

PARISH OF HOLCOT

Mrs Lisa Callan (Parish Clerk)
2 Walgarth Court
Holcot
Northamptonshire
NN6 9TL

MINUTES OF THE HOLCOT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT THE CHURCH ROOM, MAIN STREET, HOLCOT ON MONDAY 21 MAY 2018 AT 6.30 P.M.

Present: Councillor Walker, Councillor Buckle, Councillor Fountain, Councillor Scordellis, Councillor Hawkins

Minutes taken by: L Callan (Parish Council Clerk).

Also in attendance: 2 parishioners

Apologies: County Cllr Judy Shephard, District Cllr Lesley Woolnough, Cllr Gunnett, Cllr Wilson, Cllr Middleton

Minutes of the last meeting: The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30 May 2017 were approved and signed.

The Chair opened the meeting. He précised the main points of his report.

Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting – 21 May 2018

Thank you everyone for coming along this evening – if you don't know me, I am David Walker and I'm the Chair of the Parish Council.

Today's meeting is important for the Parish Council as it allows us to meet and discuss with parishioners the work of the Parish Council and to celebrate our lives in Holcot. In the next few minutes I will outline what has happened in Holcot since the last Annual Parish Meeting (in May 2017) our successes and challenges, as well as provide a summary of what else has happened in Holcot that is outside the Parish Council's direct control but contributes to the quality of life that we hopefully all enjoy.

I will also endeavour to dust down my crystal ball again and suggest what I expect to be the top challenges over the next 12 months. There is a written report which will be available on the parish website, so I will talk to the main points rather than read verbatim.

At this point I would like to introduce the Parish Councillors to the meeting;

| Councillor | Sector responsibility |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Roger Gunnett | Main St/Farm Close/Walgarth Ct |
| David Walker | Back Lane/Brittens View |

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Jackie Fountain | Moulton Rd/Tithe Close |
| Kathryn Buckle | Sywell Rd/Ivy Farm/Sunny Bank |
| Ralph Hawkins | All outlying properties |
| Phil Scordellis | Rectory Lane/Beelhook/Walgrave Rd |
| Martin Wilson | Brixworth Rd/Glebe Close |
| Nick Middleton | Poplars Lane/Winsland Court |

Each of the Councillors has a “sector responsibility” for part of the Parish, with the Councillor for your sector being your principal point of contact. As far as possible the sectors are aligned to the Councillor’s own home. Councillors also have a portfolio responsibility for a number of subjects – for instance Phil is responsible for road safety, Kathryn for Police Matters, Martin for streetlighting and so on. The full list of portfolio responsibilities is on the Parish Council page on the website.

The last person to mention in relation to the Parish Council is our Parish Clerk, Lisa Callan. Lisa’s job is to manage the activities of the Parish Council on a day-to-day basis. It is a role that is far beyond that of an employee as I am sure that you appreciate. Thank you to all of the Councillors and the Clerk for your service over the last year.

When we look at the activities over the last year, I will draw a distinction of the activities of the Parish Council itself and of the Parish as a whole. I haven’t listed everything, but here goes.

Parish Council

Some particular projects – as always, a real variety

- ***The Walgrave Road footpath*** – the footpath up the left hand-side of Walgrave Road has now been approved. This has taken 5 or 6 years.
- ***Northampton North Orbital Route, Northampton North SUE (Overstone Leys/Overstone Green) and Moulton Heights*** – The NNOR is now stalled whilst NCC has gone through it’s trials and tribulations. We are not aware of when (and if) it will be resurrected. Parishioners and the Parish Council did a great job of pushing back on the proposals that were based on incorrect assumptions in our view. Northamptonshire Highways eventually agreed that their assertion that a design with a roundabout on Moulton Road would reduce traffic through Holcot was erroneous.

The work on Northampton North SUE has started, with a small development. Eventually it will be 3500 houses stretching to the Holcot roundabout. The A43 works that have commenced are associated with this, with a long-term objective of dualling from Round Spinney to the A14. This will rely on funding.

Moulton Heights, which would be south of the NNOR between Moulton Road and the A43 has raised it's head again – we had been told that it was not part of the planning agenda. The Parish Council are now on the circulation list to find out about this development, if and when it arises, but the last plan was that a planning application would be submitted in 2018. This represents more encroachment in my view.

