



Full Council and Open Spaces Committee

Jon Clarke: Chair of Northchurch Parish Council and the Open Spaces Committee.

Committee Members: Mark Somervail, Neil Pocock, Gordon Godfrey, Michela Capozzi, Lara Pringle, and non-councillors: John Porter and Claire James

Our Vision for Northchurch

This has been an exciting and successful year for the council. We welcomed a new, energetic, and highly qualified councillor, Michela Capozzi, and we awarded £500 to Trish Pocock in recognition of her 21 years of outstanding service at Northchurch Recreation Ground. The councillors want to make Northchurch a safe, healthy, and vibrant community so we developed seven challenging aims, which reflect residents' needs and aspirations:

- Help local people to improve their physical health and mental wellbeing
- Make our roads safer
- Protect and improve access to the Green Belt and other open spaces
- Preserve the environment and increasing biodiversity
- Preserve the historic identity of Northchurch
- Be open and accessible, and engage local people in decision making

These aims have shaped and focused our efforts and led us to many successes which I summarise below.

Aim: help local people to improve their physical health and mental wellbeing

Recreation Ground Improvements

We have developed an exciting £105k project to improve the recreation ground. Committee members consulted hundreds of park users, met representatives from play equipment companies, visited local parks, tried out equipment and assessed different surfaces. We used this research to produce a plan with options that will cater for residents of all ages, include a play area for 6 to 12-year-olds, a skateboard area and zip wire for teenagers, a mini football and basketball area for young people in general, a calisthenic adult exercise area for adults, new picnic tables and bins, and a meandering footpath with seating and planting for seniors. We will pay equipment companies to produce designs based on our options and we will consult residents before choosing the winning design. At the same time,



Northchurch Parish Council Annual Reports May 2020 to April 2021

we have approved the full use of the football pitch by Berkhamsted Tornadoes FC who have increased their numbers to run two adult Sunday League teams. If all goes well, we will soon have a range of exciting facilities that will improve the health and wellbeing of all residents.

Grants to Improve Health and Wellbeing

We have given health and wellbeing grants to a range of not-for-profit organisations which are detailed in the annual report of the Finance and General-Purpose Committee. We are also negotiating with Dacorum Borough Council to permit Bon Soiree to install outdoor tables and chairs. This will support residents working from home who need places in Northchurch to relax, socialize and drink coffee. We have made Sunnyside Rural Trust (SRT) our preferred contractor for maintenance work because they offer training and work experience for people with learning disabilities to acquire skills in rural activities.

Aim: make our roads safer

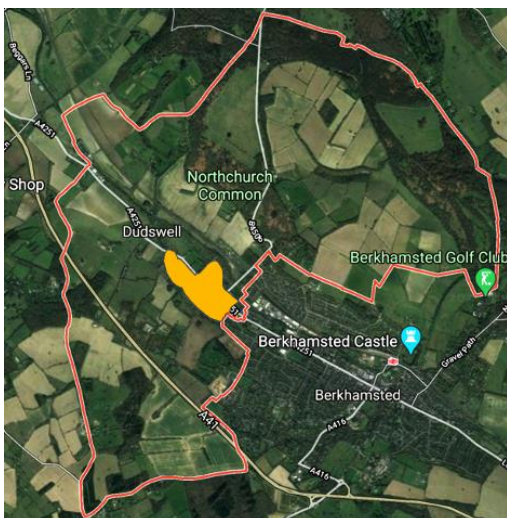
Working Party and Webpage

Our Working Party, chaired by Cllr Lara Pringle and supported by enthusiastic residents, has identified problem locations and is actively seek solutions. These include pruning trees and shrubs in the High Street at the crossing to the recreation ground to increase visibility and enable pedestrians to see approaching cars before crossing; and arranging for a Speed Indicator Device to be installed at a dangerous location in New Road. They have created a dedicated webpage highlighting the six locations where residents have said they feel most unsafe.

Aim: protect and improve access to the Green Belt and other open spaces

Open Spaces and Allotment Committees

As the yellow area of houses shows, Northchurch is 95% open space. So, we formed an Open Spaces Committee. To help us, we added two enthusiastic and knowledgeable non-councillors, John Porter and Claire James. Together with St Mary's School, we are exploring the possibility of converting their unused tarmac playground at the corner of New Road and the High Street to a community garden.



