

Ditchingham Parish Council

DITCHINGHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Monday 15th May 2023 – 7.30pm

Ditchingham Village Hall

Councillors: Julian Green (Chair), Keith Weston (Vice Chair), Brendon Bernard, Angela Gifford, Georgina Simmonds

Clerk/RFO: Sally Chapman

Also Present: Two members of the public

Minutes

The Chair of the Parish Council Chaired this meeting

1. **To Confirm the Minutes of the 30th May 2022 Annual Parish Meeting**
The Minutes from the Meetings held on 30th May 2022 were confirmed unanimously as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair.
2. **Any Business not on The Agenda Arising from Those Minutes**
None
3. **The Retiring Chair will give A Brief Report on The Council's Activities**
The Chair gave a verbal report (*attached*).
4. **The Responsible Financial Officer End of Year Report**
The Responsible Financial Officer read out a summary of her report (*attached*).
5. **To Receive Reports Giving A Summary of The Year's Activities from Council's Committees:**
 - a) **Community Committee**
Cllr Gifford read out the main points of her report (*attached*).
 - b) **Finance & Resources Committee**
The Chair's report was included in point 3's report.
 - c) **Planning & Highways Committee**
Cllr Weston read out the main points of his report (*attached*).
6. **To Receive a Report from the County Councillor**
County Councillor Barry Stone sent apologies and a report on DPC's website:
<https://ditchinghampc.norfolkparishes.gov.uk/category/meetings>
7. **To Receive a Report from the District Councillor**
District Councillor Brendon Bernard read out the main points of his report (*attached*).
8. **To Receive a Report from Ditchingham School Governing Body**
None received
9. **To Receive a Report from Ditchingham United Charities**
To follow after their Annual General Meeting on 24th May 2023.
10. **To Receive a Report from Ditchingham Village Hall**
The Chair Keith Weston read out the main points of his report (*attached*).

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11. To Receive Reports from Community Groups

a) Ditchingham's Men's Shed

Tony Rainbird from Ditchingham's Men Shed gave a talk about Men's Shed and informed:

- It had taken 3-years to get their shed built and up and running with Covid delaying the progress.
- In 2022 they held an official opening with Julie Ranger the TV weather girl cutting the ribbon.
- The shed is disable and wheelchair friendly with an assessable toilet and workbench.
- Men's Shed held a hobbies day at Ditchingham Village Hall and it was very well attended with a vast array of hobbies and interesting items to look at.
- DPC has ordered several bird boxes including an owl box for parish land and they will be completed soon.
- Men's Shed supports men's health and mental well-being and lots of people attend for refreshments and to socialise.
- NCC supports and help with the marketing to encourage more people, women as well as men, to come and get involved and join in projects.

12. Public Questions

None

The meeting ended at 8.02pm

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3. The Chair's Report

DPC Annual Meeting May 2023

As retiring chair I'm pleased to chair this meeting as invited to do so. This report will embrace both the Chairs report & that of the Council's Finance Committee.

I would like to reflect on the year just gone. And take the opportunity to report on the focus of activities in that period. In no particular order.

District & County Councillor support: I would like to thank District Councillors Brendan Bernard & Chris Brown, and County Councillor Barry Stone for their attendance at our meetings & funding support for various schemes. Brendan is also a Ditchingham Parish Councillor.

Elections: Recent elections have been advertised, held, and gone. In Ditchingham elections were not contested. This is a sad situation when so many [of the potential electorate] appear happy to openly criticise existing councillors, indeed, questioning their competence. But are not willing to stand for their part. And, as evidenced in the recent social media dialogue concerning Chicken Roundabout. For those that may be interested in the future, the full complement of councillors for DPC is 9... this means there are 4 vacancies that can be satisfied by co-option.

Ditchingham Parish Councillors: With that in mind I would like to thank Fred Hartwell who was previously Chair, but resigned in year, and also of Alan Larkin who also resigned in year. Acknowledging the remaining councillors, myself excluded; [Julian Green – Chair], [Keith Weston – Vice Chair, Brendon Bernard, Yvonne Daplyn, Angela Gifford, Georgina Simmonds] they have offered their services as councillors in the new term. Councillors are not in receipt of remuneration. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge the keen support of our Clerk, Sally Chapman, without whose attention matters would not run smoothly. I would also like to acknowledge the quality of her professionalism as is evidenced by the outstanding independent audit report that this council has received. Thank you
For my part, having a combined tenure of around 12 years on the Council, with around half of them as Chair or vice Chair, I have decided enough is enough.