- **Playing Field Development** – You will remember a couple of years ago that the Parish Council arranged a safety and compliance survey of the playing field and its equipment. This led to various maintenance actions, removal of the slide, and a desire to redevelop the playing field. Since then, Cllr Fountain who has accountability for the playing field and a few others have set-up “The Friends of Holcot Playing Field Group” that has made great progress on organising funding for the modernisation of the playing field equipment. Many of you will have attended this weekend’s event to celebrate the Royal Wedding for instance.

Some of the old equipment has recently been removed, and the implementation of Phase 1 – an adventure path – will commence on 11 June, taking about 3 days to complete. The Parish Council is due to consider closure of the playing field for the duration of works this evening.

Great progress – and sincere thanks on behalf of the Parish to everyone involved.

- **Neighbourhood Planning approach** – Our approach is to develop a Parish Design Statement, more commonly known as a Village Design Statement or VDS. This is still work in progress. Once this is completed our intention is to develop a Parish Plan, similar to the one created 10 years ago.
- **Road safety** - You will have seen in the newsletter, on the website, in Parish Council agenda and minutes that the Parish Council continues to strive to improve road safety in Holcot. The County Council has again refused our request to reduce stated speed limits across the Parish – getting this far has taken a great deal of effort and is hugely frustrating. Despite the evidence, the accountable officer does not believe that changing limits will have the desired effect given the road conditions, and although we have pointed out plenty of precedents these were apparently implemented without control prior to the committee being established. His letter is posted on the website. Our position on making the village itself a 20-mph zone is still on-hold, awaiting the outcome of a central government report. ***The Parish Council are due to decide on our course of action in respect of the refusal, and I have included an item on this evening’s agenda to hear Parishioners views as to next steps.***

A second part of our road safety activity is the Community Speedwatch programme, where we aim to create driver awareness. The next programme is in June and July, and takes a small amount of time. Please contact Lisa if you are willing to help.

Lastly, in conjunction with Parishioners the Parish Council had proposed a number of physical changes to roads and signage, funded by S106 monies from the Overstone Leys development. The VASID is due to be installed in Holcot shortly we are told. The other principal works were to change the gateways, road painting, and changing the Back Lane/Moulton Rd and Poplars Lane/Walgrave Road junctions. Both of the latter came in at least twice the original budget once they were designed, and we need to revisit where we go next.

Our thanks go to the Cllr Scordellis who has done a massive amount of work getting us this far, dealing with the authorities, council members, and preparing a very strong case.

Some of the routine but important stuff

- Lighting – We continue to control the costs of lighting the village through gradually modernising lights as they fail, and managing the costs associated with electricity metering.
- The website – we continue to promote the use of the website as the best source of information about what is happening in the parish – it is updated regularly so ***please*** subscribe to the site to receive email notifications of news items, and don't forget to email in your news items or ideas of how the site could be improved or extended.
- The newsletter – Please continue to use it.
- Parish maintenance and the Friends of Holcot – the 'Friends of Holcot' group of parishioners continue to support the parish by doing all of the essential maintenance tasks that helps keep our parish looking in such great condition. Thanks Roger Gunnett for coordinating, and the whole team for everything you do for us.

Governance and Financial Performance

I can report that the Parish Council have met formally 10 times since the last Annual Parish Meeting in May 2017. Our governance conforms to the statutory requirements, and transparency is achieved there

Lisa has circulated to this meeting a summary of the financial performance of the Council for Financial Year 2017/18. For those that follow the budgetary and reforecast process, you will have noticed that we spent around £10k less than the original budget. This is due to the budget process being one of "best estimates", some savings/non-spends, and timing differences (projects slower than envisaged, expenses falling in FY2018/19 rather than FY2017/18). Our income exceeded budget due to transfer of funds from the Holcot Hobble and Road-Calming in particular. The first has been spent on its intended purpose (footpath) and the second is ringfenced to road safety. I have abbreviated these below and would just like to draw your attention to some of the key numbers. You can monitor financial performance on the website during the year.

