

WESTON BY WELLAND PARISH COUNCIL



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Annual Meeting of the Parish

St Mary the Virgin Church, Weston By Welland at 7.00 pm

Wednesday 10th May 2023

Attendees:

Parish Cllrs: Bob Roberts (Chair), Simon Grandidge, Nicky Garratt, Anna Cowling, Vicki Score and Steve Emery.

NNC Cllrs: David Howes.

Parishioners and others: 7 including Margaret White (PCC) and Graham Garratt (Tree Warden).

Apologies:

NNC Cllr M Tebbutt

1. The Chair welcomed those attending.

2. Chair's Report – Cllr Roberts

Following the council elections that were held in April 2022, the council began the 2022-23 year at full strength with seven councillors. There was one resignation during the year, with Cllr Baggott choosing to resign his office. At the moment, this vacancy still exists. The Council would welcome any expressions of interest in this vacancy.

During the 2021-22 year, as the minutes record, the council was subject to a complaint under the Freedom of Information Act, from a resident to the Information Commissioner's Office. The complaint concerned the council's refusal to comply with multiple requests for information, on the grounds that the requests were vexatious. Following a lengthy investigation by the commission, a Decision Notice was received in August 2022. The decision was that the ICO upheld the council's position, and the council was not required to take any steps.

Six meetings were held during 2022-23. The council is again grateful to NNC Cllrs Howes and Tebbutt for their frequent and useful presence at these meetings.

In the light of the substantial increase to the precept made the previous year, and in the light of the current cost-of-living crisis, the council managed to pass a budget for 2023-24 which was a slight reduction on the previous year. As such it was one of an extremely small minority of local precepting councils to do so. Despite this, the various factors used by the county to calculate the amount paid by residents resulted in a fractional increase. The Band D tax rate for Weston by Welland rose by 1%, compared with an average for Northamptonshire precepting councils of 5.8%.

Residents might recall that at its inception in May 2021, the council published a Council Plan for 2021-23. Looking back at that Plan, I can report on it as follows:

The council established a number of working groups: for EVENTS, for the RECREATION AREA, and for ENVIRONMENT matters. Two of those groups, the RECREATION AREA and the ENVIRONMENT, are still in

place, and the councillors that lead those groups will report on them this evening. The third, the EVENTS group no longer exists. However, its main function, which was to work in partnership with other existing village bodies, has carried on and I will say more about this in a moment.

A third working group has been set up in the last twelve months, the HIGHWAYS group. This was set up to look into matters such as concerns over speeding traffic, and parking issues. The group has welcomed residents as members.

The council is keen to work as closely as it can with residents and would welcome any resident offering their services to any of these groups.

The Plan made it clear that the council wanted to work alongside existing village bodies, particularly because at that time we were all beginning to think about the Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June 2022. One of the most enjoyable, and successful aspects of the council's work in the last twelve months has, indeed being able to work in liaison with other village bodies. The council worked in collaboration with the then Community Group, and with the church committee, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) on the Jubilee celebrations, and then subsequently with the PCC over the funeral arrangements for our late Queen Elizabeth II. Recently, of course, we have again worked closely with the PCC over plans for the Coronation of King Charles

Looking back again at the 2021-23 Council Plan, I can report as follows:

- progress towards a formal Neighbourhood Plan have stalled because of the size of the task involved
- We continue to collaborate with neighbouring parish councils in the Welland Valley over the Welland Wanderer bus service. This service is in reasonable financial shape for the duration of this financial year. However, its long-term future remains a matter of doubt since this local partnership arrangement was only ever intended as a temporary replacement for a council-run bus service.
- Training on the defibrillator has taken place and was well attended.
- The traffic-calming speed camera has continued to operate and has provided interesting data. The council is grateful to Ray Carver for his efforts here. The Highways working group that I referred to earlier now oversees that initiative.
- The council continues to press the county authorities for improvements to the pavements. This is a slow grind, and there has been some effective repair work in some places. We will continue to seek action on this.

