish Council. I've been a PC for 5 years, lived in NN for nearly 10 years and was elected Chairman at our meeting on Tuesday 3 May 2022. So a warm welcome to fellow Parishioners of North Newnton and friends, especially those who have recently joined the community. Nice to see everyone here on such a lovely day. And a special thank you to Sue and Graham for hosting us; it's marvellous to see The Woodbridge Inn open and doing so well!

Also great to see representation today from Hilcott Village Hall Trustees, St James' Church Parochial Council and Paul Oatway QPM, our stalwart Ward Councillor and who will be speaking later (For context – one level above PCs and advises and helps PC, especially this Chairman!)

Let me start by briefly talking about your Parish Council. I want to pay tribute to some truly effective councillors who have left the Council since our last APM in September 2021 (the first for 18 months and delayed until lockdown restrictions were lifted):

Marcus Stoneham, our Chairman for the past 3 years

Mac McLean, a long-serving councillor, and staunch advocate for the North Newnton Footway Project

Olivia Campbell Slight, who did great work on traffic calming and the Neighbourhood Plan over the past 3 years

And of course our excellent Parish Clerk for the past 3 years, Gill Tatum.

Thank you for your dedicated and selfless service to the council and the community. You've been great role models with a brilliant community spirit and will be really missed. None of you have left the community so we hope to see you at PC meetings!

On the positive side, Sean Devine (North Newnton) has re-joined the Parish Council and was co-opted at our meeting on Tuesday night – welcome back Sean!

I'd also like to introduce my two newly-elected Vice-Chairmen, David Brisker and Tony Mulliken. This nucleus of three elected councillors – myself, David (Bottlesford) and Tony (Bottlesford) – were joined by Rich Cook (Hilcott) and Andy Gray (Bottlesford), who were co-opted at our meeting on 28 March. Welcome, and thank you for volunteering to serve. Together with Sean, we now comprise a Council of six councillors out of the seven we are entitled to; we'd really like to see a lady on the council as our seventh member...

We do have a lady however, and that's our amazing new Parish Clerk, Rosie Charnock. Rosie's also a local, and she is rapidly becoming the go-to expert on any manner of things. It is a real pleasure to work with such an enthusiastic and dedicated Parish Clerk – please give Rosie a warm welcome!

We have a great team on the Parish Council with diverse backgrounds and a ton of specialist skills, and while I jokingly allude to the settlement in which they live, I know that each Councillor's true allegiance is to the Parish as a whole. Let me stress by the way that I'm not the Council 'leader'. As Chairman I act as a facilitator, and the LGA 1972 which regulates Parish Councils is clear that it's my job as the Chairman to run meetings, develop consensus and make sure all views are heard. And that's what I will do.

I'm now going to take this opportunity to bring you up to date about a few things that have affected the Parish Council since we last met as a Parish back in September 2021. There are seven points I'd like to speak to...

### **First, PC Meetings:**

Coming out of lockdown and 18 months of Zoom meetings, we recognised that PC meetings need a very focused agenda so as to better involve members of the public; and so that no item comes before the PC for discussion or a motion to decide without councillors being well-prepared. This will lead to more frequent but shorter meetings (every 6 weeks and for 90 minutes maximum) and hopefully to quicker and better-informed decision-making. We now tend to meet in The Seven Stars which is closed on Mondays, which matches our preferred Monday schedule. If this is not available (e.g. for the Annual PC Mtg on Tuesday) we use St James' Church or another suitable venue.

