

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025

Dear Resident,

I am delighted to provide you with this year's Swanton Morley Parish Council annual report. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of the work the Parish Council has carried out on your behalf and our plans for the year ahead.

YOUR PARISH COUNCIL TEAM

Our Clerk, Kelly Pickard works in our Parish office based at the village hall. The public opening hours are Monday - Thursday 9am-12pm. Information about the work of the council can be found on our website, village noticeboards, the Mardler newsletter and the Link-Up magazine. Kelly and I also communicate regularly with residents using social media. Last summer we welcomed Brian Powter, who was co-opted onto the Parish Council to fill our last remaining councillor vacancy. It is pleasing to now have a full councillor team. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those councillors who have taken on responsibility for specific aspects of our work and have carried out practical work, as well as providing regular reports for the Parish Council meetings. The proactive attitude of our Council team ensures that this is a vibrant and effective Parish Council.

YOUR COUNCIL TAX BILL

Our precept requirement has decreased from £99,384.00 in 2024-25 to £97,905.00 in 2025-26.

This year, thanks to another significant increase in our tax base (number of households paying council tax) up from 792 to 851, we were able to reduce the Parish Council element of your Council Tax bill from £125 in 2024-25 to £115 in 2025-26 for a Band D property. 82% of households in Swanton Morley are in bands A – C so pay a lower figure than this. The increase in the tax base can perhaps be attributed to the number of new houses now occupied at the Swanton Vale development and also a number of newly private homes on Robertson Barracks now being occupied in what is called Worthing Fields. The Parish Council is not immune to the cost of living pressures being felt across the country with costs going up across the board. One area of significant increase is that of ground maintenance. Our net cost for this has increased very significantly since 2021. We have budgeted over £21,000 for grass and hedge cutting alone for 2025-26. We always endeavour to try and obtain grant funding and match funding where possible to assist with capital items such as play equipment. In addition, we also seek to receive commuted sums of money from qualifying housing developments to pay for the ongoing maintenance of new assets such as open space areas and these funds are kept in an interest bearing account. Swanton Morley has a significant amount of assets and facilities compared to most other villages, all of which require ongoing maintenance and improvement. Our budget provides the means to do this so that residents can continue to take pride in our village.

CHURCHYARD & BURIAL GROUND

Last year I wrote to you to advise that we had budgeted to install a permanent water supply in the Hoe Road East burial ground for use by relatives and to help us better maintain the memorial rose garden. I wrote then about the extremely frustrating delays in obtaining a legal wayleave agreement across third party land owned by Breckland Council to connect the water supply. This didn't get any better with solicitors for both parties continuing to go back and forth for the rest of last year. We then had more frustration in getting Anglian Water to carry out the connection of the water supply. However, I am pleased to now report that the water supply is finally connected and ready to use and I would like to thank Kelly for her dogged persistence in this matter.

ENVIRONMENT

The Parish Council are responsible for maintaining Burgh Common, located on the bank of the River Wensum. We employ a specialist contractor to cut the weeds in the river and tidy up the riverbank, making it easier for Anglers to use the site for fishing. The Parish Council also maintains Mill Common. This is a site of special scientific interest and is subject to a Countryside Stewardship scheme for which the Parish Council receives an annual income from the government. In the summer months, as part of this agreement we allow a local farmer to graze their cattle on there. The use of cattle is important to promote healthy growth of the scientifically important flora & fauna which grows on the common. We are very grateful to the Harris family for their help with this. We also have an ongoing agreement with Swanton Morley Farms to keep open several footpaths in the village. These are all detailed on our website including location maps. We know that it is important to residents that these footpaths remain open for them to enjoy, but the Parish Council does pay an annual fee for this access and this forms part of our precept. I would ask that you treat the countryside with respect and pick up your litter and your dog's mess and place it in the bins provided by the Parish Council, or alternatively take your rubbish home and place it in your wheelie bin.

HIGHWAYS

It is fair to say that the most frequent complaints we receive are about speeding traffic and the poor state of the roads and footpaths in the village. Norfolk County Council (NCC) is responsible for highway maintenance. When defects are reported to the Parish Council our Clerk logs these on the NCC website and tracks progress. At that point we are completely in the hands of the NCC Highways Department as to if/when a defect is repaired. To help the Parish Council I would encourage residents to also log defects on the NCC website. This can be done anonymously if preferred and the weblink is:

<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/highwaysproblem>

I would also encourage you to contact our county councillor, Bill Borrett, with your concerns. His contact details are on the NCC website but for your ease of reference he can be contacted by telephone: **01362 860200** or by email: bill.borrett.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk

Last year I wrote to you about the problem of excessive surface water on the Dereham road bends after persistent heavy rainfall and the effect it was having on the state of the road surface. I attended two site meetings with representatives from Norfolk County Council, RWE's contractor, Murphy and the owners of Walnut Tree Farm. Following these meetings, I was pleased that all parties worked together and carried out some extensive improvement work which has remedied the flooding issue in that location.

