



NORTHCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Northchurch Parish Council annual newsletter.

2022 was a very busy year for the Council. As well as the usual maintenance and upkeep around the village we also delivered a number of exciting projects and initiatives. We continued to invest the money allocated to NPC from the Bearroc Park development to improve existing and provide new infrastructure in Northchurch. All the work described in this newsletter has been delivered by the 8 volunteer Councillors who form NPC, along with our long-standing Clerk, and some wonderful members of our parish.

It was with sadness that we said goodbye to our Chair and long-serving colleague Cllr Jon Clarke in January 2023 and we thank him for his leadership and hard work during his time at NPC.

In May, the local elections will be held and we'd be delighted to have new people join us. If you might be interested in joining us, we've added some information at the end of the newsletter on what a Councillor does and what you might be able to do for Northchurch.

Cllr Michela Capozzi
Chair of Northchurch Parish Council

Willow Trees

After noticing more and more branches falling from the willows in the recreation ground the Council engaged an arborist to undertake a survey to tell us about the health and condition of the trees. The report informed us that the trees are 5-10 years away from the end of their natural life and the number of dead branches, and the risk they posed to the public, required urgent attention. A tree surgeon was employed to remove all dead branches over 50mm diameter and of the 13 trees, 12 were reduced in height and width by 2m and, unfortunately, one tree had to be felled as the trunk was rotten nearly across its full width. There are plans to introduce a new generation of willows to replace the existing ones when they reach the end of their life



Wildflower Verge

Our wildflower verge project, started in 2021, alongside the A4251 between Northchurch and Cow Roast, continues to flourish. Sunnyside Rural Trust worked hard through Spring and Summer to cultivate the land and allow the natural flora to flourish. We installed 'Do Not Cut' signs to ensure no-one disturbed the growing wildflowers and the result was a verge full of insects and a beautiful selection of flowers.





Trees at Canal Lock 47

In 2021 the privately-owned land adjacent to Lock 47 on the canal in Dudswell was cleared of 6 acres of trees and shrubs. The loss of the trees was not only devastating to the beautiful landscape but the wildlife lost a haven. Local residents, lead by Angela Shields, took action and gained permission from the Canal and River Trust to plant trees and shrubs along a 2m wide strip of land running along the canal bank. With a donation of £1000 from NPC and a grant of £350 from the Queen's Green

Canopy secured by Cllr Clarke to purchase the trees, a group of dedicated and passionate volunteers spent 2 hot days in March digging and planting. In the next few years the appearance and habitat for wildlife will be restored.

Keeping Northchurch Tidy

In January NPC was delighted to renew the contract with Sunnyside Rural Trust (SRT) for the maintenance and upkeep of open spaces in Northchurch in 2022. SRT is an important charity for NPC as it supports young people and adults with learning disabilities by providing training and work experience. The team does a wonderful job in cutting our grass areas, trimming hedges, maintaining flower beds, litter-picking and emptying bins in the recreation ground. SRT also take on additional adhoc work for us such as tree and hedge removal and laying turf.



Upgrade of facilities at the recreation ground

Phase 1 of the upgrade of the facilities at the recreation ground was completed in 2022. An investment of £80,000 has provided new play equipment suitable for 6-12 year olds; a multi-goal on an extended tarmac surface; a zip-wire; an adult exercise area and a refurbished skate ramp. There were concerns from local residents that the new equipment would diminish the open feeling of the recreation ground but the feedback since completion of the project has praised the upgrade and users continue to enjoy all aspects of the recreation ground. The number of users of the playground has increased and feedback from local residents and visitors has been very positive.





Senior Seating Area

All the work to improve facilities for the children of Northchurch got Cllr Edwards thinking about the senior residents of the Parish and what they would enjoy at the recreation ground. Her idea was somewhere peaceful to sit with friends and chat and admire the view. This is how the idea for a senior seating area came about. Cllr Edwards came up with ideas for how the area should look and we got advice from Sunnyside Rural Trust about suitable plants to surround the benches and provide a peaceful environment. The area was completed in March and people can often be seen making the most of the space. Work continues to get the footpath right as the

original installation hasn't met our requirements but we hope that will be sorted early in 2023. We would like to thank our County Councillor Terry Douris for his donation of £1000 from his Locality Budget towards the cost of the area.