During the last year, the council put in place a Communications Policy, together with an accompanying Strategy and a Social Media Code of Practice. (These are on the council's website.) Cllr Garratt has taken on the role as our Communications 'Officer'. We are striving to communicate better with residents in a variety of way, not least by establishing a new Facebook page, and occasional leaflet drops.

Planning. The council considered three planning applications during the year. No objections were lodged to any. However, the council did have concerns about an amendment to planning submitted by Langton Homes regarding whether residents were sufficiently aware of the proposals and made representations on this point. Furthermore, the council has been following up with the planning authority's issues to do with the provision of a footpath by Langton Homes associated with the Butler's Yard development.

Finally, I would like to thank members of the Parish Council, who have all made substantial contributions to the council's work in the last twelve months.

3. Accounting Statement 2022-23

The Chair read the Accounting Statement for the last financial year, noting an opening balance of £2,958, listing various income and expenditure items and a closing balance of £6,081. The Chair noted that money had been received this financial year for an environment grant which will be ringfenced for the required expenditure and that half the requested election costs had been met, with the second half owing for the next financial year.

4. Reports from

a) Parochial Church Council (PCC) – Margaret White

On behalf of the PCC thank you for the invitation to contribute this evening. It is important in such a small village we can collaborate with events and last year we held successful coffee mornings with the Parish Council – Environmental Group also the Jubilee Celebration. The Parish Council also included the Churchyard in the plans for the big help out on Monday and I hope this went well despite the gloomy weather. I am sorry I could not attend myself. The Church had a

very eventful year last year with closure for around three months for ceiling repairs. Under the umbrella of the PCC, St. Mary's Restoration Team arranged exciting fun events raising much needed funds for further extensive repairs which are required. Also, the team helped in running events to help fund the running costs of the Church. The reports and accounts for the last financial year are in Church and available to view. Whilst it has been frustratingly slow, we expect some repair work to commence in July and further extensive work will follow. It has been wonderful to have the villagers support for our only community building.

b) Footpath Warden

The Chair advised that Ryan Cowling has agreed to replace Jill Postlethwaite as the new footpath warden. Ryan will be checking on the condition of the parish footpaths and liaising with North Northamptonshire Council about any issues that occur.

c) Tree Warden

Graham Garratt provided the following report.

The 2022 drought killed many of the trees the village planted on Sutton Hill, which I subsequently replanted the following winter, plus limited additional planting in agreement with R Hart. The second tree walk on 12th November looked at trees in the churchyard as they prepare for autumn. Cllr Cowling and the children from the village collected and planted c.200 acorns. The acorns that then germinated (c.30) were then moved to my back garden where we have cared for them since in the hope of a tree planting day around the village in winter 2023/24 - suitable land to be found.

d) Litter Picking Group

The Chair explained that Ali Carver overseas the litter Picking Group but was unable to make the meeting. As such, the Chair read Ali's report, detailing with gratitude, the work of the group (the 'Weston Wobbles'), in conjunction with North Northamptonshire Council, as well as the ongoing litter collection actions of the wider community.

e) Recreation Area Working Group – Cllr Grandidge

The Working Group Consists of Nic Hanlon, David Warden, Bob Roberts and me. A lot has happened in the last 12 months. On the 28 April 2022, North Northants Council approved the Planning Application submitted by the Parish Council to change the use of the land to Recreation use including a grassed area with seating, children's play equipment and a Multi-Use Games Area along with small car park. As with all Planning Applications, it was approved with Conditions, none of which are onerous. In March of this year, the Parish Council signed the Lease with the Landowner, Mr Chris Parker. Now that we have both the Planning and the Lease, the working group can start the process of raising the funds to deliver the project. The sum needed to deliver everything that we have planning permission for is considerable, so we are currently breaking the project down into stages. Once we have enough funds to start the work, we will engage with the village again to make sure that what we are delivering is fit for purpose. We will undoubtedly also need help from volunteers in the village to deliver the project.

