

SWANNINGTON WITH ALDERFORD AND LITTLE WITCHINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Annual Parishioners Meeting held at St Margaret's Church, Swannington
on Wednesday 3rd May 2017**

Present:

Tim Praill (chairman)

Steve Williams

Trevor Nelson

Hazel Nelson (minutes)

Malcolm Rust

Helen Mutimer

16 parishioners

1. Welcome by Chairman

2. Apologies for absence

Steve Griggs and Ed Jones

3. Minutes of meeting held on 2nd June 2016

It was resolved to approve the minutes as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters arising

None

5. Chairman's Report

The Parish Council has met 5 times since the last AGM.

The parish finances continue to be in a very good shape – thanks to our very diligent finance lead – Trevor Nelson. We still have the complication of running the parish account alongside the Commons account, but Trevor makes an excellent job of producing very clear spreadsheets for us to work from at the meetings. We have been bolstering the Council's financial reserves in anticipation of moving to an employed parish clerk. This will be decided upon at our May 2017 meeting as Hazel Nelson our excellent clerk who has been carrying out the role, unpaid, for many years has expressed a wish to stand down.

The Commons, as always, has kept us busy over the year. The ponies remain at Upgate common and thanks go to all who check them very regularly. We have also had a small flock of sheep on Alderford Common this spring.

My thanks go to Steve Williams, who oversees all the commons and is a very competent link with all the agencies. Steve also manages all the volunteer groups that come and help with commons maintenance. This takes a lot of Steve's time. The Parish Council has started to think about how best to replace the boardwalk through Upgate Common. This will be a sizable undertaking for which we have been building up our financial reserves. Over the coming year the Parish Council as owner of Upgate and Alderford Commons will also start to think about the next Commons Management Plan due in 2019, and how to engage with interested parties: particularly local parishioners.

Planning – we have dealt with various planning matters over the course of the year. My thanks go to Malcolm Rust who has approached the neighbours and parishioners affected by planning applications and got their views and reported back to the council.

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The play area at Swan Close continues to be a vital part of the parish and Helen Mutimer has continued to be responsible for this on behalf of the council: many thanks Helen. The Council has been in negotiation with the current owners to take over ownership of the play area: thanks to Steve Griggs who has been leading on this.

Our thanks go again to Tom Mutimer for cutting the common by the pump in Swannington for yet another year and Pam and Jeremy Smith for acting as our footpath wardens. Steve Griggs has very kindly overseen and reported back on any footpath issues. Thanks also to Jeremy for his work with the village web site which acts as a useful notice board. Swannington News can be found at www.swannington-news.org and to Pam who acts as our link.

Thank you also to Beverly Easton who cuts the grass around Swann Close and keeps the area tidy; Tylor and Abbi, children from Swannington, who diligently carry out regular litter picking along our highways and byways ensuring our parish remains clean and tidy; Emma Broom, who encourages and supervises the children, and supplies them with their yellow jackets and litter pickers, ensuring health and safety is maintained.

Thanks go to Edward Jones, as Deputy Chairman, for his local knowledge and long-standing experience on the council.

I have continued with the lead for highways matters which continue to cause vexations for us all. The use of Hall Road, Alderford by HGVs continues to be monitored: transport managers of culpable companies are contacted and where necessary details are passed to the police. Roadside parking down School Lane Swannington causing problems for buses and other large vehicles remains unresolved. The council reports minor repair and maintenance issues to the County Council for their ranger teams to tackle. Councillors have met Highways officers for site visits on several occasions. The Parish Council was able to get Highways to improve the triangle at the junction between Broad Lane and School Lane. The Parish Council was also successful in getting part-funding for improving the Swannington bus stop area, a 50:50 shared cost between the County Council and ourselves.

