



SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL

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SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT 2015

Dear Resident,

I am delighted to provide you with this year’s Swanton Morley Parish Council annual report. It has once again been my great privilege to serve as your Chairman for a ninth consecutive year. The last year has been an incredibly busy period and I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of our achievements and frustrations during this time.

PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Since 2006 and once all of the existing developments are completed our village will have increased in size by 20%. To reflect this we recently underwent a formal process to increase our number of councillors from 7 to 9. This was approved by Breckland Council’s General Purposes Committee in February of this year. This now brings Swanton Morley in line with similar sized villages although some still have more councillors. Unfortunately we will not be having an election this year. We only had 9 candidates come forward for the 9 vacancies and as a result all were elected unopposed. John Carrick is retiring from the council and I would like to place on record my thanks to John for his long service and dedication to Swanton Morley. We welcome Damon Harris, Seamus O’Dowd and Brenda O’Dowd as our new parish councillors. The first meeting of the new council term will be held on 11th May. I would like to pay tribute to our Clerk, Faye Lebon for all of her hard work, much of which is done behind the scenes but without whom, we simply could not function properly.

VILLAGE HALL

It is now five years since the Parish Council became the sole managing trustee of the Swanton Morley Village Hall trust. At the 2010 Annual Parish Meeting I reported that we had inherited a very bleak outlook as the previous Trustees had left us with a £3,000 debt to the electricity supplier and the hall only had £99 to its name. Having completed the extension and major refurbishment of the building, got costs under control and increased its income, I am pleased to report that the Village Hall Trust is now in very good shape. A more detailed report will follow later in the meeting. Faye carries out all of the financial, administration and marketing duties for the hall. The Trust also employs two cleaners as well as some part time bar staff.

I would also like to thank Ursula and Brian Moulton for their kind work in planting up and maintaining our new flower beds at the front of the building.

We feel that all of this work is very worthwhile and that Swanton Morley now has one of the best facilities of any village in Norfolk.

PLAYING FIELDS/COMMON LANDS

The last year has seen numerous working parties of parish councillors carrying out such works as planting tree saplings, building a sluice gate on Mill Common and constructing a larger car park for the Gooseberry Hill playing field. I would like to thank all of my colleagues who took part in some way.

STREETLIGHTING

I am pleased that with the exception of the two lights on Wensum Gardens our entire stock of street lighting has now been replaced with the new LED lights. These operate at 60% brightness between midnight and 5am and have significantly reduced light pollution. They are also much more energy efficient resulting in a saving of some £1200 in the last year. The fittings have a 10 year warranty and as such we have also saved a significant amount of money on repairs.

CHURCHYARD & BURIAL GROUND

Having had the West gates re-hung as part of the church wall refurbishment we have had them sandblasted and repainted. Due to a more pressing need for expenditure elsewhere we decided not to proceed with the installation of rabbit fencing at the churchyard. The biggest cause for concern at the moment is damage being caused by the mole population. At the present time the Parish Council is trialling some electronic mole repellent devices. If successful we will look to expand our use of these. At the burial ground we will soon have a new bench paid for by a generous donation received from a member of the public and the Friendship Club will also be having a bench installed to commemorate the club's 50th birthday.

In the last year there has been a £2,280 reduction in our income from burial fees. Whilst this has affected our budget it is obviously extremely good news that the need for burials has decreased!

CRIME & ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The village continues to enjoy low levels of crime and antisocial behaviour. The installation of the CCTV system at the village hall has also helped. I occasionally attend the Safer Neighbourhood Area Partnership (SNAP) 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. I am also pleased to say that our former Vice-Chairman, Alex Sommerville is an independent member of the Norfolk Police Crime Panel which works closely with the Police Crime Commissioner. The main issues of antisocial behaviour in the village are:-

