

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD THURSDAY 7TH APRIL 2022 AT 7.30PM
IN SULGRAVE CHURCH HALL

Present: Cllr Fonge (Chairman of PC), Cllr Powell, Cllr Higginson, Cllr Castle, Cllr Priestman, Cllr Alison Eastwood, Martin Sirot-Smith, Colin Wootton, Graham Roberts, Clive Preston, Julian Rodway and four villagers.

Apologies

Cllr Staples (covid)

The Chair welcomed everyone and new residents to the village who have contributed something. He remembered Mr Barrett, Mr Taylor and Mr White.

South Northants Police

PCSO Morgan attended the meeting with another colleague. They cover 43 villages and have active patrols to identify local priorities. Their priorities are road safety, speeding (Speedwatch, speed gun) and drugs (using intelligence).

An incident of fly tipping on the Moreton Road was reported. Details will be passed to PCSO Morgan. A village surgery will be held in the Church Hall on 10th April 2022 5-7pm.

HS2 – David Butcher

The main contractor for HS2 is EKFB, a joint venture of Eiffage, Kier, Ferrovial and BAM Nuttall. The HS2 main works contractor for the 80km section between the Chiltern Tunnel and Long Itchington Wood. It's a 5 year construction period consisting of 15 viaducts, 6.9km of green tunnels, 22km of road diversions, 81 bridges and 30 million cubic metres of excavation.

Reflections on last year:

Preparing sites for main construction phase – ecological mitigation, fencing, vegetation removal by HS2s contractor Fusion JV.

Covid had impacts on their workforce – less staff in office sites, socially distanced construction work. Covid impacts on engagement – less face to face, more email updates, virtual 1:1 sessions, online meetings with Parish Council's and key stakeholders.

Some key local impacts in early 2021 - Building the Greatworth Green Tunnel Compound on Sulgrave Road.

Key Message for 2022

Entering the main phase of construction with an increase in activity and staff numbers.

They will have more face to face engagement and continue to keep in regular contact. This includes the use of the mobile visitor centre.

A brief construction update was given on Greathworth, Sulgrave & Thorpe Mandeville.

Greatworth Green Tunnel Compound

The site access road crossing over Banbury Road is complete. In Q2 there will be utility diversion work on Banbury Road. Ongoing, Greatworth Compound will have office and welfare facilities, storage areas and parking. Looking ahead in 2022, there is excavation for the tunnel and stockpiling, an increase in workforce during the tunnel construction, completion of compound lighting (less intense than temporary lights).

Greatworth to Sulgrave Road

Excavation for the tunnel is ongoing. In Q2, there will be a site access road crossing the area over Sulgrave Road. There are drainage ponds. The temporary road will be built in the summer of 2022. In 2022, looking ahead, it will be the main phase of tunnel excavation, further site access and haul road construction.

Thorpe Mandeville and Lower Thorpe

The site access road crossing over Banbury Lane is complete. In Q2 there will be a small diversion of footpath near Banbury Lane and utility diversion. In Q3, demolition work by Fusion JV requiring some off peak road closures. In 2022, looking ahead there will be utility diversions on Banbury Road, excavation for the tunnel and stockpiling, pilling and foundations for Lower Thorpe viaduct. The installation of a tunnel structure will happen in late 2022.

Greatworth 'T'

Final design details are being discussed with West Northants Council. Construction of the temporary road will take place in Summer 2022.

Key points looking ahead in 2022 for HS2

Increase in workforce

Entering main earthworks phase

Site access and haul road

Pilling work and preparations for structures

Community Engagement

They will be visiting Sulgrave this summer with the Mobile Visitor Centre. A suitable place will be agreed.

Mr Butcher thanked Cllr Staples for her work. She liaises well with Simon Davies and feedback has been good.

Report from Parish Council – Cllr Richard Fonge

There has been no Annual Parish Meeting for three years. Cllr Staples and Cllr Castle have been co-opted. They replace Laura North and Anna Faure who resigned. Achievements for the year include the planter by the shop which has stopped the parking. Thanks was given to Maureen Jeffery who has taken over the job of looking after it.

The library in the church opened last year. Thanks was given to Sue Sanderson. The library is used regularly. The idea of jigsaw puzzles and DVDs was tried but DVDs were replaced with children's books. It is a good initiative but the PCC have not organised any coffee mornings.

There is new felt on the shelter in Pocket Park. Trees have been planted in the park and an Oak tree up the Gated Road. The pond has been cleaned and the Chair and Andrew Osmond have cleared trees. The basketball hoops have been replaced. One is in place and one is being made. Thanks was given to Nick Jackson.

