

SULGRAVE PARISH COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
HELD ON THURSDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2018 AT 7.30PM  
AT SULGRAVE CHURCH HALL

Councillors Present

Chris Jackson, Will Priestman, Troy Daniels, Neil Higginson, Anna Faure and Christine Coles (the Parish Clerk)

District Cllr Peter Davies, Colin Wootton, Janet Smith together with eight villagers

Introduction

Cllr Jackson 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 Laura North, Mr Martin Sirot-Smith, Mr and Mrs Pollak and Cllr I Morris

**2. Report from District Councillor Peter Davies**

Northants County Council has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. NCC has gone bust and been put in special measures. A central government inspector has produced a report which says:-

- 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, Kettering and Wellingborough. These unitaries should be established following elections to be held in May 2020. Commissioners would take over the running of NCC and the debts would be put into a residuary body. These proposals cut across the successful joint working for all services which SNC now has with CDC (saving SNC £1M per year). There will have to be further discussions on future arrangements.

SNC continues to produce a balanced budget despite further cuts in central government funding thanks to growing house numbers and growing business rates income. Total community awards for Sulgrave amount to £4350.00. The current amount available for this parish is £6095.00. The Local Plan Part 2 for SNC is being drafted, to replace the 1997 policy. Some changes in parish boundaries may be made. National Planning Policy requires each Council to have a 5 year bank of planning permissions. For SNC this amounts to 1680 sites. SNC's current land supply is 3296 sites. SNC has invested £4M in Brackley Leisure Centre with a new 6 land pool to be ready by the summer. There have been improvements at the Towcester Leisure Centre. The A5 through Towcester is often congested. Work has started opposite the Racecourse entrance to provide a relief road to link with the A43 by 2020. SNC has loaned £3M to Silverstone Heritage Ltd for a motorsport centre opening in 2019 which should bring in 1000s of extra visitors to boost the local economy. With regards to broadband, the target of 95% of SNC to be covered by super fast broadband has now been achieved. SNC has set up a partnership with Care and Repair Northamptonshire Ltd to offer help to the vulnerable, disabled and elderly with small home improvements, such as fitting grab and stair rails, assistance with plumbing and electrics etc.

Cll Faure asked how the loan to Silverstone Heritage Ltd would be repaid. Cllr Davies replied it would be repaid over 5 years.

**3. Report from Sulgrave Allotment Society read by Janet Smith**

There are currently two vacant plots which will be advertised in the May newsletter. The rents continue to cover the water and insurance payments. The AGM will take place later this month.

#### 4. **Parish Council Report read by the Chair man**

2017/18 has been another busy year for the Parish Council, it has also been in many ways a year of change for the Council.

At the start of the year Graham Roberts retired as Chairman, having been filling the roll following Andrew Waite's departure from the Council during December 2016. Graham's stint as Chairman this time may have been short, but it came at the end of 15 years of service to the Council, a good number of which he held the roles of Chair and Vice chair. Many thanks are due for Graham's long-term service.

During the year David Walker also chose to resign from the council. David joined in 2014 and again the Parish Council are grateful for his tireless efforts on behalf of the village, in particular his persistence in getting Northamptonshire County Council to carry out essential works but also pushing through a wide number of improvements to the village environment and representing the Parish Council in all matters HS2.

With departures come new arrivals and the Parish Council were delighted to welcome Neil Higginson and Anna Faure, both of whom have thrown themselves into Council activities with both feet.

The work of the Council remains varied with large amounts of work going on both publically and in the background. Many activities are not seen but are all part of the role of a Parish Council. Here are a few of the main activities:

