

North Runcton Parish Council

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

Tuesday 17th May 2022 7.45pm

Present: Cllr Rick Morrish (Chair), Cllr Kerry Fuller, Cllr Jeremy Fuller, Cllr Barry Houchen, Cllr Steve Palmer, Cllr L Gunn, Cllr J Braybrook, Clerk – Rachel Curtis Bor Cllr Simon Nash

12 members of the public were present

1. Apologies

Cllr Karen Williams, Cllr Paul Yallop, Bor. Cllr Peter Gidney, County Cllr Jim Moriarty

2. To accept the minutes of the Annual Residents Meeting held 6th May 2021

The minutes were accepted and signed by the Chairman.

3. Chairman's Report

Cllr Morrish read his report as follows:

Last May we were still being advised not to have public meetings due to the pandemic and the annual residents meeting had to be held 'online'. After 15 months we held our first public meetings outdoors, in the VMP yard, in June and July, but we cancelled a planned summer 'village social' because many people were still cautious of socialising in large groups. In September we ventured back into the hall and have continued with indoor meetings, but by late autumn the covid Omicron variant was spreading rapidly across the country. Now it seems that few North Runcton residents, even when fully vaccinated, have avoided the virus completely, but for most people the symptoms have been short lived. It is unlikely we have seen the back of covid – especially as it is now spreading rapidly again in China and Korea.

The pandemic is one of the reasons we are now experiencing a rapid rise in the cost of living, with fuel and energy prices reaching record highs and expected to continue to increase for the rest of the year. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in March has exacerbated problems, but ironically it may speed up government action on another pressing matter – the shift from fossil fuel use to renewable energy.

These are all global issues but they are likely to affect our local community permanently. It is difficult to know how a small Parish Council should react to such issues, but the phrase 'think globally, act locally' seems relevant. My personal view is that climate change remains the biggest and most long-term threat that we must all address. I am sure there will be some 'big' solutions for decarbonising the economy, but many current ideas remain unproven. Therefore, smaller initiatives at the household level must not be ignored. This was one reason why we produced the series of resident newsletters at the beginning of the year describing ways to reduce household 'carbon footprints'. Few of us really like the idea of sacrificing flying, or driving less or spending money on a new heating system – but we are stacking up massive problems for future generations if we don't commit to such changes.

In spite of our limited resources, the PC has looked at a number of potential initiatives this year – with varying levels of success. Further to the localised flooding in the winter of 2020/21 we applied for and received a small BCKLWN grant from their Community Infrastructure Levy fund (CIL) to assist local drainage works. In fact, a number of landowners undertook works at their own cost and it looks as though we will return the unspent grant. We recently applied for another small CIL grant to assist provision of public information signs on Hardwick Common and at Sheep's Course Wood. A similar sign on North Runcton Common has been well received. This time there was more competition for CIL money and we didn't get the grant. In future it looks as

though we may need to gather letters of support from residents in order to obtain any CIL monies for local projects.

We have looked at reinstating a 'TROD' (informal footpath) along Rectory Lane. This once existed, but the carriageway appears to have widened and NCC concluded there was insufficient space. We have continued operation of the speed signs on New Road and Rectory Lane, which do seem to help reduce driver speed. We are looking for new volunteers for the additional speed watch initiative and propose to hold a training session in coming months once we have enough people. We have also looked at automatic opening gates on the common as some residents are unable to easily open/close them when cattle are out. There are considerable issues to overcome with this idea (or the alternative cattle grids) – not least cost, maintenance responsibility and the need to conform to Highways requirements.

I was disappointed that we were unable to agree having an additional bench on Church Green. It seemed to me like an obviously beneficial feature for the majority of residents. Meanwhile we have again been asked to erect more dog bins. The PC have already paid for four bins in the parish, and the cost of weekly emptying comes from the precept. This for a community of 600 people where perhaps only 1/3 of households have a dog. It doesn't seem unreasonable to me that if you have a dog you take the waste home with you – but I know some people disagree.