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We pointed out to Hertfordshire County Council that they had mistakenly left out Two Ponds Lane from the definitive rights of way map. They have agreed to add the lane to the map and install bridlesway signs at both ends. They have also removed the obstructions and cut back the overgrown hedge from the southern end of the lane so that, once again, local people can walk



Northchurch Parish Council Annual Reports May 2020 to April 2021

along this attractive lane. Our Allotment Committee chaired by Cllr. Gordon Godfrey has worked very hard to maintain the allotment in excellent condition and ensure that it is very pleasant open space for plot holders and visitors.

Aim: preserve the environment and increasing biodiversity

Wildlife Verge Project and Protecting the Environment

We have engaged Sunnyside Rural Trust on a five-year project to plant and maintain a wildflower verge between Dudswell and the Cow Roast. This will increase biodiversity and provide an important green corridor for wildlife.

We successfully opposed plans to build a care home on part of the Chiltern's AONB but unsuccessfully opposed the felling of 6 acres of trees in Dudswell. Representatives from the Forestry Commission have agreed to meet councillors in May to explain their decision. We have also started the lengthy, legal process to secure the Home Secretary's approval for recreation ground byelaws which will help us to prevent damage and antisocial behaviour.

Aim: preserve the historic identity of Northchurch

Opposing Major House Building and Protecting our Local Pub

Our Planning Committee, chaired by Cllr. Beryl Edwards has reviewed every planning application made in Northchurch meticulously and objected to any application that breached planning regulations and would harm other residents.

In December, the historic identity of Northchurch came under the biggest threat since WW2. DBC's plan to build 922 houses in Dacorum every year is based on out-of-date 2014 projections by the Office for National Statistics which are more than double the current projections. Northchurch was not mentioned once in the plan. Despite this omission, the centre of Northchurch would lose 40 acres of Green Belt and its population would more than double. In line with the views of residents and other stakeholders, we submitted detailed objections and requested that DBC revise their Local Plan to reflect current projections of housing demand. We are now waiting for DBC's response.

We also applied for AVC status for the George and Dragon Pub which would prevent them secretly selling the premises. We did this because the pub has been a community asset that is valued by local people. However, DBC rejected our application probably because lockdown meant that we were unable to provide current evidence of community use.

Our History Webpage

Richard North, the Treasurer for the Berkhamsted & District Local History Society, has kindly offered to write the history of Northchurch for a dedicated page on our website. This is a long-term project which is slowly taking shape.

