



Northchurch Parish Council News December 2021

Jon Clarke: Chair of Northchurch Parish Council

Our Vision for Northchurch

The last 18 months have been challenging but rewarding. We have had many successes and a one or two disappointments. Our eight councillors, who are all unpaid volunteers, give up their time to make Northchurch a safe, healthy, and vibrant community. After speaking to many local residents, we developed six key aims:

- 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 which I summarise below.



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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 which is due to be installed in January or February 2022 depending on weather conditions.





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Over the last 12 months, Councillors consulted hundreds of park users, met representatives from play equipment companies, visited local parks, tried out equipment and assessed different surfaces.



Based on this research, we produced a plan to cater for children and adults to improve their well-being and increase their fitness levels in a friendly and dynamic environment while promoting inclusion and building stronger social ties. This includes a play area for 6 to 12-year-olds, a zip wire for teenagers, a mini football and basketball area for young people in general, a calisthenic adult exercise area for adults, and new picnic tables and bins. For the benefit of older residents, Sunnyside Rural Trust will be installing a meandering footpath with seating and planting running from the main entrance to the Mandelyn's side entrance. We have kept the football pitch area, which makes up 90% of the recreation ground, free for general exercise, strollers and dog walkers. I am also delighted that Tornadoes FC have increased their numbers to run two adult Sunday League teams and we have given them exclusive use of the pitch for their Sunday matches.



After a tendering process, we chose a design by Prodludic, which we felt was exciting and best matched our criteria. Prodludic are an international company with over 30 years' experience in designing and manufacturing outdoor playgrounds and sports areas.

[Grants to Improve Health and Wellbeing](#)

Over the past two years, we have given health and wellbeing grants to a range of not-for-profit organisations including £20,000 towards a new astroturf pitch for the Hockey Club; £10,000 towards new practice nets for the the Cricket Club; £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 £600 to Northchurch United Charities, led by Cllrs Sue Rees and Neil Pocock, who support local people in need. We also purchased and installed a defibrillator on the outside wall of Tesco, and inside Sunnyside Rural Trust's shop in New Road.



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We want to support the increasing number of residents who are working from home and need places in Northchurch to relax and socialize. To this end, we have given Derek Freeman, the owner of Bon Soirée Café permission to install outdoor tables and chairs in the green space outside his café. Bon Soirée is a great asset for Northchurch providing a warm, cozy atmosphere serving freshly prepared and delicious food. I can recommend their homemade Truffle Tortellini, Asparagus and Green beans served in a lemon and thyme butter. Derek hopes to install the outdoor seating early in 2022.



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.



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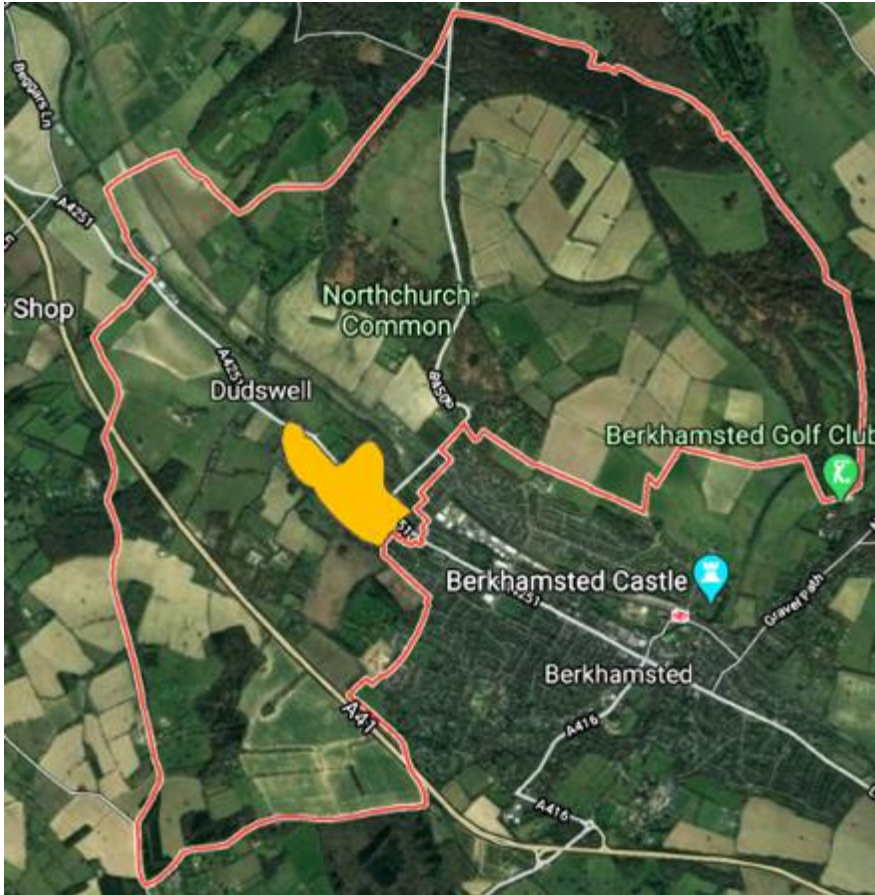
Aim: make our roads safer

