Norton Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting – Wednesday 8 May 2024

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2023/2024

The past year has been an extremely busy and productive time for Norton Parish Council and this report details the Council's principal activities since the Annual Parish Meeting last May. The Council has met nine times during that period, including three special meetings to discuss planning applications.

Planning matters

One of the key statutory powers of a parish council is the right to be consulted and to comment on planning applications relating to land and buildings in the parish. This is a responsibility that we take very seriously.

During the reporting period the Council has commented, in detail, on 22 separate planning applications involving a wide range of planning issues in the parish, and in doing so has maintained its excellent working relationship with the Local Planning Authority to the mutual benefit of both councils.

Two applications commented on by the Council are particularly significant:

23/01003/OUT - an outline application for residential development for up to 35 dwellings, vehicular access and associated works, on land between Cold Elm Cottage and The Teachers, Tewkesbury Road, Norton.

24/00086/OUT – an outline application for residential development for up to 42 dwellings with all matters reserved apart from access, on land adjacent to Lock's Paddock, Tewkesbury Road, Norton.

In both cases the Council has submitted robust objections to the proposals. These applications are still being considered by the Local Planning Authority and have yet to be submitted to the Borough Council's Planning Committee for a decision.

The Council is also aware of proposals to build a further 46 houses on land off Lime Close and met the developer, Centaur Land, who briefed councillors on their intentions. The Council understands that a formal planning application has been submitted, but this has still to be sent to the Council for comment.

The Council has also reviewed government proposals to amend permitted development rights and considered their potential effect on the parish.

The Council is reliant on the provisions of the Down Hatherley, Norton and Twigworth Neighbourhood Development Plan to help protect the parish from

unsustainable development. This Plan is now five years old and the Council is leading the three parishes' efforts to review and update the contents.

Governance

At the parish council elections last May there were only four nominations for the five available seats. Councillor Helen Costin was co-opted onto the Council to fill the remaining vacancy. Helen has proved to be an active and effective councillor and I thank her for all her efforts.

The Council obtained a seat on Gloucestershire Airport's Consultative Committee and Councillor Anne Marie Delaney was appointed to represent the parish on this body. I want to thank Anne Marie for representing our interests.

Following a request from a member of the public, the Council reviewed its procedures for public participation at Council meetings. After careful consideration, the Council decided to leave its current procedures unchanged.

The Council reviewed and adopted its key procedures, namely:

- Standing Orders;
- Code of Conduct;
- Publication Scheme for the Council's website;
- Financial Regulations; and
- Financial Risk Assessment.

As part of a national campaign, the Council has lobbied the National Association of Local Councils, and Laurence Robertson MP, for the right to hold virtual and remote council meetings. Currently, the law requires such meetings to be held in person. This requirement was suspended during the Covid pandemic and many local councils would like to see the law changed to permit virtual and remote meetings.

Financial

Despite reducing the parish council element of householders' Council Tax bills for the past two years, the rising cost of items like insurance and playing field maintenance has meant that the Council needed to increase Council Tax this year by 15.08% overall.

However, to put this into perspective, it should be noted that this percentage represents an increase in monetary terms of £1,900. The Council's precept for the financial year 2024/2025 (its annual income) is £14,500.

Responses to Government consultations

The Council has responded to three important consultations during the year, namely:

- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on permitted development rights.
- Local Government Boundary Commission for England on their proposals for Gloucestershire.
- Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan on proposals in the draft plan.

Norton Nurturing Nature

The arrangement between the Council and the residents of The Green for the maintenance of the Village Green and Pond continues to be a success. The Council thanks the local residents for maintaining the Green to such a high standard.

The Council is also grateful to Councillor Martin Griffiths for co-ordinating this arrangement and for acting as the Norton Nurturing Nature lead.

The Council has adopted a Biodiversity Plan in order to comply with its responsibilities under the Environment Act 2021.

Maintenance of the Play Space

A maintenance inspection plan has been put in place for the Play Space. The Council is in the process of re-negotiating its contract with UBICO for the maintenance of both the Play Space and the playing field.

Asset of Community Value and Tree Preservation Order applications

The New Dawn Inn has been a public house since 1827 and plays a prominent part in the social life of Norton.

Recognising its importance to the community, the Council has successfully applied to the Borough Council for the New Dawn Inn to be designated as an Asset of Community Value so that the building's use is protected.

Additionally, the Council has successfully obtained a Tree Preservation Order to protect the sycamore tree at the entrance to the New Dawn Inn from the A38. The tree was planted by the village to commemorate King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935.

Tackling Climate Change

The Council has published a Climate Change Guide showing how Norton's households can make a real difference, reduce their carbon footprint and save money. The Guide was distributed to all Norton News subscribers and a copy is available on the Council's website for residents to read or download.

Speed limits on the A38

As reported last year, the Council, working with Down Hatherley Parish Council, has requested Gloucestershire County Council (in its capacity as Highway Authority) to reduce the speed limit on the section of the A38 between Down Hatherley Lane and the junction with Old Tewkesbury Road from 50mph to 40mph.

After much discussion, the County Council agreed to conduct a Feasibility Study to determine whether there was a case for making a Traffic Regulation Order to reduce the speed limit. The Feasibility Study has been completed and its outcome is awaited.

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill

This Bill was introduced to implement the main recommendations of the Manchester Arena bombing inquiry. Referred to colloquially as “Martyn’s Law", the Bill requires those responsible for public venues to consider the threat from terrorism and implement appropriate mitigation measures.

As our Village Hall will be one of those public venues affected, the Council has been prominent in lobbying for a proportionate approach to the proposed anti-terrorism measures.

Thank You!

An Annual Report is the perfect opportunity to thank all those people who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make parish affairs run smoothly. In particular, I want to thank the following people:

The volunteers on the Village Hall Management Committee who run the Village Hall for the benefit of the parish. Using funds obtained by the Council under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Management Committee has embarked on an ambitious improvement plan for the building and the car park and I commend them for their efforts.

It would be hard to think of a more public-spirited group of people who rarely get the thanks they deserve, so I want to put that right now.

The Flood Warden, Sarah Clifford, and the Snow Warden, Jeremy Phelps, for diligently carrying out their responsibilities.

Brad Smith for editing and publishing the excellent Norton News.

Our Borough Councillor, Mark Williams and our County Councillor, Paul McLain for their unfailing support of the parish.

My colleagues on the Parish Council. It’s often forgotten that parish councillors are all unpaid volunteers, and there’s much more to the role than

just attending meetings so I want to thank them, especially the Vice-Chairman Councillor Anne Marie Delaney, for all their hard work.

The Parish Clerk. Selina Bostock is a truly outstanding Parish Clerk who keeps the affairs of the Council and the parish running smoothly. I want to thank her both for her dedication to the parish and for the support that she provides to me as Chairman.

And finally I want to thank you, the parishioners, for attending Council meetings like this, volunteering whenever volunteers are needed, and for generally taking an interest in parish affairs.

Richard F N Page
Chairman of the Council
8 May 2024