Grants and Donations

In 2022 NPC was proud to be able to donate towards deserving local projects. In total we donated just over £41,000 to local charities. We continued to support St Mary's primary school with the provision of the crossing patrol and swimming lessons for Year 4 – both considered very important for the children's safety. We were also delighted to support the Hannah Marie Dance Academy whose students had qualified to represent the UK at a 5-day event in San Sebastian, Spain. We also gave to the Northchurch United Charity who help families in Northchurch. But our biggest donation was to Northchurch Social Centre. Urgent works to replace the roof were needed to secure the future of the building and the Council saw this as an important investment for the residents of Northchurch.

Road Safety

2022 saw a renewed effort from the Councillors to pursue Herts County Council (HCC) about road safety in Northchurch following the loss of momentum due to Covid. The Council recognises the safety issues along the High Street and Tring Road due to speeding vehicles and has agreed to fund a feasibility survey by HCC for a pedestrian crossing from High St South to the recreation ground. The Council's Road Safety Working Party is working with members of the Go20 group to raise other road safety concerns with HCC.

In our 2021 newsletter we wrote about our struggles to get HCC to recognise the dangers posed by parking on the bend at the bottom of Darrs Lane and at the entrance into Mandelyns. We didn't let the matter drop and in 2022 we finally saw our efforts repaid as HCC agreed to install double yellow lines at both locations. We are assured these will be complete by the end of March 2023.

Planning

The NPC Planning Committee had another busy year reviewing upwards of 50 planning applications. Applications were mainly for small scale development like front porches, single and double storey extensions and, in some instances, work to trees, which are always referred to the Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) Tree Officer. One particular application was for a five-dwelling development on Hamberlins Farm. NPC made no comment, but DBC rejected the application and the applicant has gone to appeal.

A welcome outcome of the DBC Local Plan consultation in 2021 was the recognition of the damage being done by the number of visitors to the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation, a protected area which includes Ashridge. A 12.6km 'Zone of Influence' has been created around the Area, which includes Northchurch, to provide protection. A mandate has been issued by Natural England, to all local authorities within the Zone, prohibiting them from approving any planning applications that would result in a net increase in dwellings. This mandate aims to limit the potential for an increase in visitor numbers and will remain in place until a mitigation strategy is agreed by all local authorities involved.

What's in store for 2023.....

Following on from Phase 1 of the upgrade work in the recreation ground, we are planning Phase 2. The scope of work is yet to be confirmed as the Council considers what is needed and listens to suggestions and feedback from our residents.

We shall continue to pursue road safety concerns with Herts Highways and work closely with the residents' representative group, Go20.

But the biggest milestone for 2023 will be the **Local elections** on 4th May 2023. Have you thought about becoming a Parish Councillor? Whether you have or not until now, you will probably have some questions after reading our newsletter so we thought we'd answer the most common ones.

Why become a Parish Councillor?

If you enjoy living in Northchurch, have a particular hobby or interest that aligns with our Mission or are interested in what happens to Northchurch in the future, then you might enjoy being a Councillor. You represent local residents' interests to the Borough and County Councils for issues or concerns that fall under their responsibility.

What would I do as a Councillor?

Northchurch Parish Council has a relatively large portfolio of assets to manage which makes it an interesting Council to be a part of. The old adage "many hands make light work" could not be truer and being a Councillor does not mean giving up hours and hours of your time. We share the areas of responsibility between us according to interest and experience. There are a few Committees to help focus on specific topics so you join the ones you can help with.

How much time would I spend on Council business?

The Council meets every six weeks on Monday evenings, for about 1½ hours. The Planning Committee meets every 3 weeks to meet DBC timescales for responses to planning applications. Other Committees meet as often as required. Lots of business is conducted over emails to make debating and decision-making as efficient as possible.

Who would make a good Councillor?

A successful Council comprises local residents from all sorts of backgrounds and experiences. This helps ensure the interests of our residents are fairly represented. You will need to be committed to the role and willing to participate in committees and meetings. You'll be willing to put your opinion forward but also participate in debates and be able to compromise to reach agreement with fellow Councillors.

What skills would I need?

If you have an interest in gardening, landscaping or rent an allotment, you could support us with the Open Spaces maintenance contract and management of the allotments on New Road; if you like looking at spreadsheets and budgets then you'd be right at home on our Finance committee; if you were concerned about the impact of the DBC Local Plan, or about development and changes in Northchurch generally, then the Planning Committee needs you; if you enjoy using social media or have an interest in website management then you can help enhance our on-line presence.

These are just a few examples of how your talents and interests can be used to support your local community and maintain Northchurch as the flourishing and welcoming village it is.

If you'd like to chat about becoming a Councillor please get in touch with the Chair or Clerk at clerk@northchurchparishcouncil.gov.uk