**HOLLOWELL & TEETON PARISH COUNCIL**

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**THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

**Wednesday 18 May 2022 at 7.15 pm**

**Chairman’s Report**

**COUNTY / UNITARY and PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS**

The elections scheduled for May 2020 were postponed due to Covid – 19 and held on 6 May 2021.

This complicated the change from County to Unitary status where it was originally intended to have a ‘shadow’ Unitary Authority in place to take over from the County and District Councils. The change took place on 1 April 2021 and election of Councillors (for West and North Northamptonshire Councils) on 6 May 2021. West Northamptonshire Council replaced Daventry and South Northants District Councils together with Northampton Borough Council.

Only seven candidates stood for the Parish Council and therefore seven Councillors were ‘elected’. No candidate came forward to fill a vacancy to represent Teeton ward and regrettably no resident has been willing to be co-opted to complete the compliment of eight councillors.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS**

In March 2022 the Council was advised of the death of Teeton resident, Barry Wendon. Barry's was a life of service to the community. He was a parish councillor for almost three decades, and served as Chairman of the council for a number of years. Barry was also a longstanding member of the Village Hall Committee and was heavily involved in the construction of the brick foyer extension to the old school building. A talented fine artist and photographer, Barry taught as a senior lecturer at Northampton University. The framed photographs inside the village hall and the village hall sign were all created by Barry and he was instrumental in creating the initial design for the Millennium Dome bus shelter. Barry died peacefully at home after a short illness. Condolences were passed to his partner Yvonne, and to his family and friends. He will be much missed.

Administratively the Parish comprises two wards, Hollowell, which includes Highfield Park, and Teeton. There are eight Councillors, two of whom represent Teeton ward, supported by one paid employee, the Clerk, Mrs Gillian Greaves, (appointed in September 2016) who also holds the position of the ‘Responsible Finance Officer’.

**Delegated Roles & Responsibilities: (2021 – 22)**

**Hollowell Ward:**

**Andrew Crisp [Elected May 2016 / 2021]** Chairman / Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator / Police Liaison / Highways Representative / Hollowell & Teeton Notice Boards / Street Lighting Co-ordinator / Finance Signatory

**Emily Curtis [Elected May 2016 / 2021]** Vice Chairman / HPPAC Liaison / Asset Management support / Jane Letts Trustee

**Allen Eaton MBE [Elected May 2016 / 2021]** Mowing Co-ordinator / Jane Letts Trustee / Pocket Park Support

**Graham Leah** **[Co-opted July 2016 / Elected 2021]** Representative on Hollowell Village Hall Committee / Jane Letts Trustee / Finance Signatory

**Sue McCubbin [Co-opted June 2016 / Elected 2021]** Rights of Way (Public Footpaths) Representative / Council Asset Inspection (twice year)

**Hannah Oswin [Elected May 2016 / 2021]** HPPAC Liaison / web site and computer support / Finance Signatory

**Teeton Ward:**

**Mike Tomalin [Elected May 2016 / 2021]** Tree warden (Hollowell & Teeton) / Internal Audit / Pocket Park Support (H & S Inspections)

**Vacancy [May 2021 – 2022]**

**NB**: The Council does not qualify for ‘General Power of Competence’ under Sect 8 Localism Act 2011, which requires two thirds of councillors to be elected, together with the Clerk holding a specified qualification. Although all Councillors were elected in 2021, the change of Clerk in September 2016 has removed the specified qualification.

**Changes to Procedure in Response to Covid - 19**

Government restrictions and changes to Council procedure, imposed in response to Covid – 19, meant that initially meetings could continue but were held ‘virtually / online’. However, legislation (LGA 1972) determined that ‘virtual’ meetings could not continue when Covid regulations expired. This required Councillors to actually attend meetings despite other Covid restrictions and Public Health advice deterring public gatherings. Despite this the Council was able to maintain a ‘business as usual’ process but individual Councillors did have to make personal assessments of the risk.

**ASSET SURVEY**

Assets within the Parish, that are the responsibility of the Council, are inspected in accordance with the Council’s Risk Assessment Policy. Details of these assets are recorded on the Asset Register which can be viewed on the Council web site.

**Northants County Association of Local Councils Asset Management Project**

In December 2021 Northants CALC worked with North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) to submit a bid for funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and a grant of £281k was awarded for an innovative Asset Mapping Project (AMP).

The funding provided parish and town councils in North and West Northamptonshire with the valuable opportunity to take some time to think about and explore what potential future devolution involves. It offered the chance to develop a solid evidence base from a community perspective by mapping assets and services that are provided by the unitary councils, and to build local capacity & skills.

The Council participated in the project and received a grant from NCALC towards the cost of researching and recording assets within the Parish currently provided by West Northamptonshire Council. In addition, Assets of Community Value (ACV) were identified and recorded.