### **Second, the North Newnton Footway Project:**

We've resolved the major funding issue which came to a head in early 2022. It was related to our relatively small annual income, pressure on our budget, the projected cost of the NN Footway project and the formal Deed of Variation releasing Acorn Construction's Developer Deposit to fund the Footway. I'm pleased to report that at the Local Highways and Footways Improvement Group (LH & FIG) meeting on Wednesday 4 May, the completion of Phase 2 of the Footway Project was reinstated on the schedule as a Priority Scheme as a consequence of the PC ring-fencing its agreed contribution to the Project of £14,800. Work is to be completed this financial year, with a projected start date of January 2023. This is later than we would all have hoped, but there is limited contractor capacity and there are other projects which are a higher priority or must be completed when schools are closed. The work will be funded largely by Wiltshire Council, with £5,000 coming from what was the Community Area Transportation Group (CATG), now the LH & FIG. A Parish contribution of £12,800 will be drawn from the Woodbridge Close Section 106 money held by Wiltshire Council (which means that we do not need to draw on the Parish funds earmarked for the Project, which will remain intact in our investment account). And I can reassure you all that the continuation of the Project is a matter which the PC will continue to pursue with Wiltshire Highways through the LH & FIG. Paul Oatway and I will shortly be meeting with a local landowner with a view to developing an informal footway for Upavon Rd.

### **Third, Planning Applications:**

We recognise that Planning Applications can be divisive. Our role as a consultee is limited, and we need to consider how to add value through our comments on applications. All Parishioners can comment on an application on the portal and all comments carry weight with Wilts Council (the LPA). Our view needs to reflect the needs of the Parish as a whole.

### **Fourth, Road Safety:**

I'd like to focus on two aspects:

First, road safety in general. People speed through our Parish and at times this makes the roads very unsafe for other users, in particular local folk going about their daily travels whether they be pedestrians or motorists. The PC work closely with Wiltshire Councillors Paul Oatway and Jerry Kunkler, who coordinate local bids for Highways and LH & FIG funding. Recently we were able to secure funding assistance from the LH & FIG, for traffic calming in Hilcott. The PC contributed £300, and hopefully you have seen the 40 mph speed limit 'roundels and markings in the roadway. We've also purchased our own Speed Indicator Device which cost close to £3,000. This SIDS device will shortly be active and will be moved around the Parish to speeding 'hot-spots'. I also note the self-help signage in Hilcott, and there is similar in North Newnton. We welcome suggestions for further traffic-calming measures and each settlement has a Councillor to lead on this.

Next, the Park Rd/Rushall Rd junction. This is particularly contentious due to the associated development of 3 houses at the junction, whose planning applications were varied in 2014, 2017 and 2020 with the planned Footway reducing in width each time. I don't believe any of us realised the impact 3 large '*passive Haus*' would have on that site although the PC did ask at the time that the materials and layout of the development should reflect the local setting. Leaving wider planning issues aside, I want to acknowledge the efforts of Edwina Lawson and Sean and Sandra Devine for representing the local community's interests in this area. The PC and Paul Oatway have also done what we can at our level, but we have reached the point where Wiltshire Council will not shift from their decision that visibility at that junction has always been and remains 59 metres and is unaffected by the new housing or its fencing. Whether 59 metres provides sufficient stopping distance or not is another matter, and that is an argument we will continue to develop. In the meantime, a refreshing/repainting of signage and road markings has been agreed by LH & FIG. Paul and I will meet with Highways staff shortly to refine what will be done. I am advised that this will be funded through the Highways budget at no cost to the PC.

### **Fifth, Parish Council Finances and the Precept:**

I can report that the Parish Council remains on a taut but sound financial footing. On 1 April 2022 we held £5,470 in our Treasurer's Current Account and £19,934 in our Investment Account. These are higher amounts than at the same time last year when they stood at £4,996 and £16,423 respectively. (Note that £14,800 in our Investment Account is ring-fenced as Parish contributions to the NN Footway Project)

Our major source of income comes from the Precept, which is that element of Council Tax which comes to the PC from Wiltshire Council at the start of each financial year. The Precept is set by the Parish Council in December each year. Currently the Precept Charge stands at **£73 per year for a Band D property** and this generates approximately £10,000 of disposable annual income. We are on a par with other parishes (Rushall pay £101, Upavon pay £62, Pewsey pay £90 and Woodborough pay £57 for Band D). At a recent PC meeting there was some support for an increase to the Precept in order to allow further funds to be built-up in our investment account for major projects. On reflection, the PC has taken the view that given the financial pressures people are facing in the current economic climate it would not be right to make even a small increase in the Precept. So we will hold it at the current rate for next year, which we have done for the past two years. That means that value for money continues to be a critical concern when looking at PC expenditure.