##### **Transfer of Land Behind the Village Shop**

During 2016/17 an opportunity to acquire a small area of land behind the Sulgrave Village Shop, essential to the operation of the shop, came about. Prior to this the land had been used on an informal basis, however sale of the adjacent properties required this arrangement to be formalised. As part of negotiations over taking ownership of this land, the Parish Council and Sulgrave Village Shop Management Committee identified opportunities to build a closer relationship, where each could benefit from the success of the shop whilst being incentivised to work together to ensure the success continues. As a result of this, rather than charging a fixed rent for the additional land, the Parish Council and SVS MC entered into a profit share arrangement, where in lieu of rent the Council receive a proportion of the shops profit, up to a capped figure. This arrangement is revolutionary and allows the shop to achieve its constitutional aims of investing in the community whilst allowing reduced rent in leaner years. The Parish Council are pleased to have reached such an agreement and are pleased to note the past year has been particularly strong for the shop, however they know that such success is based on hard work and many hours of volunteer input that can never be taken for granted. They applaud the efforts of all involved and will help wherever they can to ensure the continued success of the shop.

##### **Bus Shelter**

Over the year the Parish Council has looked in detail at the future of the bus shelter. The existing structure is over 50 years old and showing its age. A proposal was put to residents to replace the bus stop with a new structure to be funded by a Public Works Loan and New Homes Bonus Grant funding, however, they received clear feedback that repairing the existing structure was the preferred option of residents and therefore are now working to define the best way to do this.

##### **Newsletter Printing**

Everyone appreciates the village newsletter which is put together by Janet Smith. During the course of the year printing costs and lead times were significantly increased to levels that could not be sustained. With Janet's help the Parish Council was able to arrange for alternative printers to take over the printing of the letter in order to ensure continued timely circulation. The Parish Council have also made concerted efforts to re-introduce the monthly summary of meetings, including moving Council meetings forward a week to allow a summary to be prepared by Troy Daniels for the next edition.

### **Pocket Park**

The Pocket Park is a valuable resource for the village and requires careful and continual maintenance to ensure it is both safe and a pleasant environment for adults and children alike. Laura North has taken over as the Councillor with responsibility for the park and is working on a number of initiatives to involve the community in ongoing maintenance tasks to look after the facility. Larger jobs however need more specialist skills and in the past year the Parish Council are indebted to Richard Fonge who has co-ordinated a number of works including hedge laying and essential tree works, including emergency works to make a damaged tree safe following a storm, to ensure safe use of the park. Richard also voluntarily cuts the grass in the park. Sadly the arrangement of borrowing equipment to do this from the Manor could not be continued this year resulting in less cuts being possible. To avoid this issue in future years the Parish Council have invested in new equipment.

### **Grass Cutting Contract**

Continuing the grass-cutting theme, during the year the Parish Council received notice that the current grass-cutting contractor was planning to retire. Neil Higginson led the tender process for a new contractor and the Parish Council are pleased that the new contract will start in May, with similar costs compared to the previous contract. Naturally the Parish Council expect a few teething issues so please do not hesitate to let the Parish Council know of any issues once the new Contractor starts.

### **Neighbourhood Watch**

Sadly the past year has seen an increase in crime within the village. This has stirred interest in setting up a neighbourhood watch scheme. The Parish Council invited Nick King from the Neighbourhood Watch South Northants Area Support Team to explain the details. Neighbourhood Watch is now an online based system for dissemination of information. Following this introduction the Parish Council advertised for a Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator for the village and are delighted that Carol Churchill has volunteered to take on this role.

### **HS2**

No Parish Council report could be complete without mention of the upcoming HS2 project. With construction contracts awarded last summer, the reality of HS2 is getting ever nearer. The current programme is that major works will commence in this area in early 2020, however more minor works are likely in advance in preparation, for example on the B4525 Greatworth Junction. The Parish Council were in attendance at the information event organised by Lucy Apperly and tried, as far as information allowed, to answer residents questions. The event highlighted understandable concern from residents about the impacts of the scheme and a strong desire to know more. In response to this demand the Parish Council are working to be at the heart of providing information to residents on construction and acting as a conduit for information. The Parish Council adopted a communication strategy that includes a commitment to organising future information events and ensuring they are up to date on developments with the scheme and in a position to act as a reliable source of information to residents. Furthermore, the Parish Council has used contacts gained at the information event to ensure they are able to stay up to date. They are particularly grateful for Colin Wooton for his efforts in establishing contacts within the Contractors, including meetings with HS2 at their headquarters. In addition to this, Anna Faure is the Councillor with responsibility for HS2 matters and attends the South Northants HS2 group. From all these actions the Parish Council will shortly be launching an HS2 specific page on the village website to act as a single point for any information they receive.

