

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

2019 – 2020

This report is to cover two years instead of one as the report due to be presented at the 2020 AGM was not done on Government instructions due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The rest of the AGM was also postponed.

At the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting the Parish Council Officers were re-elected and at the Annual Parish Meeting the Clerk reported that the Council Finances had been to External Auditors and all passed with flying colours. It was also noted that this would be the last time we had to go to External Audit as the Government had changed the rules so that smaller Parish Councils with an annual turnover of less than £25,000 only needed an internal audit.

The year started with our first Meeting on 21st of May when the Election results were noted, all Councillors being re-elected with no challenges for seats. The damage to two of the posts between the road and the duckpond was discussed again. These posts were damaged by contractors exiting Manor Farm where they had been demolishing some parts of the farm now it was no longer in use. This had been reported to Thorpe Estate as it was their contractor that caused the damage with a comment that if they weren't repaired properly the matter would be passed to County Highways, who own the posts, to deal with including the name of Thorpe as being responsible. This so the posts could be replaced without the County having to pay for them.

Also raised was a letter from the Village Hall Committee regarding the safety of people from cricket balls during matches. This was caused by a bridal party that walked out on to the pitch to take pictures and the bride was almost hit by one ball. The complaint had originally gone to Tamworth C. C. who had rejected it on the grounds that no-one with any sense would walk out onto a cricket pitch whilst a match was in progress. As the incident had already been spoken about by Tamworth to the Village Hall it was considered that dealing with this incident was being carried out. However we did look into it as there were other parties that might get involved so signs were purchased and installed warning of the danger from cricket balls. We also passed this on to the Village Hall Committee with a suggestion that they should include it in their Hire Agreements so that future hirers of the Hall would be aware of this before they actually came to the Hall and would be able to take appropriate care.

It was at this time we found out that the Grant for new playground equipment made by Mrs Ann Porter and Cllr. Gary Hunt had been approved and we were in receipt of a sum of £9941.00. An information request was submitted to NWBC regarding what safety surface they used on their playgrounds. The order for the equipment funded by the lottery had been placed. It was also noted that the diesel roller that we purchased was now running really well.

Pond cleaning was also mentioned but we are awaiting a written quotation before we can move forward. We are constantly being hampered by the time of year, winter too wet as the water supply to the pond is run-off from the fields, Spring, birds and ducks nesting, Summer lack of land to dispose of the sludge that comes out. We need to rethink our position on this.

Salt St. again has come to the forefront due to its condition caused by off-roaders. All our previous investigations were mentioned and one of our Borough Councillors has offered to look into it at a higher level and a request for warning signs of CCTV in operation be provided with a hope that the fly tipping here be at least reduced.

The ongoing problem of potholes in the Village Hall Carpark was mentioned. At the moment there is sufficient material to fill these but our new Highways Engineer has said that we can't have any more as now there isn't enough for the County's use.

The new Playground equipment has been installed. Everything was well received but the Chairman did query the type of safety matting used as he did not consider it to be anywhere as good as that under our existing units and was concerned that the mower, when cutting the grass would rip it up.

The development at Junction 11 of the M42 was ongoing but it was reported that various Tree Preservation Orders had been raised on several trees on the site.

Salt St and its condition was again at the forefront of our June meeting. M/s Gina Speakman attended the meeting bringing a fair amount of documentation. The Council, whilst in full support of M/s Speakman's position on this had to point out that we had no control over it and had been in discussions with both Warwickshire and Leicestershire County Councils for at least 12 years with neither Council showing any inclination to do anything about it.

A verbal quote of £2800 + VAT had been obtained by Cllr Wilson. We have asked for a hard copy. In the meantime it was reported that multiple deaths in our duck population had been caused by careless drivers.

Move up

A suggestion that we applied to the English Cricket Board for provision of an artificial wicket managed to get a grant, providing it was made by a Cricket Club, of £3,750 towards a total cost of £7,250. The PC agreed to a grant request by offering £1,000. This left £2,600 to be raised elsewhere. Tamworth C.C. said they were sorry but at the time they were tied up in various grant applications already. The Committee of Austrey & Newton Regis Juniors refused point blank saying they weren't going to be forced off the pitch they paid for even if the artificial strip would actually be to their benefit. No further action will be taken.

