

**MINUTES OF NORTH WOOTTON PARISH COUNCIL
ANNUAL PARISH (RESIDENTS) MEETING
THURSDAY 4th APRIL 2024 - held at 7.00pm at the Village Hall, North Wootton**

Present: Cllrs Marshall-Grint (Chair), Border, Blood, Blackmoore, Edwards, Harper, Nurse, Lamb, Merrey,

Also in attendance - Clerk Rachel Curtis, Borough Cllr Richard Coates, Borough Cllr Simon Ring and 1 member of the public.

1. To accept any apologies – Cllr Cox, ill health, Cllr Lemmon, prior meeting. Apologies accepted.

2. Chairman's Report

John Marshall-Grint

During 2023 your Parish Council has been busy working to improve our community. Thanks need to be extended to all the Councillors past and present who have at all times sought to put the community first. Particular thanks to our clerk Rachel Curtis. We have welcomed new members to our Parish Council this year along with three new Borough Councillors and a new County Councillor who are all actively supporting us.

A variety of fresh installations have come to our village including the North Wootton gateway signs which are in place on our village boundaries. The North Wootton village sign has been refurbished, thanks to all who played a part. SAM 2 Signs have joined the efforts to bring both knowledge and data about speed awareness in the village, the siting and location of these has been a joint project with South Wootton.

The Priory Lane land purchase of 'the green triangle' has been completed. The PC has worked on significant planning matters including the Telemast on Wotton Park which is nearing an agreeable conclusion. Development of The House on the Green site including the public house itself has moved forward. Work with Castle Rising and South Wootton PCs continues concerning the Knights Hill Development. A proposal for an agricultural building on Nursery Lane has currently been withdrawn.

Successful events have taken place in the village including Picnic on the Park, Christmas Fayre and village hall bingo nights and regular farmers markets.

The Neighbourhood Plan is nearing completion. The Borough Planning team have appointed an examiner upon recommendation, Tim Jones. The Clerk has confirmed this with the Borough Council and we await his comments.

The Water Management Alliance has agreed to take a look at the dykes along Marsh Road and offer any assistance they can as they are becoming blocked again.

Discussions for a proposed project to ease traffic congestion around North Wootton Academy are still ongoing. Several meetings have been had with North Wootton Academy and we are still working on trying to find positive ways to improve the parking situation. The issue of speeding and traffic management in the Woottons and Castle Rising has been discussed at a meeting hosted by NWPC and the three Parishes will continue to work together to find a solution to these problems.

Thanks again to all our Parish Councillors for their time, dedication and effort throughout 2023.

3. Responsible Finance Officers Report Will Border

This financial year has proved to be steady without too many unexpected events. However due to the cost of living crisis and costs going up at an alarming rate it has been challenging to keep to the budget that we set a year ago. Therefore our gross expenditure to the end of this financial year of 2022/23 was £62731 versus a budget of £49500. However once we claim the VAT back, the over spend will only be £6500 over budget which is 13.5%.

The largest part of our precept is used to keep the village street lights on. This came in at just shy of £20000 which was an increase of 42% from the previous year. The only conciliation is if we had not change to LED lighting it would have been considerably worst. We were unfortunate this year that we did not a manage to obtain CIL funding for the repair of our village sign, this was an expense of £1978.00. These expenses did not help our budget for this year. This year also saw the finalising of the purchase of the green triangle at the end of Woodland Gardens.

I am unaware of any new expenditures that will need to be allowed for in the forthcoming year. It is however worth mentioning that if we embark on any new project we must seek funding for these larger projects prior to agreeing the spend. We are not fortunate enough to be a cash rich Parish.

The Council debated the precept for 2024/25 and it was agreed that we should ask for a precept increase of 4% this was passed as acceptable at the January meeting due to the ongoing costs of energy and the cost of keeping the lights on! I have set the budget for this year at £54500 and will strive to come in under this.

We start the new financial year with reserves of over £9200 this is equivalent to two months worth of the gross expenditure. This is the just under the recommended normal range for a Parish Council Reserve (between 3-12 months gross expenditure). So I am happy to report that our finances are in a satisfactory position as they could be in the current circumstances. I would just like to thank the rest of the committee for their continue support and encouragement.

4. Wootton Park Report Will Border

This year has been a very mixed year in the Park, with a hot dry summer and very wet winter. There has been a few smaller projects that have happened over the year, and a few that are still in the pipeline. Some of these I will mention specifically throughout the report.

Last year we said the the priority would be to address the winter flooding on the park, and we were lucky enough to obtain CIL funding for this issue a total of £7750.00. However the approval of this money came in October and was too late as the rains had set in for the winter. The ground was too soft to allow diggers on to the park, and has been ever since. I have been watching the park every week all winter for any sign of let up so that we can give the contractors the go ahead for this project. I hope to be able to call them any time soon. Just for the record this February has been the warmest and wettest since official records began. The winters are starting to become milder and as a consequence of this so they are becoming wetter. We have seen an unprecedented amount of rainfall and flooding on the park, so I look forward to having this project competed as soon as possible.