Earlier in the year we undertook an inventory of our 'Conservation Volunteer' (NRHCV) initiative, which was set up in 2019. Using some monies gifted by the lord of the manor the group had undertaken training, acquired equipment and undertaken works costing £977. They had undertaken 310 hours of voluntary work including woodland management, tree, shrub and bulb planting. If any landowners have a field margin or corner that they would consider offering to the Parish for nature conservation work – then NRHCV would be interested in discussing ongoing management.

Tree planting is (rightly) being promoted by national and local government – but it is a long-term strategy for environmental benefit. In the short-term, protection of the trees we already have seems most important. In recent years we have lost many mature trees in and around the village and if this trend continues the character of North Runcton will be diminished. A preoccupation with often unnecessary crown reductions and other tree work often means old trees are being 'pruned to death'. We realise that this is often encouraged by house insurers – who know little about trees.

We continue to monitor the proposals for the West Winch Growth Area and to attend the stakeholder's meetings (mostly online). Proposals last autumn to consult the community regarding a masterplan for the whole area and the design of the relief road in Spring 2022, seem to have already slipped. That probably means the plan to start building by 2024 will also slip? However, consultants for the scheme of 1100 houses at Hardwick continue to submit more details and a scheme for 500 dwellings between Rectory Lane and Chequers Lane was re-submitted by Metacre in March. Both North Runcton and West Winch parish councils have objected. Even if you think 3-4000 new dwellings might ultimately be needed and that development of this kind will benefit the local economy, it is difficult to see how large car dependent housing estates, as proposed, can support the development of a sustainable, carbon-neutral community. But that is what government say we need to achieve by 2050. North Runcton and West Winch PC have therefore been liaising with North and South Wootton and Castle Rising to lobby for development of a more considered transport strategy for West Norfolk – although the fact remains that transport planning should have really defined which sites were allocated for housing, 12 or more years ago.

We continue to monitor other planning matters in the parish. Last year I noted that the SDA 'Hays Wood Retreat' was now operational and we understand that they have since increased their landholding. No planning variations have yet materialised. Last July we eventually signed off on a

99-year deed confirming no general access to their site from School Lane. We hope that we can maintain good relations with the SDA and avoid any disturbance for neighbours.

Use of the VMP has returned to pre-pandemic levels – but running costs are obviously increasing, especially heating. This has not been helped by the desire to keep buildings well ventilated – ie have all the windows open! NRPC presently remain in financial good health – but did agree to raise the precept by 2% in January (against a current inflation rate of 9%).

We said goodbye to Cllr Lee Stevens this year and welcomed Cllr John Braybrook. I thank the Council and our County and Borough Cllrs for their continued support – and especially the hard work of Rachel our clerk.

4. Finance

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

At 31st March 2022 the Parish Council's income and expenditure account shows income of £16,498 and expenditure of £12,213. This generated a surplus of £4,285. Underspends in 2021 were largely due to focusing on maintaining essential services and there were unspent budgets for training fees, elections costs and legal fees. The North Runcton and Hardwick volunteers carried out work and these costs have totaled £277 during the year.

At its January meeting the Parish Council agreed to increase the precept for 22/23 by 2% to £16,655, this means an increase of £1.01 to a Band D property for the year.

The balance of the Village Meeting Place account as at 31st March 2022 is £20,527. In April 2022 a Covid grant was received from the Borough Council of £8,000, this was the last of such payments due to the pandemic. As Covid restrictions have lifted we have seen an increase in hirers wanting to use the Hall which has been good to see.

We are now half way through the payback period of the PWLB loan which was taken out in September 2017. The balance outstanding is £19,933.81 with an interest rate of 1.59%. The VMP met both of the loan repayments during the year, a payment from the PC account was not required.

The combined closing cashbook balance for 21/22 of the PC and VMP is £55,763.67, this shows the PC to be in a sound financial position and 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

Cllr Nash reported on matters which he is currently working on at the Borough. There are some complaints and investigations which are pending. Cllr Nash also noted that he has a facebook page which he will use to report on Borough Council matters.

