

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – Monday 29 March 2021

ANNUAL REPORT FROM BARBY & ONLEY PARISH COUNCIL - April 20 – 31 March 21

In normal times every English parish is required to hold an Annual meeting of its Parishioners between 1 March and 1 June. This is not a Parish Council meeting but a meeting of parishioners, although if the parish has a Parish Council then the Chairman is required to chair the meeting.

Last year (2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Central Government brought in temporary legislation to help Parish Councils operate in a Covid secure way with socially distanced remote meetings.

(The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020) came into force on 6th April 2020. This legislation allowed Parish Councils to meet remotely via video conferencing and removed the requirement to hold the Annual Parish Meeting.

Most people are now very familiar with “Zoom” and other forms of video conferencing, but it was all very new in April and May, so the Parish Council decided not to hold an Annual Parish Meeting in 2020.

The planned Elections for a new Parish council in 2020 were also postponed and have been rescheduled for 6 May 2021. This means that the current Parish Councillors have served a 6 year term, far longer than normal.

Despite the considerable difficulties posed by Covid-19 the Parish Council has adapted very well and managed to continue meeting remotely using “Zoom”. We have continued to strive to put things in place to continue help improve the parish where we can.

I believe I can say it has been the strangest of years that most people can recall and I hope that with the vaccine rollout progressing at fantastic speed, our new normality will begin during the summer months and better times are ahead of us.

Councillors

The Council was Chaired by Councillor Dawn Cotton through 2020, but in November 2020 she was keen to hand over the reins of Chairmanship to another Councillor.

The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, which had been delayed from May with the intention of holding it as a face-to-face meeting, was held online in November. (no-one had any real concept that the pandemic would last so long when it first started)

At the Annual Meeting I was elected as Chairman with Councillor Steve Gee as Vice-Chairman. During the year we have said goodbye to Carol Weller, James Wood and Bridget Little, and welcomed Edan Edison as a Councillor.

Thank you to all those who take on the role of Councillor to try and ensure our parish is a great place to live, it is an entirely voluntary role and each councillor gives up some of their spare time for the community to make decisions that we feel benefits us all. We hope that we will have a full complement of 11 new and returning Councillors after the May election. Please put your name forward if you are keen to get involved. The closing date for nomination papers is Thursday 8 April at 4pm.

Planning

The Parish Council acts as a consultee in the planning process with the decisions on whether Planning consent will be granted or not being made by the Planning Department at Daventry District Council. This year the Parish Council has been consulted on 30 planning applications and 3 Appeals.

Defibrillators

We now have potentially life saving defibrillators in place at Barby Village Hall, and in the old red phone box at Onley. These are checked every week by volunteer members of the village. Thank you for carrying out this essential service to make sure that they are always in good order.

Play Equipment Upgrade

Last year we were able to install Adult Fitness Equipment at both Barby and Onley Park thanks to grants from “Tesco Bags” and Daventry District Council, however the annual Playground Equipment inspection last year found that the slide and swings at Barby had rotted at ground level and were deemed unsafe.

We were able to make good use of the period that Play Areas had to be closed due to Covid restrictions to remove the condemned equipment and install a new slide and swings ready for use when the Play Areas were able to reopen.

A grant of £8041 from Daventry District Council helped to pay for half the cost of the new slide and swings, and grass safely matting has been installed below the swings which has removed the need to regularly top up the woodchip that was previously there as a safety surface, therefore reducing maintenance costs a little going forward.

Other repairs and improvements

The bench opposite “Barby Village Stores” has been repaired and the rotten wood replaced, and the new age travellers memorial bench on Elkington Lane has also been renovated.

With an eye on the environment and sustainability which the world has now realised we all need to play our part in, wildflower seed has been planted on the village green, and on the Ware and the area of wildflowers around Barby flagpole has been enlarged. We hope they will look lovely when they flower in the summer and help encourage wildlife, bees, and insects to the village. Whilst this was already planned and only Covid halted it from being done last year, we were fortunate to obtain a grant for Daventry District Council to cover some of the costs.