Finally and by no means least, my thanks go to Hazel who has continued as our unpaid acting clerk – she has prepared meetings' agendas, taken the minutes and acted as our link with Broadland District Council. Her hard work and knowledge on council matters have been really appreciated, not just by me but everyone on the parish council. Thank you, Hazel.

6. Parishioner's questions and comments

1. Mr. Tony Forster asked about Japanese knotweed.
This was treated 3 times last year and will be treated again shortly, probably another 3 times and maybe next year too.
2. Mr. Chris Liles asked about the large sums of money spent on the commons last year.
This involved paying the NWT for vet and farrier, a new brushcutter, commons maintenance, path clearance, boardwalk repairs - These are all certain tasks undertaken to receive HLS funding. Volunteers are used wherever possible and the numbers of volunteers has been increasing. There is still a large balance because expensive work will be necessary for pond clearance and the "boardwalk". Money is kept in a "Commons" a/c and transferred to the cheque a/c to cover the costs.
3. Mr. Chris Liles then asked why the boardwalk was there as it is an expensive item and possible liability.

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No decision has yet been made about the future of the boardwalk but parishioners will be consulted. Dr. Mark Hassall stated that the original reason for the boardwalk was to separate walkers from horse riders.

4. Mr. Barry Hildrup asked about PC planning procedure.

All those affected are consulted and BDC erects planning notices.

5. Mr. Carl Sturgess was unhappy about the building plot opposite his house and the size of the proposed application.

An apology was given that the Parish Council did not consult them personally. However no written complaints were received by the Parish Council. Dr. Mark Hassall made the point that permission was granted, only because the application was given Parish Council support.

6. Mr. Chris Liles asked about the Commons Management Plan

The HLS (Higher Level Subsidy) finishes May 2019, a new scheme then comes into being, and a need to reapply. A Management Plan for the SSSI can help when applying for grants and it will be necessary to work *with* Natural England and the parishioners. Mr. Graham Symonds made the point that it is important that parishioners are involved. This was agreed because "they are stakeholders too".

Dr. Mark Hassall suggested that plenty of time was required to ensure funding was available for more clearance. However, the Chairman affirmed that the basis of the current management plan was it is maintenance of existing habitats, **not** clearance.

7. Mr. Tony Forster asked about poor broadband.

Upgate is on the future upgrade plan initially, maybe then others within the parish may have help.

8. Mr. Chris Liles asked about the role of "Honorary Commons Advisor"

In 2010, when he resigned from the Parish Council, and, at his behest, Dr. Mark Hassall became "Honorary Commons Advisor" and he suggested the position be reviewed at the AGMs.

There have been differences of opinion over the last few months. Broadland District Council is happy with the way the PC works; however there has been much correspondence between MH and BDC, including several lengthy meetings. This culminated in a meeting involving Mark Hassall, Tim Praill, Steve Williams and Mr. Martin Thrower (Head of Democratic Services for BDC). This seemed to go well and the following day TP received an email from MH thanking him for such a positive and constructive meeting and suggesting a change in the name of "his role". This suggestion was rejected. MH then sent a long email to Martin Thrower (not copied to Tim and Steve) criticising Tim Praill and Steve Williams. Martin Thrower responded that he could not share some of the concerns MH raised and that his recollections of the discussions at the meeting varied from MH's. He went on to say that there is every good intention from Tim and Steve to make things work yet MH remained cynical and Martin was left with the conclusion that sadly MH would never be satisfied with the management of the Commons unless MH was totally involved and had the ability to influence decisions.

MH had offered to undertake the management plan and was upset from the lack of council response. However after being initially delighted that MH was offering his help, now after 6 years, SW found the offer turned invasive; it had to be Mark's way or no way. MH considers the commons as his own.

9. Mr. Robin Howes asked if Upgate Common would be cut.

Under HLS stipulations no cutting can take place between October and June. It will then be cut. People have differing opinions, some like it cut and others prefer the "wild state".

The parishioners were thanked for attending.

Meeting ended 8:36pm

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