**Assets of Community Value (ACV)**

The Community Right to Bid (Assets of Community Value in legislation) was one of a raft of new initiatives introduced in the Localism Act 2011. Hollowell Steam Rally field was identified as a local asset and at a meeting on the 16 March 2022 the Council determined to apply to West Northamptonshire Council (Daventry) to have the field formally registered as an Asset of Community Value (ACV).

**COMMUNICATIONS**

**H & T PC Web Site (Openness & Accountability)**

The statutory requirements for ‘Openness & Accountability’ have continued to engage Councillors and the Clerk in the management of Council communications and information. The Council web site remains the primary source of information for the public regarding agendas, minutes and important council related issues and Councillor Hannah Oswin has continued with the maintenance and development of the web site to ensure compliance with the ‘Openness & Accountability’ procedures. The work undertaken by Hannah is greatly appreciated.

**Hollowell Facebook**

The Hollowell News Facebook web site has enhanced the Councils links with Parishioners. This is not a Parish Council responsibility, but was developed and is managed by Councillor Emily Curtis. This continues to provide an invaluable platform in communicating information to the community about local issues and I take this opportunity to yet again express appreciation for the time and effort that Emily devotes to the management of the Facebook page.

**The Village Link**

This is a local bi-monthly publication, with web site, that provides news from, and is distributed free of charge to, the Northamptonshire villages of Cold Ashby, Cottesbrooke, Creaton, Guilsborough, Hollowell & Teeton and Thornby. Information about recent activities of the Parish Council is submitted for publication to assist with maintaining Parishioners awareness. Councillor Emily Curtis contributes time and effort into ensuring that activities of groups within Hollowell and Teeton Parish receive appropriate publication.

**Whats App and Email Groups**

Residents have options to receive local information via email and WhatsApp by joining groups managed by Councillor Emily Curtis. The Whats App facility was introduced in support of planning and management of the FAFF event and then continued to provide a platform for residents to seek advice, receive reports of incidents and other initiatives within the Parish.

**FINANCE**

At the meeting held on 22 January 2021 the budget for 2021/22 was agreed at £14,373.00 but the Council resolved to set the precept at £11,000.00 for 2021/22 to ensure Reserve funding could be maintained.

The Council transferred its accounts to Unity Bank on the 1 April 2021 and this has facilitated online management of payments and supervision of accounts by the Clerk who is the Responsible Finance Officer.

Section 137 of the Local Government Act of 1972 allows councils to provide grant funding to support community initiatives and the Council resolved to make provision of £1,500.00 within its reserves for this service. Payments made during the year include £250.00 to Hollowell Parochial Church Council

By maintaining a budget of under £25,000.00, the Council is able to limit the level of audit but has to comply with transparency regulations. Even with this reduced level of audit there is a heavy burden on the Clerk / RFO in ensuring the Councils accounts comply with regulations and procedures.

As Chairman, and on behalf of the Parish, I wish to record my appreciation for the work undertaken by Mrs Gillian Greaves in maintaining the Councils finances.

**GRASS MOWING CONTRACT**

The Council web site has details of the areas which the Council has designated for mowing of verges and grassed areas within the Parish. The Council has received a small grant from Northamptonshire County Council for undertaking maintenance of roadside verges within 30 mph restricted areas of the Parish. This grant funding is expected to continue with West Northamptonshire Council.

Elm Tree Garden Maintenance (ETGM) was appointed as the contractor from 1 March 2017 and the Council extended this into 2020 – 21/ 22.

Councillor Allen Eaton MBE maintains a working liaison with the mowing contractor to ensure the contract is fulfilled efficiently. This work is appreciated.

**HIGHWAYS & RIGHTS of WAY**

In August 2018 the Council resolved to take over responsibility for two of the four grit bins located on Church Hill, Hollowell but fortunately the relatively mild winters since 2018 resulted in less use of the bins and NCC Highways then changed policy and undertook to refill all the bins. This will remain an issue for the Council unless or until the new Unitary Authorities determines to re-adopt the bins.

The Right of Way Referenced CY6, known locally as ‘The Jetty’ provides a link between Guilsborough Hill and Church Hill in Hollowell. Residents have raised concerns about the maintenance of the footpath and during 2021 this became an issue when the Council was informed of a concern about the condition of trees aligning the route. The Council instructed Maurice Fitch Tree Works to conduct a survey of the trees and this resulted in recommendations to remove several trees but at a substantial cost. The Northants Highways Right of Way Team declined to accept responsibility for resolving the issue and enquiries with residents whose property borders the footpath also failed to establish responsibility.

The matter was resolved when new owners took up residence at Hollowell Manor and contracted Maurice Fitch Tree Works to carry out the necessary works. The Council thanked Liz & Simon Hunt of Hollowell Manor for financing this work.