The Japanese Embassy to the UK invited us to receive Cherry Trees as part of a project to foster good relations between Britain and Japan. The trees were paid for with grants from Japanese companies that trade with the UK, and the project hopes to see cherry trees planted throughout the country. We have planted 3 on Barby Green opposite the shop, 3 near the War Memorial on Rectory Lane and 4 at Onley which will look wonderful when in bloom for many years to come.

Work has been carried out on trees within the parish as and when required, with the dead cherry tree at the end of Rectory Close being removed and ivy trimmed back from trees that were being over laden with ivy foliage. Trees have also been trimmed back where they have been obstructing street lighting.

Tree maintenance forms quite a portion of our annual costs, and whilst issues are regularly brought to our attention, not all are Parish Council responsibility with some being County Council which we

try to press as hard as we can to be resolved but this isn't always as timely as we would like.

Policing

Unfortunately it has not been possible for the police to run the "Speedwatch" initiative during this year due to Covid restrictions, but the police have been able to visit Barby with the speed van at various occasions which does help remind people to drive within the speed limit. We do regularly ask where possible that the mobile camera visits the village as Daventry/Rugby Road regularly sees excessive speeds as it is so straight and 'tempting'. During the quietness of lockdown periods, it was observed by many villagers that speeding had appeared to increase.

The police have also installed an ANPR camera to help them monitor vehicle movement between County boundaries. The data is only available for police use but can help them identify any problems with vehicle movements. With incidents such as the 'sheep rustling' that occurred in 2020 and was a cross border major crimes incident it can help provide key information about vehicle movements and useful intelligence.

The Parish suffered an attempted break-in at Barby Sports Pavilion in December which resulted in damage to the roller-shutter door and security lights.

Although the PCSO Craig Edgell has so many villages to cover that he can only visit the parish rarely, he is very keen to be kept informed of any issues and will visit should the need arise. His contact details are on the Parish Council website and monthly newsletter so you can report any non-urgent police matters to him and he will help where he can.

Communication

It has been great to see everyone pulling together during this difficult year. We've all had to adapt very quickly to working from home, home schooling, social distancing and shopping for those who have been shielding, many have also helped with litter collection whilst going out for daily allowed exercise. The community response to the pandemic when the fear of the unknown hit us all was truly fantastic, it highlighted what a close community we live in with neighbours offering help and the community Facebook page being full of offers of help wherever needed. Thankfully compared to many other areas of the country and world, we were certainly away from the worst of the issues.

Councillor Edan Edison has taken over posting on Facebook and the Parish Council strives to increase communication with the Parishioners the best we can. By holding online meetings this alone has enabled more people than usual to be able to keep in touch with what the Parish Council has been doing.

To stay in line with legislation the website has been reviewed and an accessibility statement produced.

We have also been able to make more use of the flag pole to commemorate events, and any parishioner is able to request a flag to be considered to be flown but they must give us notice for it to be agreed during our monthly Parish Council meeting. We did launch a project to designing a village flag but unfortunately didn't get any takers for the project. Thanks to Cllr Gee for taking on the responsibility of raising the flags.

We have relisted "Barby Village Stores" and "The Arnold Arms" as assets of Community value. This places a legal charge on them and allows the parish first refusal on them should they ever be sold. This legislation was put in place in 2011 as part of the Localism Act and has allowed Community buy-outs of pubs in some rural areas and prevented loss of a valued village meeting place.

Accounts

Barby & Onley Parish Council financial year ends on 31st March. Barby & Onley Accounts are complicated as when the village of Onley Park was transferred to the parish by the Ministry of Justice in 2005 a lump sum of £165,185 was provided to cover maintenance of the open space land. This money is ring-fenced for that purpose. At 31st March 2021 £98,229 of the ring-fenced money was left. £5,722 was spent on mowing and tree works at Onley during the year.