### **Church Hall Project**

Whilst HS2 brings many issues, it also presents opportunities. The PCC, supported by the PC, are preparing a bid to the HS2 Community Fund renovate this hall to create a more welcoming environment that the village can use. Further details were included in the recent newsletter.

The Parish Council are grateful to Ingram Lloyd on behalf of the PCC and Anna Faure on behalf of the PC for the many hours of work that have gone in to preparing the bid documentation.

### **Finance and Budgets**

The recent events at Northamptonshire County Council cannot have escaped the attention of residents. The budget issues have resulted in a wide range of cuts to services that directly affect residents. The Parish Council have responded to the consultations on these cuts, however sadly they have occurred all the same. The Parish Council fear that the efforts to resolve the situation will result in ever decreasing service from NCC in areas under their responsibility, in particular highways where the state of the roads seems to get worse every year. They will continue to put pressure on NCC to deliver services on behalf of residents, and now look into where they can plug the gap and use local enthusiasm and interest in their community to improve the surroundings. Upcoming schemes include work to clear excess gravel on Little Street, replace road signs and general maintenance to local infrastructure. The Council Tax for this coming year has been increased by the largest amount NCC is permitted to do without a referendum, nearly 5%. The Parish Council opposed this increase as they consider it excessive. They are pleased to report that the Parish Council's finances are in somewhat better health. Through careful management of the budget, they have been able to keep the increase in precept within inflation, with an increase of 2.5%.

### **Ongoing Projects**

Finally, looking forward to the next year the Parish Council has many activities ongoing. As well as continuing the activities described previously they are also looking to install a defibrillator in the village to help save lives in an emergency and are also working with the History Society to prepare a village guide. They look forward to developing these and other plans going forward and look forward to another year working on behalf of the residents of the village.

From the floor a villager asked if there is a plan B if HS2 do not give any money. There is no plan B. There will be a meeting in Sulgrave Church Hall on 12th April at 7.30pm which will demonstrate the community wish to go forward with the grant application.

#### **5. Castle Green Report (read by Colin Wootton)**

It has been an exceptionally quiet year for the Management Committee. There have been no wall collapses, no dangerous trees to deal with and no real problems. The Committee met three times in the year dealing with routine maintenance – ensuring grass cutting and hedge trimming were both satisfactory and the general condition of the field and furniture well maintained. It was hoped to have a village event on the Green but the June date clashed with a Manor event and the Open Gardens day and the Autumn date proved not viable for the performers. Hopefully they will be luckier this year with a Sulgrave Castle History Day planned for Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September from 11.00 to 12.30pm. More details will be posted on the website and in the Sulgrave Newsletter nearer the date. Thanks was given to the committee, Paul Crowley, Jo Powell, Christina Shillito, Colin Wootton, Peter and Clare Pollak and Will Priestman for their continued support.

#### **6. Report from Sulgrave Village Shop (read by Cllr Jackson)**

The accounts have not been audited but the last year has been very good. The shop still attracts fantastic support from all our volunteers - without whom the village would not have a shop. SVS are pleased to have come to a satisfactory understanding with the PC on the rental addendum - an innovative solution that provides a win-win situation for all involved. Mr Johnston thanked the PC and the SVS Committee for getting across the line on this. SVS look forward to welcoming the Parish Council and colleagues to their AGM in June when the latest accounts will be available.

#### **7. Report from Sulgrave Charities**

No report had been received from Sulgrave Charities.

**8. Report from Village Website, Colin Wootton**

During the past year approximately 80 new items, or posts, have appeared on the website front page in addition to regular updates of the permanent pages, such as the monthly Diary and Events. 24 of the new posts appeared in December, featuring each of the Advent Calendar Window Unveiling Parties. This involved taking and uploading almost 500 photographs and a number of videos. The average number of daily visitors to the website was approximately 100 during the year and this average increased to 272 per day during December. Some of the posts were simple adverts for meetings and so on whilst others covered events such as the village gardens open day, Grafton Team Chase, Annual Ploughing Match, New church organ concert, Aunt Sally at the Star and various events at Sulgrave Manor. Chris Behan's ever popular Village Views page continues to receive lots of visitors.