It has taken about 15 years to get to this point and a huge amount of work has gone into getting us here. I would like to thank Graham for kick starting the project all those years ago, to David for his skill set and professionalism, especially with the Planning, to Nic and Bob for their hard work and all the Councillors for their input and support.

The project has got to this point without costing the Parish Council a penny and that is down to the generosity of a couple of people in the village which we thank you for.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to Chris Parker for offering to lease the land to the Parish Council. This isn't the first time that Chris has offered land for the village to use, and we are very grateful for his continued support.

Environment Working Group – provided by Cllr Cowling

Thanks to a grant from the NNC community funding, we have been able to initiate several projects aimed at enhancing our village and surrounding environment.

Firstly, I am grateful to Richard Hart for allowing us to place one of the two benches funded by the grant on his land near the jubilee becon area which offers stunning views over towards Sutton

Basset. We have selected benches made from FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified wood with a 10-year warranty, ensuring sustainability and durability.

The second bench will replace the broken one near the post box, providing a comfortable space for all community members.

Additionally, part of the grant will be used to distribute wildflower seeds to all residents along with an informative leaflet. This initiative will not only enhance the beauty of our surroundings but also create valuable habitats for local wildlife. We have a draft version of the leaflet ready for printing pending your approval.

In terms of events, we have organised two successful tree walks, thanks to the efforts of our dedicated tree warden, Graham Garratt. We engaged the children of our village in an acorn collection and planting activity. They enthusiastically collected and planted over 200 acorns, which we hope to nurture and plant during a future tree planting event. The children also had the opportunity to learn about nature through fun activities like chlorophyll chromatography and natural pigment painting.

I would also like to mention our successful tree planting event last year, where community members came together to plant trees and contribute to our local ecosystem. It was a significant achievement, and we are excited to plan more tree planting events in the future. With the collection and planting of over 200 acorns by the village children, we have a promising foundation for expanding our tree population. We look forward to involving more community members and fostering a sense of pride in our natural surroundings.

Regarding infrastructure, our environment group has liaised with Dylan to ensure that all street lights in the village are functioning properly, ensuring safety and security during the evenings.

Furthermore, we have established connections with other villages and groups, such as the FROGS (Friends of Green Spaces) in Cottingham. This networking has allowed us to exchange ideas and strengthen our mission.

I would like to express our appreciation to all those who participated in the recent help-out day, where paths were cleared of weeds, and the river clean-up was successfully conducted. Your contributions have made a significant difference.

Special thanks go to Natalie and Charlotte at the pub for hosting our talks, and to our guest speakers who shared their expertise with us. We had a heritage talk by Archaeologist Vicki Score, a talk on "How Healthy is Your Home" by Professor Paul Harrison, and an informative farm walk led by Richard Hart.

Looking back, we can proudly say that it has been a busy and productive year for our environment group. We are committed to continuing our efforts and welcome any ideas or involvement from the community.

f) Highways Working Group

Following meetings with Ian Boyes (Assistant Community liaison officer) to discuss speeding and parking issues in the village, he provided a quote for dragon's teeth to be painted on road entries -£1500 per entry, but it is clear that there is no available funding from North Northamptonshire for any speed restrictions or extra permanent signs. He was able to give us some speed signs and 'do not park on the pavement' signs to secure to existing posts which we were able to do.

Councillor Emery met with Steve Barber and has secured an additional pole for the VAS speed sign and that is currently being processed. The installation of this (on the grass verge on the road from Ashley), will be funded by Ian Boyes and should provide monitoring of traffic entering the village from the direction of Ashley. The data from the VAS speed sign has been looked at and the intention is to provide an easily understandable data for all villagers to go on the village social media sites and noticeboard, that can be updated regularly. Parking continues to be an issue for many residents and the group will be working with the PC to monitor this and try and find solutions.

5. Open Forum

Chair extended thanks to the landladies of the Wheel and Compass (Natalie and Charlotte) for all their support of village matters. Thanks were given for clearing the vegetation around the church wall.

The Chair closed the meeting at 8 pm.