

SULGRAVE PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 13TH APRIL 2017 AT 7.30PM
AT SULGRAVE CHURCH HALL

Councillors Present

Graham Roberts, Chris Jackson, Will Priestman, David Walker

County Cllr Ian Morris, District Cllr Peter Davies, together with twelve villagers

Introduction

Cllr Roberts welcomed everyone to the meeting. This is not a normal council meeting but an annual report to learn about other village activities that have happened during the year.

1. Apologies

Cllr Troy Daniels, Cllr Laura North and PCSO Colin Brookes

3. Report from District Councillor Peter Davies

Cllr Davies thanked the Parish Council for the invitation to attend. The pressure on Local Government finances continues, as Central Government strives to reduce its budget deficit. The Revenue Support Grant to SNC fell by £600K in 2016-17 to £812K. In the current financial year 2017-18 it will fall again to £287K and next year will disappear entirely. The Rural Services Delivery Grant will drop from £187K to £151K. Despite these problems SNC achieved a balanced budget for the past year and remains debt free. Other councils have not fared so well.

Last year Cllr Davies mentioned the savings that were being made through joint working with CDC especially in the back office and IT areas. This has been extended to include joint planning teams, legal and senior management. Savings from joint working has amounted to over £3M so far. Work continues to identify further economies.

A debate is now going on about more wide ranging reorganisation, including the abolition of District Councils into mega Unitary Councils centred on whole counties. Apart from the logistical problem of providing local services from a more distant hub, there is also the issue of council debts. Would SNC want to be linked to other council's debts?

Council Tax increased this year. SNC takes just over 11 % of the total for services which include housing, town planning, licensing, refuse collection, recycling, elections, fly tipping and pest control. 70% of the Council Tax goes to NCC and 13% to the Northants Police and Crime Commissioner. Parish Councils get 2%.

Business Rates - The rating list is updated every 5 years. For SNC there has been an increase of 5.6% in rateable values. There is an appeal system in place for anyone who considers they have been assessed unfairly but any appeal needs to be made early.

New Homes Bonus - The government is reducing the payments from 6 years to 5 in 2017-18 resulting in a loss of £190K this year. This will be further reduced to 4 years in 2018-19 meaning a bigger loss of revenue. The total local community funding allocated to Sulgrave amounts to £8726 of which £5726 remains unspent. Other funds may be available under the Community Development Capital and Revenue Schemes.

The SNC Local Plan part 2 is currently looking at all village confines. It is to tidy up anomalies. There is a huge amount of house building in progress around Brackley and soon to be for Towcester as well.

The congestion on the A5 through the town centre should be eased with the construction of a relief road from opposite the racecourse to the A43 south of Towcester due to begin in 2020. All council's are required to have a 5 year land supply, without which a planning inspector can allow any development on appeal. South Northants has more than that but still no identified travellers sites.

SNC and Cherwell's joint Chief Executive Sue Smith retired last month and her replacement Yvonne Rees currently with Surrey and Essex Council's, selected from forty applicants, takes up the post in June.

The Chair spoke about the Local Plan of which the Parish Council made comments. Cllr Davies confirmed these comments will be taken into account.

2. Report from County Councillor Ian Morris

This is Cllr Morris's fourth report as County Councillor. The purpose of which is to highlight the activities of the County Council, his role and the current plans that the new Council (after the Election in May) will be following. Since May of last year he has been a Cabinet Member. The new leader Cllr Heather Smith asked him to take over the Environment, Development and Transport portfolio. A role that takes in Street Lighting, Waste, Highways, Broadband and potholes amongst other things.

Since 2013 NCC has provided safety for 3,100 of the most vulnerable children in the county and at any one time we have 1,000 children we care for. The Invaluable Fire and Rescue service has attended around 4000 incidents and this number of incidents continues to fall. Since 2012 NCC has created 13,474 new school places. The Library Plus centres are being used more than ever and have been visited by over 3,000,000 times this year. The Country parks have been visited by 2,000,000 people. Highways have repaired 40,000 potholes this year alone.

NCC continue to focus on innovative ways of maintaining and improving the roads, while maximising value for money. This against a backdrop of budgets that are under increased pressure. The public recognises that the roads require a great deal of attention, as surfaces have suffered due to underinvestment in the past and the cumulative effects of severe winters. In recent years Highways has received additional 'windfall' money from the government for potholes. August 2014 - £3.3million January 2013 - £3.7million available for the maintenance over the following two years. While this is very welcome – it represents a drop in the ocean compared to what is required to bring roads up to a 'good' standard – which they estimate to be more than £350 million. Any highways issues can be reported through Street Doctor at www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/streetdoctor. The more a pothole or a problem is reported the higher up the priority list it goes so do persevere. This winter has been unusually wet and this has caused some worsening conditions on the roads. Highways gritted the roads 63 times this winter more than last year which may surprise some people and this combined with the rain to cause further damage to our roads. A programme of road repairs will now be rolled out as the weather improves and everyone should see a marked improvement over the summer.

