

MARSTON ST LAWRENCE PARISH COUNCIL
DRAFT MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON 8TH MARCH 2016 AT 7.30PM
IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllr Gale (Chairman), Cllr Carletti, Cllr Goodwin, Cllr Scott, Cllr Skermer, Cllr Tims, County Councillor Ron Sawbridge, District Councillor Rosie Herring, and nine villagers

16/25. Apologies

Maurice Skermer and C Jakeman.

16/26. To approve the minutes of the last APM held on 10th March 2015

The minutes were agreed and signed.

16/27. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising to discuss.

16/28. To receive a report from County Cllr R Sawbridge

Cllr Sawbridge reported on the articles in the local press about the problems over the border in Oxfordshire and the Cherwell/South Northants Council plans to form a unitary authority. Due to the nation's indebtedness there has been a squeeze on County Council finances over the last few years. The amount that Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire County Council have been receiving from the government by way of Revenue Support Grant has been reduced every year. Costs have been rising due to several factors, the main ones being an increase in longevity, an increase in the numbers of children in the care of the council, a growth in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and an increasing general population. There has been a government cap of 2% on the increase that can be made on the council tax so over the last few years, NCC have had to find means of making a substantial reduction in the cost of the services provided. Much progress has been made by linking with other councils to cover services like finance, legal and human resources. There is an urgent need to reform local government. The removal of one government tier would result in savings by reducing bureaucracy and the costs of democratic decision making and a single council would be better able to meet the major challenges of a growing and ageing population. One council would be better able to plan for continuing growth in population by combining responsibility for housing, schools, planning and transport. A single council would reduce the number of CEO's and senior managers that are duplicated across the current arrangements.

The County Council is responsible for the services which are covered by over 70% of the council tax paid by residents. These services include: Adult Social Care with 13,000 people looked after and support supplied for 6,062 people with learning difficulties; Children Services with nearly 13,000 children referred each year and a total of over 1,000 children in the care of the County Council plus about 140 unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and nearly another 1,000 children subject to protection plans. These are the two demand led services which cost the most with a combined net budget in 2016/17 of £275M. All other services have a net budget cost of about £140M including Fire and Rescue Service, Highways, Planning, Trading Standards, Parks, the Libraries and the Record Office and Waste Management. It is the Adult Social Care and Children's Services which are the two services putting the most pressure on finances.

The Government is scheduled to completely remove the present Revenue Support Grant by 2020 which will mean that this money will have to be replaced by increases in taxes paid by residents. If not, there will be no money left to spend on anything but the two demand led services.

The District Council in Oxfordshire are proposing to form four unitary authorities, the most northerly one comprising Cherwell District and South Northants. This has been done in secret without reference to Northants County Council.

Northants County Council has now started independent research to explore the options for a major reform of local government for Northants. There are three possibilities, one unitary authority for the whole county serving a population of about 700,000; two authorities one covering the borough of Northampton, population of about 280,000 and the other the rest of the county population about 420,000; the third option, two unitary authorities splitting the county roughly into two with each part serving a population of about 350,000. The seven MP's in this county all support the plan to reorganise local government in this county by the formation of one or two unitary authorities.

Cllr Sawbridge concluded his report by advising that Council tax has increased by 2% to 3.95%.

16/29. To receive a report from District Cllr R Herring

SNC Budget - The SNC Nett budget is £11.78M. Core funding from government has been reduced again by £600K and the funding squeeze will continue until 2020. The Government have offered SNC a four year funding deal which was in line with the financial projections SNC had made. Council tax is to rise by 2.95% which is the first time since 2010. This equates to £5 on a Band D property which is up from £170.37 to £175.37.

New Leisure Contract - SNC are to improve both leisure centres at Brackley and Towcester. Brackley are to have a new pool and extensive modifications are to be made to the existing building. A new operator will take over from October 16. SNC are to invest £4.8M but they will get an improved annual running cost.

Waste Recycling - SNC recycled 59.9% of its waste thanks to the blue bin and green bin schemes and the co-operation of residents. SNC was best in Northants, best in East Midlands and 11th overall in the country.

A43 improvements - Work will begin at the Abthorpe roundabout (McDonalds) Feb/March 2016 and is to run for approximately 18 months.

Brackley Sustainable Urban Extension - Housing are being delivered at double the rate planned on the Radstone Fields development. Ground work is advance for the Sainsburys site which will also have the new medical centre for Brackley along with other retail and commercial uses.

Local Plan - The SNC Local Plan part 2 will reconsider all the villages and confines and seek to put them in place where they do not exist. The plan is scheduled for adoption in Autumn 2018.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) - SNC will adopt CIL from 1st April 2016. This has been consulted upon with the development industry and will be used to pay for the infrastructure in the district. It will apply to many of the smaller developments that did not pay S106 monies in the past. The Parish Council is entitled to 15% of all CIL monies or 25% if there is an adopted Neighbourhood Plan in place, capped at £100 per existing house in the parish.

