

North Runcton Parish Council

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

Tuesday 15th May 2018 7.45pm

Present: Cllr Rick Morrish (Chair), Cllr Kerry Fuller, Cllr Lee Stevens, Cllr Jeremy Fuller, Cllr Paul Yallop, Cllr Keith Longhurst, Cllr Lucy Davies, Cllr Barry Houchen

26 members of the public were also present

1. Apologies

Cllr Amanda Dobbing. Bor Cllr Bal Anota

2. To accept the minutes of the Annual Residents Meeting held 16th May 2017.

The minutes were accepted and signed by the Chairman.

3. Chairman's Report

Cllr Morrish read his report as follows;

The Parish Council have completed several important projects this year – the first of which was completing the Neighbourhood Plan process with our partners West Winch. An independent examiner found the plan was 'sound' in June, thank you if you were one of the 90% of voters who supported it at the referendum in September – and the Borough Council have duly adopted it as a local planning document. This was no mean feat – still only 3 other West Norfolk parishes have an adopted Neighbourhood Plan and across the whole country less than 5% of parishes have completed one. Ours is also relatively complex – few parishes the size of Runcton and Winch are being asked to grow by a factor of ten in coming decades.

However, we mustn't be complacent about having a Neighbourhood Plan in place. It is essential that the Parish Councils use it when reviewing new plans for the area – and we need to ensure the Borough planners do not ignore it. We will also need to constantly review the policies and ask whether they are being useful. The Plan is meant to cover the period until 2026 – so in only 8 years we will need to replace it. In the mean time I would urge any resident who wishes to submit or comment on a planning application, whether to support or object to a scheme, to read the Neighbourhood Plan and refer to relevant sections in your correspondence.

Whilst mentioning the planned urban expansion in the Parish – The Borough Council do not appear to be making especially fast progress with their infrastructure planning – and a few months ago failed to obtain a Govt grant to assist initial road building costs. We have been told an infrastructure delivery plan is complete – but it has not yet been made public, and Highways England maintain a holding objection over the outline planning application for 1100 homes and a school at Constitution Hill. Consultants working for Zurich Land have not yet submitted a planning application. We feel we have established a reasonable working relationship with the various stakeholders involved in these processes – but the Parish Councils are often not the first to be told about new plans and decisions – so if any residents do hear that balls are rolling again – please pass this on to your Councillors!

The second important project we completed this year was refurbishment of the VMP. This was the first significant maintenance and modernisation of the building for over 30 years and we feel it has made it a much more attractive and usable facility now and for the future. We tried to recognise and retain some of the old school's best features – and the new 'blue plaque' and the watercolours by local artist Austin Pearce also aim to celebrate this, our local heritage. Many thanks are due of course – to WREN, the Community Foundation and Greenyard Frozen for generous grants and contributions, Peter Samways for contributing to our new projector and screen, to the many other people who got involved with other fundraising activities, and to Bespoke Norfolk builders who delivered the project on time and in budget. All of our hirers have been very complementary and Ian Bix Associates, our architects, have said they will put the project in for the Mayors Design awards. Apart from our regular clubs, we have had several very successful

community events over the last 18 months – and if anyone would like to organise further events – especially talks, classes, film shows or other entertainments for the benefit of residents – please get in touch.

A smaller scale but no less important project has involved purchasing our phone box and opening the ‘Smallest Art Gallery and Museum in Norfolk’. We now have a regularly changing display of art work curated by our own Art Group and a summary of local history which will be updated from time to time. If you haven’t already visited – do drop in! Thanks also to Cllrs Lee Stevens and Kerry Fuller for returning the kiosk to its former glory with their painterly skills.

I also thank Lee and Richard Markham for taking on management of our new vehicle activated speed signs which were implemented last September. As far as we can tell these do seem to make most drivers check their speed and they also allow us to monitor how much traffic is passing through the village. We think this might be important data to hold, when, as we expect, construction of the West Winch development area begins to impact on the already busy A10 and A47 roads.

In the autumn we again held a successful bulb planting morning, this time setting bulbs along Rectory Lane and we will hope to add to those bulbs this autumn. We have been improving the Parish Council website and are in the process of developing a more comprehensive coverage of village history. We would also like to have more information about clubs and amenities in the parish – so if you would like to promote a local club on our website - please send your details.

Development of the campsite at Runcton Hall Stables began in earnest last summer and neighbouring residents have suffered a fair degree of disturbance from construction traffic – for which we sympathise. It was therefore good news to learn that the developers intend to build a new access road from the south and are currently awaiting planning permission. Once they have consent they have indicated they would need 5-6 weeks to establish a new road which will take all future construction and operational traffic. A group of Parish Councillors had a positive meeting with the builders and SDA representatives in March and learnt that the first camping activities are planned for spring 2019, with the development proposed for completion in 2020. We have asked for more dialogue regarding future operational management of the site and are presently seeking to meet their development team to review the current works in progress.