Streetlights: The decision to take responsibility for maintenance & operation of the streetlights was taken in 2019. This has placed significant financial burden on the Council. In year the Council reviewed its Streetlights maintenance & operating policy recognising both economic & environmental factors. Consequently some 13 lamp standards were deleted where their condition was deemed unsafe and were not located in critical areas.
Recognising that continued streetlamp provision is not to everyone's favour, the Council has undertaken to keep existing policy under review. Continued maintenance of the streetlamps will remain a significant financial burden in for the future if they are to be retained, as the lamps have on average a life expectancy of just 25 years, and are roughly 50% through their safe operating life. Replacement or deletion is at the Councils cost.
On average, in FY 2022-23 parish streetlighting including capital provision, maintenance & energy, cost each council taxpayer ~£29 in year.
Parishioners should also be reminded that the Council determined a transfer from general reserves to streetlamp energy reserve £10,000 and utilised the entire CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) monies available, some £13,947 to help recover backlog streetlamps maintenance reserves. An additional equivalent cost for each council taxpayer of some ~£37 in year.

Open spaces & play areas: Residents should be pleased with the quality of upkeep. The Council is working with Norfolk Wildlife Trust and has reduced the frequency of grass cuts, including defining

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areas where 'environmental' support is given higher priority [for example, the Play areas, the Dip banks, the Cemetery etc]. This means that these areas may appear less tidy... but this is deliberately so in the interest of the environment, it also saves costs!

With both environment & amenity in mind the Council with the support of South Norfolk and Norfolk County councils, and importantly with the help of local volunteers, has created the Orchard on Hollow Hill Road encompassing 10 oak trees and 30 fruit trees which are Heritage varieties. The scheme includes boundary hedge planting. Clearly this is a longer-term project as we wait for nature to mature but much effort is required in the first few years to support for watering and essential maintenance.

Significant attention (and cash) has also been expended on play equipment & other amenities maintenance, and the Council now retains the services of a local handyman to ensure maintenance issues don't run away! I would also like to acknowledge the service of Paul Austin who has now given up the role of litter picker and play area inspector, and to welcome Sarah Harland & Curtis Last who now take on that position. A job well done.

We must also extend our thanks to Ann Mulley, our village cleaner. Ann attends the bus shelters, youth shelter, Lychgate and phone box, supported by her husband Richard Mulley (a volunteer) who also helps out with maintenance jobs around the village. Regrettably some of the detritus left in these locations is less than pleasant. So Ann, thank you again.

More thanks to our local Community Bungay First Responder Alan Rudd (another volunteer). Alan looks after the defibrillator at the village shop and checks it numerous times throughout the year, ensuring this vital piece of equipment is ready for action at all times.

On average, in FY 2022-23 open spaces & play areas maintenance, cost each council tax payer ~£22 in year.

Chicken Roundabout: As always attracts much attention, it is recognised internationally, even if the natural inhabitants have long been imprisoned, deported, or eaten. That said, there have been challenges with Norfolk Highways on maintenance issues, and with the local community with regards to how the roundabout should be acknowledged.

The Council can report that notwithstanding evident impasses with Highways, it continues to keep the roundabout grass tidy, and has again planted bulbs and wildflowers using its own resources. In the meantime, we continue to explore with Highways options to acknowledge the roundabouts recent history on site.

The Council are pleased to see public interest in the roundabout is enthusiastically followed as evidenced in the recent social media campaign, even if the actions & decisions of the Council are misreported in local news media publications (since which Newsquest, publisher of the B&B Journal and sister publications, has corrected online content & apologised to the Council).

Precept & Finances generally: The Council determined a precept of £40,000 For FY 2023-24 equivalent to ~£62 for each council taxpayer. This is at a lower level than established for previous years, and as a consequence required support from available reserves & CIL monies, principally to support continued streetlamp provision.

