

Minutes of Abthorpe Annual Parish Meeting

Held on Monday 14th May 2018 in the Old School, Abthorpe at 19:45

Councillors present:-Mr J Ford-Cordes (Vice-Chairman) Mr K Fenwick, Mrs M Berry,

Representatives present:-Mrs J Miles, Old School Committee; Mr D Robbins, Parish Path Warden; Mr J Riches, Age Concern, Mrs A Robbins, St John the Baptist PCC, Cllr Peter Davies SNC

Villagers present:-Mr R Tomalin, Mr S Andrews, Mr R Miles, Mr P Berry.

The Vice-Chairman of Abthorpe Parish Council welcomed everybody to the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Cllr Ian Morris – County Council, M Perrigo (Chairman), T Emerton (Clerk)

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 8th May 2017 had been published on the Abthorpe village web site. The Vice-Chairman asked if there were any errors or omissions. As there were none he signed the minutes.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Chairman's Report 2018 - Presented in Absentia of Marna Perrigo by Vice Chairman Jamie Ford-Cordes

This is my first annual report as Chairman of Abthorpe Parish Council. It marks the end of a challenging year of change for The Parish Council, which began sadly with the sudden loss of our loyal Clerk, Bob Carter.

Keith Fenwick, former Chairman and a Councillor of many years standing, voluntarily took on the temporary role of Parish Clerk until the autumn, when we were able to appoint local resident Tina Emerton to the post. We owe Keith a debt of gratitude for supporting us through this period, and I thank him for his continued guidance on all matters pertaining to the increasingly onerous requirements of Parish Council responsibilities.

So what have we done in the past year. The electorate of 278 adults raises a small annual budget from the Parish Precept. This year we found it necessary to increase the precept from £4,000 to £4,300. We use this money within the remit of our powers to support the parish by maintaining street lighting, the speed control signs, and to support Abtalk. We have continued our modest financial support for Abthorpe PCC, Air Ambulance, Victim Support and TADD. Our maintenance of the village green finally exhausted the old mower, which was replaced by a new one in September paid for by money received from the Solar Farm. With the benefit of an SNC grant of £6,400 over 2 years we have been able to replace unreliable street lighting throughout the village at a cost of £6,500, the balance being made up with money from the Solar Farm. You may have noticed the recent installation of the entire set of all 18 new lighting units by EON. These lamp-standards are wholly owned by Abthorpe Village. If any resident needs to report a problem concerning the function or failure of the lights, they should contact a member of the Parish Council in the first instance, and not NCC.

We have worked to protect the integrity of the village and maintain services supplied to it by considering and commenting, where appropriate, upon planning applications, the Local Plan for 2011-2029, and the County Council Medium Term Financial Plan. Our attendance at the Mini Farm appeal saw the Inspector grant permission to increase development on the site. Public transport services are under imminent threat of withdrawal, leaving some older parishioners without a bus service to Towcester. This is likely to limit independence and increase isolation. The Parish Council will endeavour to assist those affected to identify alternative provision. Similarly, road maintenance in this area, especially for the now more heavily trafficked Brackley Lane, remains an issue for vehicle owners. On-street parking throughout the village continues to create pockets of restricted access for some residents.

The Vice-Chairman asked if there were any questions. There were no questions raised.

5. Financial Report

The Vice-Chairman presented the financial statement for the year to 31 March 2018