The Forum, Moat Lane Regeneration - SNC moved to the Forum over the Easter weekend in 2015. The first year has been successful with more people visiting the building and using the library. The Forum has more than SNC offices and also houses Adult learning, the library and Registrars services for births, deaths and marriages. SNC are in discussions with the police about a front desk operation.

Joint Working - Unfortunately Stratford District Council did not make any decisions about progressing in partnership with SNC and CDC in a three way alliance. Rather than delay, SNC and CDC have pressed on continue joint working on a two way basis to have all services joined up by the middle of this year. There is a management restructure going on to ensure the council is able to face the changes to local government and reduced funding. During 2015/16 the councils transformation programme has continued to deliver savings through increasing joint working with CDC. Since they began joint working, savings of over £3M have been made from the annual budgets. As well as senior management team all back office services are now shared and they have delivered savings through joint procurement of ICT and also waste collection.

They are currently implementing a shared customer service team which will ensure there is more capacity to answer calls and provide a wider range of services to customers. In 2016/17, they will establish a joint revenue and benefits service with Cherwell. This will ensure that benefits work is undertaken locally and is predicted to save in excess of £250K. Whilst delivering services through joint working during the last year, they have invested in some key services, specifically economic development which aims to ensure business locate and grow within the district. The business rate growth for last year was £780K.

The meeting was opened up the floor.

Cllr Scott felt that conflicting reports were given from both County and District Councillors about the plans to form a unitary authority. Working together is good and links to OCC are great such as the hospital, doctors and dentists. Both Cllr Sawbridge and Cllr Herring agreed that people at local level are important and NCC/SNC has to ensure there are no gaps and no vulnerable people.

16/30. To receive a summary of the finances for year ending 31st March 2016

An overview for the year was circulated to members.

Total income for the year was £3980.00.

Total payments for the year were £4012.00.

Thanks was given to the Parish Clerk for her work and support. The Parish Clerk to find out when the Public Works Loan will finish.

Parish Council report

An election was held in May 2015. There are seven seats on the Parish Council and six Councillors stood for election. Cllr Scott stood down as Chairman and Cllr Gale thanked him. A new website has been set up for transparency purposes. A grant was received to cover set up and running costs. There will be ongoing costs to pay each year. A water problem at the southern end of the village was addressed and a white line is being painted outside Long Cottage which should have been done three years ago. A review of the Conservation Area was carried out. A suggestion was made to include the bridge over the pond and this was included in the new review. A recent suggestion has been made to move the existing 30mph signs further out of the village. A letter has been sent to NCC Highways but the Parish Council are concerned about potential costs of this work.

Councillors agreed to keep the precept for 2016/17 the same as last year. An update on the Marston Inn would be given next.

16/31. To receive an update on 'The Marston Inn'

The Chair advised that 63 questionnaire responses were received. This is excellent for a village of this size with 89 houses. A few weeks ago, a couple of Councillors met a planning consultant, Dale Ingram.

This is her statement.

"The Marston Inn has been closed for the best part of three years following an uncertain period of trading at the site previously. The instruction from Hook Norton Brewery was to conduct an options appraisal to work out appropriate and sustainable uses of the site as a whole. The clear steer from HNB is to see whether, how and in what way a viable pub use can be reinstated. The Options appraisal is a genuine engagement between the community and the brewery and working closely and collaboratively together with South Northants, they intend that an achievable solution can be arrived at. To make the communication task more manageable she asked that we point any commentary you have as a community user of the pub to the Chair of the Parish Council and the brewery's chief contact within the village. Anyone wishing to operate the Marston as a pub should contact me directly and confidentially by email in the first instance".

The Chair advised that there will be a public meeting at the end of April where options will be presented. The consultant is employed by the brewery and she has done a lot of work on community projects. Her job is to try and save pubs. The worst possible outcome is that there is no viable business. The Parish Council have confidence that everyone will work together. The Parish Council are hoping for co-operation from the District Council too. They do not want an island site in the middle of the village to remain derelict for too long. Cllr Herring asked to be informed of the date of the public meeting. She has already spoken to the Planning Authority and spoken about the will of the community.

The Chair concluded the discussion by saying that the pub is a social focus of the village. The village is a poorer place without it. The village population ranges from 18 months to 90 years and the social interaction will disappear. One comment made on most of the questionnaires was the requirement of good basic pub food.

16.32. The following village reports were received:-

Village Hall (read by Cllr C Skermer)

The Committee of Trustees continues to monitor and maintain the hall and now has a new Secretary. There is also a cleaner who has been maintaining the cleanliness and replacing the volunteers who did it previously. The committee are looking towards re-decoration though it may cost. (It was last painted due to the efforts of Pete Scott, Phil Curtis and Maurice Skermer. M & P Scott have carried out necessary maintenance. The baby change table has been installed. The hall has good usage, with regular activities including table tennis, billiards, Dolly Mixture, a new sewing group, Dance & Drama, Martial Arts plus Film nights. In addition there are celebrations, parties (childrens and adults) quizzes, and Christmas functions all at reasonable rates. An issue with missing bowls in the kitchen has been dealt with. Finances are maintained with a sensible balance. The AGM is to be held on 20th April.

