

Overthorpe Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 28th April 2021 at 7pm via zoom video conferencing

Present: 13 members of the public – all councillors, clerk

1) Welcome

2) Chairman's report from the Parish Council

A strange year. Beginning during the first lockdown, and ending as the third lockdown was coming to an end. Much of our lives put on hold. Despite that we have welcomed 6 new households to the parish.

Finances

The Council's finances are robust. Expenditure in the year 2020/2021 was below budget, primarily due to savings on costs of meetings, enabling addition to reserves. Our reserves are in line with Government guidance, taking into account monies set aside for specific expenditure, such as replacement of vehicle activated speed warning signs.

Councillors

During the year we have welcomed a new member to the Council, Richard Randall. However, following the resignation of Martin Holt, a vacancy for a Councillor remains. The Council must have a minimum of three Councillors to keep functioning. All four current Councillors have been re-appointed in an uncontested election.

Traffic

The lockdowns have resulted in significant reductions in volume of traffic. With exception of the knock-on effects of roadworks in Banbury, our surveys have reported the lowest number of vehicles cutting through the village.

Excessive speed of a minority remains an issue. The County's Speedwatch programme was suspended, although we could not have committed to the programme in 2020 as we lacked sufficient volunteers. We hope to take part again in 2021.

Minor improvements have been made to improve sight lines at the Warkworth Lane crossroads, by removing overgrown hedgerow and extending verge mowing. Thank you to Margaret Stead for planting bulbs at the crossroads.

As a consequence of lockdowns, the meeting with the County Council's Highways representatives, originally planned for March 2020, finally took place in April 2021. This meeting was to review ongoing highways issues as already described, as well as provision of footpaths, and further speed reduction strategies. We are awaiting their responses in terms of what is achievable.

Overthorpe + Warkworth Community Fibre Upgrade Project - Update

Thank you to all those involved:

- The project team who worked on the project

- The support received from members of the Parish Council
- Warkworth residents – especially Roger Mawle initially, and now Hugh Dickerson , for their support.
- All residents who have committed to the upgrade

The final commitment 'value' for our community based on the 2020 voucher scheme is approximately £200K. The project cost estimated by BT Openreach for the fibre upgrade across Overthorpe and Warkworth is £151K.

Where are we...

- Still working with BT Openreach as our partner
- DCMS are changing the Gigabit Voucher Scheme to a new scheme in the 21/22 financial year. The new scheme is moving funding towards centralised schemes, so reducing the access to funds for individual communities., such as ours.
- Deadline to submit our Community Fibre Project through Openreach to DCMS was 19th February to qualify under the 2020 scheme. Overthorpe+Warkworth CFP project was submitted on the 17th February,
- Openreach indicate that the project is now approved to proceed by DCMS as a voucher scheme.
- The DCMS are restructuring their systems for the new scheme, so Openreach are stalled at this time as they cannot access DCMS systems to progress our project. No timeline given by Openreach at this time.
- The next action would be to contract with Openreach for the works. A Community Interest Company has been set-up for this purpose.

3) District Councillor's report

First, I hope you, your family, friends and work colleagues are all keeping well. During these unprecedented times, I'm sure you will agree with me that it has never been more important for Councils to keep in touch with residents and help those in our community who are vulnerable for many reasons no matter what their age.

The past 12 months have been dominated by Covid and Local Government Reform. A year ago, we went into lock down, and Councils were asked to invoke their emergency procedures to help the vulnerable which we did and food parcels were distributed and homeless people were taken off the streets.

To sum up the year and frankly there have been highs and lows and on top of everything else we have been experiencing changes in legislation not to mention future ways we are to be governed and I'm thinking of the new Unitaries going forward and for us West Northants. The sheer scale and complexity of bringing together different Authorities into one new one is vast. Needless to say, the importance of keeping services running smoothly, safely and legally is of paramount importance.

A quick recap: In April 2020 the Government issued a revised Structural Changes Order to cancel the elections for May and create a Shadow Council made up of all the existing Councillors. Ian McCord, the Leader of SNC, was appointed as the Leader of the Shadow Council and Jonathan Nunn, the leader of Northampton Borough was appointed Deputy Leader. The programme for creating the new council was revised with Vesting Day being 1 April 2021. From 1 April to 10th May this is called the Interim Period when the old councils are abolished but the new Councillors to be elected on May 6th have not taken over. During this period all the existing Councillors (includes me!!) will continue and the Executive will meet. If there is a need for a planning committee it will be the existing Committees that will meet to decide. Once the election is out of the way a new set of 93 Councillors will set the policies and direction of West Northants Council.

