

SULGRAVE PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 14TH APRIL 2016
AT SULGRAVE CHURCH HALL

Councillors Present

Andrew Waite, Graham Roberts, Chris Jackson, Will Priestman and Mr C Snow of Sulgrave Manor, Cllr Ian Morris, Cllr Peter Davies, Mr J Rodway of Sulgrave Charities, together with three villagers.

1. Introduction

Cllr Waite 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.

Apologies

Cllr Walker and Martin Sirot-Smith

Before the meeting began, Cllr Jackson advised that there was a HS2 matter which needed discussing. Cllr Walker had attended an Action Group meeting and there is a petitioning period which will open shortly and last for 3 weeks. The public are allowed to petition on issues relating to the Bill contents. The Parish Council cannot object to the principle. They have been made aware of predicted travel figures of local roads through the construction period. There will be 500 per day in each direction on Banbury Road and Welsh Lane (B4525). The Parish Council took the decision to petition the House of Lords but to be realistic. Matters relating to the quality of the junction of Banbury Road/Welsh Lane and have been raised. The Parish Council have requested a full assessment of the junction and said that traffic lights are not appropriate. There is a section of road between Sulgrave and Thorpe Mandeville which is dangerous. The Parish Council have asked for a proper assessment to be done and improvements made. There will be no lorries on Sulgrave Road but this is a more direct route to the B4525. This has been suggested as an alternative route. The deadline for petitions is 18th April. All Councillors present agreed to the wording of the petition and the Chair and Cllr Roberts would sign the paperwork. Once the petition is received a representative will be asked to attend the House of Lords and give a presentation with slides and photos.

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

Unfortunately the Brackley Safer Community Team were not in a position to send any staff member to attend the meeting in person. Therefore they have issued a standard report starting with the crime figures, as follows:

Sulgrave

Assault with injury – 1

Assault without injury – 3

Theft – 1

Attempted burglary in a dwelling – 1

Domestic incident – 1

Possession of a controlled drug - 1

With regards to crime in general, there has been an emerging issue relating to Theft of purses from persons using Supermarkets. Therefore we are asking member of the public to be vigilant when using such locations and to report any suspicious circumstances by dialling 101, the non-emergency telephone number.

Northants Police also supports local social networks such as ‘Brackley Gossip Girls’, ‘Brackley Burglary Crime & Prevention’, ‘Northamptonshire Street Watch’, ‘Newbottle and Charlton Crime Prevention Group’ and

other village networks by providing information and advice for circulation. They recognise the value of these pages for keeping a two-way flow of information between the Police and the public and are very grateful to the administrators of each site who keep this going. The handbag thefts recently have proved the value of these sites.

The above sites have proved very popular and all communicate with each other to increase their effectiveness. Every village/community within the South Northants area would benefit from developing a similar Facebook site to continue to expand this network of information and make the area less attractive for criminals. It is acknowledged that there are a lot of people who do not use social media and persons who administer the existing sites provide information to their local Neighbourhood Watch schemes for distribution via email or other methods.

If a village is interested in developing a similar site for their area they should look at the above mentioned pages for examples of content and rules and for more information to contact:

Brackley Sector villages – Sergeant Michaela SIMONS via micki.simons@northants.pnn.police.uk

The Police website also contains pages for their local area and further crime prevention and personal safety advice. The Northamptonshire Police website can be accessed via: <http://www.northants.police.uk/#!/SouthNorthantsBrackley>

Members of the public can also contact the Police in confidence, via 999 in an emergency, 101 for non-emergency. If there are concerns and villagers want to arrange to speak directly to a local Brackley officer then contact them via their email address: SCT-SouthNorthantsBrackley@northants.police.uk.

Follow them on Twitter: @BrackleySctSgt or visit the Northants Police website for updates, events and local team details: <http://www.northants.police.uk/#!/SouthNorthantsBrackley>.

After the report was read out Cllr Roberts felt that the police force is becoming a virtual one. Over the last ten years the village have had a good relationship with the police. They have attended every Annual Parish Meeting and stopped and talked to people.

Action: Cllr Roberts agreed to contact them and ask more detail about crime figures.

3. Sulgrave Manor Report (Cymon Snow)

Mr Rooney is the CEO and has six weeks left in his contract. They Manor are hoping he will be staying on. He had hoped to attend the meeting but had a family bereavement to attend to.