A flagpole has been purchased by the PC and will be placed in the churchyard. The PCC will be responsible for looking after it and buying the flags. It should be delivered ready for the Dames visit on 21st May.

The allotment area has a new fence. The Parish Council are buying a new village sign for the Magpie Road end. Highways are changing the posts which are rotten. The Parish Council are still waiting for

the 30mph sign at the Magpie Road end to be moved. The road repairs on Magpie Road were not carried out to a high standard. A complaint has been made.

Sulgrave Manor asked for planning permission for the Kiln Farm site in November. In January, the Chairman of the Manor Board came to visit and explain the ideas. This was appreciated by the Parish Council. The village opposed the ideas but other things are progressing now. There was little liaison with Sulgrave Manor before and this is a good step forward.

Sulgrave has entered the Best Village Competition. Thanks was given to Ingram Lloyd and Janet Smith for all their work in the transformation of the Church Hall. It's a decent meeting place now.

Platinum Jubilee Celebrations will take place on June 5th. There will be celebrations on Castle Green to honour Her Majesty the Queen.

The Chair thanked his Councillors for being such a good team and the Parish Clerk for her support and work.

Report from Unitary Authority – Cllr Alison Eastwood

The unitary authority replaced the previous district, borough and county councils on 1 April last year and has since been making good progress on its fresh start to deliver better local public services across Daventry, Northampton and South Northants areas.

Born from the biggest restructure of local government in Northamptonshire in over 40 years, the Council, having guided communities through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, now heads into its second year with a balanced budget and additional investment in services ahead.

Future transformation plans are also taking shape, including progressing work to join up health and social care services and working collaboratively to help people live their best lives, work on our Anti-Poverty plans and skills agenda and an ambitious new approach to making West Northants a more sustainable and environmentally friendly place to live and work, to protect and improve the local environment, economy and society for future generations.

Councillors are fully aware of the challenges presented by the warehouse developments in Towcester and HS2 in the north of the Ward, and are doing everything we can to mitigate the impacts of these developments. HS2 are looking to extend their working hours to include Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. There will be a meeting in May to discuss this further. The Councillors will try to protect local people as much as they can.

Since last April the Council has delivered a broad range of services, projects and activities as part of its six top priorities for making the area a great place to live, work visit and thrive;

Priority: Improved Life Chances

- Supporting and guiding residents and businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic
- Continuing the improvement journey in children's services as recognised by Ofsted
- Progressing plans to join up health and social care services
- Helping the most vulnerable including free school meals, funds to help households with food and energy bills, resettling Afghan families and the Government's Ukraine response locally
- Developing our Anti-Poverty Strategy with partner organisations and charities
- Continuing to build high quality council homes
- Council Tax reduction scheme and improving financial support for care leavers
- Allocating school places and proposals for a new secondary school Proposal for Moulton

- Staging a range of events to celebrate our communities, equality and diversity
- Awareness and commemoration days and events – IDAHOBIT, Pride, Armed Forces Day, International Day of Disabilities and Black History Month
- Developing the Armed Forces Covenant and establishing new armed forces hubs
- New customer experience strategy to improve how residents access our services

Priority: Green and Clean places

- Shaping our new sustainability goals - to net zero the Council's own emissions by 2030 and those of residents and businesses by 2045
- Retaining Green Flag awards for our high-quality parks
- Improving Towcester Watermeadows and encouraging community tree planting
- £6.2m community flood protection scheme
- Installing new electric charge points across West Northants
- Crackdowns and prosecutions on environmental offenders, from fly-tipping and food safety
- New litter charter and community litter-picking initiatives
- Grants for landowners to tackle fly tipping

Priority: Economic Development

- Submitting a bid for city status for Northampton
- Securing £37m funding for regenerating Northampton town centre and Market Square
- Delivering Daventry's new cinema complex
- Redeveloping Brackley Library and delivering our award-winning 'For the Love of Books'
- Supporting businesses and start-ups with funding, advice and support

Priority: Connected Communities

- Embarking on a major roads improvement programme
- Making plans and funding bids to improve bus services
- Extending Northampton's public e-scooter scheme
- Shaping our future highways maintenance service and transport infrastructure
- Appointment of HS2 Marshal

Priority: Thriving villages and towns

- Providing accommodation and support for rough sleepers
- Localising planning arrangements and simplified, more effective planning enforcement
- Investing in a host of initiatives to make communities safer
- Distributing grant funding for community and voluntary groups
- Re-opening the refurbished and extended Northampton Museum and Art Gallery
- Showcasing our heritage with open days and supporting the Go Northamptonshire
- Working with parishes on Neighbourhood development plans and conservation areas

Priority: Robust Resource Management

- Capping Council Tax rises at £99 per year
- On target deliver our first year on budget, and setting a balanced budget for the year ahead and making robust plans to tackle financial challenges
- Working to join up local services across the whole West Northants area, to make them better and more cost-effective

Councillors are proud to serve their local communities and look forward to helping everyone in 2022/23.

