



# SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL

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## **SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT 2016**

### **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. As you might expect in a vibrant village such as ours, 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 work to come in the year ahead.

### **YOUR PARISH COUNCIL TEAM**

Last year I reported that in order to better reflect the increased size of the village the number of parish councillors would increase from 7 to 9 starting in May 2015. I am pleased to say that this new larger team has worked well. 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. Faye and I have both now been in post almost 10 years and it is no exaggeration to say that legislation and the sheer volume of administration affecting the work of Parish Councils has changed enormously during this period. It is imperative that Swanton Morley Parish Council keeps abreast of the latest legislation and working practices in order that it can best serve the village and to this end both Faye and I are undertaking additional training. Faye is studying towards a level 5 degree in Community Engagement and Governance and I am studying towards a Certificate in Local Council Administration. In addition to this all councillors are undertaking an in-house course of initial councillor training. We are currently having plans drawn up to extend and refurbish the parish office located in the village hall. The building work will be paid for by the Village Hall Trust. The current office is very small and is only open to the public between 10am and 2pm on Mondays. Once the work is completed it is our intention to increase the opening times for the office to help provide you with a better service. We have also decided to recruit a part time Administration Assistant to work with Faye and I am pleased to announce that Diane Dunston is joining our team. I am sure you will want to join us in making her feel welcome.

### **VILLAGE HALL**

It is now 6 years since the Parish Council became the sole managing trustee of the Swanton Morley Village Hall trust. I am pleased to report that the Village Hall Trust is now in very good financial shape and has seen an increase in the number of hirers. Our Clerk, Faye carries out all of the financial, administration and marketing duties for the hall and will provide a more detailed report for the Annual Parish Meeting. The Trust also employs two cleaners as well as some part time bar staff. To complement our team I am very pleased to announce that we have now hired a part time Caretaker for the hall. We welcome Barry Overman in this new role and look forward to working with him.

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

### **PLAYING FIELDS**

In the last year we arranged for a contractor to paint both sets of swings and the slide. All of the Council owned seats and benches were also painted. We will shortly be replacing one of the picnic tables at the Gooseberry Hill playing field. We have also surfaced the car park area and installed some concrete bollards to prevent further damage to neighbouring property caused by some car drivers parking on site. In the last year we have seen an increase in the number of repairs needed at the Gooseberry Hill playing field. This is mainly due to the

age of the equipment, much of which has now been on site for 8 years. With this in mind we have increased our budget for the forthcoming year to cover additional repairs/replacements.

### **COMMON LANDS**

In relation to Mill Common and Burgh Common, we continue to work closely with Natural England and the Environment Agency. In the last year we have lowered the height of part of the river bank on Mill Common to improve the connectivity between the river and floodplain. This helps to keep the common wet during high flow events and increases the suitability of this part of the site for wetland birds such as snipe and duck. Some alder trees have also been selectively planted along part of the river bank. Once established these will enhance the landscape value of the site and contribute to a pattern of light and shade along the channel, locally suppressing vegetation growth and increasing habitat diversity. The Hawk and Owl Trust have also expressed an interest in carrying out a survey of the site.

The Parish Council has expressed an interest to the Environment Agency in having an Interpretation Board for Burgh Common to provide information about the wildlife and conservation value of the Wensum. Natural England has also now given us its formal permission to enable us to clear vegetation from the river around the fishing platforms at Burgh Common. Going forward we are keen to explore the possibility of forming a Nature Group whereby interested local people can volunteer to help us with our conservation work. If this is something that you think you would like to get involved with we would be very pleased to hear from you.

### **CHURCHYARD & BURIAL GROUND**

In the forthcoming financial year we have budgeted for the installation of rabbit fencing in the churchyard. Once installed, we will look to humanely eradicate the rabbit population in the churchyard and repair the worst of the damaged ground caused by them. At the churchyard we will soon have a new bench installed which has been paid for by a generous donation received from a member of the public. To celebrate the club's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Friendship Club has kindly donated a new bench which has been installed in the burial ground.

