

Parish Meeting 2018

All our Parish Councillors have stayed in post during this year, so your current members of the Parish Council are Trevor Roberts, Richard Belson, Fred Bloomfield, Andrew Dunn, Phyllis Lunken, Brian Kinnair and myself. Kevin Boardley is now settled into his role as Clerk to the Council and has attended a number of training courses to bring him, and us, up to date with a number of initiatives relating to Parish Council business and requirements. The other major change relating to Council is that I decided not to stand for re-election as Chair at our Annual Parish Meeting. Allow me to introduce our new Chair, Trevor Roberts.

Other information you should need to know is that Parish Council meets in the Priory Room at 7.00pm on the second Tuesday of each month when we encourage the public to attend and raise issues and concerns. Notification of a meeting is posted ahead of time, in the village notice board and online, by the Clerk. Draft minutes of meetings are always published in the Observer to keep the village up-to-date on matters of interest. Under the requirements of the Transparency Code, last year you may remember that I reported that we had our own website where you could find all details of meetings, finances, standing orders and other regulations required by law. One of Kevin's responsibilities this year has been to put all that information onto the village website to make it easier for folk to find out about us and link us in to other information about the village.

Amongst the chief responsibilities of the Parish Council are the maintenance of the walls, memorials, trees and grassed areas of the closed churchyard which surrounds the Church; street lighting, bus shelters, litter bins, street cleaning, public rights of way, oversight and commenting on planning applications, and having an awareness of any other matters which may impact on our community. We also support the Play Council and the Play Area in Townhouse Road.

Our usual two Litter Picks have taken place during the year, one before Gardens Weekend and one in March this year. We have over 30 people involved all over the village during the course of these weekends and I am very grateful for their ongoing help. As for the most recent, what a day to choose!!! It was actually the nearest to the first day of Spring and I don't think the weather has ever been so bad for a 'Spring' pick!! What did we get? Cold and snow!! You may have seen some hardy folk out picking on the 18th; others during the following week when the weather perked up a bit!! Whenever the trusty band of 'pickers' ventured out, I am SO grateful for their efforts to tidy up around the roads and hedgerows before the quick rush of green growth which signifies Spring, really hit us.

Better Broadband continues to be an ongoing issue although improving around the village! Last year I encouraged you to write to Jonathan Chown and said that the more of us who make his life uncomfortable, the more likely he may be to get into gear!! Well, he did, got into gear and left his job for pastures new!! However the website states that most of Walsham is targeted for completion by the end of June this year but residents in The Street may be waiting till 2021!!

Our saga with Suffolk County Council Highways continues and our roads remain in the sad state that we know all around the county. Please remember to inform Highways via their website of any potholes that you may find, or disappear into, as apparently they wait to be informed by the public and then send out work-parties for individual holes! Mind you, their three attempts to cope with the crossroads pothole outside the Six Bells have all failed dismally and Jessica is looking into the situation for us! It is also becoming apparent that we have an issue with the state of roadside signs becoming illegible or even giving up totally and falling down. Please continue to inform Highways if you see any evidence of this – maybe if enough of us shout out, some remedy might be applied that doesn't involve local volunteers taking on Council responsibilities as has been mooted recently.

Any footpath related issues need to be referred to Richard who is our designated Footpath Warden. Last year, as in the year before, we were promised the replacement of a number of fallen finger posts. We are still waiting for this to be completed, or even begun!

Our budget has been fixed for the coming financial year when councillors decided that there should be a small increase to the precept as the cost of services continues to increase. We have held it steady for a number of years, even reducing it once or twice! Our outgoings are, top of the list, about £2,500 to maintain the historic setting of our Parish Church and its closed churchyard which includes grass cutting, tree surgery, upkeep of memorials, wall repairs and also our final repayment on the £10,000 loan that was taken out some few years ago to rebuild a section of the wall; another £2,500 for street lighting and maintenance, and additional monies earmarked for future conversion to LEDs; outgoings towards the maintenance of the Townhouse Road Play Area; and the provision of two SIDs, Speed Indication Devices, one to be sited near the Sports Club in Summer Road and one to be moved between various sites in the village.

The Play Area as you will probably have been aware from Parish Council Minutes has occupied us this year and we have now resolved as tenants of Walsham Old Town Trust to take over responsibility for the day to day maintenance, leaving the Play Council Committee to concentrate on the issues of fundraising for new equipment and the upgrading of aging apparatus. Parish Council is looking forward to working with the new Committee formed at their recent AGM.

I am happy to say that we now have a working group for our Neighbourhood Plan; have already twice utilized the centre pages of Walsham Observer to alert residents to what it will mean for Walsham; and have arranged a consultation meeting for 27th June which Phil will be telling you about later this evening.

Our other 'big issue' of the year is that of additional building in Wattisfield Road and the impact of 80 additional dwellings on the village. We recognise that growth of our village is essential in order to protect the sustainability of our facilities but are only too aware that our school is already at full capacity with no room to expand; that we no longer meet Primary Village requirements relating to our facilities; that our nearby surgeries, doctors and dental, are operating with overly high numbers; that our bus services have dwindled to such a degree that they are not a viable option for travel to work; that the provision of a footway will narrow the road width and that the extra numbers of cars will cause further congestion at the bottom of the road and along The Street, pinch points of which Walsham residents are only too well aware! Outline planning has been granted so we know that there will be more issues to overcome when full planning permission is applied for. And this isn't all .. I don't know whether you know this or not but there is a distinct possibility of at least 500 houses feeding into the top of Summer Road.

I wish to close with thanks to my fellow councillors for their support and hard work on behalf of the village and for their support for me personally during my fairly long tenure as Chair. My thanks to Kevin who was thrown in at the deep end when he took over as Clerk but who has assimilated a vast amount of Parish Council knowledge in a relatively short time and who I know will work well with his new 'Boss'. Trevor, welcome to your new role which I know will be a challenging one with its highs and lows but most certainly will never be boring or mundane!