The provision of local bus services will continue to be under pressure and where services are underused unlikely to remain in the short to medium term. This means that innovative work like the total Transport plan for the entire community may take a significant role in protecting and providing local bus services in the future. Essentially this is a ground breaking new venture that will see the County Partnered initially with the University of Northampton and the Northamptonshire Healthcare foundation trust and which will essentially make use of spare vehicles to provide transport for Schools the Health Trust and the university but this could be expanded to include park and ride and eventually new bus routes into rural areas. The cost of the initial exercise is being entirely funded by government and is being closely watched by other counties.

Northamptonshire's rollout of superfast Broadband continues at pace. NCC were one of the first councils to accelerate rural broadband connectivity. Last year over 43,000 premises were connected and 181 new fibre cabinets were deployed across the county. This year 65,000 more premises have been connected. The phase 3 part of the contract with Gigaclear will see further rollout to the rural areas that have up until now not had any broadband or little chance of connection to superfast broadband and by the end of 2017 NCC should see 98% of properties connected. In particular those properties with exchange only connections should see a solution that allows them to connect to the network

In terms of the Council Tax, Northants still has the lowest Council Tax in the country despite having to put it up by 4.99 %. This is broken down into the 3% extra that NCC has been allowed to charge for adult social care (£11.7 million) and the 1.9% NCC are allowed to increase it by without having to go to a referendum. This effectively is saving the taxpayer at least £102 a year compared to the national average.

Despite the ongoing pressures from Adult Social care and Children's services and unprecedented growth in demand for both NCC has once again balanced the budget and will do so going forward. Future changes to government funding to 100% retention of business rates by 2020 with no government grant meant that all Local Authorities will have to look at how they operate going forward. This county currently has nine local authorities including the County, Town, Districts and Boroughs and over 400 elected Councillors. Cllr Morris has long been an advocate for some form of unitary authority in this County and this is something that the next administration will have to look at. To be very clear this is not a take over of the Boroughs, Districts and Towns by the County but a redesigning of the entire system. All nine Authorities would cease to exist and a new one would be formed with all new Councillors and officers. The savings to be made and therefore spent on front line services are large and cannot be ignored going forwards. The number of unitary authorities might be up for debate but it is his opinion that one makes the most savings and any more than two begins to water down the savings significantly. Whatever model is proposed the people of Northampton would be fully consulted with and ultimately it would be their decision. Cllr Morris finished with a mention of the Councillors Empowerment Fund. Many if not all of the villages within his division have benefited over the last four years from the annual amount of this fund. It has been reduced this year and next to £5K a year. It is something he will fight to retain going forward. Cllr Morris can be contacted on Imorris@northamptonshire.gov.uk or followed on Twitter Cllr Ian Morris @aussielover100.

Cllr Walker reported the problem with the storm drains in the village which seem to be ongoing and worse after rain. He suggested it would be more productive for the sucker machine to spend the day emptying the drains and checking they all connect properly. Cllr Morris agreed to take this point away. Another suggestion was to invite Helen Howard, NCC Community Liaison Officer to a meeting.

Cllr Walker reported street furniture which is often left on the sides of the road after highway work has finished. These would need to be reported on Street Doctor.

The Councillors Empowerment Fund was discussed as Sulgrave have not submitted an application during the last three years. Applications have to be in by 6th May.

4. Report from Northants Police (read by Cllr Roberts)

The report from the police was very broad and covered the whole of the district. The reason for this was that systems have changed and the police are no longer able to look up crime figures for individual wards and villages. The police recommend visiting www.police.uk to access up to date statistics. The Brackley Safer Community Team has reduced in size, changing from one Sergeant, six police officers and six PCSO's to one Sergeant, two PCSO's all covering Brackley town and over 40 villages all working across a rotating shift pattern. The numbers in the past two months have increased and there are now three PCSO's covering the area.

The Chair had looked at the website and there have been some Anti Social Behavioural Incidents and a burglary earlier in the year. Surrounding villages do seem to be suffering too. People are advised to be vigilant at all times and call 101 for non urgent calls. From the floor Mrs Blayney noted that she has seen on local Facebook pages that dogs are being stolen from surrounding villages.

