

SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT 2013

This year has been a very busy one for your Parish Council. Here is a summary of just some of the work carried out on your behalf and information on some of our future challenges:-

VILLAGE HALL

A much needed programme of improvements is well underway at the village hall. This programme totals some £260,000.00. We have already completed the work to refurbish the kitchen and install automatic detection to the fire alarm system. Work to build the new extension at the front of the building is underway and this will be predominantly used by the Little Swans Pre-School. Work on several grant applications is either completed or well underway. We hope to soon have the money to sort out the poor acoustics in the main hall and purchase a new stage. Additional storage will be constructed off the main hall and security grilles and wider external doors will be fitted to the bar area. We also have plans to carry out a great deal of civil engineering work including a new patio, concrete area for deliveries, concrete disabled parking bays, a new concrete footpath from Manns Lane to the main entrance, larger concrete area for the recycling bins and improved surfacing of the car park. We have also secured money to purchase some outside play equipment for under 5's. To date we have secured £118,000.00 of grant funding and £4,000.00 by way of an 'in kind' voluntary contribution. The Parish Council has committed to fund £86,000.00 towards the total project of which £18,000.00 has already been funded from the proceeds of the sale of the old village hall and our precept. The remaining £68,000.00 will be funded from a public works loan. This leaves £52,000.00 for us to find from additional grant funding to complete the project. We feel that this is very much worthwhile and when completed Swanton Morley will have one of the best facilities of any village in Norfolk.

PLANNING

The Parish Council has been working very hard on planning issues affecting the village. We are aware that major changes to planning are being implemented by Central Government to try and make it easier for developers to build new homes. This is not helped by the fact that planning authorities such as Breckland Council will now receive a 'Build Bonus' for each new house that is built. Parishes are being advised to produce a Neighbourhood Plan which we have been told will cost a parish several thousand pounds to produce with little prospect of recovering this money and at the end of it, Breckland Council will still have the final say on any future development in the village. Together with the introduction of the Localism Act, there is an unwelcome increase in 'red tape' and bureaucracy to deal with. I foresee many challenging planning issues for our village in the future.

YOUTH & PLAYING FIELDS

We have once again painted all of the village seats and picnic tables. The new youth football pitches on Manns Lane are now being well used by Swanton Morley Rovers FC.

STREETLIGHTING

We have recently agreed to request funding from NCC to replace all of our street lighting stock as part of their Parish Partnership initiative. It is our intention to replace the old orange sodium lights with new low energy white LED fittings. These fittings will work at 60% brightness between midnight and 5 AM to save even more energy. They are anti-glare fittings and will greatly reduce light pollution. Under the terms of the scheme Swanton Morley Parish Council will provide 25% (£8,257.00) of the funding for this project by way of a public works loan. When taking account of the potential savings in energy cost and maintenance, we should realise a saving of between £2000 – 3000 per annum. There will be no need to replace any columns as these were done in 2007/8.

CHURCHYARD WALL

The poor condition of the west gate and boundary wall at the churchyard continues to give cause for concern. In 1993 the Parish Council of the day agreed to takeover the responsibility for the maintenance of the churchyard and boundary wall after receiving a request to do so from the Parochial Church Council. This is a statutory function of the Local Government Act 1972. Having commissioned an Architect's report about the state of the wall and a specification for repairs we have obtained quotations to carry out the necessary work which will cost £20,000. We were unsuccessful

with a recent grant application and will therefore have to fund this work ourselves by way of a public works loan.

CRIME

Thanks to some hard work with the Police and other agencies, the village has in the last year seen a significant reduction in the level of antisocial behaviour. The installation of the CCTV system at the village hall has also helped. I attend the Community Action Group (CAG) meetings held in Dereham which are held every two months. This forum allows members of the public the opportunity to discuss specific issues in their neighbourhood and Police resources are allocated to work in those areas identified at the meeting as having a high priority. This has been very beneficial for Swanton Morley. I am also pleased to say that our Vice-Chairman, Alex Sommerville is also an independent member of the recently formed Police Crime Panel which works closely with the Police Crime Commissioner.

HIGHWAYS

The B1147 Tuddenham Road is in very poor condition in places and this has been reported on more than one occasion to Norfolk County Council (NCC). I recently carried out a site meeting with the NCC Highways Engineer in Thompson Close. The concrete footpaths which are 60 years old are in a very poor condition and in some places dangerous. We will continue to press NCC for action to repair these. We have recently agreed to request funding from NCC to widen Manns Lane as part of their Parish Partnership initiative. The stretch of road between the houses and the Village Hall will be widened to 5 metres. This road is a vital link to our school, village hall and allotments and would greatly benefit from such widening. Under the terms of the scheme SMPC will provide 25% (£3,400.00) of the funding for this project by way of a public works loan. We have unsuccessfully lobbied NCC to get Manns Lane gritted during the bad winter weather. However, once the road is widened we will press NCC to reconsider this decision.

ALLOTMENTS

We are very pleased that the allotments have been a success although we are very sorry for our keen gardeners who have experienced some awful weather! We have installed a number of different access gates around the site, constructed a new access track and installed a permanent water supply to the site.

VILLAGE SIGN

Our village sign has been replaced and should last us for at least another 50 years just like the last one. I would like to place on record our thanks to Bernie Marsham who constructed the plinth.

FINANCE

Looking to the future, you will be aware that the Parish element of your council tax bill has increased this year by 7.7%. Our budgeted precept is actually 0.88% lower than last year but due to uncertain changes to the way the new Council Tax Support system will work and a subsequent reduction in the tax base (number of houses paying council tax) we have ended up with the higher 7.7%. I would like to apologise for this confusion. A band D house in Swanton Morley will pay £1.23 a week for all the services that the Parish Council provides. This amounts to an increase of £4.57 for the year. 83% of homes in Swanton Morley are in Bands A, B or C and will therefore pay less than this. **Unlike Breckland Council and Norfolk County Council we receive no central government subsidy.** It is our intention to finance some of the projects listed here with a £100,000 public works loan paid over 15 years. We feel that given the current very low interest rates which we can fix for the term of the loan, the competitive prices received during this poor economic climate and the availability of funding from third parties, this makes good economic sense. Once completed, we should have a village which we can all be very proud of.



ROGER ATTERWILL
CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL