

# CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

## 2022-2023

Another mixed year of change, success and failure to complete. Our biggest change as a Parish Council is the resignation of our previous Clerk and appointment of her successor. Mrs Nicola Allton has been with us for nine and a half years and only left us to take up a full-time position. During her time she has been instrumental in sorting out our accounts and keeping us on the right track, her counsel will be missed. Mrs Allton also assisted in getting her replacement, Mrs. Barbara Cox, up and running and Mrs Cox is turning out to be a worthy successor.

Our biggest success is getting the funding and organising the repairs to the Village Clock. The hammers of the clock were breaking up and, on Christmas Eve the weight cable snapped with the weight dropping down its channel and causing further damage. Mercia Park came up with the £6,000 cost of the repairs which Smith of Derby carried out. Incidentally Smith of Derby built and installed the clock back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and have maintained it ever since.

Our biggest failure is in not cleaning out the silt from the duckpond. I can't call it a total failure as it is still ongoing and we are still trying to find a contractor to carry out the work and funding to pay for it. We are now looking at a sum in excess of £15,000 and like all the funding avenues we have approached they only fund capital programmes and this, like surfacing the Village Hall car park, is classed as maintenance. We are still negotiating with a possible contractor and hope that something will come out of that.

For those people concerned about the funding already raised by the villagers I can guarantee that it is still in our accounts and is specifically earmarked for this purpose only.

One where we are having some success is the misuse of Salt St. In No Man's Heath by off-road bikers and cars. This is down to Warwickshire Police's off-road task force and their motorcycles. There is a long way still to go but at least we now have regular attendance by these officers who have the ability to seize and destroy offenders bikes and, presumably cars, and as this becomes better known those causing the problems are going to go somewhere else. There are still those that just ignore this and this is where residents can help by reporting any such use or registration numbers of vehicles that transport the offenders to the Police or Parish Council who will pass it on to them.

We started this year by passing our Annual Audit with flying colours, thank you Nicky,. This is always good news as all Parish Councils have to work to very strict rules on how we can and how we cannot spend Public Money and your Council is proven to be operating legally.

Concerns were expressed over the speed of traffic through Newton Regis. Your Council is aware of this and whilst it believes that the majority of vehicles travel through the village at or below the speed limit it also accepts that there are still some rogue drivers who consider Main Rd. to be the M42. A Sat Nav speed check proved this to be an accurate approximation though not accepted by the principal complainant. The County were approached over this and a request for speed humps was turned down as it is no longer the County's preferred way of dealing with the problem. A further request to alter the road markings was also turned down but a refresh of the existing markings in the next Financial Year would be considered. Through circumstances not under the control of your Council the Laser speed gun was not used. This has now gone on so long that we are going to need a refresh of our list of approved operators of the equipment. If you are interested, please contact Cllr. Dilys Cox, who leads on this, or any other member of the Council or the Clerk.

Some 200 leaflets were posted around Newton Regis asking for the residents to tell us what they would like organised to celebrate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee and I am sad to report that we had just 18 responses, i.e. 182 weren't interested this after a 60+% response to a similar check regarding the village clock. As a result of this the decision was made to leave it to individuals to do their own thing.

We were looking at the Mercia Park Community Fund to help towards the cost of cleaning out the duckpond but unfortunately, as we couldn't clear the funding they supplied for the repairs to the clock and as the rules only allow one bid at a time we couldn't get the clock signed off before the date to put in this next and last tranche was passed. I'm glad to report that various other bodies around the Parish were successful in their applications. We did approve a grant to No Man's Heath Village Hall to top up their bid to the Fund.

Another ongoing problem is the small number of people who will not clean up after their dogs. Everyone knows that it is an offence not to do so in a public place, this includes Public Footpaths, Sports Fields and Children's Playgrounds, these latter ones may not be so well known especially when your Council spends your money putting up signs to warn of these only for them to be ripped down and thrown away by one of those dog owners who considers it below his/her dignity, also remember "Don't Pick, Flick is also illegal. Only legal way is to pick up after your dog and place in the bin provided. No bin, take it home and dispose of it your own waste. Dog faeces can cause blindness in children, can actually kill other dogs and harm farm animals so we have to say that it is down to you considerate dog owners, report anyone abusing the rules to the Parish Council or to the Borough Council where Streetscape will prosecute the offender. At some time in the future we intend to move the dog waste bin that is on the field to outside the gate.

