

# Abthorpe Annual Parish Meeting

## Not held due to COVID-19.

### AGENDA

#### 1. To note any matters arising from the minutes

#### 2. Chairman's Report

Annual Report - Abthorpe Parish Council 2019-2020  
Chairman: Mike Greenhalgh

There have been some changes in personnel on the Council this year. Following the resignations of Marna Anderson and Merrilyn Berry I became Chairman with Keith Fenwick as Vice Chairman.

The Council co-opted Chris Zachar and Rachel Stevens as Councillors.

The council continues to meet every 6 weeks, until recently in The Old School, but now remotely on 'Zoom'. Our thanks to Councillor Hammon for enabling this. The meetings commence at 19:45 and there is a Public Forum agenda item where Parishioners can come along and bring up any issues they wish. This has been used in the last year but only rarely.

This has been a challenging year with Safety/Crime, Parking/Car speeding and then the Flu Pandemic being top of the agenda.

In the Autumn there was a theft of a motor car and assault followed by a further theft of a motor car. After much discussion and a visit from Nick King( NW county representative), the Council decided to look at relaunching the Neighbourhood Watch(NW) Scheme. A flyer was sent out with the February edition of ABTALK promoting NW and explaining how to get involved. This only generated a number of responses and certainly raised awareness. I would like to thank Jill Tolson for her work as co-ordinator of our scheme. Other communication schemes in the village include a facebook page and also an Abthorpe Alert scheme. We have also put up new NW signage scattered around the village, to advertise our commitment as a village to Neighbourhood Watch in all its forms.

The NW scheme is not just about crime and crime prevention it also looks to identify and support lonely or vulnerable people. This of course takes us onto the Pandemic Flu. There has been an excellent response for volunteers from the village to help those vulnerable and at risk villagers at this time . We thank all the volunteers for what they have done.

Car parking continues to be a thorny issue within the village. We have had a number of complaints from parishioners about difficulties. School Lane is very narrow at one point and if a car parks there then access to the green would be impossible. After consultation with the Community Liaison Officer we have made an application for double yellow lines to be painted at the Wappenham Rd end of school lane round onto the slipway to Towcester. We will await the outcome.

Speed was again raised especially at the Crossroads intersection. This was also discussed with the Liaison Officer but there appears to be no real evidence that the cross roads is difficult/ Dangerous, and apparently no reported accidents in the last 3 years which surprised us all. At present we just need to monitor the situation. As to speed through the village, the Council have purchased a second speed sign, so we will have a speed sign on entering the village confines from either direction on a permanent basis .

There have been the usual planning applications to consider which we have done. From now on thanks to a grant from central Government we have the equipment to look at plans digitally onto a screen from projector/ laptop. This of course will only happen when we return to having proper meetings in the Old School.

The Village green project is on going . We started last year with clearing of patches around the church, green and church wall. This proved a great success so we intend to continue to keep the village as tidy as possible. This will include mowing some of the council held land, as well as safe weed killing to help the areas dealt with remain weed free. Over the last year we have also had the disused Telephone box repainted by Mr S Marshall, our thanks go to him for his time in repainting.

Other significant issues through the year remained that of dog fouling with minimal progress on this difficult issue. We are also looking to create a stand alone Parish Council Website rather than being part of the village one. This is very much work in progress.

We have as a Council continued to keep up to date with local issues and also the statutory requirements from Central Government . The changes are on the way in the Local Government Reorganisation, with Abthorpe under West Northamptonshire unitary authority. This is due to go live from next April.

We have continued to receive our share of the Solar Farm money which is very helpful and enabled the Council to support The Old School committee in their excellent work refurbishing the building. The Council organised a lighting of the Christmas Tree event and along with the PCC were involved with the Remembrance Day service.

After careful consideration of the financial state of the Council, it was decided to reduce the Precept for the 2020-2021 year to £4000.

I would like to thank our clerk Tina Emerton for her excellent work over the last year, and all the Councillors for their contributions to the smooth running of the council. Due to the Pandemic, the election has been postponed for a year so the council will remain unchanged until next May 2021 when hopefully we will be in a position to have elections.

In the meantime stay safe and keep your distance.

### 3. Finance

- At the year end the Treasures Account was £1741.71, Business Account was £5883.52, Petty Cash £48.00 - Total £7673.23.
- Our total expenditure was £8695.25.
- The precept for Financial Year 2018/19 will be £4,000. This is an decrease on previous years of £300.
- Other income: VAT Refund £1366,93; Bank Interest £2.94 and Renisola £3325.38.