Report from Sulgrave Manor – Clive Preston

Clive Preston is a local Trustee. The Manor have sold off outlying properties to build an endowment fund. The Woolhouse has been sold. They have reached heads of terms with a local person re the land at Kiln Farm. Lawyers have been instructed. They are hoping to extend the garden space behind Thatched Cottage and it will go on the market in June. The Manor opened on 5th April on Tuesdays/Wednesdays and Sundays. Residents can get a season ticket online or fill in a form at the Manor for free entry. There will be an Easter Extravaganza on 17th April. The Centenary of the opening of the Manor was postponed. On 21st May 2022 70-80 dames will be arriving. Its their first visit in 3 years.

From the floor, Jill Barrett asked why the gateway to the car park is sometimes shut as people like to park there to walk their dogs. Mr Preston explained that the gate has to be shut to give clarity for visitors, opening times and allocate parking for them.

Report from Sulgrave Allotment Society – Graham Trower

The Allotment Society are looking at ways to raise funds. 6 allotments are currently let and there is 1 spare. A water tank has been installed. Thanks was given to Janet Smith for being the Secretary for nine years. Thanks was given to the Parish Council for the fence at the bottom of Towrise and for their encouragement and support. Cllr Fonge noted that two years ago the allotment area was a mess. Graham has ploughed the land and made it respectable. Cllr Fonge has received an enquiry letter from a newcomer.

Report on footpaths – Graham Roberts

Graham has undertaken the voluntary role as Parish Footpath Warden since late 2019 and because of the pandemic lockdown this is the first opportunity to report it at the Annual Assembly.

There are 11 footpaths designated with the prefix AY within the parish boundary, two bridleways and one permissive path.

The footpath AY12 and part of footpath AY6 leading westerly along the Parish Boundary at Stuchbury, leading towards the Welsh Lane, have been closed due to the HS2 worksite, as have some neighbouring footpaths which will, and will continue to restrict walking access to Greatworth. This has been raised with the HS2 Liaison Officer.

The accessible footpaths have been walked at different times of the year to check on conditions and where necessary Graham has cut back overgrown shrubbery, replaced faded way markers, installed steps on a steep embankment with Richard Fonge and Paul Crowley and repaired stiles. Where it has been outside of his capability to affect a repair, Graham has reported it via the Street Doctor System and he was pleased to say he has a good and rapid response to issues.

An example of the support from the District Rights of Way Officer has been improvements to Footpath AY3, from the Morton or Gated Road leading towards the Weston Road and over the Railway embankment which has been troublesome for some years due to horse riding and scramble bikes using the embankment and destroying the footpath. This footpath is now fully cleared, overgrown areas cut back, the path levelled and new kissing gates installed making a significant improvement. A natural barrier has been put in place to prevent further use of the embankment by scramble bikes and this will also provide an opportunity for wildlife to return.

Finally as Spring and Summer approaches and the ground dries out it is hoped to organise local walks to offer villages to benefit from being in the countryside around the village.

Report from Castle Green – Martin Sirot Smith

Since Martins last formal report to the Annual meeting, which was due to take place on Thursday 2nd April 2020, the committee has met six times in the intervening period.

Those in 2020 were dogged by the continual restrictions of the Covid epidemic. All the various events planned to celebrate the conclusion of the Castle Hill project had to be continually postponed. 2021 proved to be just as frustrating as events again had to be postponed. Hopefully 2022 and the Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebrations will enable everyone to enjoy using Castle Green, now with Castle Hill added, once again.

Since the completion of the fencing around Castle Hill and the installing of the kissing gate entrance, the main work on the whole site has been dealing with the trees and hedges. Overhanging vegetation from neighbouring properties has been cut back and the lower branches of the trees on and around the Green have been taken down.

It has been very gratifying to see how well Castle Green and Hill are used by regular walkers and families. Also to see it used for the Christmas carols, the pop up picnic and the Remembrance Day gathering. All these village events enhanced by the lovely setting of the Green itself.

We now all look forward to the Big Jubilee Lunch and all its allied celebratory happenings on Sunday 5th June.

Martin gave thanks to the committee, namely Paul Crowley, Richard Fonge, Rosie Shillito – replacing Peter Pollak, Jo Powell, Will Priestman and Colin Wootton for their continual commitment and support.