In his absence Cllr Gidney had sent a report detailing that the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is now out of special measures, the Baden Powell Cockling Boat is now back in the water on the South Quay and there is a new cycling and walking plan survey that can be consulted on by 30th May.

Cllr Morrish thanked, Simon, Peter and Jim for their support over the year in attending the PC meetings and taking on board Parish matters.

6. Reports From Community Groups

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

This year has been a calmer one with the covid pandemic but has still had some challenging times with staff sickness and also children becoming ill with covid and lots of other minor illnesses.

The number of children currently on the role is 23 and we have 14 children leaving to attend four different primary schools. We have some children booked to start in September but need to increase this number further to continue to be financially viable.

Most Autumn terms we run at a deficit due to lower numbers initially. The Group has been affected by staff costs with the big increase in minimum wage and pension contributions etc which is not reflected in the funding rate we receive for each child from Norfolk County Council.

There are five members of staff at the setting with the majority working part time hours and this includes a mature apprentice. Buttercups Pre-school is a registered charity which is governed by a Committee of parents. The Committee always needs new members to help out this could just be an interested person from the local community. If anyone is interested please do get in touch and help us continue to make a difference to our local children!

We have been able to continue with more of our 'normal activities' this year and it was lovely to have our Christingle in the church. We have been enjoying our walks and our very grateful to a local resident who lets us go see their horses and feed them carrots! Recently our walk also involved a gentleman showing us inside his glider trailer which the children loved. We are always very grateful for these precious moments when we can give the children some additional learning experiences.

Earlier in the year one of our parents who is a police officer bought a police car on the Green which was very popular. Also another parent who is a skin specialist came in to demonstrate and talk about skin care which involved one of my staff having a face mask which the children found hilarious!

In the Easter holidays we held a very successful bingo which was a lovely fun evening attended by mainly parents and some of 'our' neighbours. We hope to repeat this in the Autumn and plan open it up more widely having been quite cautious with numbers in the VMP initially.

We have lots of things planned for the summer term and will be celebrating the platinum Jubilee with a tea party and lots of crowns, bunting, red, white and blue clothing, princes and princesses! We are having a sports day, a Teddy Bears picnic at Sandringham plus, an end of term party and Leavers presentation

Thanks to the Parish Council for their ongoing support and particularly to Rachel for her prompt responses and actions which we really appreciate.

Art Group – Margaret Sutcliffe was present and reported on the following

The group started meeting face to face again in August 2021, however member numbers have reduced since Covid, but the group is actively looking to recruit new members. It would be appreciated if a flyer would be able to be a permanent placement in the front window of the VMP. There are regular changes of artwork in the phone box gallery. Quarterly subscriptions have increased for members and it was questioned as to why there is a gap between the hire rate of the Buttercups and the rate which everyone else pays. The group are grateful for the new heating system but have made a plea for the PC to consider the purchase of new chairs as the current ones are very uncomfortable.

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

Since the last meeting, one word will sum up the activity of the PCC 'Grants'.

That said, the last year saw great progress with more positive responses to applications and finally after applying to 13 grant providers to fund mains water supply, accessible toilet and kitchenette in all Saints, 9 grants, a 69% success rate plus donations, the target was achieved.

Covid and the shortfall in funding have delayed the start of the work especially as some grant providers required either all monies to be secured and/or work must have started before the grant is released. This caused the original contract to become stale. Given all the things affecting the price of goods, the new contract has increased by £6,000 to £60,000.

Having accumulated all the necessary secured funds at the a meeting in mid-April with the Architect and the chosen contractor, the questions was asked when could work start, to wit the contractor replied 'next Tuesday', hence rapid appearance of men and machinery. Apparently, their next project had been put back allowing us to fill the gap. Last Friday the contractor assured me they were on target to complete by the end of June in time for the 4-day 25th Flower Festival which starts on Friday 8th July. In addition to the instant benefits the project will bring to the church it will also help its long term future.

Many thanks to the Parish council for allowing the use of the VMP for services of worship for the duration.