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Balance brought forward from 31 March 2017 | £15,548 |
|---|----------------|

(rounded £)

Income

| | |
|---------|---------|
| Precept | £17,500 |
|---------|---------|

| | |
|--------------|--------|
| Other income | £9,657 |
|--------------|--------|

| | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Total Income | £27,157 |
|---------------------|----------------|

Expenditure

| | |
|---|--------|
| Admin and communications (<i>Website/Newsletter/Audit costs/</i> | £1,225 |
|---|--------|

Memberships/Training/General Admin costs)

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Maintenance (<i>Mowing/Playing Field/General Maintenance</i>) | £4,386 |
| Projects | £3,500 |
| Lighting | £994 |
| Grants & Contributions (<i>Church/Village Hall/Clock</i>) | £2,627 |
| Other (<i>Insurance/Allotment/Clerk Salary</i>) | £3,448 |
| Total Expenditure | £16,180 |

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Total Balances and reserves at 31 March 2018 | <u>£26,525</u> |
|---|-----------------------|

Other Community activity

I promised that I would mention some of the other things that are not within the control of the Parish Council, but have contributed massively to the community over the last year.

- The Village Hall and Church Room are fantastic facilities – we are very lucky, and a huge amount of effort goes into looking after these amenities for the parish;
- The Holcot Hub Monday-evening youth group continues to support our children;
- A group of Parishioners look after the defibrillator;
- The various clubs and societies that use the village hall and church room and local facilities – we are fortunate to have an active WI, Brownies, Footlights amateur drama group, dance group, art group, model boat club, model helicopter club, cricket club and so on. These groups are always looking for new members, so please don't hesitate to get involved;
- We are fortunate to have the allotments which are used by many parishioners, and the Flower and Vegetable Show organised by the Village Hall committee is an important annual event, maintaining fantastic traditions;
- The annual Christmas dinner for our more senior citizens is another important annual event;
- Work on the churchyard extension that has made it so attractive;
- The White Swan, with open mics, quiz nights and other events; as well as entertainment events organised by other groups.

Thank you again to everyone that has in any way supported these and of course all of the other activities not mentioned.

Back to the Parish Council - What are some of the likely priorities of Parish Council over the next year or so?

- We will continue to work through road safety issues. The speed limits, A43 works, the NNOR, Moulton Heights and Northampton North SUE will all impact us.
- Completing the Village Design Statement to help protect us from planning issues, and preparing a new Parish Plan.

- The Crossroads project – about 18 months ago we asked Parishioners for ideas as to what could be done with the crossroads green to make it more of a feature of the village. We put the project into abeyance to allow the road safety proposed changes to be worked through – we have now agreed to reinstate the project and a proposal for a design is due to be discussed by the Parish Council shortly.
- Continuing to maintain the parish.
- Doing whatever we can to improve the playing field equipment, supported by funding from The Friends of Holcot Playing Field.

There are lots of other things that the Parish Council will have to deal with of course - some we can foresee, but some we can't.

And finally...some last thankyou's

As I've talked I have thanked a lot of people, and there are loads more I probably should have thanked including officers and members at DDC and NCC, the emergency services and community organisations that support the Parish as well as other individuals and organisations. There are too many to mention specifically, and some we probably don't realise how much they do for us!

In particular you will know that Ann Carter has retired as our District Councillor and has moved to the Isle of Man – thank you Ann for everything. Welcome to our newly-elected District Councillor, Lesley Woolnough.

Thank you everyone for listening.

David Walker

21 May 2018

County Councillor Report - Judy Shephard:

I have now been your County Councillor for the past 21 years and in all that time I have never had to write a report in such a challenging environment and of such a serious nature about recent Northamptonshire County Council activities. I have found this year to be completely without precedence.

I am sure you are all aware as the news has been dominated in recent weeks on the way that Northamptonshire County Council Cabinet has been operated financially which has led to Commissioners now in all probability being called in at the end of April. I will try to elaborate:

NCC, year on year, has historically faced a financial shortfall due to lack of appropriate and lessening funding from HM Government for Adult Social Care and Children's Services. HM Government has also imposed budget savings on Northamptonshire totaling £400m since 2010 despite us being a targeted housing growth area, having a large number of Looked After Children (including 'Unaccompanied asylum Seekers' which incidentally cost us £35k per child per annum but we only receive reimbursement of £23k by Government) and with a higher percentage of over 85 year olds

due to advancing medical treatments increasing longevity. This has meant that this year we faced a £50m funding gap between what we have to provide by law and setting a viable budget. This has left Adult Social Care on the edge of intervention.

We were also capped this year on the maximum amount that Council Tax could be set at. (6% although we set ours at 5.98%). In the past we have prided ourselves on having the lowest council tax in England but that now, in hindsight, was too ambitious a call, as this decision added to our Social Care shortfall year on year.