Report from Sulgrave Charities – Julian Rodway

There are two main charities, Relief in Need and Education Charity. The Relief In Need Charity is for those in desperate need. The Education Charity has helped with apprenticeships, schools such as Culworth and Chenderit. The Charity have had a good liaison with both schools. Money has been given to families in the past for school uniform.

Report on village website – Colin Wootton

Colin has now been looking after the village website for sixteen years, during which time he has posted 2,200 items on the front page and illustrated them with 54,000 photographs, maps and diagrams. All of this information remains on the website and individual items can be found by entering a request into the Google type search panel on the front page. He tries to make the items as interesting as possible but Sulgrave is only a small village and the most exciting entry he can find in all that time is “Badger walks through village in daylight”.

The various entries are divided into regular and occasional. The most obvious regular entry is the always available village weather forecast in a panel on the top right of the home page. One click and you will enter a world of local weather statistics. Colin is indebted to Bob Foster who maintains his own weather station to which the website is linked.

Colin confessed that the monthly Diary and Events page is simple copied from the Village Newsletter which is so diligently maintained by Janet Smith. Newly published copies of the Newsletter are uploaded to the website and back copies of them can also be found on the appropriate page. In terms of the distribution of news, the newsletter is far more valuable than the website, since it is delivered to every household by a dedicated band of volunteers.

By agreement between the Parish Council and HS2 management, information on construction activities is regularly sent to me for inclusion on the website. Colin receives daily emails updating the situation along the full length of the railway and his task is to extract those relevant to the village for publication on the dedicated HS2 page. He tries to make the new information as comprehensible as possible by setting out the contents of the engineering drawings on an OS base which includes the village and its surrounding roads and footpaths. The Parish Council's nominated Member for HS2 matters is Councillor Sara Staples.

The Parish Council has a formal web page containing statutory information such as past minutes of meetings, budgets and other financial matters and other material such as the rights and duties of councillors and an outline of the powers of the council. A recent introduction has been the creation of a page in a prominent position called "Latest Parish Council News". Here you will find agendas for forthcoming meetings and in advance of the formal minutes, a summary of the most recent meeting.

A page is dedicated to the Village Shop and Post Office, containing the latest Newsletter. Current opening times are given and I have to confess that it has been quite a struggle to keep these up to date during the frequent changes caused by the pandemic.

The Sulgrave Camera Club has its own page giving details of forthcoming meetings and events, together with albums created by members.

Several pages are devoted to the making of online applications for grants to village children's educational needs, to be paid from the funds of consolidated village charities.

Colin drew attention to an item called "Village Appraisal and History", being the first entry under the heading of Sulgrave History Society. This is the typescript of a now rather rare document called "The Chronicles of a Country Parish" being a village appraisal carried out between 1988 and 1994 on behalf of the Parish Council. It is a mine of information about the history of the village. Colin opted to type it into the website manually so that it can be interrogated by the search engine.

Finally, a much appreciated regular feature of the website are Richard Fonge's monthly agricultural notes. These have been appearing for 5 years and filled a gap about which I had long been conscious. For most of the residents of the village, the many farm machines passing through and the activities in the surrounding fields are something of a mystery. Richard's long and varied agricultural career has enabled him to "de-mystify" things in an entertaining and often humorous way!

So much for the regular items. The irregular items comprise reports on village activities such as the Annual Produce Show, the Harvest Supper, Village Picnics and Gardens Open Days. An exciting addition to these first appeared in 2014, namely the Advent Calendar Window Displays. These were meant to be a "one-off" but have clearly come to stay. On that first occasion I sallied out every evening during the 24 days of advent to take pictures of the windows and also of those attending the "unveiling" parties. The website items attracted visitors to the various pages from all over the world. I was quite thankful when Christmas Eve arrived, never dreaming that it would become an annual challenge. I look forward to each December 1st with a mixture of anticipation and dread! I sometimes wonder if I have the stamina to continue but then remember that the monthly average of 2000 website visits rises to 7000 in December! During recent years he has been greatly helped by members of the village camera club.

Finally, Colin noted that the website makes a useful contribution to village life at the modest cost of £20 per year for the domain name.

The service provider is his grandson, who is a professional website designer. He makes no charge for his services and is very patient with the many emails he receives from Colin, simply headed "HELP".

Open Forum

The Chair thanked Janet Smith for providing the tea, coffee and biscuits during the break.

The Chair noted how good it is to have an active website and thanked Colin's grandson for all his work and support.

The Chair concluded the meeting by presenting the Parish Clerk with a bouquet of flowers to thank her for her 18 years of dedicated service.

Meeting finished at 9pm