James Wild visited All Saints during the year and was pressed to lobby the government to retain the Listed Places of Worship VAT Reclaim System. The outcome was the scheme would continue for a further year and has since been extended for another 3 years. This is good news as it will help in going forward to attain a grant to finally re-roof much of the church and restore the render on the tower and re-build the spire.

A delegation from South Creake visited All Saints looking for guidance on how to apply for grants for a similar facilities project.

Thanks to Chairman Rick for promoting the church when interviewed on 30th January by Julie Reinger on the Sunday morning BBC Norfolk Radio Programme 'Norfolk Treasure Hunt'.

A Hornbeam tree (*Carpinus betulus Fastigiata*) has been planted in the churchyard as part of the Queens Green Canopy Initiative. Given plenty of water in the early post-planting days, it appears to have established well.

A very successful coffee morning was held at the VMP last Saturday when £280 was raised towards the greatly increased cost of flowers for the festival. In addition to the Flower Festival there will be a concert by Sara Bennock in All Saints on Friday 8th July – tickets concert only £5 and concert with supper £12.

On behalf of All Saints Lilian Fisher is publishing a North Runcton village 2023 calendar which will be launched at the Flower Festival. Many thanks to Steve Palmer for producing the excellent photographs. The calendar will be priced at £7.99.

The Community hour returns on Saturday 25th June at 3pm in the VMP with talks by 2 local experts. One on the evolution of surgical joint replacement and secondly some personal reflections of time spent in Afghanistan. Don't miss it, tea and biscuits provided.

Another date for he diary is the Harvest Supper which will be held in the Sports Pavilion on Wednesday 12th October, tickets £12.

Representatives from the Rapid Relief Team – Fred and Tom

Tom and Fred attended to inform the meeting about the activities the RRT undertakes as the public outreach arm of the Plymouth Brethren. Fred lives on New Road. It is a global organisation which shows compassion offering humanitarian relief, disaster relief and poverty relief. The main initiative now is to help the effort in the Ukraine, with £1 million being raised so far. Over 50,000 food and sanitary boxes have been donated and support is being given to the emergency services. The organisation also helps local communities with food boxes being given to the Purfleet Trust and Shelter and well as helping in schools by giving out educational boxes. Training was offered on the defibrillator for any groups wishing to know more. Anyone wishing to find out more about the team can look at the website - www.rrtglobal.org

7. North Runcton Conservation Volunteers

Cllr Palmer reported that the volunteer group has re-started at the end of October 2021 after the pandemic restrictions eased. Sheep's Course Wood was cleared and also an area near the A47. Hardwick Common was another area which benefitted from a tidy up and some planting with a litter pick carried out along the Setch Road and Twisty Twiney. Bird boxes were made and put up on the commons. More workdays will resume at the end of the Summer. If anyone would like to volunteer to come along and join us, then contact Steve or anyone else on the PC.

8. Ideas Session –

- The PC is making enquiries with the land registry re the path between New Road and the churchyard with a view to registering the land.
- A new permissive footpath around the new clay pit on Setch Rd is now in place, but there is some work to be completed before it will be officially 'open'.
- The PC are going to look into the idea of solar panels on the roof of the VMP and obtain quotes for the work involved and payback period etc.
- Graeme Warriner (planning consultant) will be attending the Parish Council meeting on 14th June to give an update on the Hopkins Homes site, the meeting will start at 7.15pm with all residents invited.
- The PC hopes to get the speedwatch group up and running again, once we have a group of 5-6 volunteers wishing to do the training. For further info contact Rachel, our clerk.
- The PC is holding a tea party on 5th June at the VMP to celebrate the Queens jubilee. Fete games need to be checked and volunteers to be arranged to 'run' them.
- If anyone has any thoughts on the layout and content of the PC website then let the Clerk know.
- The Councillors Community Grant scheme is running again, so if any local groups would like to find out more look on the Borough Council website.
- It was agreed that it would be good to recommence the annual summer fete for the village, but that it would be ideal if it could be held in a sheltered garden.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.

Signed