No matter what your view is on how we got to where we are, we now must leave the past behind and look forward. There are opportunities that the new council will create that we must seize. If we can get planning

and highways to work more closely together, have housing and adult social care aligned and environmental health and trading standards all operating as one team then residents will be better served. Anyway, that is the new goal.

So: Where we are now?

Planning - Local Plan Pt 2

This plan has been many years in compiling and sets out the future of our district for the next 5 years. It was consulted on many times by parishioners both locally with exhibitions, on the internet and in SNC Review. It was adopted at full Council in July 2020 and forms the backbone of current and future planning applications in our district. It has been used on many occasions since adoption to prevent speculative developers trying to build in the open countryside outside village boundaries. It also importantly identified areas within the district suitable for industrial development.

Land Supply and Appeals

Having a land supply of greater than 5 years is key to resisting developments in the Countryside and the fact we have one of at worst 5.18 has meant we have refused applications. We currently have approx. 6 appeals being considered by the planning inspectorate 2 of which were in Middleton Cheney – Waters Lane and Thenford Road – a 9-day meeting!! Both have been granted.

Due to Covid the planning department have spent the last year working from home and planning Committee meetings have been held via Zoom each month.

2020/21 has not been a normal year! What should have been a "calm sea and a prosperous voyage" turned into the perfect storm. What should have been a year where we prepared for a smooth handover to West Northants Unitary Council has been impacted by the covid pandemic which has generated a significant additional amount of work for me and may other departments I work with.

Community Funding Grants

South Northants Council has been supporting community projects and voluntary groups across the district for the past 6 years with financial funding. During this time £5,692,410 worth of grants have been awarded to over 270 projects. The grant awards have supported both small community projects and big scale projects such as new facilities.

Leisure and communities Section 106 developer contributions

Work has progressed to support our local sports clubs and Town and Parish Councils to access SNCs allocation of S106 funding for leisure and communities. The following projects have had funds agreed and our Leisure Facilities and Contracts Officer continues to build a future pipeline of projects. E.G. Roade Football Club - £6,000, Middleton Cheney Academy, £11,000

School holiday activity programmes. The Covid 19 restrictions and government guidance have meant we were unable to provide our activity programme through the school holidays for children and teenagers.

Computer support for school children. The pandemic has highlighted the divide that exists between those young people who have their own computer and those who do not have access to one at home. The IT team have risen to the challenge and already offered 20 redundant laptops for use by local families in desperate need of IT equipment while they home schooled their children during lockdown. Normally laptops would be taken by an IT company and reconditioned for onward sale.. SNC identified an urgent need for 200 computers where children are not able to participate fully in lessons due to not having appropriate equipment at home. These computers definitely helped make home learning a little bit easier for those families that need it. This work is ongoing.

Free school meals. The Housing Options & Strategy Team are working with partners in West Northants to support the roll out of Free school meal vouchers for eligible pupils across Northamptonshire through the school holidays. Assistance has been provided in the form of supermarket vouchers distributed by schools.

Towcester Food bank

Through the pandemic Groups have worked closely with the Foodbank in Towcester and other local food organisations like the Community Larder, who have risen to the challenges of Covid

Virtual Meetings

For Councils continuing to operate they have adapted to online meetings and I am delighted with the way the legal functions of Councils have been delivered, Zoom has been very useful but as we all know a meeting in person is what we will all look forward to which we hope will be able to do in a few months' time.

The Economy 2020 – 2021

Despite the number of residents that have been made redundant, unemployment levels remain far below the national average and have consistently been the lowest in the County throughout the year. New businesses continue to start-up and investment in the District remains healthy.

The SNC Economic Growth Team, once they have transferred into the new authority, will continue to champion businesses and economic growth.

4) County Councillor's report – None.

5) Open forum – members of the public are welcome to raise any items they wish to discuss with the parish council/other parishioners - A parishioner gave a presentation regarding changes that have been made to the village confines on the southern boundary of Overthorpe which means this area could now be approved for development as it would be considered 'infill'. A number of parishioners raised concerns about this and asked that the Parish Council look into what they can do to request the confines be returned to their previous positions.

Meeting closed @ 7:37pm