Recognising the draw on reserves in the year, this will likely lead to increased levels of precept in future years to re-a fully balanced budget & establish reserves consistent with recommended levels. But that, and other challenges will be a matter for the new council.

Julian Green

Chair Ditchingham Parish Council

~2022-23 tax base 636, 2023-24 tax base 649

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4. The Responsible Financial Officer End of Year Balance Sheet

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Year ended 31st March 2023

Receipts and Payments		
2021/22		2022/23
£	Receipts	£
37,000.00	Precept	38,100.00
3,535.00	Cemetery	3,925.00
265.00	Allotments Rents	245.00
7.76	Business Account Interest	546.46
6,075.10	VAT Reclaimed	6,574.63
93.30	Thwaite Road Play Area Cashbox	-
0.00	Community Infrastructure Levy	17,265.09
0.00	Section 106/Grants	-
46,976.16		66,656.18
Expenditure		
11,823.02	Staff Costs	12,239.45
396.00	Clerk's Office Costs	396.00
2,232.14	General Expenses	1,609.80
100.00	Allotments rent to land owner	100.00
1,106.00	Dog Waste Bin Servicing	1,106.00
766.08	Insurance	780.25
51.25	Miscellaneous	-
750.00	Parishioner Magazine & Website	750.00
2,658.37	Cemetery Maintenance	1,318.31
2,386.21	The Dip Maintenance/grass cut/litter picker	1,262.13
2,479.21	Thwaite Road Play Area Maintenance/grass cut/litter picker	2,017.11
2,234.20	Village Maintenance	2,676.84
0.00	Tree Survey & Maintenance	3,272.00
1,200.00	Street Light's Electricity & Maintenance Contract	1,051.16
6,000.00	Village Hall Grant - Section 137	-
0.00	Local Project Grants - S137	16.00
7,471.89	VAT	5,396.41
0.00	General Maintenance (Handyman)	2,170.00
0.00	Community Projects (Jubilee)	905.31
11,750.65	Play Area New Equipment & Repairs	-
14,002.00	Street Lights Repairs/LEDs/Removal	15,745.00
0.00	S137/Community Infrastructure Levy Expenditure	1,570.50
67,407.02		54,382.27
-20,430.86	Surplus Income over Expenditure	12,273.91
142,438.08	Balance b/f	122,007.22
122,007.22	Balance c/f	134,281.13
Balance Sheet		
Cash at Bank		£
36,623.18	Current Account	12,930.25
85,574.42	Business Saving Accounts	121,350.88
0.00	Petty Cash	-
220.00	Uncleared Receipts	-
-410.38	Uncleared Payments	-
122,007.22		134,281.13
18,117.08	General Reserves	19,065.40
103,890.14	Earmarked Reserves	115,215.73
122,007.22		134,281.13

The above statement represents fairly the financial position of the Authority as at 31st March 2023 and reflects its receipts and payments during the year.

Signed

Chair

Keith Weston

Signed

Sally Chapman - Responsible Financial Officer

S.S. Chapman

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5.a) Community Committee Report 2022/2023

2022 The Jubilee Fete, despite dreadful weather was a success. Ditchingham was colourful, posters and fliers ensured that the Afternoon Tea was a community success. Much food had been donated, the Village Hall decorated and over one hundred people of all ages attended and mixed together in celebration.

2023 Similarly the Coronation Tea organised by Georgina and many willing volunteers provided a success. Food donations were plentiful and the two-hour window of people and families coming to enjoy the celebration in the Village Hall was popular.

Varying projects around the village have been carried out, the major one being refurbishment of the playing field equipment and tidying up of the land.

The allotments are well used and kept tidy and productive.

Both the bus shelter and the library telephone box are kept in good and clean condition and are used by villagers.

The new notice board is now in use.

The grass in the cemetery is cut and wildflowers are growing. However, some of the grass currently, May 2023, is long and in wet weather, is not helpful to anyone who wishes to tender to a grave.