Balances	3/31/2020	
Treasury Account	1,741.71	
Business Account	5883.52	
Petty cash	48.00	
	7,673.23	
Treasury Account Expenditure		
E-On Street light supply	£378.19	
E-on Street light maintenance	£21.60	
Insurance	£381.24	
Hire of hall for meetings	£150.00	
Village newsletter	£127.00	
Training	£36.00	
NCALC	£425.86	
Mower	£36.30	Petrol
Section 137 donations	£50.00	St John the Baptist Church Warden

Misc	£66.58	Print cartridge, paper etc
Village Green Project Paths Wall Telephone box refurb	£1,350.99	
Mower road insurance	£160.16	
ICO registration	£35.00	Data Protection Officer
TADD payments	£88.00	£3 from previous year and £17 returned
Old school Donation	£2,327.72	
New Speed sign and batteries	£3,606.00	
Christmas Tree Event	£93.89	
Neighbourhood signs	£56.00	
	9,390.53	
PAYE	362.60	Bring inline with tax year, one less payment this year
Salary	1,449.90	
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>11,203.03</b>	
VAT reclaim	638.21	
<b>Total Income</b>		
Precept	4,000.00	
Renisola	£3,325.38	
VAT	1,366.93	
Interest	2.94	
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,695.25</b>	

#### 4. Asset Register

Assets		
From previous years		
Petrol Strimmer	89.98	
Red Telephone Kiosk	1.00	Nominal value
Bench	706.00	
Millennium Sign	1,000.00	
Vehicle Speed Sign	3,541.39	
Village Green	1.00	Nominal value
Defibrillator	999.00	
Laptop and Software	447.40	
Printer and mouse for laptop	55.71	
Ride on mower	2,337.50	
Street lights	6,508.00	
<b>Purchased this year</b>		
Speed Sign	2,805.00	
Laptop	295.00	Grant from Council
Projector and cable	393.46	Grant from Council
Projector screen and stand	171.23	Grant from Council
<b>Total Value of Assets</b>	<b>£19,351.67</b>	

#### 5. Organisation Reports

## **5.1 St John the Baptist Church, Abthorpe**

### **PCC Changes:**

At our 2019 Annual Parochial Church Meeting, Richard Tomalin stood down as Churchwarden and as a member of the PCC. Richard has been a true stalwart of the church during his time, initially as a PCC member, then treasurer and, since 2007, as churchwarden. He was instrumental in organising the design and purchase of the stunning new altar frontals in 2006 and as churchwarden has ensured that the church, churchyard and churchyard extension have been kept in excellent condition. We now have no churchwarden and just three members remain on the PCC.

### **Recent progress with changes to the church:**

Although things are still moving very slowly, the good news is that we have now been granted permission to continue with the development of the North Aisle. Richard Tomalin is continuing to project manage this and he has already secured 3 grants towards funding this, totalling £17,500. Although we still have a long way to go, this is a good start.

### **Tea and Piece:**

Our monthly afternoon tea events held in the church continued during the months of better weather. We have had steady support for these from a core group of villagers raising £550 in total. One innovation has been a take-away service for those wishing to take homemade cake away with them.

### **Harvest:**

Our annual Harvest Supper was held on the evening of Saturday 12th October which happened to be Hispanic Day so we decided on a Spanish theme. The support for it was good if rather late in coming although, as with Tea and Piece, new faces would be most welcome. The fresh produce donated at our Harvest Festival service the following day once again went to the Hope Centre in Northampton whilst the non-perishable donations went to Towcester Food Bank.

### **Remembrance Sunday:**

We held a short Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial led by Alison Robbins, but with other villagers taking part. Mike Greenhalgh, as Chairman of the Parish Council laid a wreath on behalf of the village. A good crowd attended and most then joined us in church for refreshments afterwards. A collection of £151 was sent to the British Legion.

### **Christmas:**

Our Christmas celebrations started on 7 th December when we once again held a Coffee Morning at the home of Mike and Jill Greenhalgh. £385 was raised for church funds. This was followed the next day with the switching on of the village Christmas tree lights. The Rotary Club Santa joined us on his "sledge" and he gave a gift to all the children there. We did get rather chilly singing Christmas carols and songs around the tree but then went into the church to warm up with mulled wine and hot chocolate, mince pies and Christmas muffins. On another evening, the Reverend Paul McLeod organised his now customary 'Beer and Carols' in the New Inn (with of course cracker jokes to make us all groan!) The evening finished off with tasty snacks supplied by Rob and his team.

We embraced the Church of England's theme of '#follow the star' this year with a lit star in the porch doorway welcoming all into church. Inside the church was a 'winter tree' adorned with personal star-shaped messages, and a star hung suspended above our traditional Nativity scene.

