

North Runcton Parish Council

Minutes of the North Runcton Annual Parish (Residents) Meeting held at the Village Meeting Place

Tuesday 16th May 2023 7.45pm

Present: Cllr Rick Morrish (Chaired the meeting), Cllr Barry Houchen, Cllr L Gunn, Cllr J Braybrook, Cllr P Yallop, Clerk – Rachel Curtis

4 members of the public were present

1. Apologies

Cllr Palmer, Cllr J Fuller, Cllr K Fuller, Bor Cllr Jim Moriarty

2. To accept the minutes of the Annual Residents Meeting held 17th May 2022

The minutes were accepted and signed by the Chairman.

3. Chairman's Report

Cllr Morrish read his report as follows:

The general consensus seems to be that the pandemic has passed – or at least not many people are talking about it now and social activities seem to be back to normal. However, I note that more than 25,000 Britons have died with covid on their death certificate in the last year, and worldwide, in spite of countries recording the statistics in different ways, nearly 7 million deaths have now been attributed to the virus.

It was a busy year for historians of constitutional monarchy – with the Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrated in June 2022, sadly followed by her funeral in September and then the recent Coronation of King Charles III in May. In North Runcton we tried to adequately mark these events with a tea party for the Jubilee and hog roast for the Coronation – which were both well attended by residents. We haven't marked these events with anything more permanent yet – but I would still favour planting a commemorative tree or two.

It was another year of confusion and obfuscation in the House of Commons – at one point featuring three different Prime Ministers in less than 4 months, 4 Chancellors and innumerable cabinet reshuffles. Apart from failing to get on with the jobs of government, consequences appear to include an inflation rate of nearly 10%, industrial unrest, ongoing strikes by public servants and growing uncertainties about the sustainability of all areas of public finance. Ultimately, I expect all of this will result in further contractions to local government, public services and the pounds in our pockets.

At the Parish Council level we are not well equipped to counter these trends – but we have managed our accounts sufficiently well to avoid the need to increase our precept this year, funded the aforementioned village events, redecorated the VMP and continued to maintain various other little bits of community infrastructure. We are also looking at ways to manage cost overheads going forward – including the installation of PV panels at the VMP to offset electricity running costs.

The process of 'planning' the West Winch Growth Area, such as it is, has rumbled on. Representatives from North Runcton and West Winch Parish Council have continued to attend the so-called stakeholder liaison meetings, although these tend to be repetitive presentations by

officers stating their commitment to the scheme, rather than a discussion about how to resolve obvious and considerable problems.

The facts are that in its entirety this is the largest ever growth plan for Kings Lynn – larger than the London overspill at Fairstead in the 1960s. The scheme requires millions investing in roads, drainage and other infrastructure in order to work, but even at this stage a surface drainage design that is acceptable to all parties has not been agreed, funding for the major roads not confirmed, and details of other important infrastructure such as public transport and cycle paths are little more than aspirational lines on concept plans. Let alone schools, community facilities and convenience stores.

I have become quite sure that the scheme cannot meet current requirements for delivering ‘sustainable’ development; that even in construction stages it will flood our local roads with additional traffic and lead to decades of disruption for local residents and King’s Lynn as a whole; that the current claims by officers that the scheme will ultimately improve local transport are completely spurious; and, that ultimately the scheme will not provide long-term economic, social and environmental benefits to King’s Lynn or West Norfolk.

In my view there could be more cost-effective ways of providing housing throughout the Borough that really would offer opportunities for regeneration and infrastructure improvements – but at this stage I am not clear that the County and Borough Councils are capable of, or willing, to review.

Another large organisation whose policies we queried this year were National Highways, who cut down more than 20 mature trees along the A47. We wrote a letter of complaint and subsequently had an online Teams meeting with them where they indicated that they would come back and plant new trees or hedging next winter. However, we have had no further confirmation that this will happen. They claimed that these and other works were for highways safety and biodiversity enhancement. Tragically, four people have died on roads in the parish in the last few months – seemingly due to reckless driving rather than the quality of the roads.