Mr Snow reported that the two cottages have new roofs at last and look much better. The money came from American Express donations and the Dames. Thanks was given to them. They are hoping to raise funds to finish the job and put the cottages back to where they are. No decision has been made about the cottages yet. The Manor have won a Heritage Lottery Grant for £86K. This will fund a lot of things at the Manor such as electronic point of sale, a new website, Development of Board of Trustees and a Heritage Asset Survey. The archive section is moving. The Manor are changing part of the space above the shop where the archives are stored. The Manor are not able to take the general public to the loft area and this will give more access to the archives.

A lot of weddings (37) are booked for this year. The Manor are always conscious of the disruption to the village. They have a sound monitoring system which they use on a regular basis to check the sound level at the end of each property.

They have had work done to the artefacts, both paper and parchment. Three important Washington portraits have been cleaned and renovated recently. This has meant that insurance premiums have increased.

The Manor are hosting both the village fete on 26th June and the car show in September.

The Manor introduced an Annual Pass last year. They are able to get gift aid donations on every person who enters so the gift aid donations have doubled.

There are new items in the shop and more on the way. There are film nights which take place in Culworth and the Manor are thinking of starting them too. A new lady called Charlotte has started working at the Manor and she is very enthusiastic.

Mr Snow spoke about future work at RAF Croughton which won't affect the village. The site is expanding and number of servicemen tripling by 2020. Local people are concerned with construction and traffic as well as the implications with HS2.

From the floor Mr Rodway asked how many weddings had taken place in 2012. The answer was 6. The Manor are not a sole wedding venue and to get 35-40 bookings is comfortable. The weddings take place between early March and the end of October.

3. Report from Sulgrave Allotment Society, (read by Cllr Waite)

The allotment plots are all let and the society are in the process of collecting all the rents, for annual payment of insurance, rent and water rates.

5. Report from County Councillor (Cllr Ian Morris)

6. Report from District Councillor (Cllr Peter Davies)

South Northants Council is under a lot of pressure financially. Funding from Central Government has reduced by £600K. Joint working with Cherwell District Council has saved £3M. An attempt was made to link up with Stratford Upon Avon but was unsuccessful. All services with CDC/SNC will be joined up soon. There is a shared Customer Service team and a joint Revenues and Benefits service.

The CIL was introduced in April 2016. It affects new developments. There are some exceptions such as affordable housing and care homes.

Council tax has increased by 2.955. This equates to £5 on a Band D property. The New Homes Bonus is under review. They will not pay for homes which are won on appeal. Sulgrave has an allocation of funds and some will be used for the street lighting project.

Work on the Local Plan is currently underway. Cllr Davies noted the importance of villages feeding in their comments to SNC on village boundaries. All councils are to have a five year land supply. SNC has a seven year supply and is in a comfortable position. The Parish Council have to respond by 10th June.

60% of waste is recycled. South Northants is the best in East Midlands and 11th in the country. SNC moved to the Forum in Towcester.

Improvements are being made to the Leisure Centres in Brackley and Towcester. Improvements are being made to the A43 Abthorpe roundabout and will be ongoing for a year.

7. Parish Council Report (Cllr Waite)

The Chair said a few words about the work as a Parish Council over the past year and plans for the year ahead.

The start of this year brought some new faces to the Council and the Parish Council were delighted to welcome Cllr's Will Priestman, David Walker and Chris Jackson to be with us. They have brought some new skills and knowledge with them and it is hoped they will continue to enjoy their roles during their second year.

In the last twelve months the Parish Council have been involved in so many different activities in and around the Parish that it is difficult to provide a succinct summary.

At the beginning of the year the Parish Council liaised with the organisers of the "Wings for Life World Run" over the route for the charity run event which took place on 3rd May 2015. The Parish Council sought to provide information to residents about this event and to minimise the impact on the Village. Happily, there was less disruption than during the previous year's race when access to and from the village was effectively closed for a period.

Again, on the matter of Roads, Streets and footpaths the Parish Council have frequently pursued those responsible for the upkeep of road surfaces and pavements to encourage them to repair potholes, to fix broken signs and to remove fly tipping debris and so on. The Parish Council have had some notable successes in making improvements this year and will continue to work in this area.

The Parish Council met with Highways and discussed proposals for the reinstatement of a section of path in Little Street. The Chair was pleased to report that the area of path was restored at the end of October 2015. This was thanks to the assistance of both Helen Howard at Northants Highways and to the support from Cllr Ian Morris too.