There have in fact been various building projects in the village over the last 6-12 months – and some contractors have been better than others at minimising disturbance to neighbours. I think it is always best if neighbours speak directly (and politely!) to tradesman if there is a problem – but the Parish Council have, on request, also followed up a couple of complaints this year.

Planning applications we have reviewed have generally been for quite small-scale development this year – but the large development at Morston Point, adjacent the Hardwick Estate, moved a step closer as they were given consent to phase construction at the site – with a supermarket, hotel and fast food outlet to be first. The consent notice requests a reserved matters application by November. Plans for a massive new power station at Saddlebow have also been put forward. With buildings 40-50 metres tall, flue stacks 80-90 metres tall, and the building site possibly employing 600 people for 4 years, it seems likely to be one of the biggest construction sites in the region if it proceeds.

After 30 years of service to her community we were sad to see Anne Towler retire from the Parish Council this year. John Sherry also resigned due to his work commitments and we have now welcomed Keith Longhurst and Lucy Davies to the Council. I thank all my fellow Councillors for their continued support. However, I reserve special thanks to Rachel our clerk, who even by her own standards, has played a remarkably good hand this year – being instrumental in securing grants and a loan for the VMP project, managing all of the project finances and somehow even extracting a VAT refund from the taxman! All this as well as tackling new data protection law and attending all of our community events. Thank you, Rachel - our gratitude is very deep!

Finally – we think the Parish Council has made significant steps to improve and develop in recent years, even whilst addressing the significant challenges laid in our way. We have therefore agreed to apply for the Local Council Award Scheme this year so that we can benchmark where we are and where we might seek to be better.

Cllr Houchen arrived at the meeting at 8.00pm

4. Finance

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

At 31st March 2018 the Parish Council's income and expenditure account shows income of £17,796.81 and expenditure of £33,239.40. A movement of £20,440 from reserves was agreed to help fund the VMP refurbishment, leaving a surplus for the year of £4,997.41. This surplus is largely due to the VAT element on the VMP work paid for by NRPC subsequently being reclaimed. This is following advice from a financial consultant that the PC was able to reclaim VAT on VMP expenditure for the last 3 financial years, and has given the PC funds a boost of £14,791.30 for the start of 18/19.

The precept for 18/19 was increased by 3% to £15,852 and has now been credited to the PC account together with the Borough Council grant of £80. The increase will represent a rise of approximately £1.80 in Council Tax for a Band D property and is roughly in line with predicted inflation.

The balance in the Village Meeting Place account as at 31st March 2018 is £8,891.50. The refurbishment work cost £135,000. This was funded by £50,000 grant from WREN, a Public Works Loan Board loan for £35,000, a movement of reserves from the Parish Council as mentioned above along with grant funding from other bodies, donations and £10,000 from the VMP accounts.

The loan has a repayment period of 10 years and interest rate of 1.59%, and at year end the balance outstanding on this is £33,378.51.

Of the £8,891.50 in the VMP account - £5,835.90 the retention amount for the contract work to be paid to Bespoke in November 2018. We are also awaiting the outcome of the ombudsman's resolution to the dispute with Scottish Power over unbilled backdated charges of £2,428.12.

Taking into account the recent reclaimed VAT this means the Parish Council has been able to replenish much of its reserves and is in a sound financial position maintaining the recommended range for a Parish Council Reserve (between 3-12 months gross expenditure).

5. Borough Councillors Report

Cllr Peter Gidney reported on the following:

- The new mayor has recently been appointed – Nick Daubney and deputy mayor is Geoff Hipperson
- There are no developments to report with the West Winch / North Runcton Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- A major upcoming project for the Borough Council is the renovation of the Guildhall
- There is no update on the transport strategy, however Cllr Gidney said that if the PC has any comments to make about this he will ensure they are raised

There was no County Councillor present at the meeting.

6. Reports From Community Groups

Buttercups Pre-School - Linda Creed was present and reported the following;

It has been a challenging year financially with a further annual increase in the minimum wage while Local Authority Funding is frozen to 2020, this threatened the group to become unsustainable. Linda thanked the PC for their reviewing their decision and not increasing hire fees for the group in April which has helped the group along with charging for snacks and receiving some donations. In July 2018 there will be 13 children leaving, it is predicted that the Group will run at a deficit of between £3-5k in the autumn term. There is a Local Authority Sustainability Grant available which is a safety net, but this has not been pursued yet. Staff and parents are pleased with the VMP refurbishment, improving the environment for the children. Volunteers to the committee are always welcome, notably looking for someone to take the role of treasurer. Linda thanked the PC, Rick and Rachel for their help and support and especially for the installation of the telephone landline to the Hall.