Balances	31/03/2017	31/03/2018	
Treasury Account	4,175.00	4,509.56	
Business Account	3,876.74	3,878.66	
Petty cash	69.00	31.00	
	8,120.74	8,419.22	
Treasury Account Expenditure			
E-On Street light supply	616.00	711.88	
E-on Street light maintenance	260.00	310.16	
E-on replace cells	23.00		
E-on new light	345.00		
Insurance	429.00	439.04	
Hire of hall for meetings	100.00	100.00	
Village newsletter	272.00	285.10	
Clerks expenses	155.00		
Defibrillator	465.00		
Training		211.00	
NCALC	321.00	327.02	
Petty cash	69.00	20.00	Top up
Clerks Direct		75.00	
Mower	110.00	126.64	Maintenance and petrol (6.00 petty cash)
New mower		2,805.00	
Printer and Mouse		66.85	
Section 137 donations	150.00	100.00	£50 left to claim
Misc	15.00	6.00	Clerks job advertisement and photocopying (0.40 petty cash)
Transparency fund	417.00		Purchase of laptop computer for Clerk
TADD payments	220.00	170.00	£17 paid back into Petty Cash
	4,244.00	5,753.69	
PAYE	220.00	114.20	Part year payment due to vacancy
Salary	880.00	456.95	
Total expenses	5,344.00	6,324.84	Inclusive of 6.40 Petty Cash
VAT reclaim	277.00	569.50	
Total Income			
Precept	4,000.00	4,000.00	
Renisola	3,000.00	3,122.31	
VAT	267.00	277.29	
Abtalk donation		20.00	
Over Petty Cash		1.52	
Transparency fund	693.00		
Interest	2.00	2.00	
Tadd refund		17.00	As above
Total	7,962.00	7,440.12	

6. Asset register

Assets			
From previous years			
Petrol Strimmer	89.98	89.98	
Red Telephone Kiosk	1.00	1.00	Nominal value
Bench	706.00		
2nd bench	200.00	200.00	Nominal value
Millennium Sign	1,000.00	1,000.00	
Vehicle Speed Sign	3,541.39	3,541.39	
Village Green	1.00	1.00	Nominal value
Difribulator	999.00	999.00	
Mower	2,374.00		
Laptop and Software	447.40	447.40	
Purchased this year			
Printer and mouse for laptop		55.71	
Ride on mower		2,337.50	
Total Value of Assets	£9,359.77	8,672.98	

Question from the floor - Why was the fixed assets the same as 2017? It was confirmed that this is how the Parish Council have to record our Fixed Assets at book value and no depreciation is required

7. Organisation Reports

7.1 Abthorpe PCC– Mrs Alison Robbins

Although attendance at our regular twice monthly services continues to be low – and, to be honest, decreasing - numbers at our special services (such as Easter Day and Remembrance Sunday) are good. Once again, our Christmas Eve Christingle service was particularly popular with virtually every pew filled. We hosted the Confirmation service in October when the Bishop of Peterborough came to confirm a candidate from Paulerspury. Two weddings and a funeral took place in our church last year as well as some Baptisms.

Despite the small numbers on our PCC we are all committed to keeping our lovely church in good order and making it a welcoming place for everyone. Our main fundraising last year was our garage sale. Although successful, there were not the number of garages open as at our previous event in 2015 and there were fewer people around the village, although the tea room was very busy. £551 was raised for the church. Our other fundraising events were our Harvest Supper and our Tea and Piece monthly afternoon teas throughout the summer months. We also joined with other village teams and organised the teas for both the Plant Sale and the Christmas Fair.

Our charitable giving last year was £134 to the British Legion from the Remembrance Service, £207 to the Children's Society, £207 to the Bishop's Charity from the Confirmation service and £35 to Famine in Africa.

Plans for developing the North side of the church have moved on. Our architect has produced designs for a new servery, stone flooring, heating and lighting. This will include a new water supply with provision for a possible toilet in the future. These plans have been submitted to the diocese as part of the first stage in gaining consent. We are currently waiting to hear the result so that we can make plans to move forward.

We continue to have our box in the back of the church for donations to the Towcester Food Bank. Last year, 283.5kg was taken to the food bank and this year, 85.7kg has been donated. Our total since we started the box has been 1,319.1kg which is an amazing total from people in the village. Thank you to everyone who supports this.

At our Annual meeting this year, Darren Emerton sadly resigned as churchwarden. We appreciated the work he did during the time he was in post. Richard Tomalin told this meeting that, after many years as churchwarden and quite a few of those working as the sole churchwarden, he will resign at our annual meeting next year. Richard does so much for the church above and beyond his role as churchwarden and we are not sure what the situation will be this time next year. Steve Andrews has resigned as Electoral Roll Officer, a job he has been doing for the past few years. Thank you to Steve for doing this job so efficiently.