Progress on getting the field mown properly has suffered from the weather. At the time of writing this report we have cut the grass 3 times and it is still at the over winter height as no

sooner it is cut the rain starts. It isn't just waiting for it to stop raining but needing two or three days of dry weather for it to dry out that has caused our problems as we have had the drying out days, instantly followed by torrential rain. After the problems of last year involving the proximity of travellers to our playing field and having to keep the gates locked for security reasons, much to the disappointment of many, advice was taken from the Police who suggested that a height barrier would be a reasonable way of stopping casual access of caravans to the site and that the gate could be left unlocked through the day. On recommendation we purchased a unit from a firm called Flowplates which has turned out to be the worst decision we have ever made. The barrier should have been installed in September/October last year and as we stand we are still missing parts from the barrier in April of this year. We have installed what we have got so far and are taking legal advice on how to proceed with obtaining the missing parts.

For a very long time this Council has had a sort of no interest from the Police over Parish affairs. Whilst we have always understood that operational issues were far more important than a Parish Council meeting we have also felt that the Police were failing to use a source of knowledge and information that could help them. I am very happy to report that with the advent of our new Safer Neighbourhood Team Police Constable, PC Mike Redman that has changed. Officers have attended Council meetings for the first time for years and whilst we don't expect them at every meeting we now have a designated point of contact, PCSO Simeon Hodson who will also provide us with regular Beat Reports for our area which means we will always know what is happening and what we need to be careful about in our Parish.

An extremely successful event was, and is now becoming an Annual Event, the switch on of the Christmas tree lights and subsequent carols, mulled wine and mince pies in St Mary's church. The Parish Council funded, acquired and put in place the tree and rigged the lights, the Church allowed us to tap into their electric supply, the mince pies and mulled wine were funded by Cameron Homes, the Rector allowed use of the church for the mince pies, mulled wine and the carol singing. The singing was massively enhanced by the children from Newton School and the ladies of Diamond Harmony, thank you all. We also contributed to No Man's Heath Christmas tree.

The Annual New Year's Day Goosewalk, which is organised and run by various volunteers, overseen by your Parish Council (which liaises with the Police etc. and provides the Insurance cover for the event,) all of whom should be praised for their efforts for without them this "historic" event could not take place. This year I was unable to be present as we were recovering from Covid 19. I must not forget all those who turned out to walk the 3 mile route as without them there would also be no Goosewalk. This year, Mr Bob Lane, who has a long history with this event, donated a "fun" trophy to be given to "the most deserving participant" as chosen by the organisers. This might be for wearing fancy dress, completing the route with the whole family and their pets or even bringing along a couple of geese which has happened

in the past! There is no winner for finishing the Goosewalk first as it is not a contest, though some of the younger participants do have a little personal challenge. It is just a fun event and a great way of working off the Festive Season's excesses. As usual there was a donations collection, plus a raffle organised by Mr A. Walsh, the proceeds of which were handed over by the volunteers to St Mary's Fabric Fund and this year some of the funds were given to support the News and Views publication that is distributed throughout our Parish several times a year and helps keep our community informed of events taking place around our Villages.

A little more detail on what is happening with the Duckpond. Cameron Homes, builders of Newton Manor, were approached to assist with the silt removal and at first they were quite happy to do most of the work on it but then their Health & Safety team got involved and I'm afraid that they put a stop to the plan as neither their employees nor equipment would be covered off the Newton Manor site. They did, however, offer to help with the funding if we can find a reasonable quotation for the silt removal. The main costs on this operation are the extraction and disposal of the silt and when they were presented with an estimate of £15000 from a company called Aquatic Solutions Ltd they sadly declined to fund the shortfall as it exceeded the amount they had anticipated and budgeted for. Since then Cllr. Gary Hunt, who has led on this from the start, has been trying to find another contractor who can do the work at a much more reasonable price. I am pleased to say that he has been in touch with another contractor, Wright's of Twycross, who have said that they can help with this community project and they are currently in the process of putting together a quote for us. Once this is done we will approach Cameron Homes again and hopefully this time they will be able to support us with the funds we require to proceed.