On another Transport related matter the Parish Council have been following developments regarding HS2 closely and have sought to bring information relating to this project to the attention of Villagers. The Parish Council are grateful to Cllr's Walker and Jackson for their recent work to prepare a petition to the House of Lords in response to the most recent information received on potential HGV traffic movements during the construction phase. The projected traffic flows looks like it may impact on residents and the Parish Council has concerns about safety too. Concerns on these matters are the subject of the petition and this will be discussed again at our next Council meeting.

Keeping with the railway theme brings us to a much older railway line and a public right of way. The Parish Council reported last year that they had been consulted about the condition of the old railway bridge over the public right of way from this village to Weston (route AY4, as it is known). The Parish Council have been seeking a solution to avoid diverting the current right of way and (with others) have objected to a proposal which would do this.

The Bridleway route AY4 is currently closed as the result of a temporary order on safety grounds, the order having been put in place by Northants County Council. There has been a general lack of maintenance of the tunnel under the disused railway line for many years and this has reached the point where the tunnel has been declared too dangerous to remain open for public use. The Parish Council would very much prefer the tunnel to be repaired and re-opened.

In an attempt to negotiate a compromise discussions have been on-going since 2014. An alternative route was put forward with backing of the Parish Council. However NCC were against the route (although the Parish Council have never been convinced by the reasons for this) and without Northamptonshire County Council's support it was not possible to make further progress with this particular option.

During 2015 discussions took place regarding potential funding for repair of the structure, which led nowhere. The temporary closure order was put in place by NCC In September 2015. This left an impasse whereby the landowner will not repair the structure, NCC will not progress the permanent order with

objections and the Parish Council and a Sulgrave Resident will not lift objections unless a more satisfactory route can be found.

To try and break this impasse the Parish Council arranged a meeting for all the interested parties in February of this year to try and negotiate a way forward. Alternative routes were discussed including the possibility of a pedestrian route over the old railway. The Parish Council want greater certainty of legal status and maintenance and therefore want a full right of way establishing. This discussion is ongoing. The Parish Council position remains that our preference is repair of the tunnel, but in light of the ongoing closure they are trying to adopt a pragmatic position to reopen what was historically a well used route for the benefit of all users, in particular local residents who we represent.

On less controversial matters; the Parish Council have once again supported the funding of servicing the Church clock mechanism in recognition of the importance of this historic asset within the village and the prominent place this feature plays in village life.

A major preoccupation of the Parish Council has been the street lighting scheme for the village. The Parish Council are very grateful again to Cllr. Roberts for all his work on this important project. For those who might not be aware, the street lights will soon become obsolete and are in many cases in a poor condition requiring replacement. Over the last year the Parish Council have consulted with villagers with options for replacement lights and a Contract is currently underway to replace the light fittings with the new lantern being almost unanimously favoured by those who responded during the consultation exercise. The project is being funded by the Parish Council and through a Public Works Loan.

Turning to related safety and security matters the Parish Council have been pleased to support Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) across the South Northamptonshire area.

On the subject of planning the Parish Council have commented on numerous applications placed before them and have carried out site visits to properties concerned. The Parish Council have been consulted on a diverse range of projects and have undertaken site visits where necessary to understand the issues involved.

On a related Planning Matter to do with wind farms, the Parish Council are grateful to Colin Wootton. Colin has advised and represented the Parish Council on such matters and has kept them well informed about the long running saga of Broadview's proposed Spring Farm Ridge Windfarm and about the activities of the Helmdon Stuchbury and Greatworth Windfarm Action group. The Parish Council understand that, there is nothing new to report on this except to note the ongoing affair of Broadview asking first the High Court and now the Appeal Court to set aside the Secretary of State's decision to dismiss their appeal and refuse planning permission, on the basis of unfair lobbying of the Secretary of State whilst he was considering his decision. The Appeal Court Hearing is set for 19/20 May which Colin will attend, having submitted a Witness Statement.

Colin also deserves a lot of thanks for his tireless work on use Sulgrave.org website which is still the biggest and the best website exclusively devoted to the life and times of the Village of Sulgrave. The website, under Colin's careful curatorship serves as a valuable conduit for the Parish Council to communicate important messages to residents. But it is also valued greatly for the charming way in which Colin reflects community life with his stream of information about the village ranging from articles about the old railway to a record of Christmas advent calendar Windows and more besides...and there is still that handy weather widget on the home page to save people from straying from the iPad...