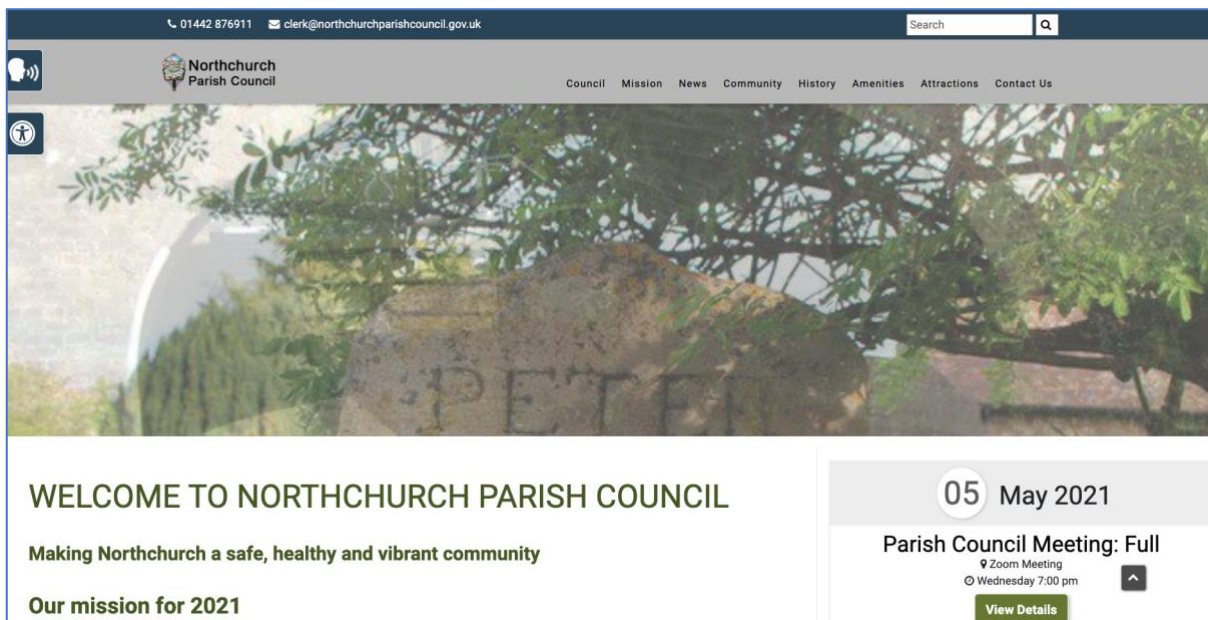


Northchurch Parish Council Annual Reports May 2020 to April 2021

Aim: be open and accessible, and engage local people in decision making

Online Meetings and Our New Website

Despite some initial confusion, the enforced move to online meetings has enabled more residents, and experts from further afield, to attend council and committee meetings e.g., at one meeting recently, over 50 residents attended. It has also made it easier for us to discuss and explain issues by sharing images, documents, and maps. For example, we used Google Street View to decide where to install safety barriers by the pedestrian traffic lights in the High Street. Our new website provides much clearer information for residents and, looking ahead, we are considering how to best carry out online surveys:



Financial integrity

Maintaining Our General Power of Competence

Our Clerk Usha Kilich continues to study for advanced qualifications which give her the knowledge and skills to ensure that the council operates lawfully and efficiently. They are also a vital ingredient in maintaining the Council's 'general power of competence'.

Improving Our Finances

Our Finance and General Purposes Committee (F&GP), led by Cllr. Michela Capozzi and Cllr. Mark Somervail, has worked with our Clerk to restructure our financial arrangements and committees, update our policies, and streamline our maintenance contracts. Our new policies will improve the way we work together, and the structural changes will strengthen our financial position and lead to long term savings e.g., transferring our 31 expensive-to-



Northchurch Parish Council Annual Reports May 2020 to April 2021

maintain streetlamps to Hertfordshire County Council; transferring our riskier investment funds to safer accounts; and moving our office in the High Street to a combination of home working for our clerk and free document storage at Sunnyside Rural Trust.

Thank You All

I would like to thank my fellow councillors all of whom are volunteers and devote their time and energy towards making Northchurch a more pleasant place to live; they have worked extremely hard this year. I would also like to thank our County Councillor, Terry Douris, our Borough Councillor, Lara Pringle for their constant support and the many residents who have helped us to have such a successful year, in particular Bob and Jean Farrer who maintain our beautiful flower beds. Northchurch Parish Council can look forward to a great year ahead.

Cllr Jon Clarke



Finance and General-Purpose

Michela Capozzi: Chair of the Finance and General-Purpose Committee (F&GP).

Committee members: Mark Somervail, Gordon Godfrey, and Jon Clarke

The committee's role

Finance

Our finance role involves monitoring all income and expenditure of the Council in accordance with our Financial Regulations. This includes financial management, financial risks, management strategy, internal and external audit, policy, and treasury transactional matters. Over the year, we have made recommendations on major financial transactions and the annual precept rate, and prepared the annual budget

General Purpose

Our 'general-purpose' role includes HR matters, complaints, policies and procedures, health and safety, non-maintenance contracts, and applications for grants and donations.

The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

We are assisted by our Clerk and RFO, Usha Kilich. The RFO is responsible for the proper administration of the Parish Council's financial affairs and the maintenance of any documents and records necessary for the effective fulfilment of the committee's duties.

A productive year

The Finance and General Purposes (F&GP) Committee had a productive year. In addition to the routine monthly review of 2020/21 budget and spend, the Committee also delivered the following:

New website and email address

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 required all local councils' websites or mobile apps to be more accessible and data protection regulations require councillors to use '.gov.uk' email addresses. The Committee procured the services of a new web host who could provide the standards required for the Council website and could facilitate the creation of the .gov.uk emails. Over a number of months the Committee members developed and edited the website to improve the look, feel and content. The new website and email addresses went live in



Northchurch Parish Council Annual Reports May 2020 to April 2021

January 2021.