Hollow Hill Road path has debris along most of the hill slope, mainly due to rain coming off the field. Towards the bottom bit of the path, wet weather could mean that someone could easily slip on the mud and the only place to fall would be roadside. Not all pedestrians know that the high path is a second path not a pathway to a field. Should a sign be erected to direct pedestrians to use this?

Chicken Roundabout. An email sent to The Poultry Association suggesting they could make a donation to the plaque we wish to put up, to date has not been responded to.

Angela Gifford
May 15th 2023

5.c) Planning & Highways Committee

Chair's Report to Annual Parish Meeting 2023

Planning

Despite the Council's objections, the Badger Homes development accessed via Hamilton Way went ahead and many properties are nearing completion.

Our District Councillor, Brendon Bernard, has objected to another phase proposed beyond the present one unless the access is via an Alternative to Hamilton Way. I support his objection.

There have been no other contentious planning applications during the year.

I have commented on a small number of non-contentious plans.

Highways

New attempts have been made to commemorate the chickens on Chicken Roundabout. A company called New Rock put forward a suggestion. It was based on their leasing the roundabout from the

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Parish Council. The Council has no ability to grant a lease and NCC Highways have consistently forbidden any artwork on the roundabout.

The PC has permission to install a lectern-style information board on the verge adjacent to the roundabout. The Council is looking into funding options for this.

This year has seen a continuation of our efforts to improve local pavements – especially those between our village and Bungay. A lot of time and energy has been spent trying to improve sight lines at the crossing point at the Ditchingham Dam/Pirnough Street junction. We have been unsuccessful.

Some of the worst areas of damaged pavement have been resurfaced. These include the entrance to Smokey Joe's and parts of the Ditchingham Dam footway. NCC tells us that more work is scheduled for 24/25 (funds permitting).

We have, through Freedom of Information requests, questioned the County Council's priorities and its apparent failure to utilise local intelligence in its decision-making. We note that large sections of serviceable pavements, in the area near to the primary school, were spray coated. Apparently, this process is intended to prevent deterioration of pavements. Major work was done to the pavements around the Norwich Road/Drapers Lane junction – an area that has very low footfall. We are told that the plastic kerbing was breaking up which made this work necessary.

I attach a letter to DPC from NCC as an appendix (with some annotations) to this report.

Keith Weston
May 2023

Appendix

Letter from NCC (with my annotations (in red))

Grahame Bygrave <grahame.bygrave@norfolk.gov.uk>

Fri, May 5,
11:44 AM

Dear Sally,

Many thanks for your email below and the attached letter. Cllr Plant has passed your comments and questions over to me so that I can investigate and respond direct.

First of all, thank you for the comments and feedback. It is always helpful to hear how our services viewed and feedback from local communities is always really helpful.

To help explain, our overall highway asset management strategy and approach is based upon 'prevention is better than cure'. This means that we commonly use intermediate or preventative treatments such as surface dressing on roads and micro-asphalt on footways to protect the investment already made. These treatments are most effective in prolonging the asset life when ideally applied before deterioration starts. This then delays the need for larger scale interventions which are more costly and very disruptive.

This was the case with the spray coating referenced in your letter on Waveney Road, Rider Haggard Way, Longrigg Road, Turner Close, Thwaite Road areas. This is an intermediate treatment designed to slow the deterioration of the footway asset, and it is low-cost treatment. Resurfacing or reconstruction costs are typically 10 times as much.

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In addition to the approach above, we also carry out condition surveys on both roads and footways with the frequency based upon functional importance. All footways receiving a survey within 4-years. Similarly, our local highway staff undertake safety inspections based upon functional importance at least once a year.

We use the condition data, maintenance history, the social and functional importance of the asset and engineering judgement when assessing the prioritisation of the maintenance programme of highway works. However, with current funding levels unfortunately we cannot meet all aspirations and seek to make the best use of our resources.

In addition to the locations above, in 2022/23 we also delivered resurfacing and kerbing works on sections of the B1332 Norwich Road. This included the replacement of failing plastic kerbs, see attached photograph, which demonstrate the need for the works.

In summary to your specific questions:

How were the priorities for work on our village pavements arrived at?

- Condition Surveys and judgement of local highway staff using their engineering experience and knowledge of local priorities – as detailed above.