Throughout the year we have reviewed a number of small planning applications in the village. We do try to encourage higher design standards and consideration of the Neighbourhood Plan. Consent was recently granted for a new Lidl supermarket and a ‘drive-in’ Greggs bakery adjacent the A149, on land that not all residents may realise lies within the Parish. The schemes are pretty mediocre in quality and in our view will not enhance the approach to the town. It is difficult to understand how this type of edge-of-town development is really required and it seems likely to give rise to yet more local traffic. The site also needs raising by several metres to make it acceptable for construction – so these stores are unlikely to open any time soon.

UPP, a broadband provider, came to a parish meeting earlier in the year to announce their intention to install fibre optic cable throughout the village, and they have subsequently been working along New Road, Rectory Lane and Common Lane. We are not yet clear when they will be offering their service to residents – but presumably later this year. They will offer faster broadband access.

Thanks to Cllr Steve Palmer who has taken on running the ‘Conservation Volunteer’ (NRHCV) initiative, which we set up in 2019. We have had several successful litter picks and undertaken various other management tasks, but we are still seeking somewhere to create a new community garden or nature area. The PCC are looking at a new Heritage Lottery funding application to

repair the church which will include a nature conservation thread. We have indicated that the volunteers will assist where we can.

Thanks also to Cllr John Braybrook for continuing his management of the speed signs – where he regularly records vehicles travelling at twice the speed limit. The police have said they will commence spot checks and we are organising redeployment of the speedwatch team later this year.

Thanks again to Rachel for her continuing role as our clerk. After 9 years as chairman of the PC I am stepping down and Kerry Fuller will be taking over. So at this point it is worth reminding residents that the PC can work best when the entire community contributes to events, activities and decision making and for this we do need your support and your feedback – whether positive or negative.

4. Finance Report

Rachel Curtis, Clerk and RFO read out her finance reports as follows;

At 31st March 2023 the Parish Council's income and expenditure account shows income of £16,901 and expenditure of £11,205. This generated a surplus of £5,696. Underspends in 2022/23 were largely due to focusing on maintaining essential services and there were unspent budgets for legal fees and asset management.

At its January meeting the Parish Council agreed not to increase the precept for 23/24, asking the Borough to collect £16,655 on its behalf. This decision was made taking into account the underspend in 22/23 and the current cost of living pressures everyone is facing.

The balance of the Village Meeting Place account as at 31st March 2023 is £17,939. Regular hirers continue to use the Hall and we have some additional hire at weekends.

The balance outstanding on the PWLB loan is £16,437 with an interest rate of 1.59%. The final loan payment will be made in September 2027. The VMP met both of the loan repayments during the year, a payment from the PC account was not required.

The PC maintains its sound financial position is well within maintaining the recommended range for a Parish Council Reserve (between 3-12 months gross expenditure) with funds in reserve to be allocated for future projects.

5. Borough and County Councilor's Report

Bor Cllr Moriarty had circulated a report of the current events happening at County Hall at present which Councillors had seen.

6. Reports From Community Groups

Buttercups Pre-School - Rachel Curtis read out the following report prepared by the Pre-School Manager – Sue Fuller

The number of children currently attending Buttercups is 25 and we only have 9 children leaving this school year to attend six different primary schools. We are almost full for September now which is excellent.

However, the Group is still challenged by increasing costs due to the large increase in minimum wage and pension contributions etc which are not reflected in the funding rate we receive for each child from

Norfolk County Council. This is likely to become even worse with the introduction of universal funding for two years olds.

There are five members of staff at the setting with the majority working part time hours. The Leader has a degree in Childcare and a post graduate qualification, three other members of staff have a level 3 and one has a level 2.

Buttercups Pre-school is a registered charity which is governed by a Committee of parents. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly difficult to acquire new members and we currently have two key roles being filled by parents whose children left the setting a number of years ago. Sadly this cannot continue so we do desperately need some new members to help out. This could just be an interested person from the local community. If anyone could help in any way please do get in touch and help us continue to make a difference to our local children and ultimately the Village Meeting Place!

So far this year we have enjoyed our Christingle in the church and the positive relationships this creates. We continue to enjoying our walks and appear to have adopted a cat which most of the children love! Although he is a bit naughty with our milk cartons but very cute!!

