

Annual Parish Meeting 19th April 2016

It was once again an honour to be elected as Chairman for the Holywell cum Needingworth Parish Council. I thank the Council for the trust they place in me to carry out my duties as their Chairman.

Precept- 2015/16

The Precept for the last financial year was set at £101038 a small increase of 1.86% on the previous year. This was to cover some improvements to the Parish but also the increasing costs that had been underestimated within the previous budgetary year.

Once again the Council has been very successful in containing its running costs despite pressures from unplanned issues that always cost more than expected. Expectations from Parishioners to continue to keep the village standards high and the reduction in services from both District and County will add to the financial burdens for future Parish Councils.

Looking forward to the 2016/17 financial year a small inflationary increase has been necessary taking the precept to £103117.

To individual households this will mean that a Band D property will be paying £106.42 per year which equates to a 1.95% or a £2.04 annual increase (£0.04p/week). There has been a number of addition costs we have had to make provision for. The primary one being the Government requirement for the provision of Pensions for some of our staff.

The May election was not contested and there were 2 vacancies. The Council therefore advertised the posts and co-opted two new councillors who are both proving to be a great asset to the Parish Council

The year also saw the departure of our Assistant Clerk Helen Sirot-Smith who, after 7 years in her role to return to teaching. We all wish her well and thank her for the hard work and help she had put in to the successful running of the office during this time.

Following a recruitment process, which attracted a number of applicants, we recruited a new Assistant to the Clerk, Mrs Penny Peart who, despite being on a steep uphill learning curve, is learning the ropes quickly and settling into her role well.

Planning applications

The Council have been consulted on 23 planning application this year .Once again some have been in direct conflict with our Village Design Statement, Conservation area and Parish Plan.

To this end the Parish Clerk and I attended a couple of meetings with the District Council Planning Officers and Council Members to voice our concerns on the processes the District Council were using in their delegation of powers. This culminated in a meeting between the

Parish Clerk and our local Member of Parliament the Right Honourable Mr Shailesh Vara who has raised the matters of concern with DCLG.

We have also been successful in obtaining some Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money following some unrelenting and persistent work by the Clerk which has been put to good work in replacing the Cargo net within the children's play area.

Consultations:

The Council has always had a policy of responding to documents that it had been asked to consult on.

This year some of those are as follows

- Consultation on the revision of Cambridgeshire's Strategy for Flood Risk Management
- Licencing Act 2003 – Draft statement of Licencing Policy – Consultation.
- Houghton & Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015-2036
- Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036: Targeted Consultation
- Huntingdonshire district council elections
- Electoral review of Huntingdonshire

Environment:

One of the greatest successes this year was the final completion of the River bank project in Holywell. This has been in the planning for a number of years and had to be carefully funded.

I am pleased to say that it was completed on time and within budget. We have had a lot of pleasing positive feedback from residents and visitors alike. We are now in the process of looking at ways in preventing long term moorings along this stretch of our common land.

Garden plots continue to be fully utilised with only one current vacant half plot and no waiting list although two half plot owners would like whole plots if they become vacant.

After 22 years of working with the Parish Council Mr George Briton was honoured by the Parish Council District Council Tree Officer with the planting of an Oak tree in the Falklands walk. A number of Parish Councillors and children from the school attended. I wish to thank George for his continued support to both the Environment committee and his précis of our meetings for the local press.

A group of volunteers also spent some time in the national campaign of 'cleaning for the Queen'. A very large number of refuse sacks along with some tyres were collected following a few hours work in the woods and Mill road. A great effort over a short time that really made a difference to the cleanliness and look of the village. Further areas will be looked at in the near future.

The Full Council had to take some legal advice over recent issues to do with the Common Land that had come to light over the past year. This legal advice has highlighted how complex this subject is and all its requirements. By law that the Parish Council, as custodians of the Common land, have to comply.

It is the Parish council's legal duty to ensure the Common land is protected. This may have caused some upset within a small number of residents but we must do what is correct for the whole Parish and what the law dictates.

Village hall

You may recall last year I told you about the working party that was set up with representatives from the current Village Hall Trust to look at the best long term solution for the future running of the village hall.

The new lease has been signed with the Trustees of the Village Hall for the running and all its associated costs. The Parish Council now has a licence to occupy the Parish Office at a peppercorn rent and makes a contribution to the utility bills.

The grant obtained by Parish Council has been paid following the successful completion of the refurbishment of the ladies toilet in the Village hall. I am told it is a great improvement to the facilities by those that use it.

Local Highways Improvement BID

After requests from a number of residents within the Parish I have to report that the Parish Council was unsuccessful in securing a Local Highways Improvement bid for 2016/17. This was to add shark teeth to the Bluntisham end of the Village and add yellow lines round the corner of the shop on the High Street/ Townsend Rd.

The continued selfish parking of some residents and visitors to the shop are creating some dangerous conditions for motorists and pedestrians alike around the shop, Townsend Rd and Willow Green. The Council will continue to work with the Police and District council for solutions to this highlighted problem.

As I reported last year The Parish Council were successful in the Highways bid for a 20 MPH speed limit and parking restrictions along parts of Church Street and Mill way.

Working with the Counties Highways professionals, the School and residents this scheme should greatly improve the safety of the Children and parents making their way to and from school.

This work has started and should be completed early May 2016.

Millfields

Millfields continues to be well used throughout the year with both the football and cricket teams have a thriving large group of players.

The Council have been working with these teams to balance their success and the concerns of residents about the occasional parking issues from the large number of cars attending these games and matches. The main concern has been for the requirements of vehicular access and egress from both Millfields and Holywell in case of an emergency. We will continue to monitor the situation and work closely with all those concerned. Millfields has also been used by the school for a football tournament, HAS fun run and a ladies county cricket team.

Finally

I would like to thank all Councillors who have given their time over the past 12 months and supported me in my 1st year as Chairman. To my Vice Chair, Colin Pearce, for all his support and standing in when I cannot attend.

Once again special thanks to our Clerk Jane Bowd for all her hard work throughout the year. It's been a difficult one in many ways. Keeping tabs on a Chairman for one. The challenges from some residents who, understandably, have difficulty in understanding the complexity of the Councils constraints in both finances and its legal requirements. It must also be remembered that a new staff member takes time to settle in and has to be trained up which all takes up valuable time.

Anybody who has visited the office will realise that it is not that conducive to efficient working. It is somewhat cramped with little outside light. The phone is constantly ringing and there are also the visitors to contend with. And all this with a so called part time 27 hours of a working week. I think it is time again to look at this office environment.

I would also like to, again, record the sad loss of a previous Parish Councillor of many years and Vice Chair to many Chairmen, John Precious, who passed away this year.

To Penny Peart our new Assistant to the Clerk for her work in supporting the Clerk.

Our fine Groundsmen Ian Armstrong and Ricky Storr for keeping the Parish looking immaculate. Lorraine Pearce our cleaner and our tree warden Cathy Border.

To finish on a very positive note and a thank you to Councillor Eda MacPherson on behalf of the whole village. Thanks to the kind generosity of Villagers and the coordination from Eda we now have two Defibrillators within our Parish. This was an excellent community project which I am sure none of us ever want to be used.

Jon Neish

Chairman

Holywell cum Needingworth Parish Council