**THE MISS JANE LETTS (HOLLOWELL) CHARITY**

The charity is required to be managed by three Parish Councillors, in accordance with the will of James William Boothe Letts, who died on 16th December 1940, although it is not a Parish Council statutory responsibility. I acknowledge the contribution that Councillors make in managing this trust and commend Councillor Emily Curtis for her perseverance in researching the processes and preparing appropriate reports and accounts, details of which are displayed on the Council’s web site.

**LITTER PICKING**

Covid restrictions limited the scope of residents in 2021 who have previously volunteered their time and energy to undertake a litter pick around the Parish in early spring, co-ordinated by Councillor Emily Curtis and supported by Hollowell Steam with the contribution of litter picking equipment. However, this annual litter pick was re-instated in Spring 2022 with several residents continuing to undertake collection of litter when out walking throughout the year and are to be commended for their efforts.

**NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH [NHW] AND POLICE LIAISON**

Councillor Andrew Crisp continued to undertake the role of NHW Co-ordinator and Police Liaison. NHW requires the participation of residents by remaining vigilant and reviewing the security of their homes, vehicles and property if a low crime rate is to be maintained.

The Parish Council continues to support the Hollowell & Teeton NHW but no expenditure was incurred this year.

The scheme remains active and maintains close liaison with Police staff on the Daventry Rural Policing Team. Neighbourhood Alert messages, advising of recent crime incidents and prevention, are circulated to members and this distribution is supported by Hollowell News Facebook.

NCALC re-introduced a ‘Police Liaison Representative’ role in March 2021 and this has been developed throughout the year. It remains to be seen how this role benefits the community and the activities of NHW.

**PLANNING**

**Planning Applications**

The change to Unitary Authority (01/04/21) altered the process for dealing with Planning Applications but maintained a Development Control department based on the Daventry District. The Parish Council has been required to hold extra-ordinary meetings to deal with planning applications and continues to make reference to the Village Design Statement (VDS), for Hollowell and Teeton Parish, adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 2008.

Chapter 5 of The Settlements and Country Side Local Plan (Part 2), adopted by Daventry District Council and retained by West Northamptonshire Council, relates to ‘Development in Rural Areas’. This indicates that development within the rural areas will be guided by a rural settlement hierarchy that will comprise the following categories:

• PRIMARY SERVICE VILLAGES;

• SECONDARY SERVICE VILLAGES;

• OTHER VILLAGES; AND

• SMALL SETTLEMENTS/HAMLETS.

Hollowell Parish remains classified within ‘Other Villages’ and Teeton is classified within ‘Small Settlements/Hamlets’. It is expected that this strategy and the VDS will continue to be applied by West Northamptonshire Council Development Control Officers to manage development.

**POCKET PARK**

**Annual Health & Safety Inspection**

I acknowledge the contribution of Councillor Mike Tomalin who carried out monthly inspections of the Park and play equipment. The issues raised in the Annual Health & Safety Inspection Report were considered by the Council and remedial work undertaken when and where necessary. This included the replacement of the support posts for the child swings which was an original item of equipment when the Park was opened.

National guidelines were issued relating to the use of Parks and Play equipment and Covid – 19. The Council took a pragmatic view of continuing to allowing access to the park and reminding parents to follow relevant guidelines when children used the play equipment.

**Hedgerow Maintenance, Grass Mowing and Weed Control**

The hedgerows on the north and west boundary were trimmed by Roger Heygate of Heygate Contracting Ltd. The east boundary hedge was planted approximately 20 years ago, when the Park was first opened, and been allowed to grow into a mature hedge. The Council determined it required laying and Councillor Crisp volunteered to undertake this task which was completed in March 2022.

The areas of grass are mowed by Mark Hazle of Elm Tree Garden Maintenance in accordance with the Council’s contract which provides for frequent cutting around play equipment where weed control has to be monitored.

**Hollowell Pocket Park Action Committee (HPPAC)**

Councillors Emily Curtis and Hannah Oswin are members of the HPPAC which assists with them providing liaison between the Council and the Committee. Details of the activities of the Committee are contained in the report from the Committee Chairman, a copy of which is available on the Council web site.

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Hollowell has continued to be served by a Public Bus Service (59 / 60) linking the village with Northampton and Market Harborough albeit with an amended and reduced service. This has been maintained with subsidies funded by West Northamptonshire Council and local Parish Councils. The Chairman of Spratton Parish Council, John Hunt, continued to co-ordinate response from the Parishes directly affected by the threatened withdrawal of services and this resulted in the provision of funds to continue the revised service from April 2022.

The Council has committed to provide £979.89 in support of the continued service.

**STREET LIGHTING**

The 32 Street Lamps located within the parish are managed under contract by E.ON Energy Solutions Limited. Faults are reported to Eon and remedial work undertaken as part of the maintenance contract.