Cameron Homes are also going to replace the damaged post and railings on the road side on the pond following the damage done by one of its contractors. An alternative more decorative type of barrier was considered but then it was determined that the railings belong to the County Council and are not part of our Village Green. They are also in the Conservation area and Planning Permission would be needed as it involved a change. There was every possibility it could be refused whereas a straight replacement did not need Planning Permission.

We have been asking the County Council for over a year to replace the gateway entrance sign in Kings Lane that was damaged by the County's grass cutter and at last we can happily report that it has just been done.

Unfortunately the Thistle Bowls Club have had to cease their outdoor activities as they could not find people who were prepared to carry out various tasks involved with the operation and day to day running of the club. As the land is only leased to the Club from the Parish Council it reverted back to the Council on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December last year. Not wishing to see their clubhouse fall into disrepair or be demolished they kindly handed that over, together with a

lot of its contents of tables, chairs, crockery and equipment and our intent is to turn it into something that can be used by the residents of the Parish. It isn't huge inside and we don't see it to be a competitor of either Village Hall but just somewhere that small groups can use at a cost that will cover its operation. When we have tidied up the clubhouse and sorted out one or two problems it is our intention to hold an Open Day so all residents can come and see what they have got.

There is also the Bowls Green that we need to find a use for. So far we have had two suggestions, one to turn it into a putting course and the other to turn it into allotments. We have looked at both alternatives and both have their downside, cost. The putting course would obviously need ongoing maintenance after its build together with equipment and someone on site to collect green fees etc. The allotments idea hit an immediate snag when some of the old hands who were present when the green was laid out pointed that there was a thick layer of hardcore not that far down from the surface that would need cleaning out before anything other than grass was planted. The contractor that came to have a look at the site suggested that rather than dig anything out and with the green being some 12" below the path around the green, why not fill it in and plant from the top of that. This brought its own difficulties in how the extra soil could be added. Only suggestions were to remove part of the hedge to allow access from the road or to bring HGVs across the playing field. The quotation for this work has not yet been received. If anyone else has ideas, please let us know.

This year we have been hit with two unexpected heavy costs to our budget, the Bowls site and Election costs, these on top of our normal costs. This year we are forecast to make a small loss so we would normally just add an item for inflation to our costs plus a small increase to cover the loss but we have been forced to add £1,000 to cover the costs arising from the Bowls site and a further £1,000 as we have been informed by the Head of Election Services at North Warwickshire Borough Council that the costs to an average Parish Council of these upcoming Elections was expected to be in excess of £2,000. We already have a contingency fund for Elections but nowhere near this figure and as the Election isn't until the next Financial Year we have had to budget for it this year.

This coming year we welcome the return of Open Gardens weekend. It has been missing for a while due to the Covid 19 epidemic and this year has a slightly different format that we have been asked to help with by making sure the car park at the Village Hall is available and organising with the Borough Council for street cleaning etc. close to the time.

We have also been approached by Polesworth Flying Club regarding the use of our Playing field by them to fly their model aircraft. We are told that the majority of their aircraft are now electric powered meaning the noise element isn't there and they agree to keep their models no nearer housing than the middle of the cricket square so privacy should not be an

issue. They have been given a 3 month no-cost trial period and the closest houses have all been informed and it will be those householders that have say on whether the trial will be extended.

A successful trial was held at the beginning of April when four Club members came with their models and, after a final discussion on where they could fly them, they took to the air. The lack of the noise from petrol engines was uncanny, from a few feet away, on tick over you couldn't hear them. In flight there wasn't much difference and it was agreed that the trial period would commence as from April 1<sup>st</sup>.

For the coming year our hope is to finally sort out the Duckpond which includes clearing the overgrowth from the pond wall. To continue to work for the good of the parish and to work with those that will work with us, especially the Borough and County Councils