At the end of last year, the old concrete footpaths in Thompson Close were removed by Norfolk County Council and replaced with new tarmac footpaths. The work was hampered by some continuous spells of wet weather and the completion was delayed until January. We are aware that there are some defects in this work which need to be rectified as well as repairs to the grassed areas. Our Clerk continues to chase this up with NCC. The last remaining section of substandard concrete footpath in that location is on a part of Hannah Road and we have asked NCC to inspect this and hopefully plan to replace with new.

Responding to resident's concerns about speeding traffic, a couple of years ago the Parish Council set up a community speed watch scheme in conjunction with Norfolk Constabulary. We currently have six volunteers for this. Sessions are run successfully with Norfolk Constabulary, sending letters to motorists found to be exceeding the 30mph village speed limit. We are required to have three trained volunteers present at each session. The training takes a short amount of time and Speedwatch sessions are 1 hour duration. If you think you could help us with this, we would love to hear from you. The statistics provided from this scheme, combined with the data provided from our SAM speed signs, provide valuable data for Norfolk Constabulary. On the back of this they have also conducted some mobile speed enforcement camera sessions in the village. In 2023 we were advised by some residents that they felt unsafe crossing the road on Town Street from the church towards the Old Papermakers. Norfolk County Council were not prepared to make any improvements to the crossing so we asked local company, Westcotec if they could suggest a solution. They suggested a pedestrian activated warning sign for motorists approaching from Bawdeswell. This technology detects any pedestrians on the crossing point and activates a warning sign for motorists approaching the crossing. The total cost of the scheme was £9,682.00 of which we successfully obtained 50% grant funding from Norfolk County Council's Parish Partnership scheme. The equipment was successfully installed last year.

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

A few years ago I reported to you about the changes to the Norfolk County Council grasscutting contract affecting many of our estate roads. These areas were previously cut under contract by Breckland Council using their contractor, Serco. Norfolk County Council decided to end this contract and we were faced with them only cutting these areas twice a year. In 2022 we entered into an agreement with Norfolk County Council whereby they provide us with a sum of money and we cut these areas instead. The Parish Council now have these areas cut by Breckland Council at the same time as they cut other pieces of land which they own in the village. Breckland Council also cut the hedges for us once a year along the

frontage of Thompson Close and Hannah Road. We have had to allow additional money in our precept to cover the cost of sufficient grass cuts, and the hedge cutting needed, to keep these areas tidy as the money provided by Norfolk County Council does not cover the cost. We have also included money in our precept for a separate qualified contractor to carry out verge cutting, which in our view is not done often enough along Rectory Road, Manns Lane, Gooseberry Hill and the Dereham Road bends. We also have a dedicated contractor who cuts the grass in the churchyard and Hoe Road East burial ground and another contractor who carries out the cutting in all other areas such as the village green, village hall, Davidson Park and playing fields. The village hall now reimburses the Parish Council for the cost of cutting the grass on its site and this has helped a with some of our overall costs. We currently employ the services of four separate grasscutting contractors in order to keep the village tidy. This year we anticipate that the ownership of open spaces and the children's play area on the new Swanton Vale development will be transferred to the Parish Council. When this happens, we will seek to add this work to the schedule of one of our contractors. When the legal title of these areas passes to the Parish Council a financial contribution of £56,000 will be provided by Hopkins Homes for the future maintenance of these areas.

OPEN SPACES

Over the past year there have been ongoing inspections carried out on the open spaces and any repair work deemed necessary has been carried out. We have successfully obtained grant funding of £22,000 for the installation of new swings and safety surfacing in the Gooseberry Hill Playing Field. An order has been placed with the contractor and the work will be carried out this month. On the village green we have had new safety surfacing installed under the swings.

PLANNING

Following the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in December. Breckland Council is now required to build significantly more homes than previously anticipated with a new target of 903 homes per year across the district. Work on their Local Development Plan review is ongoing and the Parish Council will continue to engage in this process. The Parish Council, with the help of a dedicated group of volunteers and a planning consultant is currently carrying out a five year review of the Neighbourhood Plan. This has been made possible thanks to successful grant applications totalling £15,000. I would like to thank everyone who attended our open public event on 19th April. We will shortly be reviewing all of the comments received during the six week consultation period.

THE FUTURE OF ROBERTSON BARRACKS

In the recent edition of the Mardler I wrote at length about the future of the Barracks. By way of a further update, since the Mardler was distributed we have been contacted by Defence Infrastructure Organisation who will be arranging a meeting sometime in June for representatives of Swanton Morley Parish Council and Hoe and Worthing Parish Meeting to meet with them and receive a report on their work to date and current plans for the site.

OTHER NEWS

Last Christmas for personal and logistical reasons a smaller display of Christmas tree lights was installed. I would like to thank Sean Atterwill for installing the lights, Bernie Marsham for his kind donation of the trees and to those people who volunteered to help transport the trees and place them in position. We have yet to plan what we will do this year in terms of the Christmas lights or a Carol concert. Further information will follow later in the year.

AND FINALLY...

The Annual Parish Meeting will this year be held on Monday 19th May commencing at 7.00pm. For those residents who are unable to attend this meeting but would like to ask a question or raise a concern, I am happy for you to contact myself or our Clerk directly and we will do our best to help you.

ROGER ATTERWILL BEM
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6th May 2025