Art Group - Denise Coles was present and reported the following;

The Club meets on a Wednesday and Thursday afternoon and regard the VMP as their home, and this year marks their 10 year anniversary of meeting. The annual exhibition in November is well attended and the group also exhibit work in the 'art gallery' in the phone box, which the Group were very appreciative of the PC giving them the opportunity of displaying their work there. As well as painting the group are active in raising money, they have recently made a donation to the VMP refurbishment fund, the Salvation Army and Purfleet Trust. Denise wished to put right an omission which she made on the opening day of the VMP and Art Gallery – she thanked the PC, Rick and Rachel for their support.

Parochial Church Council - Ken Matthews , Church Warden was present and reported the following;

Thanked everyone who was involved in the fundraiser on Easter Saturday, £945 was raised and also thanks to those that have made contributions to the roof restoration. Funds total £14,000 at present which will not allow any work to start just yet but will be essential for match funding and is a stipulation in many grant applications. It was disappointing that the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund was unsuccessful; it has been decided to concentrate now on smaller grant applications. An architect has surveyed the Church and concluded that the North Nave Roof is in need of urgent repair at an estimated cost of £57,000. The water supply to the Church is also being looked at. The PCC have joined in with the PC bird box initiative and purchased 3, and a bench has been donated by a parishioner in memory of her brother.

Cllr Morrish noted that Historic England had surveyed the war memorial and it is now a Grade ii listed structure.

Linda Fuller reported on the following;

Coffee Morning fundraiser on 18th May for the flower festival which will be held 1st – 4th June, 10am – 5pm daily. Friday 1st will include an evening concert followed by a supper, Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd refreshments will be served in the VMP and there will be stalls outside the Church and a Songs of Praise service on Sunday evening. Any volunteers the help set up the Church on 30th and 31st May would be welcome.

The Commons - Peter Lemon, Lord of the Manor was present and reported the following;

Work has been ongoing together with Jeremy Fuller, Common Reeve to tidy the commons at Hardwick and in the Village. Next project is to look at drainage on the Hardwick Common. Norfolk Wildlife Trust now have funding to carry out a wildlife survey on the Common, a resident noted that there is a colony of water voles in the pond. Work is ongoing looking into a wayleave issue and if the outcome is favourable Peter may be in a position to make a donation to the PC and the PCC. An information board about the commons is to be erected on North Runcton Common in the Summer and a suitable lectern mount and position is to be agreed, so that it will not be damaged by the cattle. The PC thanked Peter for his generous provision of this signage.

7. Volunteer Car Scheme

Fiona Matchett from West Norfolk Community Transport attended the meeting to give some information about Dial a Bus and volunteer car schemes in response to residents' concerns over the past months at the reduced bus service in the village. WNCT now operate over 70 buses and have 25 drivers, funding comes from Norfolk County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group and Borough Council. Seven full size buses have been purchased and are operating in areas where stagecoach pulled out. The Dial a Bus Scheme operates through North Runcton on a Friday, the cost is £5 return to the town and £4 concession, seats must be pre booked. It arrives in Runcton at around 10am and returns about 1pm. The Community Car Scheme costs 45p per mile and is a pre bookable service. Volunteer drivers need fully comprehensive car insurance. All other training and assessment is provided by WNCT. They are always looking for new drivers – even if they are only available for a few hours a week. Information regarding this service will be put on the PC website and is something that the PC will monitor.

8. Bird Box Initiative

Following on from last years 'ideas session' the PC purchased 25 bird boxes from RSPB – who gave a 10% reduction in price. (If the PC ordered more than 50 at once they would offer 20% off). We have 6

boxes left – which range in price from £11.50 (simple ‘classic’ bird box) to £15.30 for special Swallow and House martin boxes. In future we could purchase other types (eg Swift/Owl). It was noted that the nesting season is well under way now, but if anyone would like to purchase one of the remaining boxes – or pre-order for next autumn, then the PC could secure a discount again. Please contact Cllr Morrish or the Clerk.

9. Ideas Session – Comments from Parishioners were as follows;

- During the meeting loud music could be heard from the property neighbouring the VMP. The resident was not at home and it is believed he was continuing his ‘protest’ in response to the Hall being let for a band to practice on some Friday evenings. Several resident’s commented that this should be reported to the Borough Council.
- Cllr Longhurst has suggested to Peter Lemon that a similar version of the information board to go on the Commons is put on the Green.
- Additional signs to show the way to the Church and VMP were suggested to be put on the fingerpost on the Green.
- A resident suggested an ‘open garden’ weekend – which has been considered previously. It might be possible to plan such an event for 2019?

The meeting closed at 8.55pm and refreshments were served.

Signed

22nd May 2019