- a) People who walk/exercise their dogs on the Village Green, Gooseberry Hill Playing Field, Village Hall Field and New Football Field on Manns Lane. These are signed 'No Dog' areas and I would ask dog owners to respect this and the health and safety of families and in particular children who use these areas for recreation and sport.
- b) Over the winter period we have experienced considerable amounts of persistent dog fouling in some areas such as Primrose Square, Rectory Road, Gray Drive, Ainsworth Close and Middleton Avenue. This is inexcusable and I would remind all dog owners that it is your responsibility to clear up your dog's mess. We have numerous waste bins for this around the village. I am pleased to report that since the Parish Council, in conjunction with the dog warden erected numerous temporary signs around the village and the nights have drawn out, the problem has become much less prevalent.
- c) Litter is very problematic in our village. Please can I remind everyone to dispose of your waste in the numerous bins provided by us or take it home and dispose of it in your own wheelie bin. I am pleased that a number of volunteers joined me in January to carry out a community litter pick at which we filled over four full wheelie bins. I hope that we can arrange another one of these in the summer.

HIGHWAYS

Thanks to continued successful lobbying by the Parish Council I am pleased to report that the 60 year old concrete footpaths in Thompson Close are scheduled to be upgraded by Norfolk County Council (NCC) during this new financial year. We are also very aware of the persistent problem on Manns Lane with surface water drainage during periods of heavy rainfall and again I am pleased to report that NCC have programmed this much needed work to be carried out in August.

We continue to have a very good working relationship with our designated NCC Highways Engineer. We often request that the NCC Highway Rangers team visit the village and carry out minor repairs such as potholes, sunken drain covers, cutting back vegetation and line marking to name but a few. One particular area where it is apparent that the service has suffered severe cutbacks is that of maintaining public rights of way. Despite the huge financial pressures NCC is experiencing we will continue to press for a fair deal for Swanton Morley.

ALLOTMENTS

We are very pleased that the allotments continue to be a success. Last summer we installed a large hardstanding area to make vehicle access and parking easier for allotment holders. We also created 2 additional plots so plot numbers now total 29. This site is now well established and has proved to be a very popular community asset.

COMMUNITY CAR SCHEME

Swanton Morley Community Car Scheme remains a vital service for the village. This scheme is designed to provide low cost transport for parishioners, who cannot access transport by any other means, for medical related appointments. This Scheme is only possible thanks to the organisational skills of its co-ordinator, Anne Sadler, who I would like to thank for all her hard work this year, and also the volunteer drivers who give up their spare time.

COMMUNITY WELLBEING

The Parish Council recently purchased a defibrillator and this has been installed outside the village hall. We feel that this important lifesaving piece of equipment is a great asset for the village but we naturally hope it will never have to be used. We have recently had a discussion about the possibility of installing a second unit near the shops and we are hoping to persuade BT to transfer ownership of the village's last remaining phone box outside Darby's to us in order that we can install a defibrillator inside it. We have also been approached by a community minded resident who has volunteered to carry out a flower planting schemes on the grass traffic island.

The parish council purchased the phone box which was situated outside the Angel PH and this has been refurbished. It will soon be installed in the grounds of the village hall and will house a community paperback book library.

PLANNING

You will recall that I wrote to each household in February to advise you about planning matters affecting the village and the reasons behind our decision to implement a significant increase in the Parish precept this year. I would like to provide you with an update on some matters since I wrote to you.

The Parish Council has been considering the merits of producing a detailed Neighbourhood Plan for the village but the costs involved are very significant. At the end of January I wrote to the leader of

Breckland Council urging him to consider implementing a grant scheme to help parishes with this pointing out that last year Breckland Council received £2.4M in New Homes Bonus and should be doing more to help parishes. I am pleased to advise that having attended a subsequent Cabinet meeting, Breckland Council has now announced a grant scheme whereby individual parishes wishing to produce a Neighbourhood Plan can now apply for up to £4,000 of grant funding. Since my letter to you in February the Government has also announced a grant scheme that can also provide up to £8,000 for each parish. This potential funding pot totalling £12,000 is very welcome news for our parish. Breckland Council has also announced that it will be funding a new post in the planning department to specifically help parishes produce Neighbourhood Plans. At the end of March along with our Clerk and Stephen Westbury I attended a daytime seminar organised by the Norfolk Association of Local Councils. This was attended by over 60 representatives from Norfolk councils. The speakers included a representative from the Department for Communities and Local Government and planning professionals from Norfolk County Council and numerous district councils from around the county. The day proved to be very enlightening but also very frustrating when one considers just how advanced some other districts are in their attitude to planning and their professional Neighbourhood Planning resources for what is a vital service for local communities.