Dolly Mixtures (read by Cllr Scott)

The January meeting was cancelled, as in previous years, in case of inclement weather. The AGM was held in February. The officers were re-elected on block as there no other candidates for the posts.

Once again they have enjoyed a varied and interesting programme. Talks have included Shelter Boxes, Cycling Around the World, Scouting Jamboree in Hong Kong, exercises to help keep us fit, a holiday in Kenya. Rosemary and Christine organised a walk and picnic last August but with the weather being wet , they enjoyed a social evening and buffet at Rosemary's house.

The annual meetings are enjoyed and consisted of a meal out in May, Garden Party at Culkein, MSL in July, Harvest Supper in October and a festive social evening in December. They continue to support the Poppy Appeal, Cancer Research & The Star and Garter Home as well as the donations they have given to various speakers.

In October they lost one of their long standing members, when Madge died. They had a minutes silence in her memory at the beginning of the November meeting. She will be sadly missed by all. Membership remains good and everyone contributed towards organising speakers, providing refreshments and raffle prizes. The group look forward to another interesting and fun filled year in 2016.

Cricket Club (read by Dave Scott)

The club continues to be well supported. A new sightscreen has been purchased this year. Indoor nets are ongoing and outdoor nets/training will start on 13th April. There is no midweek league entry this year but teams entered in the SNCL Premier League, Division 2 and two cup competitions. Junior teams are entered at U11, U13 and U15. The first Saturday league fixtures start on 30th April (1st team at home versus Syresham, 2nd team away versus Green Norton). There will be a pre-season friendly/social on Sunday 24th April from 2pm. The club is considering obtaining a club premises certificate whilst the pub continues to be closed.

Marston Billiards Club (read by Cllr Skermer)

With a little difficulty, 2 teams are maintained in the Croughton league and 1 in the Eydon league. The Croughton A team have won the league. The second team languishes. In the Eydon league, the team achieved second place in the George Barrett competition. This summer the club aims to have the table re-covered and re-cushed, to allow for further progress. Any prospective members are welcome.

Table Tennis (Cllr Scott)

The group is supported by eight to ten players but not raising a lot of money.

Church (Rector Charles Jefferson)

The Rector Charles Jefferson spoke about challenges, hopes and encouragements.

He spoke about the thriving family church service on the second Sunday of each month. The Church are trying to challenge the perception that churches are cold, boring and dull places. Another challenge they faced was part of the church roof being exposed to daylight when lead was stolen. He gave credit to the Church Wardens, community and building committee.

Longer term plans are to explore kitchen and toilet facilities to make the church available for a wider use.

Mr Jefferson spoke about future developments and the measure of anxiety about the location of the Rectory. This is out of his hands. There is a group of six parishes and the largest is Middleton Cheney. In October, the Rector will be moving from Marston St Lawrence to Middleton Cheney. The PCC will then advertise for a part time Minister to live in the Rectory here.

Clay Pidgeon Shooting (Phil Tyler)

There are two sections, clay and game. Game closed on 29th January. There are three let days to shoot game, partridge and pheasant. The group is not supported by the local community. With the loss of the pub, there is nowhere to meet and talk. The group belong to a Sunday shooting league for clay pidgeon shooting. 2 events are hosted per season. The next venue is at Middleton Cheney on 13th March. It is more of a social event rather than competitive. They have won several shields in the past. An open day last summer was well supported. The group are looking forward to next season.

16/33. Guest Appearance – Thomas Pymfrey MDCLXXXIV (1684)

He is well and may make a guest appearance at the Queens 90th birthday celebrations in June.

16/34. Other matters to discuss

➤ *Queens 90th birthday celebrations*

There will be a garden party in Greatworth on June 12th. It is hoped some people will come forward to offer to help something in this village.

➤ *Speeding*

This matter has been raised before. There is a letter from the police re Speedwatch. It requires some commitment from the village, 10 volunteers and 40% of the village to give their support.

16/35. Open Forum

Mr Barber thanked Cllr Herring for getting the road repairs done.

Mr Barber asked if consideration could be given to re-trimming the tree on the corner which is in the sight line of drivers.

A discussion took place about HS2, Welsh Lane and the consultation of the Farthinghoe bypass. Cllr Sawbridge advised that the bypass will not happen for some years and will not be there for the start of HS2. There will be a heavy impact on Welsh Lane and diversion routes need to be planned. HS2 has not been planned out. There will be 2500 HGV driving through Wardington which is unsustainable. Villagers felt that if the bypass was brought forward this might help. Cllr Sawbridge has the results of the public consultation and the northern one is preferred. Welsh Lane is a B road and has deteriorating verges.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and this concluded the meeting.

Meeting finished at 8.40pm