Unitary Trust bank account

The Committee changed the council's current account from HSBC to the Unitary Trust bank. Banking with Unitary Trust has increased security around financial transactions as approval is now online and two councillors must approve every payment.

St. James' Place investments

As part of creating an Investment Strategy, the Committee reviewed the investments in St. James' Place and how they met the criteria of easy-access and low risk investments. The review established that, overall, the investment portfolio is low-medium risk and can be liquidated easily, however there were four funds that were a higher-risk level and would take longer to liquidate than the committee felt was appropriate. Therefore, the decision to sell these four funds was proposed and agreed and will be actioned in the coming weeks.

Grants and donations

A key role for the committee is to review applications for grants and donations and make recommendations to the full council. Following recommendations by the committee, the full council has given health and wellbeing grants to a range of not-for-profit organisations: £3675 to St Mary's School Association for a crossing patrol; £1000 towards Age Concern Dacorum; £1000 for scrubs for Watford Hospital; £250 to Essex and East Herts Air Ambulance, and £700 to Northchurch United Charities, led by Cllrs Sue Rees and Neil Pocock, who support local people in need. We have purchased one defibrillator which is installed on the outside wall of Tesco, and one inside Sunnyside Rural Trust's shop.





Northchurch Parish Council Annual Reports May 2020 to April 2021

In recent months, Northchurch Cricket Club, Northchurch Social Centre, and Berkhamsted and Hemel Hockey Club have indicated that they intend to apply for substantial grants. The committee has set aside (earmarked) funds if the full council votes to award these grants.

Parish Council Office

As the renewal date for the rental contract for the parish council office approached, the Committee consulted with the Clerk to understand the impact of working from home for the past year and what the preferred arrangements were.

It was agreed that the Clerk working from home had been successful and she was happy to continue. Notice has been served to the landlord and arrangements for cancelling broadband and organising a mobile phone and PO Box are on-going. The Committee has arranged for storage and meeting space at Sunnyside Rural Trust and NPC is very grateful to Matt Felix and his team.

O2 Mast

The contract for the O2 mast located at the allotments on New Road expired in May 2020. An agent, Cornerstone, for the telecommunications companies has sent a proposed Heads of Terms and the Committee continues to discuss rent and other details with them.

2021/22 Budget

In October 2020, the Committee reviewed and set the budgets for 2021/22. A review of the year-to-date spend for 2020/21 was used to consider the requirements for the coming year and the Chairs of the other committees were consulted on their forecast spend requirements to ensure these were included. The budget was used to set the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for the coming year.

Update of policies and governing documents

In March 2021, the Committee began reviewing the policies and governing documents NPC had. Missing documents were also identified and created. The revised versions were issued to all councillors for review and comment. Motions to adopt the 17 updated documents were proposed at Full Council meetings.

Supporting local business



The Committee has been in discussion with local business, Bon Soiree, on using the green area next to the café as a seating area for its customers. A proposal has been agreed for a trial period of 3 months starting in May. However, there are some discussions still to be had with Dacorum Borough Council who own the land but it is hoped these will not impede the plans.

Cllr Michela Capozzi



Planning Committee

Beryl Edwards: Chair of the Planning Committee.

Committee members: Neil Pocock, Gordon Godfrey, Sue Rees, Mark Somervail

We reviewed 30 applications

The Planning Committee of the Northchurch Parish Council has met virtually throughout the last twelve months. We have discussed thirty applications, mainly small extensions, front porches or work to trees. One application of interest was to build two blocks of semi-detached houses at the rear of Grade II Listed Rosemary Cottage, approached from Chapel Crofts but this was refused by Dacorum Borough Council, as well as by the Parish Council.

We opposed the Local Plan

Considerable time was spent discussing Dacorum Borough Council's Local Plan by the whole council ably assisted by other residents. Our comments were sent to the Borough Council which were that we wanted no development on land designated Green Belt or AONB. Also that the figures involved were wrongly assessed.



We will continue to monitor all applications and comment appropriately so that Northchurch can remain its true self.

Cllr Beryl Edwards



Allotment Committee

Gordon Godfrey: Chair of the Allotment Committee.

Committee members: Neil Pocock, Susan Rees

A challenging year

Fortunately for those people with allotments their rights to tend their plots wasn't affected under lock down regulations as long as social distancing rules were complied with, being classed as 'essential exercise' and also falling under the heading of 'food production' . Some of our elder plot holders were affected by shielding rules so could not attend their plots.