5. Report from Sulgrave Allotment Society read by Janet Smith

All six plots are taken. A recent change in ownership has meant there is no waiting list now. All rents have been collected. Expenses include the water and insurance charges. There will be an open day on 18th June as part of the National Garden Scheme.

6. Parish Council Report read by the Chair man

This report covers the period from April 2016 and is intended to illustrate to the community the work of the Parish Council.

The Parish Council in Sulgrave consists of 6 Councillors supported by the Parish Clerk. During the period, 2 of the Councillors have stood down. Councillor Jo Powell served on the Parish Council for 11 years and Councillor Andrew Waite served for 7 years, the last 4 years as Chairman. The Parish Council owe a vote of thanks to the contribution they have made towards their community during these terms of office. Consequently, the Parish Council welcomes Councillor Troy Daniel and Councillor Laura North who have been invited to join the PC via the Co-option procedure.

The Parish Council are fortunate that Sulgrave continues to have continuity and a strong Parish Council and the Chair thanked the Councillors and Parish Clerk Christine Coles for their hard work that they have put in during the last 12 months.

2016/2017 Activities

The last 12 months has been a busy time for the PC and there have been some achievements to report as well as some continuing issues to resolve, a brief outline is given below.

Street Lighting

The Parish Council completed the project to replace all existing street lighting lanterns with attractive and energy efficient LED lanterns. They secured a Public Works Loan to fund the project which is partly funded by a nominal increase in the precept and partly funded by energy savings from the new lanterns.

HS2

The Parish Council have adopted a policy of keeping a watch on the proposed HS2 construction project during the year and have identified a concern about the volume of construction traffic that would be expected within the vicinity of the Village during the construction phase. To ensure the community voice was heard the Parish Council petitioned the House of Lords enquiry requesting to be heard on this concern. Councillor David Walker represented the PC at Committee and gave evidence in support of the petition. Consequently, some assurances were given regarding the traffic management issues. With Royal Assent now given to commence construction in 2017, the PC will continue to engage with the HS2 project and seek to minimise the impact on the community wherever possible. Additionally, the PC will seek to secure opportunities from various Government funds now established to mitigate the impact of the project on local communities.

Pocket Park

The Parish Council engaged the services of Rod d'Ayala, an Ecological specialist, to undertake a survey and make recommendations as to the maintenance of the pond area. Rod produced a very interesting report, identifying the flora and fauna, including rare species.

Rod has returned recently to undertake specialist care and upkeep and it is intended to continue this work into next year, to improve and restore the pond area. The "Natural Wood" area at the Pocket Park was becoming very overgrown and hedgerows were excluding light from the area, groundwork has now been completed to improve the area and work is to continue next year, thanks go to villagers Richard Fonge and Andrew Osmond for their contributions to this work.

Footpath AY4

Footpath AY4 passes under the old railway between Sulgrave and Weston and the tunnel has been declared unsafe, requiring a diversion. Previous unsatisfactory re-alignments of the footpath suggested by NCC and the land-owner have been strenuously opposed by the Parish Council and an individual resident. Due to the pressure on the land-owner and SNC, a more suitable solution has been offered which the Parish Council have accepted. Thanks was given to Cllr Chris Jackson and Colin Wootton for their efforts in achieving this.

Provision of a defibrillator for emergency use

There have been some problems identifying a suitable location for a defibrillator to be installed for emergency use. Recently BT stated the limited use of the pay phone adjacent to the shop does not justify retaining it and consequently the Parish Council explored the option of using the phone booth as a location for the defibrillator together with a village information point. Whilst initially investigation work by our Parish Clerk identified they could install the defibrillator at a nominal cost, BT has withdrawn the permission to use the phone booth. The Parish Council is now exploring alternative solutions.

Village Shop

The Parish Council continue to support the village shop and new notice boards have been installed this year. The Parish Council have also had a kind offer, gifting a small area of land behind the shop for storage from Mr Todd which is now being transacted via the Parish Council's solicitor.

Countryside and Village Walk Leaflets.

The Parish Council arranged for the village walk leaflets, drawn by George Metcalf some time ago, to be updated and reprinted. These new leaflets are now available in the Shop and at the Manor.

Communications

The Parish Council, together with The Manor, have sponsored the publication of the monthly newsletter throughout 2016/17. The Parish Council are appreciative of the support from The Manor as the cost would be significantly more without their help. The Newsletter is edited and distributed by volunteers and is an excellent method of communicating village news and forthcoming activities. The village website www.sulgrave.org which is sponsored by the Parish Council and managed very ably by Colin Wootton. The website provides informative and interesting features about Sulgrave Village.