### **HIGHWAYS**

Despite previous promises, Norfolk County Council (NCC) have not yet upgraded the 60 year old concrete footpaths in Thompson Close. This has been further complicated by discussions we have had with Breckland Council which owns and maintains the grass verges in this area. They would like the Parish Council to take over ownership of these small grass areas but we have advised them that we are unwilling to do so because legal rights of way do not seem to have been established/clarified for homeowners and especially those who currently drive over or park vehicles on the grass. We have expressed an interest in taking over the ownership of the large central grassed area in Thompson Close as well as those on Middleton Avenue and Gray Drive. The long awaited surface water drainage scheme for Manns Lane is now underway and is scheduled to take 7 weeks to complete. Originally this works was due to take place during the school summer holidays to minimise disruption. To our dismay we were contacted by NCC to advise that they could not proceed with their original scheme because they had realised that what they had designed, planned and budgeted for wouldn't work! A new footpath will also be constructed soon opposite the school from the entrance to Harkers Lane finishing opposite the school entrance gates. It is appreciated that both of these schemes will cause a great deal of disruption but I would appeal for patience as these schemes are essential. We have installed an additional dog bin on Worthing Road near Robertson Barracks and will be installing a further one on Manns Lane near the entrance to Harkers Lane once the new footpath is complete.

You may recall that last year we advised you that Harkers Lane would be upgraded by Norfolk County Council (NCC) using a £10,000 contribution from Hopkins Homes. Hopkins duly paid over the required sum which was a figure requested by Breckland Council (BDC) and NCC as part of a legal agreement with Hopkins Homes. When the work was first carried out we were very unhappy with the finished footpath as it did not meet our requirements which were discussed and agreed at the planning stage. As a result we made some very strong representations to BDC and NCC. Further remedial works were carried out by these parties costing them a

further combined £4,000. Unfortunately the work was still unsatisfactory and even worse a significant section of the lane remained untouched. A site meeting took place in December with officers from NCC, BDC, our district councillor Robert Richmond and members of the Parish Council. These and subsequent discussions broke down with officers from NCC and BDC refusing to carry out any more work. Unperturbed we held discussions with more senior representatives from both authorities and I am pleased to advise that we now have a resolution. NCC has drawn up a new specification for a significantly better quality footpath which will include the installation of lockable bollards at each end of the lane to prevent motorised vehicles from using it. The cost of this scheme will be £33,000 of which BDC will be contributing 50% (half of which will be paid for by their Capita led planning department), NCC will be contributing 25% and the Parish Council paying the remaining 25%. This work should commence in May and will result in Harkers Lane being closed off whilst the work is carried out. I am sure that like me you will be very unhappy that the original £14,000 spent by these larger authorities was wasted. I hope that lessons have been learned particularly around their communication and the need for them to specify work correctly before asking for a realistic contribution from developers. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to Robert Richmond for his unwaivering support in resolving this matter.

### **ALLOTMENTS**

We are pleased that the allotments continue to be a success. Occupancy of our 29 plots remains very high and it is very satisfying to see people of all ages enjoying this popular community asset. The amount and variety of produce grown on the site I think ably demonstrates that the site is now well established. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved with the Swanton Morley Allotment & Recreational Trust (S.M.A.R.T.) for their ongoing assistance in managing the site.

### **COMMUNITY CAR SCHEME**

Swanton Morley Community Car Scheme remains a vital service for the village. The last year has seen a significant increase in demand and as a result the Parish Council has significantly increased its budget for the forthcoming financial year. This scheme is designed to provide low cost transport for parishioners, who cannot access transport by any other means, for medical related appointments. Drivers are reimbursed a set amount for each mile they travel. The passenger pays 50% of the journey cost with the Parish Council and Breckland Council each paying 25% respectively. This scheme is only possible thanks to the dedication and 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 to help our community. With the increased demand there is a need to recruit more volunteer drivers and I would like to take this opportunity to urge anyone who thinks they might be able to help to get in touch with us.