This is separate from the supply of electricity which is determined through an Unmetered Supply Certificate (UMS). The supply is provided by Total Energies Gas & Power Ltd on a fixed price contract whereby the cost per kilo watt hour (kWh) is reviewed from 1 October each year.

The provision of Street Lighting remains a substantial element of the Parish budget and precept and will continue to be monitored to ensure it is cost effective particularly in regard to the current trend of substantial increases in the cost of electricity.

**TREE SURVEY**

The Councils Risk Assessment Policy requires a survey to be undertaken every three years to assess the general condition of trees located around the Parish that are the direct responsibility of the Council or their location may impact upon a Council asset. [E.g. ‘The Stumps’ bridleway adjacent to the Pocket Park]. A survey was undertaken in February 2021 and the Council proceeded with works recommended in the report provide by Maurice Fitch Tree Works Ltd., which extended into the summer of 2021 because of the variety of trees that required pruning.

**PARISH ACTIVITIES**

**Hollowell FAFF** - the third Fete and Flower Festival was organised by a group of residents and held in Hollowell on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 July 2021 in compliance with Covid restrictions that were still in place at that time. The event comprises open gardens, various stalls, displays around the village and teas in the Village Hall. The success of the event is reflected in the monies raised for the Church, Village Hall and Pocket Park with profit from 2021's FAFF an astonishing £7,430. This was a thousand more than in 2019 and was despite numbers being down on the Sunday, partly due to the heat. In all 365 people bought tickets for the FAFF - 30 fewer than in 2019. Children were free so the actual numbers attending would have been a little more. The Council acted to support the event by providing funding of £750.00 under the provision of section 137 LGA 1972. I acknowledge the time and effort invested by all those residents involved with organising the event, most notably that of Emily Curtis who co-ordinated the planning thereby ensuring a successful event.

**Hollowell Steam & Heavy Horse Show (HS&HHS), Annual Firework display** **and local pensioners Christmas lunch –** has been organised annually since 1986. Covid – 19 impacted the event and, with great reluctance, the organisers decided to cancel all events in 2020 and 2021. However, the HS&HHS event is to be held on the weekend of 2 & 3 July 2022 and Councillor Allen Eaton MBE is commended for undertaking the organisation of the show.

**Village Hall** – Residents volunteer as committee members to manage the Village Hall, located off Church Hill, Hollowell, below the church. The Council’s web site has a section dedicated to the Hall and details of booking arrangements. The Hall has not been available for local events or social functions because of Covid – 19 restrictions but as these were reduced it became possible to allow activities to resume. It was recognised that the Hall facilities may be required in response to emergency situations and the Council previously agreed to support a grant application for £200.00 of Section 137 LGA 1972 funds by “We are Hopewell” for the purchase of PPE and other items and provision of reserve fund. This equipment and funding remains in place.

**Village Planters** – three planters are located around the Millennium Bus Shelter located on The Green in Hollowell. Councillor Curtis, supported by neighbouring residents Jan & Alan Winterburn, had undertaken to maintain these and continue to do so. The Council acknowledges their kind efforts and refunds the cost of the plants and compost.

**We are Hopewell**

In October 2018 Hollowell residents Paul and Cheryl Charter set up a local support group with a mobile, email and Facebook link. Their introductory message reads: *We called it "Hopewell" because we wanted to fill a gap where anyone who is feeling "Hollow" and their "well" of strength has run dry can find a source of "Hope".*

The ‘We are Hopewell’ group has continued to support Hollowell and Teeton throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic. There was limited opportunity for social gathering (‘Coffee Mornings’) but these were re-introduced as soon as restrictions were eased.

**SUMMARY**

International, National and County issues continued to influence the activities of the Council. The world pandemic of Covid-19 imposed health and safety procedures on Council meetings. Elections, postponed from 2020 to May 2021 imposed costs on the Council even though no seats were contested. Local Government Reform (the abolition of the County and District / Borough Principal Councils and replacement with two Unitary Authorities – North and West Northamptonshire) continued apace with Parishes needing to keep abreast of developments and assessment of impact on Parish Council responsibilities. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in local support by residents undertaking collections of aid for Ukraine and then volunteering to accommodate Ukrainian citizens displaced by the war.

The Council remains vigilant of consequences of the Local Government Reform, particularly for provision of bus services and highway maintenance (gritting / snow clearance).

Councillors are either elected or co-opted onto the Council and contribute their time (and expense) to the Parish by not only attending meetings (to which they are ‘summoned’) but in managing projects, attending training courses and dealing with practical and policy issues.

I acknowledge the contribution each Councillor and the Clerk has made resulting in Hollowell & Teeton Parish Council maintaining a budget below £25,000:00.

A. G. Crisp (Chairman)