During the year, two new features were added:

The first of these is Richard Fonge's monthly farming notes. Ever since Mr Wootton took over the village website he has been conscious that very few villagers are employed in agriculture these days and may know little about what is going on in the fields around them. Richard is filling this gap with information which is being well received. Secondly, former villager John Sheppard, who has made quite a name for himself with prize winning wildlife photographs, is producing beautifully illustrated quarterly reports. Less entertainingly but more importantly, a lot of space was allocated to specially prepared maps illustrating the South Northants Council's planning policies in respect of the village as contained in the revised local plan, with invitations for villagers to submit their views.

Currently, a lot of work has gone into the preparation of a special website page devoted to explaining the implications for the village of the construction of the HS2 High Speed railway, with work expected to commence in this area at about this time next year. A close liaison has been established with the HS2 Project Manager responsible for this area and it is intended to publish all new information on this special website page and in the newsletter.

The website is maintained on behalf of the Parish Council. Colin's grandson is now an independent website development consultant and he looks after internet service provision for the village website without charge. He's also on hand when things go wrong. The only payment made by the Parish Council is approximately £15 per year for the domain name – [sulgrave.org](http://sulgrave.org).

**9. Report from Sulgrave Manor (read by Cllr Priestman)**

2017 was a year of great change at Sulgrave Manor. Thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund they were able to re-evaluate the activities they run and the way in which they staff and resource that business. Like many small organisations the business has grown organically, rather than following a strategic plan and so staffing had developed in the same way. This meant that operations were not as profitable as they should be and also meant that different types of use were conflicting, resulting in compromised experiences for their customers. They have welcomed new staff as part of the restructure and this includes a Volunteer Manager to implement new opportunities for volunteers across the site. They have been fortunate to recruit a talented and enthusiastic new Head Gardener, who joins them from the National Trust at Stowe. New positions with responsibility for Family learning/activities and Marketing all help to ensure they have the right people for the right tasks as they move into 2018. After many years of running at a deficit, current Trustees have a clear vision to cleave to core charitable objectives and to make the Trust financially sustainable. They plan to deliver a professional service to visitors and stakeholders - such as Arts Council England who oversee Museum Accreditation. There has been a renewed focus on bringing all the Estate back into use and contributing to the income generation required for the ongoing maintenance requirements of the Manor. The Wool House is currently undergoing minor refurbishment and once complete will be offered for residential rental on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy via a professional agency. Discussions on how to best refurbish and use the thatched cottages and land on Manor Road are underway internally and with the Council, and once further developed plans will be shared with the Parish Council and other relevant parties. Funding to carry out this work is a challenge.

A programme of major restoration for the Manor itself is being developed with their conservation architect and local planning officers. This will see works over the next few years to conserve the Manor and to improve Mechanical & Electrical systems as regulations change. Public opening for the Manor has been slightly revised for 2018 and in the main we are open on Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays from April to September. Please check the website for details. Finally, they are pleased to be working with a new caterer for 2018 so please take advantage of the Tea Room if you are looking for somewhere local to have a coffee and cake.

It was agreed there needs to be more engagement with the Manor. Mr Wootton, who maintains the website, attends main events and takes photographs. These events are attended by few villagers. The point was made that the front door is always locked which makes it harder for villagers to gain access.

**10. Open Forum**

There will be a litter pick in the village on Saturday 7th April meeting at the Church hall at 10.30am.

The gravel sweeping in Little Street will take place on 15th April 2018.

Mr Roberts noted his disappointment at the lack of report or presence from the Police. He asked for this to be forwarded on. The Chair agreed to pass this on.

Highway work should have taken place on the Gated Road on 29th March and notices were put up. However no work took place due to the wet weather.

The Chair thanked Janet Smith for providing the refreshments and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Meeting closed at 8.35pm.