### **COMMUNITY WELLBEING**

The Parish Council recently took over the ownership of the old telephone box outside the shops. We plan to turn this into a community information point in the very near future. We have deferred a decision for now on whether to install a second village defibrillator on this old phone box. This is something we may consider at a later date and we would welcome your views on this. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Nancy Briggs who has generously supplied and planted the spring bulbs on the traffic island. I am sure you will agree that these look lovely. The old telephone box which was situated outside the Angel PH has been refurbished and is now installed at the village hall. This has been converted into a community library where people can place books they no longer want and at the same time take away books that they fancy reading from the library. This is being very well used.

Having had an initial discussion with David Smith of Swanton Morley Butchers, we have decided to make a small budget allowance to help the village celebrate Christmas this year. Dereham Town Band has been approached about the possibility of holding a 'Carols on the Green' event and we will look to have a Christmas

tree and some illuminations in this area. Our plans are at a very early stage but we will provide further information later in the year.

### **PLANNING/HOUSING**

Last year I advised you that we had taken up the case of substandard treatment of a vulnerable resident by both Breckland Council and Flagship Housing. I am pleased to report that after 14 months of numerous telephone calls, emails, meetings and dealing with three separate housing managers the issues have been resolved with the resident and team of carers benefitting from increased fire prevention measures, wheelchair access footpath and much improved vehicle access and onsite parking for the carers. I am pleased that this has been resolved however I am concerned that other vulnerable people in our district may be experiencing similar problems. The 'system' really shouldn't be this difficult for people who have a genuine need for help.

Last Autumn Breckland Council undertook a housing needs survey on behalf of the Parish Council. I would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in this exercise. The results of this has given us a much clearer understanding of the housing needs of Swanton Morley residents and has provided us with factual information which we can use when developing our Neighbourhood Plan and when considering future planning applications.

The Neighbourhood Plan is now well underway and I would like to thank everyone who has attended our first three public consultation events. Our consultant is now working on a sustainability appraisal and beginning the process of formulating our draft policies. Further public consultation events will take place later in the year before the final document is considered by an independent examiner. We will hold a village referendum on the final document which if approved will then be given legal status. This is a process that is very much driven by the opinions and future aspirations expressed by local residents and if you have not yet participated I would urge you to do so. By now you should be aware that as part of its Local Area Plan, Breckland Council has earmarked Swanton Morley for a minimum of 145 additional houses between now and 2036. These will be in addition to those already being built. This is as a result of the Government's drive to build more houses across the country. For the Parish Council, planning now takes up a great deal of our time. I have attended many of the Local Area Plan working group meetings at Breckland Council and our Clerk, Faye has begun discussions with their newly appointed Neighbourhood Planning officer. We do this to try and ensure that the Parish Council's views are represented and that it is well informed of the latest progress/thinking at district level. The Parish Council always strives to be well informed and fights very hard to get what we feel is in the best interests of the village both now and in the future. Needless to say, when it comes to planning we cannot possibly hope to please everybody all of the time. I know that the prospect of new housing can for some be an emotive subject. Planning applications can set neighbour against neighbour and friend against friend. This is regrettable. Good communication is always the best way of alleviating such tensions. Our village is currently growing very fast and given the current direction of travel by both the Government and Breckland Council this will not change in the foreseeable future. What we can do is try and influence how our village will grow and see if we can obtain improvements/additions to our local infrastructure and amenities to compliment the additional housing. The Neighbourhood Plan is our best chance of achieving this and is recognised as such by the Government. Please be patient while we work hard to complete this process.

This is a time of great change for Swanton Morley as it grows and we welcome new residents moving into our new houses. 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**

28th March 2016