The Christingle and Carol service on Christmas Eve was again extremely well supported the highlight of course being that magical moment when the children had received their Christingles, the candles were lit, the lights turned off and we all sang "Away in a Manger". Mulled wine and mince pies followed the service and it was lovely to have so many families enjoying, what is, to many, the real start to Christmas.

The Christmas Day service was less well supported this year. Charitable Giving: Our charitable giving this year has £151 to the British Legion and £152 to the Children's Society from the Christingle service.

Thank you to everyone who has supported our food box in the back of church. In 2019 a total of 227kg of food was collected. Thank you to John Riches who took donations into Towcester food bank

regularly before he left Abthorpe in mid December. Roland Huggett has kindly now taken over this task.

### **Family Occasions:**

We had 3 weddings in church this year, all of them very happy occasions. There was one interment of ashes and there were also 2 baptisms. Church Finances: The PCC would like to thank everyone who has supported the church over the past year. Without this support the church would cease to exist in Abthorpe. Every single penny that provides our annual income is raised by the villagers of Abthorpe – through collections at services, through our planned giving scheme, through fund raising events and through the tote. Most years we just manage to break even, but any repair work on either the church building itself or in or around the churchyard and churchyard extension can have a catastrophic impact on our finances. If our beautiful church is to remain open for all occasions and to be kept in good condition, the continued support of the village is essential.

## **5.2 The Old School Committee**

Since the big room was renovated there has been an improvement in the old school finances and an increasing use of the old school.

The old school committee held another very successful ginfest last September with considerable help from villagers and their friends and family. This raised a phenomenal amount and together with a grant from the parish council, other fundraising and hire we now have funds in our bank accounts for the ongoing maintenance of the old school.

Our normal overhead costs remain comparable year on year but with the fundraising and increased regular hire our finances are in a much healthier situation. Apart from committee fundraising events there are regular Pilates sessions and Italian conversation and the old school has been hired for art classes, parties and other community sessions.

We have been able to buy new folding chairs and we also managed to purchase new tables and some children's chairs from Greens Norton village hall as that hall has now closed. The courtyard has been tidied up and with new plants in the flower bed it looks much smarter and more welcoming.

We publicise the old school on Facebook and the village website and through this get likes and some bookings. We would like to thank all those who support us both financially and with their time and particularly the parish council who gave us just over £1,900 which paid for our roof repairs during the refurbishment and our new soft furnishings.

## **5.3 Parish Path Warden**

The Rights of Way team at KierWSP remains just four people. They are working from home during lockdown with minimal office attendance. On top of this, lock down has brought new problems to the RoW network with more people out and about than usual, many using routes for the first time. This has led to an increased workload for the RoW team county-wide, sorting out safety issues and problems with walkers, livestock and gates. We have seen something of that trend in Abthorpe, with a couple of spots clearly much more busy than usual; on the other hand I have been able to walk for an hour around paths more distant from the village without seeing anyone. Fortunately the several padlocks blocking the bridleway leading from the Stocking frame TOWARDS Bucknell Woods (RA19) were removed fairly quickly.

Last year I advised that *Street Doctor* was the system to use for reporting RoW problems now – so far it has not worked for me. I need to try again, but if the issue is roadside I gather action is more likely.

I have walked the RA7 along the western boundary of the parish (with Wappenham) several times, making sure that the way is clear and signs are present and visible. I have also tried to repair the hedge and ditch crossing on a footpath just outside the village (RA4) after it was damaged by grass cutting.

Not surprisingly with such a wet winter the surface of the main byway (RA24) through and around (SC43 SC14) Bucknell Woods has been badly damaged by scrambling bikes and the route is now

closed by order of the council for a period of six months (to end July) to allow it to recover. This means that the byway off the end of Brackley lane is a dead end although not specifically closed itself.

Work has been carried out in the past year to improve the two gates giving bridleway access to Bucknell Woods (RA43) on the Abthorpe side.

There is another stile to improve near the end of Main Street when the situation and weather allow. As the ground has dried out this spring a number of stiles have become a bit wobbly – take care. We have a number of stile sets if replacement is needed. Please let the Parish Council or I know what is required.

My own contribution remains mostly at the level of observation, reporting and a little clearing. I have a copy of the definitive maps for the Parish should anyone wish to refer to them, and will be pleased to share details of local routes.