Picnic on the Park - was a great success last year, we will be doing it again this year on Saturday 8th June. We have managed to secure a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to help us with the cost that comes with putting on event of this size.

We have also been allocated £800.00 from our local Borough Councillor Richard Coates for a Football competition, "Beat the Goalie".

My thanks go to the Local Rotarians, who have had their own project in the Woottons planting trees and as part of their day they managed to replant a few new trees on the park. We have also moved, over the course of two weekends, a total of 4 Wheelbarrow loads of snow drops. These have been moved from the area behind the Anglia Water pumping station, that is earmarked for the new telephone mast. This was to save them from being lost when the development begins.

Negotiations with Cornerstone continue, to ensure that all parties are happy with the progress of the new telephone mast location and the Heads of Terms. My gratitude goes to fellow Councillors of North and South Wootton, John Marshall-Grint, Paul Bland & Ivan Jordan and to Tracey Brooker of the Borough Council for ensuring that all sides are represented fairly in the discussions.

The wildflower strips on the North and South Wootton Gaps have been reinstated for this summer. My thanks goes to Nolan Mills showing me the fine art of controlling a rotavator! Our plan is carry on doing this each year with the help of volunteers.

We have not seen the community payback team on the park for a while, their last job was weeding the car park, which has helped to keep the car park clear. I have had discussions with the new team leader as to what jobs need doing on the park, so hopefully this year they will give us some time to do the projects.

I would lastly like to extend my thanks to everyone on this committee for their continued support and encouragement. I look forward to another year on the park and hope that the weather this summer is as good as it was last summer.

5. Village Hall Report

Jason Harper

The Village Hall has once again had a very successful year.

The Village Markets continue to be very well attended, with a wide range of stallholders. New stallholders regularly join the market, as part of a natural turnover.

A “Big Lunch” celebration was held for the Coronation of King Charles III which was a very successful event, following in the tradition of the VJ Day and Platinum Jubilee celebrations. It was accompanied with a Scarecrow Trail around the village which proved very popular indeed.

Bingo also continues to be a very popular and well attended monthly event, attracting several “regulars” and numerous occasional players.

The annual Christmas Fair was once again very busy, with a huge variety of stalls offering all kinds of seasonal gifts and products. The reindeer proved very popular indeed, so this will be repeated next Christmas.

Indian nights continue to be very popular, with a core group of fans as well as newcomers enjoying the delicious offerings.

Bookings are plentiful – Yoga, Pilates, Preschool Learning Sessions and several others have regular classes. There are also a large number of private parties being booked.

Regarding plans for the Village Hall going forward, an investigation into potential issues with the roof will be undertaken as soon as the weather improves, and it is hoped that only minor repairs / renovation will be required.

The floor of the hall has also been investigated for potential problems but the first reports showed that there were no structural issues that would require major work.

There are currently 17 members of the Village Hall Management Committee, and the finances are very healthy: £8,089.05 in the community account and £45,806.01 in the business premium account.

6. Neighbourhood Plan Repot

Jason Harper

In the past year, we have made continued to work towards implementing a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish.

The draft North Wootton Neighbourhood Plan was consulted upon by the Parish Council between 13 March and 8 May 2023, inclusive, under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, Regulation 14. Following this minor corrections and clarifications were made to the report. The Neighbourhood Plan was then submitted to the Borough Council on 12 September 2023, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, Regulation 15.

As the relevant local planning authority, the Borough Council then consulted on the submitted Neighbourhood Plan in advance of an independent examination, under Regulation 16.

This consultation lasted for six weeks from Friday 13 October 2023 until Friday 24 November 2023. It was decided that the plan met the “basic conditions”, the statutory tests that a Neighbourhood Plan needs to fulfil and could proceed to examination.

Louise (Collective Community Planning) suggested Tim Jones as a good option to examine the North Wootton Neighbourhood Plan, in light of recent experience working with Tim for the Watlington Plan. This was agreed by the Steering Group. Presently, we are hoping that the examination could finish around May, which would allow the Plan to proceed to referendum in late-summer 2024.

I would personally like to thank all members of the steering group, who have put a lot of time and effort into getting this far in the process. In addition, thanks are due to all the residents and other stakeholders who have given their views or been otherwise involved in the production of the plan. I hope that in the next annual report I will be able to announce that the Neighbourhood Plan is up and running and that the village is benefitting from the protections and opportunities that this will bring.

The meeting finished at 7.25pm

..... Chairman

Date Apr/May 2025