Health membership

Last spring and summer when passing either allotment site they looked to be in full production, with a good number of plot holders on their gardens. The annual 'Potato growing competition' was held as usual

At present all plots are taken and there is a small waiting list, but this situation is fluid, changing from month to month.

Sunnyside Rural Trust (SRT)



SRT were able to complete the building of their new eco-friendly buildings which have solar panels and a large underground tank which collects the rainfall from the buildings roofs through the guttering systems. The new centre will streamline their operations and increase their client capacity enabling them to expand their operations.

Cllr Gordon Godfrey



Road Safety Working Party

Lara Pringle: Chair of the Road Safety Working Party

Committee members: Michela Capozzi, Neil Pocock, Gordon Godfrey, Jon Clarke, Mark Somervail

A Successful Partnership

The Northchurch Parish Council (NPC) Road Safety Working Party (RSWP) has again worked closely with the Northchurch Go20 campaign team throughout 2020-21 and together we achieved some great successes.

New Speed Indicator Device (SID) on New Road

Following the successful application to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for a SID to be installed on New Road, the installation was completed in March 2021. Unfortunately, the SID appears to have stopped working so this has been reported to Herts Highways for immediate action

Road Safety review for Northchurch

Following the presentation of the Go20 petition to Herts County Council (HCC), a motion at the HCC meeting in March 2018 agreed to the review of road safety in Northchurch. HCC has now started this review.

Cut-back of verge at road crossing

The RSWP took an action to get the trees and bushes alongside the pedestrian crossing opposite the recreation ground cut back in order to improve visibility for both motorists and pedestrians.

Both Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) and Herts County Council (HCC) were contacted to establish ownership/responsibility for maintaining the verge. Whilst neither organisation had records to show they are responsible for the maintenance of this section of verge, HCC agreed to undertake the reduction in vegetation as they maintain the verge along the High Street adjacent to this section.

The work has now been completed and visibility is much improved but this will need to be monitored as foliage on the remaining bushes grows.

CC Terry Douris has also asked for an additional light to be installed to shine down on the exit of the alleyway on to the kerbside.

Police Crime and Commissioner Road Safety Camera Van

Members of Go20 and the RSWP have submitted 'Community Concern Forms' registering their interest in the Road Safety Camera Van being deployed to Northchurch. The forms



Northchurch Parish Council Annual Reports May 2020 to April 2021

provide information on speeding hot-spots where it is believed the camera van should be located to reduce speed. The forms are being reviewed and a decision is awaited.

Congestion caused by waiting buses

It was observed that buses stop and wait for a period of time at the bus stop on the northbound carriage of the High Street near the junction with Darrs Lane, and this causes road safety and environmental issues.

The RSWP drafted and sent a letter to the bus company to highlight the issues this causes. A response is yet to be received.

Local Plan

A response to the Local Plan was submitted on behalf of the RSWP highlighting the major concerns the proposed developments would have on Northchurch.

Strategic approach to road safety in Northchurch

To date the improvements to road safety in Northchurch have been achieved through ad-hoc applications to HCC or the OPCC and the RWSP agreed that a more strategic approach is required. The new speed management strategy for Hertfordshire should provide an opportunity for the RSWP to work more closely and strategically with HCC.

No-idling signs outside Tesco

A proposal to install signs requesting engines are turned off was made after reports of vehicles left idling outside Tesco.

This has been investigated with Herts Highways (HH) who reported that no official 'no idling' signs have been approved by the Department of Transport, but a template for a sign was provided and further discussion with HH is required. It was suggested that the design of the no-idling signs outside St Mary's school, created by the children, could be used for the sign outside of Tesco.

Further funding from OPCC

Another round of funding from the OPCC has opened and a form has been submitted to register our interest. It is proposed to request funds for a SID on Darrs Lane.

New gateway on the A4251

After the successful application for funding towards a new gateway on the A4251 as you enter Northchurch from Tring, the delivery of the gateway has been delayed due to changes in personnel in HCC and OPCC. However, members of the RSWP have contacted both parties and have been told this is now progressing. CC Douris also contributed £1,300 towards the costs of the gateway.

Michela Capozzi