Planning

One of the duties as Councillors includes reviewing and commenting on Planning Applications. Each application is considered by Councillors with the impact on the conservation status of the village foremost in their minds. Some applications they have supported, others have been objected to. Whilst this does not always influence the outcome, the Parish Council remain committed to making their voice heard. Additionally, they have commented on the South Northants Local Plan Consultation document to hopefully influence future policy in the village's favour.

Finance

A full and audited statement of accounts is available each year and information is posted on the Shop Notice Boards following the Audit. Any resident who wishes to see the accounts can do so by contacting the Parish Clerk.

The headline figures for the year to April 2017 are as follows: -
(Figures for information only – not Audited)

Bank Balances at 02.03.17
Barclays Current Account £15,909.39
Nationwide Pocket Park Account £24.00
Treasurers A/c £121.05

Figures relating to Income and expenditure for the period to 03/03/17 are given below.

For the sake of clarity, the Capital income and Capital Expenditure for major projects have been excluded from these tables, this additional information is freely available from the Parish Clerk if required.

Full audited accounts for the period to 31st March 2017 will be published and displayed on the shop notice board, and will be available from the Parish Clerk on request, after completion of the external audit.

(Figures given in the following tables are for information only, not audited)

Income (Excluding Capital Income and VAT recovery) 2016/17

Precept	£12,500.00
Mowing Allowance from NCC*	£837.40
Wayleave from Western Power	£3.45
Allotment Rent	£1.00
New Homes Bonus from SNC	£3,000.00
Shop Rent	£1,500.00
Walking leaflets	£10.00
Total	£17,851.85

*Note The Mowing allowance shown is for two years, annual allowance is now £418.70

Main Items of Expenditure

(Excluding Street Lighting Capital Cost)

Public Lighting	£1,124.92
Village Mowing	£1,836.00
Pocket Park Inspection	£82.80
Pocket Park Maintenance	£336.00
Communication/Broadband Costs	£60.00
Village Maintenance	£480.00
Church Hall Hire	£210.00
Church Clock Maintenance	£150.00
Section 137 Subscriptions	£316.16
Audit	£585.00
Employee Costs (Salary/Travel)	£1,189.74
General Admin (Postage/Copying/Fax)	£100.00
Newsletter Publishing	£521.21
Other Admin	£1,562.50
Insurance	£986.03
Miscellaneous	£1,181.89
Public Works Loan for shop	£2,715.92
Public Works Loan for street lighting project	£1,989.48
Total	£15,427.65

7. **Castle Green Report (read by Martin Sirot-Smith)**

The wall has been repaired. Mr Scott of Marston St Lawrence completed the work under quote in January. He did report that the next section will sometime in the future need a similar repair. This would link up the sections he has previously repaired and probably preventing any further collapse.

The committee met four times during the year dealing mainly with routine maintenance, grass cutting, hedge trimming and tidying the entrances. In July, Rachel Jordan of English Heritage came to do a report on the trees. Her report was presented to the Parish Council. Following this, Richard Fonge was requested to trim back those trees that were threatening phone lines or overhanging the road dangerously. Thanks was given to him and his helpers. In general the report said the trees were in a good state.

It is intended to hold a Sulgrave Castle History Day with living history performers on Sunday 10th September from 11am to 12.30pm. It will be open to adults and children, friends and families. It will be a chance to discover the whole history of the site and exactly what is lying beneath the Castle Mound. It should be a fun session for all following a trail with questions and answers with much to find out. Further details will appear in future issues of the Village Newsletter.

The Green has been regularly used by villagers, children and dog walkers. The benches providing a tranquil spot from which to enjoy views both to the surrounding countryside and to the Church and its surrounds. The Green is available for village groups and family events. Please contact a committee member or the Parish Clerk.

Following a suggestion in last year's report, with the Parish Council's support they have been working on a village guide to be sited in the redundant Telephone kiosk. However after a considerable amount of work having been put into the project, BT have withdrawn the offer of the kiosk citing "safety issues". This is a great pity, particularly as the site is absolutely ideal. Further investigation is now needed to see whether the site can be acquired and then be able to put up their own purpose built Information Board. This will save all the man hours already expended.

Finally it was pleasing to welcome Will Priestman onto the committee as the Parish Council representative. He will be a fine addition. Mr Sirot-Smith thanked the committee, Paul Crowley, Jo Powell, Christina Shillito, Colin Wootton, Peter and Clare Pollak and Will Priestman for their continued support.