The PCC would like to thank everyone who supports the church in whatever way. We appreciate the support given by tote members and those who help with the church maintenance such as mowing and cleaning and also those who provide the flower arrangements in church.

7.2 The Old School Committee – Mrs Jan Miles

In the last year the committee have held two truckers breakfasts, a race night, a book sale and a bridge evening. There have been three coffee mornings held in people's homes. The old school has been hired for eight parties, two cycle ride refreshment stops, a talk to raise money for the roof of Slapton church, an art class, a celebration of renewal of wedding vows and a christening party. We have also received generous donations from the plant sale and Xmas fayre and a private donation.

The church has held six events in the old school; as a stop on the five churches walk, garage sale refreshments, harvest supper, refreshments after the confirmation service, Christingle making and tea and pancakes. Other users are the parish council and Tove Valley Broadband. The old school is hired regularly on Thursday mornings for Italian conversation and we have a couple of bookings during the summer. We also have two marquees for hire. All this helps towards the running costs of the old school. However there is a shortfall, and we have had to use some monies from fundraising events in order to cover these costs.

We are planning a family fun day with a Ginfest on the green in the summer and hope to do more truckers breakfasts, a quiz and more coffee mornings. With the grant from the big lottery we have now installed an air source heating system. This went in during December and January, the coldest months. We are monitoring it constantly since its commission to ensure the most efficient use of heat for the benefit of users of the old school.

The renovations to the big room, for which we have grants and money from fundraising, are planned for some time in the autumn. The old school committee would like to thank all those who have supported us in the last year with coffee mornings, donations and attending our fundraising events.

7.3 Parish Path Warden – Mr David Robbins

There were no major footpath issues this year. There are just a few points to make.

Contact with the Rights of Way team based at KierSWP has been almost zero of late. The helpful newsletter ceased some while ago, although their website is slightly more informative than it was.

[Our contact points are: at Kier Integrated Services Ltd and managed by Martin Sockett 01604 364351. Our local area representative is Katie Angel: kangel@kierWSP.co.uk, 01604 883451. Colin Wicks is still there.]

- A long period of declining funding by central government means that the RoW¹ team at KierWSP is now just four people. By contrast, in the year 2000 there were over 20 people involved in rights of way. Such a small team can only support immediate fire fighting and key maintenance jobs. It is for Parish Councils and volunteers to fill the gap.
- Earlier this year Northamptonshire council filed under section 114 (declared itself bankrupt). It will be run by commissioners appointed by the government for the next three years. It is presently unclear what the repercussions for the RoW team may be.
- The condition of a few stiles remains a concern. We have a number of stile sets if replacement is needed. Please let the Parish Council and I know what is needed.
- There are problems again at both ends of the SSSI to the northwest of Bucknell woods. The byways and bridleways in the woods had recovered somewhat after a lengthy winter closure. However, use by horse riders and scrambling bikes combined with wet weather this year has again ruined the surfaces for walkers. The RoW team is aware of this issue but there is not much they can do.

My own contribution remains at the level of observation, reporting and a little clearing. I have a copy of the definitive maps for the Parish and I will be, as ever, pleased to share details of local routes should anyone need them. I always welcome input from parishioners concerning problems in the network that I may have missed.

7.4 Age UK – Mr John Riches.

For the second year no-one has contacted us in our capacity as Village Representatives to enquire about services offered by Age UK. As people are now able to look-up the charity's web site and learn what services are available the need for village reps seems to have passed.

We have decided to quietly withdraw from being formal village reps but could be available to help if required. Joyce and John Riches. The Parish Council thanked Mr and Mrs Riches for their past and continued support in respect of Age UK.

7.5 Silverstone Schools' Federation

No report was provided.

7.6 Sponne School

No report was provided.

7.7 Tove Valley Communities Broadband - Keith Fenwick.

Currently we have 619 members with a few more waiting connection. There have been no major problems over the year but a steady load of small ones to deal with, quite often caused by wifi problems inside the home which are really outside our control.