We have been having regular sessions with Sing and Sign which the children really enjoy. A visit from Norfolk Owls was another lovely event which all the children and parents could share.

Just after the Easter holidays we held a very successful 'Fish and Chips Quiz night which was a lovely fun evening attended by friends and parents. We raised over £300 for a new home corner as the current one is looking a little tired!

We have just celebrated the Coronation with a big afternoon tea which sadly again had to take place indoors due to the weather. Our summer events are now being planned but they will definitely include sports day, an end of term party and a Leavers presentation.

Thanks to Rachel, Rick and the Parish Council for their ongoing support it is appreciated!

Art Group – There was no report from the Art Group.

Parochial Church Council - Ken Matthews , Church Warden was present and read out the following report;

Since the last residents meeting, progress has been made through the completion of the facilities project which includes a mains water supply, fully accessible toilet and kitchenette. This has allowed the provision of refreshments after services and comfort to those who have travelled some distance for weddings and funerals. The PCC is grateful for the use of the VMP during the project works were in progress.

A board has been erected in the churchyard thanking all the none grant providers who contributed towards the cost of the project.

The 25th Flower Festival was a great success, many thanks to Lynda Fuller and her team.

The facilities have opened up other opportunities to extend the community use of All Saints' such as, the monthly coffee mornings, thanks to Sue and Philip Randles, and the 'Inspired Classrooms Initiative' which was the brainchild of the previous Bishop Graham of Norwich to explore churches as places of creative learning across the school curriculum. Several schools have been approached so far, all with positive reactions to the idea.

The latest estimate for repairing the render on the tower, rebuilding the spire, replacing the North and organ chamber roofs plus replacing all the rainwater gear and drains is getting very close to £600,000.

The PCC decided to go for broke and try to find funding to cover the cost of the whole project. There are four grant providers who will be approached the largest of these, of course, is the national Lottery Heritage Fund. Thankfully, they are now more inclined to help churches to preserve history.

Getting grants of up to £10k is one thing but asking for such a large amount in certainly another. The PC decided to use the services of Saul Penfold to help with this task. Over the last two years, Saul has been successful in gaining grants from Heritage Fund of £250,000 each for two Norfolk churches, so he comes with a good track record. The system requires the production of an 'Expression of Interest' in getting a grant from the Lottery Fund which includes a full assessment of the significance and needs of All Saints' and very importantly, a list of benefits as a place of worship but also the community at large.

The PCC is at the point of submitting the Expression of Interest. It will then take around six weeks before we will know if we have been granted passage to the 'Development Stage' when tenders for the work and actual costs will be developed for submission to the Lottery Fund.

There will be a coffee morning at Sam Fullers on Friday 2nd June 10-12 noon.

Dr Paul Richards will give a talks on 'The Connections twixt North Runcton, Kings Lynn and the Surrounding Villages' in All Saints for the Community hour on Saturday 10th June at 3pm.

There will be an 'Open Gardens' event on Sunday 9th July with an Exhibition by local artists in All Saints. 10 gardens have been entered but more would be welcome.

Hopes Charity - Anna Gunn gave the following report

There is uncertainty over the land which Hopes Charity owns and its place in the West Winch Growth Area plans, and at present if an offer will be made to purchase it. Despite promoting the grants which the charity has to award nobody has applied for any assistance. Therefore the trustees have decided to fund the Harvest Supper.

7. North Runcton Conservation Volunteers

There is a growing list of volunteers and events are successfully advertised on the facebook site. Thanks to Cllr Braybrook and his wife in their help with the litter picks. It is hoped that the volunteers will be involved in many more projects in the coming year.

8. Ideas Session –

The Neighbourhood Plan will require revisiting and a questionnaire will be organised in the next 6 – 12 months.

If any suitable land is identified in the Parish it is hoped to plant some trees.

As the last quiz night was a great success it is hoped that 2 can be held per year. One in September/October and one in January. Cllr Braybrook is happy to provide the questions for this.

The meeting ended at 8.25pm.

Signed