Since December 2021 I have brought to the local highway staff the state of the Ditchingham Dam footway.

Why wasn't any attempt made to find out which pavements were in most need of repair and which ones have high footfall?

- We have condition survey information of the footways and undertake regular safety inspections.
- Our local highway teams deal with local enquires, requests for service and engagement with parish councils.

Since December 2021 I have brought to the local highway staff the state of the Ditchingham Dam footway.

- Footfall is relative and if we just treated high footfall areas, then the maintenance funding would be directed to the busier urban areas across Norfolk, whereas there is a need for the Council to maintain its entire 3,000 mile long footway network. Relative usage within communities is normally known by our local area staff, so higher priority would be given to footways near schools, village shops, village halls etc.

Once a decision has been made to carry out repairs (and funding is forthcoming) in a particular community local area staff should consult with the local council to help to identify priorities.

Will NCC adopt a policy to consult Parish Councils, when funds are available for these works, to benefit from local knowledge about how best to spend precious resources?

- Our local highway staff put forward footway maintenance schemes based upon condition data (so we get consistency across the whole county), and their assessment of both engineering need and local priority. So, why wasn't the Parish Council consulted?
- When highway improvement works are undertaken, we undertake public consultation as they be me affected by the changes i.e a new junction, a new traffic regulation order.
- When we undertake highway maintenance schemes, engagement is via public information notices and direct contact in managing the impact of the works on businesses, services, highway users and frontages.

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I hope this answers your questions and gives greater insight into our highway maintenance practices, which are based on national best practice.

We take the point that “prevention is better than cure” but still think consultation over priorities should be improved.

As always, if you have any concerns over any other highway matters in Ditchingham, please contact your local highway engineer Gary who will be able to assist.

Kind regards

Grahame Bygrave

Director of Highways, Transport & Waste

Community & Environmental Services

County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2DH

7. The Annual District Councillors Report - Brendon Bernard and Chris Brown

Main headlines:

- Collaboration between South Norfolk District Council and Broadlands has continued to reap benefits for the District, culminating in the two Councils under one roof. Long Stratton offices are under offer and Broadlands offices will also be sold in the near future. The new offices at Broadlands Business Park will provide an annual saving of £700,000 pa and help reduce the likely rates increases in the future.
- The District Council has finally accepted that we have to be more proactive on Environmental issues and has set objectives which have to be achieved by 2035.
- The District council has encouraged the increase in EV charging points in the District, doubling the number of EV charges in the Council run car parks.
- Leisure facilities have continued to make progress to improve utilisation and membership, with the hope that we can get back to levels seen before 2019.
- A balanced budget was agreed for 2023/24 and to help with the cost-of-living crisis, District rates have not been increased for this year.

District Councillors for Ditchingham and Earsham Ward

Brendon Bernard and Chris Brown

01986893240

07785331355

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10. The Ditchingham Village Hall Management Committee Report

Report to Ditchingham Annual Parish Meeting

In addition to the regular use of the hall by local clubs and the occasional use for events there are three major items to report this year.

Firstly, I am delighted to report that the new annexe was completed. The project was complex and long and encountered many hurdles. The work was organised into three phases which were hindered by the pandemic and supply issues. Despite this the annexe opened in time for the start of the Autumn term and the Pre-school (who are the main users) moved in. The new facilities are excellent and I am very grateful to all the people who gave their time and energy to get the project across the line.

The main hall is available much more now and we are seeing it used well.

Secondly, the hall was the venue for the free afternoon tea that followed the very successful Jubilee Fete. It was a very good event enjoyed by around a hundred people.

Thirdly, the hall was again used for the Parish Council's free community tea - part of the King's Coronation celebrations. About eighty people enjoyed this event.

We should all be grateful to the people who plan these events and to the folk who help on the day.

Finally, I should like to express my thanks to my Vice Chair, Brendon Bernard. Although he is very busy, with his many roles, he has taken on large amounts of the committee's work, during the building project and since. Other members of the committee, myself included, have had some unavoidable time constraints and Brendon's help is invaluable.



Ditchingham Parish Council's
free Coronation tea party

Keith Weston

Chair Ditchingham Village Hall Management Committee Chair

May 2023