It is noticeable that people rely more and more on good Internet connections so we have embarked on a programme of upgrading equipment to ensure that we can meet that demand. This involves both installing newer wireless equipment and laying more fibres.

As always we rely on our volunteers and we are not getting any younger. There is plenty of room for new blood.

Question from the floor - Has Tove Valley Broadband reached capacity yet? It was confirmed that TVB are at approximately 70% capacity and upgrading of equipment is continuing and further options are available should they be required.

7.8 Leeson Trust - Keith Fenwick

I could quite easily repeat my report of last year. Our income was the same and grants once again went to the two local schools for books and to a local charity as the best way to provide 'relief in need'.

7.9 Neighbourhood Watch

No report was provided.

8. County Councillors Report. – Cllr Ian Morris (Written report)

NCC Budget and Inspection

The County Council underwent a Best Value Inspection examining the financial management arrangements in place at the request of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Right Honourable Sajid Javid. The Government's Inspector Max Caller, identified a number of areas that required improvement and found the County Council to be failing in its Best Value Duty.

The County Council has for a long time been under severe pressure from the growth in population and the costs of social care that have been increasing year on year. Northamptonshire has one of the lowest Council Tax Rates of any county and an historically low level of reserves. .

As a Council we have always ensured that the most vulnerable in society are protected. Almost two-thirds of what we spend each year goes on social care to support vulnerable children and adults. This is a national issue but with the county council having historically low reserves and income, the transformation and savings that were required to deliver a sustainable budget position in many ways overtook us. The National Audit Office has recently backed up our view that social care is underfunded, with estimates of £2BN being cited. The Government has recently announced its intention to publish a Green Paper on the future of social care by the summer. It will be interesting to see if they set out any intention to address this significant national issue.

The previous Leader Councillor Heather Smith has resigned and Councillor Matt Golby has been elected as the new leader. Cllr Golby has acted quickly to acknowledge our failures to provide Best Value and has written to the Secretary of State setting out our intention to comply fully with the Commissioners he is likely to appoint to oversee the governance and decision making at the County Council. Matt has also announced a new Cabinet and as a leadership group Cabinet is committed to exploring every avenue available to protect our services and stabilise our budget position.

Unitary Council

The recent inspection of NCC had a key recommendation. That is reorganisation of local government into two unitary authorities. What this means is in effect all 8 councils in the county being dissolved and replaced with two new councils which would provide all services currently split across county council and district and borough councils responsibility. The County Council has for some time wanted to see a removal of a tier of local government. The vital role of parish councils will continue but you would only be dealing with one tier council above rather than two.

The County Council wants to be a willing partner in the discussions that will ultimately lead to a proposal submitted to the Secretary of State. We want local communities to have their voice heard and be able to feed into the work on unitary councils. We believe that residents and central government alike want to see efficient and cost effective services. Local Government Re- organisation can help deliver these outcomes and help safeguard local public services in the county for the future.

Libraries

The response to our latest budget consultation was phenomenal, the largest ever. It is fair to say that the majority of feedback was provided on the various proposals for the library service. In running any business one must look at all areas if reducing expenditure is required. What was clear was the high regard and value our residents place on these facilities. The traditional model of libraries as a place to borrow books or read the newspaper is long gone. There are so many other important services provided from our libraries that it was easy to understand why the public were so concerned. Cabinet and Members shared that view and rejected the option to close all but 8 libraries.

We announced plans for a Libraries Strategy. The strategy will be developed over the next three months, with all libraries in the county remaining open until August 31st 2018. Community groups and parishes who wish to establish an independent library will have until the end of May to submit a formal expression of interest to purchase or take on the leasehold for their local library. Individual project plans, including timetables for implementation and business plans to demonstrate affordability, will be worked up for each proposed independent library.

For viable project plans, libraries will continue to be staffed until September 30th 2018 enabling the sale or transfer of lease for the building to be completed. In cases where no formal expression of interest is received, staffing would be removed by August 31st. We encourage any parish with an interest in finding out more or helping to support a local library develop a proposal to contact us.