Report from Sulgrave Manor (read by Susie Blayney)

Cymon Snow has left the Manor. There is a new CEO, Events Manager and Administrator. The phone system has changed and is being monitored. Email is the best way to contact them. Kiln Farm and Manor Cottage have new roofs and will not be sold. They will be renovated when there is available money. The Woolhouse cannot be sold and will be restored and repaired at a later date. The land behind Kiln Farm is under consideration and the Parish Council and village will be consulted as to its future use. All residents passes are no longer valid, villagers are to go the Manor with proof of address to collect a new pass. There will be two public days this year. The first is the Tudor Fayre on 11th June. Mrs Blayney asked for thoughts on a one way system for these events which was tried a few years ago. The Chair suggested that the village are consulted.

From the floor Mr Fonge felt that by locking the door and expecting villagers to ring the bell was creating a very unfriendly approach.

8. **Report from Sulgrave Village Shop (read by Cllr Roberts)**

The Shop are pleased to report they have had a very busy and positive year. Jeanette had not yet been with them 12 months when the year started, however was well settled into the job and seemed to be fitting in perfectly with the committee receiving very positive feedback from the community.

The shop committee was strengthened with Helen Jackson, Jonathan Saddler & Clive Nicholls joining the existing team (Kevin Moore left the committee due to other commitments in 2016), the new members have already made some great contributions some of them very visible such as the painting and repairs. They continue to tweak the product ranges based on feedback from customers and new supplier opportunities, this seems to be working well and is reflected in sales growth over past couple of years. Any further feedback is always welcome. Unfortunately late in the year Jeanette was off with illness for the best part of a month, the volunteers as usual came together and covered Jeanette during this time, this coupled with family situation led Jeanette to believe it was best she resigned from her position as she needed more personal time. After a review they felt it would be a great loss if Jeanette was to leave and the best option would be to create a job share situation which would give them far greater flexibility moving forward. Although this now flows into early 2017 the shop are pleased to report they were successful in finding a great candidate in Tracey Speed to job share the position. With job share in place now they are focused on how they can continue to improve the shop further and continue to serve the community. Further detailed information will be available at the Shop AGM in a couple of months.

9. Report from Sulgrave Charities

The annual accounts had been forwarded to the Parish Council but there was no report to read out.

10. Report from Village Website, Colin Wootton

Mr Wootton was astonished to find out that he had been maintaining the village website for over ten years. Five years ago a new format was introduced and the statistics which he has date from that time. The average monthly number of visitors to the site is 3000 but in the last three years this has increased to 8000 in the month of December, when there was a new item on the site each day featuring the village advent window of the day.

There have been 350 new items posted in that time and there are currently 50 pages of information. Everything put on the site during the ten years is still there and villagers are reminded that there is a google custom search panel on the home page. Colin gave an example where a villager asked the name of a field. Colin suggested typing "field names" into the search panel. This immediately took the searcher to a page in the online version of the "Chronicles of a Country Parish" published in 1995 following years of research by the Sulgrave History Society. By clicking on the map a bigger version can be seen giving the names of all the fields in the parish.

Photographs appear in most items and there are currently over 10,000 images on the website. A new feature introduced during the year was Village Views and can be found on the Home page just under the first item "Diary and Events for the Year". It comprises photos by Chris Behan who is acting as a roving photographer on an almost daily basis.

In addition to the advent calendar windows the normal range of activities have been covered during the past year including May Day Celebrations, Weddings, Open Day Gardens, Village Fete, US Independence Day celebrations, Produce Show, Ploughing Match, Harvest Fayre and Grafton Team Chase.

Many of these events take place in the lovely setting of Sulgrave Manor and villagers are reminded they can usually get free access by producing their passes. Recent features have included some descriptions of farming activities during and just after the second world war written by one of the village's oldest inhabitants, Donald Taylor.

Information on Parish Council affairs can be found on the Council page, including details of the Councillors, agenda and minutes of meetings, the roles and responsibilities and powers of the Parish Council. The latest information on SNC Planning Policy and the status of planning applications can be found on the Planning page.

The website is maintained on behalf of the Parish Council and the current cost is £15 per year, that being the cost of retaining the domain name. The village website provision costs are absorbed into the overall service provision costs me by Colin's grandson for his websites. He is an information technology professional with a large outlay. The cost of the village website amount to a small proportion of his overall costs and he is happy to make his contribution to the village facility. Most important to Colin is his instant availability if things go wrong.

Finally, Colin reminded everyone that if their digital phone or tablet is under their pillow they be able to instantly access the website home page and find out the temperature, wind speed and direction in Sulgrave without getting out of bed.

11. Open Forum

There was nothing further to discuss.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Meeting closed at 9.05pm.