Staff from the HS2 project came to give a talk about where it had got to so far. As Austrey Parish Council had, we expressed deep concern about the proposal to build a Maintenance Depot at Austrey.

No Man's Heath Village Hall asked for Funding assistance as they were trying to get the Hall back to profitability and paying its way. It was agreed that we would arrange a meeting to discuss this further. Also in No Man's Heath Cllr. M. Humphries, NWBC has spoken to the Police about the misuse of Salt St and they have agreed to increase their patrols in the area.

No Meetings were held between March & June due to the Corona Virus restrictions meaning that neither the Annual Parish Meeting or the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council were held either. From July Meetings were allowed to be held remotely via Zoom and to cover the items legally required by the A.P.M. and the A.M. of the P.C. these were covered at our July Meeting, the first one held on Zoom. The full Agendas weren't covered.

We were offered the loan of Shuttington's radar speed gun when they weren't using it. We thanked them and finding out what was needed for us to be operational was put in motion.

In September we were informed that IM Holdings Planning Application for the development at J. 11 had been approved by N.W. Leicestershire District Council, despite there being 293 responses to the application, 292 against, 1 in favour. Along the same lines, a dog waste bin has been provided for Seckington.

Also in September we agreed to an updated version of our Financial Regulations and carried out a review of our Asset List. It was also reported by the Clerk that our website was now off-line, this due

to lack of contactability of our webmaster. It was agreed that the Clerk should build a new website including purchasing a new domain name and any other costs involved.

Hedges were also discussed as there were problems where they interfered with footpaths. James Daw said he would provide a "refuge" at Austrey Lane No Man's Heath for where the footpath exited onto the lane. The hedges at the top of Hames Lane were almost joined in the middle they were so overgrown, it was subsequently found to be the responsibility of County Highways who agreed to deal with it.

The new safety matting under the nest swing is already lifting. When reported to the suppliers they refused to come out to address the issue, which isn't very helpful. In the end we repaired it ourselves. The purchase of a strimmer to cut the grass was also agreed.

The post by the duckpond was repaired by Thorpe's contractor but was not considered satisfactory. Towards the cost of de-silting the pond a grant was applied for from the County Councillor's fund. Following on from the discussions with No Man's Heath Village Hall, Cllr. Mike Ruston was elected to their Committee as a Parish Council representative. This as required in their Charity Commission agreement.

November's meeting is the one where we discuss our budget and set a precept for the next financial year and this year after discussion it was proposed and accepted to increase our precept to £10,900 mainly to stay with inflation. Means of funding for more playground equipment was also discussed. Further footpath problems were discussed relating to paths T133, T134 and T131. It was noted that a bridge had collapsed and a sign had fallen down, all to be reported to the Footpaths team at the County Council.

Austrey & Newton Regis Junior Club advised that they were folding at the end of this season and were advised that this Council would be interested in purchasing their assets.

A revised playground inspection procedure was started as Sutcliffe Play required a 14 day and a 56 day inspection of the new equipment supplied by them to maintain their guarantee. They would not accept our Daily and Quarterly existing inspection routine as sufficient.

Cllr. Dilys Cox had attracted sufficient volunteers to form the basis of a Newton Regis Speed Aware team and had now applied for the relevant training, which will be delayed as the Police recruit a new trainer.

Despite being told that the damaged posts at the duckpond were incorrectly repaired and that the contractor was responsible for paying for them Mr Newham from County Highways said it wasn't their problem and were happy the way they were, this despite them belonging to the County.

Mr Walsh had purchased from Newton Regis Garden Centre all their leftover bulbs with the intention on planting all the daffodil bulbs around the village. The unwanted were sold off and the rest were helped by donations from villagers many of whom helped with the planting.

A Planning Application had been made by Thorpe Estate to build 9 houses at the field side rear of Townsend Close, part of the reason given was that as their application to build on the vacant Manor Farm site had been reduced from 30 houses to 21, these 9 houses were to make up the grand total from 21 back to 30. Various objections were made especially by the residents of Townsend Close, in part supported by this Council over what is considered the dangerous access off the bend in Austrey Lane by Townsend Close.