As part of the NCC annual budget scrutiny process to find these savings, four areas came under particular focus: Libraries, Trading Standards, Bus Subsidies and Highways, especially Winter Gritting. It became apparent quite quickly following this January's public consultation on the 3 Library options (which elicited a huge response of over 5000 responses on Libraries alone) that this was a particularly unpopular set of spending efficiency proposals. It was agreed by Cabinet and the Conservative Group in February that we should amend these proposals by reinstating some of the proposed bus subsidies and going for a softer option on Libraries which would at least have saved some of our libraries under threat of closure. Throughout all this time I liaised and worked with the Friends of Moulton Library and Moulton Parish Council to try to retain Moulton Library.

Our Chief Finance Officer issued a Section 114 Notice in February which in short was due to the uncertainty of setting a balanced budget. In essence a spending curb was placed on all unnecessary NCC spending. This Notice is still in place. Further to that NCC's outgoing Accountants KMPG issued an Advisory Notice on the eve of our Full Council Budget Meeting stating that our proposed Budget was unlawful and that the savings we had hoped to reinstate following the consultation would have to be actioned in full. The Conservative Group were now obliged to make the unpalatable decision of having to reverse our latest proposals on Libraries and busses and to find even more savings on top, which included a staff pay freeze and a 10% cut in our own allowances. The popular Empowering Councillors Grant was also deleted. Throughout all of this time I continued to work with Friends of Moulton Library and Moulton Parish Council to achieve the best outcome for our cherished Library as a viable community asset.

Max Caller CBE, an Independent Inspector was called in by Secretary of State, Savid Javid MP, in January to prepare a report on Best Value in the delivery of NCC services to be completed by 16th of March. This Inspection would be a far reaching appraisal on how NCC was managing its financial affairs. Mr Caller interviewed MPs, outside bodies, staff and many Councillors, (District and Borough and County) including myself in his quest.

Max Caller's Report, sent to Savid Javid MP, was very hard hitting with two clear recommendations for the future, including his view that a new start was needed of local government towards two unitary councils (one in the North and one in the West). This, he states, should be pursued to help protect vital services in the county. Max hopes this will be achieved by 2020 which will mean Northamptonshire County Council would then cease to exist. Mr Caller also made it very clear that it is not the fault of the hardworking and dedicated NCC staff that these problems exist.

His Recommendations are: (and I paraphrase)

- *That a new start is required which can deliver confidence and quality by the creation of two new unitary councils (North and West).*
- *That the Secretary of State should give serious consideration to whether Commissioners should take over the running of all services save planning.*

Max Caller criticized the overuse of capital receipts and also highlighted Budget Scrutiny shortcomings and lack of proper oversight of implementation of the Council's plans for Innovation. He highlighted that it was difficult for Backbenchers to know what was going on financially and that Backbenchers were 'snowballed' when seeking further relevant information.

Savid Javid MP has in his formal response, which was relayed to the House of Commons on the 27th of March in response to Max Caller's Report, said that he is minded to implement a package of interventions including two Commissioners, the lead Commissioner concentrating on Governance (or how the Council is run) and the other commissioner to work closely with our Authority on strategic financial planning and budgetary control. They could be in place by the end of April. In the meantime Max Caller has invited considered views from NCC Members and Officers by 14th of April before finalizing his decision. Incidentally NCC have to pay the Commissioners salaries and expenses.

Within our own Conservative Group our Leader Cllr Heather Smith has decided to step down along with our Finance Portfolio Cllr Robin Brown. The Interim Chief Executive Damon Lawrenson has also left. We have reformed our Conservative Group with Matt Golby now our Leader and Cecile Irving-Swift as our deputy. A new Cabinet has been announced. This is just the beginning of some positive sweeping changes that will be made in the short time we have left as a County Council.

One Angel Square, the new Council Office Building which was in the process of being sold with a leaseback clause has been "paused" while we await a clear view from the incoming Commissioners on the correct process to follow as there are concerns relating to VAT and Stamp Duty.

This year's report is longer than normal - but I feel it is such a very important issue it is wholly warranted. This has not been an easy year for any elected member of the county council. It has not passed as I, your local member, would have wished.

There have been many recriminations, some true some not, and the new leader has apologized to residents of the county for the failings of the council. I feel it is right that we now draw a line under the past and focus on the future. However long or short that may be.

JMS April 2018

Speed Limit Approach:

Nothing will be done further until the Government's 20mph assessment has been published. The Parish Council will respond as a package once this information has been received.

Finances: The clerk circulated a copy of the Holcot Parish Council annual financial report for 2017/18.