Positive News

With all the headlines on our budget position, we often forget all the vital work that goes on in the County. Our staff are fully committed to providing the best possible services to communities and residents, a feature noted by the Inspector.

Shared Lives

Despite our adult social care service being highly pressurised, the Council Council's Shared Lives service has recently won national recognition as best practice. The Care Quality Commission found the service which provides long and short-term support in a family home environment for adults with disabilities to be 'outstanding' in January this year. Jeremy Hunt, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care wrote to the County Council to express his thanks. Mr Hunt said "From visiting organisations throughout the country, I know that the immense amount of hard work that will have been behind this outcome cannot be underestimated. It is greatly appreciated, not just by me, but by all who will be benefiting as a result. It should be particularly pleasing to you to have been recognised for your outstanding safety, care and leadership".

Women's Tour

After hosting the Grand Depart of the 2017 Women's Tour, the race returns to the county for the fifth time. This year will see Daventry host a finish for the first time with the stage also including a spectator friendly finishing circuit for the first time, while Rushden makes its debut on the route of the UCI Women's WorldTour event.

The world's top female cyclists, potentially including Northamptonshire sisters Hannah and Alice Barnes of the Canyon//SRAM team will be there. The new route will take in the south of the county, passing through Wollaston, Salcey Forest,

Silverstone and Weedon Bec. We see attendance growing every year and always a huge boost for the local economy and people taking to their bikes.

Fostering

We are on target to exceed last year's record 379 children in care successfully placed with foster parents. The role foster parents play in providing a safe and secure home and family environment for some of the most vulnerable children in our county is invaluable. The positive effect this on the personal and emotional wellbeing of children in care is profound. We thank all our foster parents and encourage anyone thinking about becoming a foster carer to contact our Fostering and Adoption Service.

Agency Social Workers

Northamptonshire County Council has reduced its proportion of agency staff from 45% to 29% in the past 12 months, saving a substantial amount of money spent on higher cost social workers.

Agency staff can play a vital role in filling vacant social worker posts but the authority has been working hard to increase its proportion of permanent staff in order to provide better continuity of care for vulnerable children and families. Since January last year, the number of permanent social work staff has increased from 202 to 248 in December, while the number of agency staff in social work roles has fallen from 210 to 144 over the same period.

The success has been achieved through ongoing recruitment campaigns, including an overseas recruitment programme, as well as a scheme to encourage costly agency staff to convert to permanent social workers. The conversion scheme has seen 34 agency staff become permanent.

The council's Social Work Academy is also having a positive impact on the permanence of the children's services workforce, and is now working with its sixth intake of students. The academy, which launched in October 2014 to recruit the best-quality social workers from universities, offers graduates reduced caseloads, hands-on learning, high levels of support and mentoring, and extensive training and qualification opportunities.

Economy

We have seen the Government announce support for the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge growth corridor and associated road and rail links, which would be the focus of new housing and economic expansion. The blueprint for the proposal by the National Infrastructure Commission incorporates parts of Northamptonshire. The investment in the roads and rail will help improve journey times and increase capacity but we also want to make sure Northamptonshire is fully included in this initiative that could see significant inward investment. We have a strong local economy with historically the highest employment rate in the East Midlands. This is a hardworking county and we want to ensure it continues to be so in the future.

We have seen great success of the Northamptonshire Growth Hub – which has so far helped more than 4,000 businesses and the County Council's Superfast Northamptonshire programme has so far brought superfast broadband to 68,800 homes and businesses.

A45 Development Link Road

Work on the A45 Daventry Development Link Road, which started in 2016 is progressing well. The road will form a new 3.5 mile long single carriageway which will improve transport links between the towns of Northampton and Daventry, and improve access between Daventry and the M1 motorway. The project will also relieve communities in Flore, Weedon and Upper Heyford of through traffic as well as supporting future growth in the Daventry district. Construction of the scheme is due for completion in the Summer 2018.