Moving on to recreation matters in the village; the Parish Council have aimed to maintain and improve the pocket park and to manage both the equipment there and the vegetation within the wilder green spaces.

This Council is keen to maintain the balance play spaces and green spaces which enable the pocket park to function as an important educational resource. The Parish Council are still on the lookout for someone to take on the role of a Pocket Park warden (Any offers would be gratefully received). Opportunities for improvements to the park still exist and our work in this area continues with a consultant now on hand to help manage the pond. Thanks to Cllr's Powell and Walker for their work on this area over the last year.

On other environmental projects the Parish Council have identified a number of small repairs for the community enhancement gang to attend to. Thanks is due to Cllr Roberts and to Janet Smith for their work on this.

Also related to environmental matters the Parish Council have aimed to assist the land owner of the Castle Mound with proposals to remove trees which may be affecting the Scheduled Ancient Monument. The site has frequently been used as an area for educational activities and so the Parish Council are keen to lend their support as appropriate.

Last year the Parish Council reported that the condition of the bus shelter was giving concerns regarding a potential need for overhaul or replacement. They are currently looking into costs for this and into the means by which a solution may be brought about.

With regards to communications, there has been some discussion about whether or not the current sign boards outside the village shop are sufficient for the Parish Council's needs and whether we could provide a new and more generous sign board for the village. This, again is something still being considered but which is closer now to being resolved. The Parish Council hope to address this in the coming year. The Parish Council are grateful to Janet Smith for the work on the Village Newsletter and to all those who contribute to its pages and to its printing and delivery. The Newsletter is also a vital means for communication within the village and the Parish Council have used it again recently to (somewhat ironically) send a message about the need to prevent dog fouling. The Parish Council have resolved to reprint some old Countryside guidance leaflets. One for footpaths around the village, and another for points of interest within it. It is expected the leaflets will then soon be available to be offered for sale within the village.

With regards to other community activities;

The Parish Council have continued to consider improvements to the Parish Hall. This potential project is still at the early stages of development and again, it is hoped to make more progress this year.

The Parish Council have also arranged and participated in a litter pick around the village earlier this month.

Regarding finance, there was over £21K (£21670.86) in the current account on 31 March this year. There is also a public works loan of almost £37K (£36975.00) which is committed to the street lighting project.

Sadly the Parish Council are losing Councillor Powell this year who has decided to step down soon after many years of service. The Parish Council are very grateful to Jo for all the work she has done. Jo will be difficult to replace, but the Parish Council are now looking for someone to fill her shoes. Particularly if that person is willing to take over Jo's work at the Pocket Park.

So plans for the year ahead:

The Parish Council will continue pursuing all those projects which they are currently engaged with, in particular with street lighting, the bus shelter, sign boards, HS2 as well as other more long term planning issues will also be on the agenda.

The Parish Council received funding to buy some equipment from Community Spaces and this year will be a good time to make use of this at the Pocket Park and other places in the village for community activities, whatever they may be.

The Parish Council might also seek to promote cultural and sporting activities in the village and look into the potential to foster activities for younger people.

So the Parish Council look forward to serving the community over the next year and the Chair then thanked all his fellow Councillors for their work. Finally he thanked Christine Coles, the Parish Clerk, for keeping the council all in good order and for the good guidance that he knows she will provide for them over the coming year.

8. Castle Green Report (Martin Sirot-Smith, read by Clare Pollak)

After a wet autumn Martin was sorry to report that another section of the wall has collapsed. Mick Scott of Marston St Lawrence has agreed to repair it. It will be the third time he has had to deal with such a collapse.

9. Report from Sulgrave Village Shop (received after the meeting)

At this stage Robin is finalising the figures with auditors and these will be circulated ready for the AGM in June.

It has been a busy year getting Jeanette Smith settled in as the new supervisor and post mistress which has proved to be very successful. The shop has changed arrangements with the post office last year giving the committee control rather than individual post master and securing the long term continuation of a post office in the village.

They have invested in a new chiller & freezer allowing use to diversify the product range further. This coupled with the hard work and dedication of Jeanette and the wonderful team of volunteers has helped to achieve sales growth of approx 6%. The vast majority of this growth came in the second six months of the year once Jeanette was settled into her role and if the momentum continues through 2016 it will be another fantastic year.