### **Sixth, some Parish 'thank-yous':**

Let me start by thanking Kevin Franklin, a local resident, and Director of Acorn Construction, for facilitating the Deed of Variation in November 2021 which generously contributes significant funding (approximately £20,000) to the North Newton Footway Project. This Developer Deposit is held by Wiltshire Council and, as you have already heard, they will allocate two thirds of it to the completion of Phase 2 of the Footway, commencing in January 2023.

The Annual Parish Clean-Up happened again in April 2022. Many thanks to all 18 volunteers for their support. A special shout-out to David for once again organising the event. David is looking at running it a bit earlier next year.

Thank you to Parishioners Simon Tilling and Rob Mead and family, who are going to periodically clean the insides of the Phone Boxes at Bottlesford and The Woodbridge Inn. A really generous community-spirited offer.

Thank you to the group of movers and shakers, primarily David, Tony and Fenella Rouse, whose efforts mean we can finally install the new Bench at Martin's Close!

And without stealing their thunder as they will speak later on, congratulations to the Hilcott Village Hall Trustees on their recent progress, in particular with clearing Barnard Meadow. As plans

develop, I'm sure the PC will look favourably on future requests for support for a 'Parish Space', both from the Village Hall Trustees and from St James' Church.

### **Lastly, HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee:**

The PC made an early decision not to apply for funding from Wiltshire Council for a central event. The criteria, in terms of supervision, insurance and other requirements meant that a central event simply would not have worked. Instead, we allocated Parish Council funding for Jubilee Commemorative Mugs for those children 16 and under in the Parish. Our thanks are due to Tony for leading on this, and for Rosie for managing the distribution. Details of how to apply were in The Messenger for May and will be repeated in June's Messenger.

The PC also decided to mark the Jubilee by combining the event with a much-needed refresh of 'our' two Phone Boxes. (Thank you for your suggestion, Carolyn). Sean has generously offered to paint them, so the job will be done to a terrific standard! They will be painted in the Jubilee colours of Purple and Silver, with a gold crown. Labour and materials have generously been donated so this initiative is effectively a free gift to our community. The PC have also bought a supply of the approved heritage colour 'Poppy Red' for an eventual reversion back to the conventional colours. We believe this is a great way of marking the entrances to the Parish in an appropriate and rather spectacular manner.

So, going forward, the Parish Council believe we now have the opportunity to develop a sound base and grow a Council which Creates, Communicates and Cooperates:

**Creates** – quietly get on and do things that improve the parish and, in small incremental ways, do our bit to make the parish a better place to live, while looking for probity and value for money in everything we do.

**Communicates** – both ways – a PC that lets you know what we are doing on your behalf (The Messenger monthly insert seems to be well-received; we have the official website; and there are postings on the (unofficial) Facebook noticeboard). But we also welcome parishioners' input and views, in person at each meeting, or via email to the Parish Clerk (preferred) or to an individual Councillor.

**Cooperates** – bring folk with us by give and take, to achieve a consensus that people can buy into. There are no class, race, or political distinctions in this Parish or its Council, and we are stronger as a community when we pull together.

### **To conclude:**

I've spoken in a spirit of full disclosure about several issues and am happy to take questions after this; or engage individually, along with my fellow PCs, after this meeting. Thank you for coming along, and can I please encourage you to participate in PC meetings where you will see low-level local democracy in action. It would be great to see more Parishioners involved.

I want to personally thank Councillor Paul Oatway QPM for his help and guidance; and my fellow Councillors and the Parish Clerk, especially my two Vice-Chairs who have been a support and inspiration. I count you all as my friends as well as my colleagues.

On behalf of the Parish Council I'd like to wish all of us a happy and productive year ahead and offer **three cheers for HM The Queen!**