

Chair of Harringworth Parish Council: Annual Report to Parish Meeting – 2020/21

The past year has been extraordinary both for the Parish and the Nation. As permitted by the Coronavirus Act 2020 all Parish Council meetings were held remotely via the Zoom platform. Initial teething problems were soon overcome, and the new way of working was found to be an effective way of ensuring that parish council business could continue. The provisions in the Act allowing remote meetings expired on the 7th May 2021 and thus meetings are now, once again, held in the Village Hall. A further consequence of the Coronavirus was that the last year's Annual Open Parish Meeting could not be held. Nonetheless, by making provision for public participation at our on-line Parish Council meetings our parishioners were afforded every opportunity to raise any issues of concern throughout the year.

Communication with the District Council is now carried out exclusively by electronic means which has proved challenging at times. In addition, the demise of the County and District Councils brought further challenges as the County was split into two unitary authorities on the 1st April. We look forward to the efficiencies that our new streamlined structure of local government should produce, especially regarding planning, environmental and highways issues.

On the 6th May local elections were held for the new North Northamptonshire Councillors, Police and Crime Commissioner and Parish Councillors. Despite advertising on social media, village newsletters and posters only 6 parishioners put themselves forward for election to the Parish Council. In accordance with the regulations these six were duly elected unopposed. This was a disappointing outcome and displays a growing national complacency with our democratic institutions. The result is that the Parish Council will now co-opt an individual to fill the now vacant 7th councillor position as soon as possible.

Over the last 12 months the Parish Council have held 6 meetings and spent many hours in discussion to ensure that we fulfilled our role as diligently as possible. I am extremely grateful for this commitment by our parish councillors who carry out their duty with good grace and occasionally some difficulty. In addition, our Clerk has battled tirelessly with the bureaucratic and mind-boggling incompetence of our bank. Many parish councils suffer the same from their banks and the National Association of Local Councils has now taken the matter up with the Banking Council of the UK. In the meantime we are in the process of switching banks and the type of account in an attempt to improve the situation. Although this will now incur a monthly bank charge we could not let the current system continue.

During the past year we have dealt with 28 planning applications. In the main we do not raise objections to planning applications and when we do it is with due regard to the nation planning guidelines and not just at the whim of the councillors. As with a year ago we continue to challenge the attempt by Mick George Ltd to extend the working hours at Wakerley Quarry and have received strong support from our county councillor, Annabel de Cappel Brookes, in this endeavour.

We have renewed the grass cutting contract with Leicestershire Gardens who continue to provide a reasonable service at a competitive price. For the second year running the Clerk has negotiated a contract renewal without a price increase. Unfortunately, our roads and pavements continue to deteriorate, and we will be raising this issue with our new Unitary Authority, North Northants Council. We hope that with a 7.5% increase in our Council Tax

that our new authority will now actually carry out some proper repairs as opposed to the “patch and dash” first aid fixes that have been applied in the past.

Additionally, during the past year we have: had the churchyard trees surveyed and actioned all the remedial work identified; successfully engaged with the highways department to have illegal land encroachment on Laxton Road dealt with; had the District Council renew and place more dog fouling notices throughout the Parish; installed a footpath marker to indicate the correct line of the path between Shotley and the river; engaged with Northants First Responders, who now carry out regular inspection of our village defibrillator.

Two ongoing issues are of concern. The state of our roads and pavements, and the effectiveness of the Highways clearance of drains and gullies. We will continue to maintain pressure on North Northants Council to address these concerns. It is important that villagers continue to report all highway issues direct via “Street Doctor”.

In finishing my report I wish to thank Councillor Ges Dolman for taking on the parish council’s response to the Coronavirus. Together with his trusty band of volunteers they provided essential help to all those needing assistance with shopping, prescription collection and much more. Their effort has now been scaled back but if necessary the parish council will help provide support for those that need it. Councillor Dolman has now stepped down from the parish Council and I wish to thank him for all his help over the past years.

And finally a thanks to all the parish councillors who give up considerable time for the benefit of all the village without any reward or recognition of their efforts.

Andrew White CB DL

Chair Harringworth Parish Council

May 2021