#### **5.4 Tove Valley Broadband**

We are a not for profit internet service provider, with a combination of Fibre optic and wireless connections in the Tove Valley area

Currently we are supplying 670 properties of which there are 123 in Abthorpe (over 75%)

The decision taken last year to increase our overall capacity by adding a separate independent feed was definitely worthwhile. It has enabled the network to stay up even when one of the feeds has problems (these feeds come direct from London) it has also enabled the system to keep running with the increased demand of people working from and being educated at home. The peak usage has not changed too much but it is busier earlier in the day and for longer periods.

We have had to register for VAT in the last year and this should have driven the yearly subscription up, but we have taken the decision to postpone the increase till next year when hopefully the current situation will have stabilised. (current cost is 32p per day £120 per year).

The best way we can improve reliability and performance is by getting more fibre laid with either direct connections to houses or to the wireless access points that other houses are fed from.

We have been fortunate enough to benefit from Government grants to assist in this work and have currently had allocated just over £100,000 (paid and unpaid) on top of the £108,000 we received in 2014/2015. The latest part of this is an extension to the south side of Abthorpe up the Wappenham Road as far as The Stocking Frame, then going on to Snelson's Orchard and the east side of Brackley Road.

The whole service and operation are run entirely by unpaid volunteers without whom it would not be possible, they deserve all the credit and thanks for an excellent example of community spirit.

#### **5.5 Leeson Charity**

Management of the Charity remains as in previous years. Income and expenditure remain steady, with part of the expenditure in the past devoted to maintenance of the Trust's property resulting in lower grants to support Education and Relief in Need.

#### **6. County Councillor (Cllr Ian Morris)**

No report sent

#### **7. District Councillor (Cllr Peter Davies)**

In my report to you in April last year, I referred to financial problems at Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). These had led to the Government appointing an Inspector to find a solution. His response was to recommend abolishing NCC and all seven district and borough councils. They would be replaced by two 'unitary councils

I might add that unitary councils are not a new invention. Wiltshire became a single unitary council some years ago, so did Buckinghamshire. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole have been separated from Dorset and made a single unitary - BCP

The two new Northamptonshire unitaries are: North Northants, taking in Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and East Northants West Northants Council (WNC), taking in South Northants, Daventry and Northampton Borough

An immediate consequence of the reorganization has been the unravelling of SNC's partnership with Cherwell, finalized by December. The district elections due last year were delayed until May this year. A 'Shadow' WNC and a 'Shadow NNC' were to have been formed with elections on 7 May this year to prepare for the changes. SNC would cease to be a council at the same time, as would all the other district councils and the county council.

Then Coronavirus intervened, and the elections have been put off until next year. Meanwhile the Districts and the County continue with all their current functions.

The North and West Northamptonshire Shadow Councils will still be set up in May. Instead of being made up of newly elected councillors, they will combine the membership of the existing district, borough and county councils.

Existing councillors will sit on the shadow authorities until 1 April 2021. Clir.Ian McCord, Leader of SNC will be the leader for the Shadow West Northamptonshire Council and Clir Jonathan Nunn of Northampton Borough will be Deputy Leader. Executive committees for each shadow council will also be formed, made up of two representatives from each of the current councils. The WNC shadow executive will have 8 members.

To do the groundwork in preparation, a West Northants Joint Committee was set up last year with 4 councillors from each of the Districts and 4 from Northants County Council. All services provided by the County Council (except Children's Services which will be managed by a new Children's Trust) will be split in two and delivered by two Unitaries.

The first step has been assembling data on all assets, liabilities, employees, contracts, buildings, leases etc that form the existing authorities and then working out how to reorganize each function for the new combined services. Policies have to be harmonised for example on Council Tax, and for a single Budget. Decisions have to be made on the appointment of interim Unitary staff.

The new body has to be ready for action on Day 1 immediately following the elections in May next year. Some of the present District councillors will be standing, which will provide some continuity in the switch-over. The existing Local Plans and their 5 year land supply will remain extant for the next five years until a new policy for the whole area can be agreed. This will ensure that our district will continue to benefit from protection against inappropriate land use

All Parishes have been receiving updates from SNC's Chief Executive on plans as they develop during this difficult lock-down period. Meanwhile SNC's finances continue to be sound, with adequate reserves. SNC only gets to keep 11% of Council Tax collected, with Northants County taking 71%, Police 14% and Fire 4%. For 2020-21, £700,00 is available from New Homes Bonus for investment in the local community.

## **8. Items for Discussion**

- 8.1 Donations of £50 to St John the Baptist Church
- 8.2 Reimbursement of Villagers for TADD Membership

Signed Tina Emerton  
(Abthorpe Parish Council Clerk)

Date 17/05/20  
(Posted on Website)