Teach Northants

Our Teach Northants campaign has been a huge success in attracting new teachers to the county. This year we have seen 5,000 applications and 2,300 jobs advertised across our 357 schools. There are currently 237 vacancies available in schools across the county. We encourage any promotion of the benefits of a career in teaching in the county that parishes can provide.

Winter service

We saw significant snow fall this winter across Northamptonshire. The gritting teams totally 125 staff from Northamptonshire Highways and Kier WSP worked around the clock to keep key routes open. The Beast from the East saw our vehicles on gritting runs that were the equivalent from Northampton to Rome, with the cumulative runs the equivalent of here to Beijing.

The council will be working hard to repair road surfaces damaged by this particularly hard and wet winter. Nationally, local government estimates it would cost £9BN to bring all carriageways up to standard. We will need to continue to prioritise ad hoc repairs to the criteria we specify but anyone who needs to report a pothole should continue to do so via the Council's Street Doctor website.

9. South Northants Council update - Cllr Peter Davies

As you will have read, Northants County Council has been in the news recently, for all the wrong reasons. Basically it has gone bust and has been put into special measures. A central government inspector has produced a report which states:

- NCC lost budgetary control and abandoned effective budget setting scrutiny.

- Capital receipts were used as a way to support revenue spending.
- A new start is required. This can be best achieved by the creation of two new Unitary Councils.
 1. South Northants, Daventry and Northampton
 2. Corby East Northants and Wellingborough.
- These unitaries should be established following elections to be held in May 2020
- Meanwhile Commissioners could take over the running of NCC
- The debts of NCC would be put into a residuary body.

These proposals cut across the successful joint working for all services which SNC now has with Cherwell DC (which saves £1 million a year). There will have to be much further discussion on future arrangements.

SNC continues to produce a balanced budget, despite further cuts in central government funding, thanks to growing housing numbers and growing business rates income.

Total community awards to date for Abthorpe come to £12989. The current funding available for the parish this year is £4305.

The Local plan part 2 for SNC is being drafted to replace the 1997 policy. Some changes e.g. parish boundaries may be made. The revisions will go out for public consultation in late Spring.

National planning policy requires each Council to have a 5 year bank of planning permissions. Without it, planning restraints are relaxed in favour of development. For SNC this amounts to 1680 sites needed. In fact SNCs land supply is 3296 sites.

The council has invested £4 million in Brackley Leisure centre, with a new 6 lane pool to be ready by the Summer. There have also been improvements at the Towcester Leisure Centre.

The A5 through Towcester is often congested. Work has started opposite the Racecourse entrance for what will be a relief road to link up with the A43, hopefully by 2020.

SNC has loaned £3 million to Silverstone Heritage Limited for a motorsport centre opening in 2019 which should be 1000s of extra visitors to boost the local economy.

The target 95% of SNC to be covered by SuperFast broadband has now been achieved.

Finally, Homesafe. SNC has set up a partnership with Care and Repair Northamptonshire Ltd. This offers help for the vulnerable, disabled and elderly with small home improvements, such as fitting grab and stair rails, assistance with plumbing, electrics etc. For more information call 01604 782250 or visit the Care and Repair website. www.care-and-repair.org.uk

Questions from the floor - Is there an option for the A5 relief road to be made a dual carriageway? Also would the existing A5 through Towcester be restricted for HGVs once the relief road has been opened? It was confirmed that due to funding issues the new relief road would be single carriageway only. The restriction of HGV traffic through Towcester was unknown at this time.

Is there a time limit to using the funds obtained by the Parish Council and Old School from the community awards? It was thought that there was no time limit however once granted the funds should be used as soon as possible to avoid potential funding issues.

10. Police report

No report was provided.

11. Items discussed

11.1 Election of Parish Tree Warden - David Robbins will investigate what this entails

11.2 Donations of £50 each to four local charities - The attendees agreed that the Parish Council Funds will no longer be used for charitable donations.

11.3 Reimbursement of villagers for TADD membership - Parish Council confirmed that the reimbursement of TADD membership would continue for existing members only.

12. AOB

No questions were raised.

There being no further business, the meeting finished at 20.45