We continue to be very unhappy with the service provided by the Capita led planning department at Breckland Council. I have written to both the leader and chief executive to express our concerns and I have also had a meeting with the executive director, planning manager and Capita's director of planning to try and resolve serious items of concern particularly in relation to the Rectory Road and Woodgate Park developments. I have another such meeting arranged for Thursday of this week with the principal planning officer and building control manager where I will once again express our dismay that for example the design of the surface water drainage scheme for Rectory Road has not been resolved yet the developer has been allowed to continue with unrestricted construction work on site clearly in breach of the prescribed planning conditions.

On a more positive note I am pleased to advise that having now confirmed its LABV (local asset backed vehicle) proposals, Breckland Council has announced that the project does not include at this time any plans for the land it currently owns on the 'Middle Camp' area of our village. I have subsequently written to them asking if they will consider transferring the freehold title of this land to Swanton Morley Parish Council in order that we can protect these green open spaces for use as play areas for village children. We await a response from their asset management team.

I have also this year had two meetings with the senior housing manager to discuss what I consider to be the substandard treatment of a vulnerable resident by both Breckland Council and Flagship Housing. Some issues have been resolved but some remain and I continue to press for action. I have also had discussions around Breckland Council's housing policy and what it means for Swanton Morley residents. I am pleased that in conjunction with the housing department we will shortly be finalising a housing needs survey for the village which will be undertaken in the summer. This will give us a much clearer understanding of the housing needs of Swanton Morley residents and I hope it will provide factual information which we can use when producing any future Neighbourhood Plan.

AND FINALLY...

On a personal note the last 12 months have been challenging but at the same time it has provided me with some cherished memories that I will look upon fondly for the rest of my life.

In June my wife and I represented Swanton Morley at the Queen's Annual Garden Party held at Buckingham Palace. It was one of the hottest days of last year and we were afforded an opportunity

to explore many parts of the garden not usually open to the general public. For a working class boy from rural Norfolk the whole day was an incredible experience.

In October I travelled down to the Old Royal Navy College, Greenwich to represent the village at Biffa's national awards ceremony where our village hall was one of the shortlisted finalists in recognition of our refurbishment work. Unfortunately we did not win an award but to be amongst some truly inspirational projects from across the UK was a humbling experience and testament to what has been achieved here in Swanton Morley.

In December I spent 3 days in Germany visiting the 1st Queens Dragoon Guards in their current home. I went as part of a delegation including local schools and Dereham children's centre. It was an opportunity to make new friends, open some important lines of communication and give a formal presentation to servicemen and their families about Swanton Morley and the wider Norfolk area. I am pleased that their new welfare officer, Rob Mansel, who I met in Germany is now in post here at Swanton Morley and we have already met recently to discuss closer community ties between the regiment and the village.

Last week it was my very great honour to be asked to inspect a squadron of the Light Dragoons in Dereham marketplace during their farewell parade. At the civic reception held afterwards in the Memorial Hall I presented a gift to the CO, Lt. Col. James Senior from the people of Swanton Morley. In return he has kindly given us a gift which I have here this evening.

This is a time of great change for Swanton Morley as it grows and we welcome new residents moving into our new houses and a new regiment moving into Robertson Barracks. I hope you will join me in extending the hand of friendship to all of our new parishioners and help them settle in.



ROGER ATTERWILL
CHAIRMAN, SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL

20th April 2015