

NORTON PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIR'S REPORT for the year 2021 – 2022

In May, twelve months ago, I was compiling my annual Chair's Report with the expectation that it would be circulated in the usual way, but sadly not open to discussion in the usual way, as we were still very firmly in the grip of the Covid pandemic. The continuing restrictions meant that Parish Council Meetings could take place, but only when held electronically via the 'Zoom' platform.

In spite of the restrictions and us all feeling like a group of 'talking heads', Parish Councillors have certainly maintained their active involvement in the community. We resumed our 'in person' meetings in June 2021. Following retirements, the council has been joined by new councilors and one returning colleague meaning that we are now up to full strength again. Welcome to Dave Rotherham, David Harle and Paul Watson.

We often hear phrases from people such as "something needs to be done" or "that needs dealing with" in relation to issues perceived as requiring attention in the three villages. More rarely do we hear, "I could help with sorting out" this or that, or "I have a suggestion how to improve" this or that. Fortunately, Norton Parish Councillors don't just pass comment or talk a lot about what might be done – they actually get on with creating change, being physically involved in village life and taking responsibility for action. I am really proud of the contributions made by all the Parish Councillors and despite the difficulties, the progress that has been made over the last twelve months. More on that later.

As before, I shall structure my report under four main headings:

- The Parish Council – areas of responsibility
- Planned developments that have been achieved
- On-going projects and activities
- Next steps

The Parish Council – areas of responsibility

Wherever possible, the Parish Council works in tandem with Doncaster MBC and we endeavor to address issues collectively in order to achieve desired results for the village. We also have a set of responsibilities which are for the Parish Council to address, which include the upkeep of the Garden of Rest, maintenance of a number of grassed areas, two sets of allotments as well as the large playing fields at Rycroft Road. We have renewed the aged and insecure wooden fencing at the playing fields with a like for like replacement retaining the style of the original.

Whilst not directly responsible, the Parish Council has an important role to play in examining planning applications and being able to apply local knowledge and provide comment and advice during the process. Recently this has involved being instrumental in supporting residents of Fir Tree Avenue in their objections to a proposal for building on a small area of land that has always been seen locally as a 'green' patch in an otherwise built up area. Involvement by Parish Councillors at the meeting of DMBC's Planning Committee resulted in the application being turned down. A satisfying outcome. In addition to the Rycroft Road Playing fields, the Parish Council maintains the accompanying changing rooms, meeting room, large storage areas and facilities for the

Honeybees Pre-School Group. I am delighted to report that we have recruited a new caretaker, Joy Coleman who, assisted by her husband has taken on this demanding role with skill and enthusiasm.

Planned developments that have been achieved

Following the Parish Survey that was carried out, it was clear that the priorities identified by the residents included two major issues – the speeding traffic through the villages, and the need for play and recreation equipment more suitable for older children.

- I am pleased to report that through careful budgeting, the Parish Council sponsored the purchase and installation of **electronic flashing speed restriction signs** at four key points in the parish – in Campsall, Norton and Sutton. In collaboration with senior officers from Doncaster MBC, we now have solar-powered signs that we believe will be influential in calming traffic flow and increasing safety.
- As I write, the construction engineers from Sutcliffe Play (a local company based in Upton) are putting the finishing touches to a set of four **exciting and demanding items of play equipment** aimed at the older children in the parish. The items included are based on the choices of the youngsters themselves and will make the play area at Spittlerush an activity and fitness area with a difference.
- More work has been done in the **Garden of Rest**, retaining its serene and peaceful nature as an escape from the hurly-burly and a place for rest and reflection.
- Building on the success of last year's **Summer Event** in Campsall Country Park, hurriedly but enthusiastically put together to give residents opportunity for a family-focused day out, a **Summer Fair** will follow this summer at Ryecroft Road Playing Fields. More on that under 'Next Steps'.
- Jointly with DMBC councilors, the Parish Council strongly and persistently lobbied for a replacement bridge which carries the footpath over the river Went between Norton and Smeaton. After some months of delay, the bridge has now been replaced with a splendid new structure which will again encourage walkers to traverse this route.

On-going projects

It is the intention of the Parish Council to ensure that we retain an interest in, and fully support, activities and events that now after Covid, are beginning to take shape once again. We are fortunate in the Parish to have a mix of activities taking place at our **Village and Community Halls**. It is important that we underpin the continuation of these community activities through our direct involvement and funding support where possible.

The Parish Council has continued to compile and put out its three-times a year publication **The Magazine** which highlights village life and activities and which is distributed by hand to every household in the parish by a combination of Parish Councillors and our volunteer friends. We appreciate that we live in an age of 'social media' but clearly residents support the continuation of the magazine as a welcome illustration of the life and times of the three villages.

The Parish Council is very aware of the need to maintain and improve both roads and footpaths in the three villages and this is an area where we need to challenge our Doncaster MBC colleagues and ensure that local matters are included firmly on their agenda for attention. The continuing issue of potholes and damaged road surfaces is an aspect that we continue to identify at our monthly meetings and then identify with DMBC.

A prolonged on-going project has centred on the unadopted roads and the green area that belongs to the Parish Council on land at the side of Norton Common Road and Quarry Road. Over two years ago, Yorkshire Water had been trying to deal with huge leaks in the area and spent weeks sorting it out. As a result, with all the movement of heavy lorries and water bowsers, considerable damage was done to roads and to the green leading to flooding of gardens and roadways. We were assured by YW that all would be restored to how it was. Needless to say, that did not happen and two residents and a councilor have campaigned tirelessly to get YW to fulfil its promises. That work finally started on 4th May this year. Sometimes persistence wins out.

Next Steps

The Parish Council compiles an annual Development Plan for the Parish which involves identification of issues raised by residents and proposals and ideas from our councilors for the forthcoming year. Sometimes we are able to zip along with some aspects, and inevitably, some take longer due to lack of sufficient funding, illnesses and shortages of work people and just an annoying lack of a sense of urgency.

We shall continue to plan ahead and further develop our collaborative relationships with Doncaster MBC officers, with the Friends of Campsall Country Park and the volunteers who support our endeavours in the parish. Together we can and do get things done.

Speaking of which....this year the Summer Fair will take place on the Ryecroft Road playing fields. It will allow better access to refreshments, to toilets and allow ample space for all the favourites such as the massive bouncy castle, Hatfield and Askern Brass Band, country skills, a variety of food and drink and lots of fun activities.

Finally a few 'thank yous':

- To my Parish Councillor colleagues from the community who volunteer their time and energy to supporting developments and activities in the three villages;
- To local colleagues who run events such as the Scarecrow Festival, the Art Exhibition, The Campsall 4A Trust Lunch Club, Wellingtonia Centre, Norton Chat and Do and the Parent and Toddler groups – all much appreciated;
- To the Vice-Chair of the Parish Council, Johnny Atkins – organizer of Norton Health Walks and a tireless worker in all aspects of the parish, including the allotments as well as being a strong support for the Chair.
- To Dave Telford, our Parish Clerk who has a wealth of knowledge and considerable wisdom on which we all draw, and who is a persistent pursuer of getting the jobs done.

Mike Morgan, Chair, Norton Parish Council, May 2022