



Introduction

This is my 9th and last annual report as Chairman of Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council that I have the pleasure of presenting to you.

Ours is a rapidly growing parish, which makes it a busy one. This has been particularly true of the last twelve months. We have our frustrations, when things are not progressing as quickly as we would like them. We have had our knocks, when we have been on the receiving end of what I can only call mean criticisms. But shining above these we have had our achievements, of which we can be justly proud. I truly believe we have reached a level of maturity and strength of team that befits such a large and busy parish.

My style of chairmanship has always been to be as inclusive as possible. Whilst I insist on a couple of basic rules I try to encourage input to our sometimes lively debates from all attending – from members of the public as well as Council Members.

I believe that this has been a contributing factor in the increasing numbers attending our monthly meetings. Helping to foster a healthy public forum for steering the community in which we live in the direction that we would all like to see it go.

Changes

Due to health reasons, Cllr Joyce Parsons retired in September of last year. Joyce has been a real trooper in the Parish over many years, devoting countless hours to the community. Heartfelt thanks Joyce, for everything you have helped us to achieve.

Trevor Battle has also stepped down. Many thanks Trevor for your contributions – particularly with taking such a proactive lead on securing the defibrillator unit for the parish.

We welcome Graham Withnell, who was co-opted onto the Parish Council last November to replace Joyce.

Achievements

We have purchased a defibrillator for public use, which with the kind co-operation of Southern Co-operative and Heartstart Somerset has been

installed at the Co-operative store, Norton Mills Centre.



Speed through the parish continues to be a cause for concern with many of our parishioners. Pen Elm residents made a strong representation with the Council to ask for the speed limit along this stretch of road. Despite our efforts in support of this request we were unable to get Highways to reduce the limit, as conditions don't meet the nationally set criteria to which they must adhere. However, we have purchased Vehicle Activated Signs, which will shortly be installed to encourage them to keep their speed down.

In addition, we have obtained agreement with Somerset Highways to reduce the speed limit to 30mph from Burnshill through to Staplegrove.



With this, and the expansion of new houses from the Cross Keys the old location of the village signs seemed no longer appropriate so we have purchased and erected new village name signs. We ran an online on the choice of design for the Norton Dragon. The one you see was the clear favourite. We hope you like it!

Somerset County Council has rebuilt Brock House in Vilberie Close and so the temporary accommodation by the Village Hall has been removed and the recreation ground is in the process of being reinstated.

Environmental enhancement works

We see our village environment as being crucial to the wellbeing of our residents. We have arranged for bank repairs on Halse Water by the allotments. The repair consists of live willow weave, which is growing to provide a permanent defence against bank erosion as well as improving the overall

experience of walking along this stretch of public footpath.

We have contributed towards replacing a stile on the footpath just south of the railway line with a gate to improve accessibility. Unfortunately due to cropping of the adjacent field we have missed our slot for getting this done this summer, but we hope to have it completed in the autumn.

Paula Knott and Janet Gobey (with the help of a few friends!) have launched themselves into creating a small nature reserve by the playing fields. This ongoing project will take a few years to mature, but a promising start has been made. Our thanks to the Kilners for their donation of trees!

We have organised regular litter clearing in the village, bought an additional litter bin at Vilberie Close, and bought an additional dog bin for footpath by railway line.



Last but not least, we have repaired the wooden footbridge at the Hill Fort.

Youth Club closure

Despite sterling efforts by all involved it deeply saddens me that the Youth Club has had to close through a chronic shortage of children and volunteers. The Parish Council has agreed to oversee the disposal of assets and to hold remaining funds. A decision on how those funds may be distributed will be made in the near future.

Grants awarded:

One of our key objectives as your Parish Council is wherever possible to ensure that monies raised through the Parish Precept go to directly benefit the people of Norton. We have supported several village organisations with community grants over the last twelve months:

- £2451.04 to Village Hall for hand railings at the front entrance steps;
- £5000 to Village Hall for essential boiler replacement (50% of cost);
- £902 Norton News;
- £573.50 rent for Youth Club;
- £176.41 to All Saints Church yearly grant for electric for the church tower

In return for the free defibrillator training provided, a donation of £150 was made to the Heartstart charity.

Grants received:

The Parish has secured the following Grants money:

- £1,770.00 from Taunton Deane for 50% of the cost of repairing the hill fort bridge
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The Year Ahead

I reported a year ago that work had commenced on the undergrounding of the power cables behind the playing fields. I said then "Once done, we shall be able to pursue the acceptance of land from St. Modwen by TDBC to enable us to extend the playing fields." I added "It is going to take all our resolve to get this progressed."

I was not wrong. The sticking point is one of access. There is a strip of land at the entrance that was retained by the family who originally owned that land upon which the existing playing field stands. The family wants money for that land, but we have so far been unable to persuade TDBC to make any progress towards even finding out how much they want so that we can begin negotiations. We have reached the end of our tether and a complaint is in the process of being lodged by the Playing Field Committee with the local Ombudsman.

Thanks

Due to my own health issues, I am stepping aside from the Chair. However, I hope to continue on the Parish Council for as long as I am able.

So on this occasion I would like to extend my grateful thanks not only to all Parish Council Members for your work over the last 12 months, but also to members of the public attending whose interest in their community make it all worthwhile.

I would like to single out Paula Knott who as Deputy Chair has so ably stepped into the breach when I have been unable to attend meetings, particularly of late. Thanks Paula.

As always I reserve extra special thanks for our Parish Clerk Janet Gobey. For all her hard work and continued enthusiasm and support, without which we would not have achieved a fraction of what we have achieved.



Good fortune to my successor!



Ken Hayward
Chairman, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council