A big thank you to all the hard working volunteers, without them none of this would be possible. The shop would also like to give special thanks to Ronnie Langdon for stepping to cover Post Office & Jane Lockwood & Joy Grice for extra fundraising efforts.

10. Report from Footpath Warden, Digby Lewis (read by Cllr Jackson)

All footpaths and bridleways have been monitored throughout the year. Most footpaths remain in reasonable to good order though many of the problems highlighted in previous reports remain.

Sadly, two of the fields though which AY2 runs were sprayed with herbicide and drilled in October 2015. For many years these fields were maintained as rough pasture which meant that the footpath could be used throughout the year. This is no longer the case and the top field adjacent to the Banbury Lane now becomes very muddy after rain. Following a request to the land owner, posts have now been installed across this field. As was the case last year, the fields at the Sulgrave end of AY2, especially the areas around the gates, become very muddy and churned up after the Grafton Hunt has ridden the land.

Each year Mr Lewis has reported that the large patch of deep mud at the gate between the two fields on footpath AY8 renders this path unusable for much of the year. He has suggested remedies but the matter has never been followed up by the Rights of Way Dept.

Mr Lewis reported last year that the field to the west of the old railway embankment through which footpath AY3 runs is bordered by an electric fence on the embankment side and one needs to step over this fence to access the path over the embankment. He suggested that a stile should be installed but this has not been done. The path over the embankment has been so badly churned up by horses that it is now almost impassable. The field to the east of the embankment through which AY3 runs has been planted but the footpath has not been marked so it is impossible to follow the line of the footpath from the embankment end. In summary, path AY3 is unusable.

Bridleway AY1 is well used by riders but, after wet weather becomes very muddy next to Mill Hollow and is difficult for walkers.

Bridleway AY4 remains in a very poor state at the village end. The bridleway remains closed at the tunnel under the embankment.

11. Report from Sulgrave Charities (Julian Rodway)

Mr Rodway reported that the charity is doing well and they are struggling to give money away. They have tried various initiatives to get the community to go them. Last year with Colins help the application form was put online and this was used. It did break up some boundaries. There is money for educational purposes such as tools for apprenticeships. They would like to be able to help improve the educational standards in the village.

12. Report from Village Website, Colin Wootton

It has now Colin's pleasure and privilege to look after the village website, or edit it, for just over 10 years. During that time he has posted 543 new items, which averages a little over one new item per week. Most of these are obviously of a parochial nature, featuring events such as: fetes, garden open days, May Days and Autumn Fairs and historical re-enactments at the Manor, Christmas activities such as the Christingle Service, carol singing and more recently the advent calendar windows, the annual Grafton Chase event, motor car shows, Castle Green open days, ploughing matches, the Produce Show, Sulgrave Village shop events and news, Aunt Sally at the Star Inn, weddings, mundane matters such as litter picking days, more serious matters such as proposed windfarms and the high speed rail line, special events such as much missed Postman John's 60th birthday party at the manor and last but not least the Murder Mystery Event staged by the Sulgrave Women's Activity Group. Whilst no single event made the national headlines, taken collectively they present a picture of an active and harmonious community and Colin thinks that the very regularity of many of the events gives a sense of continuity in a rapidly changing world. Until last year, the most exciting headline was probably "Badger walks through village in daylight" but even this major event was overtaken last May with "Bomb scare in Spinners Cottages". As everyone knows, the badger was disoriented but harmless and the bomb was a cigarette lighter! Apart from the regular news items, there are 45 pages of information on the website and he reminded everyone that there is a google type search engine on the home page. Just type in a name or an event and it should be located within the website in a matter of seconds. As far as use is concerned, the average number of monthly visitors is 2500. This has more than doubled during the last two Decembers, when there are daily posts featuring the imaginative advent calendar windows. This is currently Colins biggest challenge – to attend and photograph 24 consecutive street parties and upload pictures of the revellers and the amazingly diverse window displays before going to bed each night. The cost of the website is approximately £50 per annum. As to the future, Colins is conscious that a number of items need updating and he will endeavour to do. He gathers that the official Sulgrave Village Shop Website has rather lost its way and feels that much more space could be allocated to the shop on the village website and he will pursue this with the committee. A number of new posts have been pending whilst Colin was on holiday last week and these will be uploaded in the next couple of days.

13. Open Forum

Mr Fonge spoke about the footpaths and felt that the comments made about Barrow Hill were harsh. The stile has been taken away and replaced with a gate.

Meeting closed at 9.40pm.