For year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

INCOME –

The precept amount collected through the Council Tax by Daventry District Council on behalf of the parish council was £57,330. Other income received included:

- £794 towards the cost of mowing the village verges from Northamptonshire County Council
- £784 towards litter collection within the 30mph limits of the parish.
- £430 from Newsletter Advertising which was down by 40% from the previous year – not surprising since lots of events have not been able to go ahead due to Covid-19
- £17,742 in Community Infrastructure Levy which is paid on new buildings built in the parish.
- £8,041 from Daventry District Council towards the new Slide and Swings
- £494 from Daventry District Council towards the wildflower planting
- £5,755 refund of VAT paid on goods in the previous financial year.

We also received an unexpected windfall by way of a rebate on the streetlighting charges for Barby. E.ON had not amended their records to show that all our street lights in Barby had been changed to LED lanterns, we had queried this in the past but now many years down the line out of nowhere it was resolved. This has greatly reduced the usage of electricity and we have been refunded £8,348 for overcharging since 2017, this also helps the Parish finances on an ongoing basis while we continue to pay off the interest free loans for years to come.

EXPENDITURE – precept expenditure of £55,414 was made this year. In addition £5,722 was spent at Onley from the ring-fenced fund for maintenance of the open space, and £5,767 was spent on repayment of the loan taken out to convert the street-lighting in Barby to LED lanterns.

The parish rent Barby Sports Field, Barby Play Area and Barby Tennis Court from the Townlands Charity. We were due for a rent review in September, and the trustees have agreed to hold the rents at their current level for the next 5 years which is great news for us all.

Parish Council accounts are scrutinised annually by an independent verifier who checks the figures and also checks that the council is operating correctly and has the necessary policies, insurance and risk assessments in place. To ensure that we comply with governance and accountability legislation the accounts are also reviewed annually by external auditors PKF-Littlejohn LLP.

A full analysis of the income and expenditure and spend versus budget can be found on the website which is maintained and kept up to date by Ian Webb, who we would like to publicly thank for all the help he provides to the Council by editing both the website and the newsletter.

www.barbyandonleyparishcouncil.co.uk

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

On 1st April 2021 Daventry District Council and Northamptonshire County Council will be replaced by the new West Northamptonshire Council which will deliver all services that are currently provided by Daventry District and Northamptonshire County Councils.

To contact the new Unitary Authority please visit www.westnorthants.gov.uk or phone 0300 126700

Daventry District Council has produced a special commemorative book called "Daventry District Council Through the Years, which charts the many changes, challenges and achievements during the 47-years of service to the local community. Anyone who wishes to borrow a paper copy please contact the parish clerk clerk@barbyandonleyparishcouncil.co.uk a copy will also be available to view on the parish website.

Elections will take place for the 93 Councillors who will form West Northamptonshire Council. You can help shape your new Unitary Council by either voting in the election or standing as a candidate.

Deadlines for your diary!

- Nominations to stand - 8 April
- Register to vote - 19 April
- Apply for a postal vote - 20 April
- Voting day - 6 May

To apply for a postal vote, visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-postal-vote

At the moment the old telephone numbers will be rerouted, and services will continue as before with no change to Bin collection days, and the same people will still be working at Daventry District Councils offices, which are likely to remain in place as a local hub.

Next year may see further rises in Council Tax though, as West Northamptonshire Council has been formed by amalgamating Northampton Borough, South Northamptonshire and Daventry District. The three areas will need to be brought in line, and Daventry District Council had the lowest council tax of the three, so it is likely to go up as they area is streamlined.

I'd like to pay a particular thank you to our longstanding Clerk Catherine Camp for all her hard work. Catherine is behind all of the work the Parish Council does and whilst she is a paid employee, she frequently goes above and beyond in her work and deserves the appreciation of the community for making everything run smoothly.

Finally, a huge thank you to all Councillors and residents for the part they have played in helping the community as a whole get through this difficult year. Please consider standing as a Councillor in the coming election and help us continue to improve our local area.

Paul Reynolds
Chairman
Barby & Onley Parish Council

29 March 2021