On behalf of Northchurch Go20, we successfully applied to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for a New Speed Indicator Device (SID) on New Road which was installed on New Road, March 2021. However, a parish council has no control over other road safety measures. These decisions are made by the County Council. The best we can do is identify the areas which residents tell us are dangerous and inform the County Council. These dangerous locations include speeding in the High Street, New Road and Darrs Lane, and dangerous parking on the Darrs Lane bend and at the entrance to Mandelyns. We explain these problems in detail on our website and have asked the County Council repeatedly for traffic calming measures and parking restrictions. So far, the County Council have turned down all our requests. Instead they have decided to spend their money on a 20 MPH speed limit in the Mandelyns to solve a problem that doesn't appear to exist. The proposal to install a 20mph zone on the Springwood area was put before the residents in a questionnaire in October 2021. There was a 16.3% return of which 74% were in favour. This result will be considered by Herts County Council and a second public consultation will take place in April and May 2022. We will keep trying to persuade the County Council to focus on dangerous locations. We also applied for mobile speed cameras to be deployed on Darrs Lane, Tring Road and New Road but these were all rejected due to lack of suitable locations.



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



As you can see from the orange boundary line, Northchurch is 95% open space. And we would like to keep it that way.

Our Open Spaces Committee, 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.

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



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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.

The Council has objected to both applications to build a Care Home on the Golf Driving Range, on the grounds of its being in the Green belt and the AONB and that it is a luxury care home only affordable by millionaires and not our residents. The first application in October 2020 was refused by Dacorum Borough Council. We await the outcome of the second application submitted in November 2021.



We tried very hard to oppose the felling of 6 acres of beautiful and healthy trees by the canal in Dudswell. Sadly, the Forestry Commission, who decide on these issues, gave the landowners permission to cut them all down which he has done. We discovered that the Forestry Commission pays lip-service to its stated aims of preserving the countryside and the environment and rarely, if ever, stands in the way of landowners. In November, we voted to give Dudswell residents £1000 to replace the trees and shrubs that lined the canal bank but were cut down. We are just waiting for approval from the Canal and River Trust to plant on their land.



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Aim: preserve the historic identity of Northchurch



In December, the historic identity of Northchurch came under the biggest threat since WW2. Dacorum Borough Council's (DBC) plan to build 922 houses in Dacorum every year, based on out-of-date and inflated projections of housing need, meant Northchurch losing 40 acres of Green Belt and doubling its population. 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 delighted that DBC withdrew their plan but we are not confident that they will put the needs and aspirations of local people before their desire to please property developers. We wait with trepidation for their new plans.

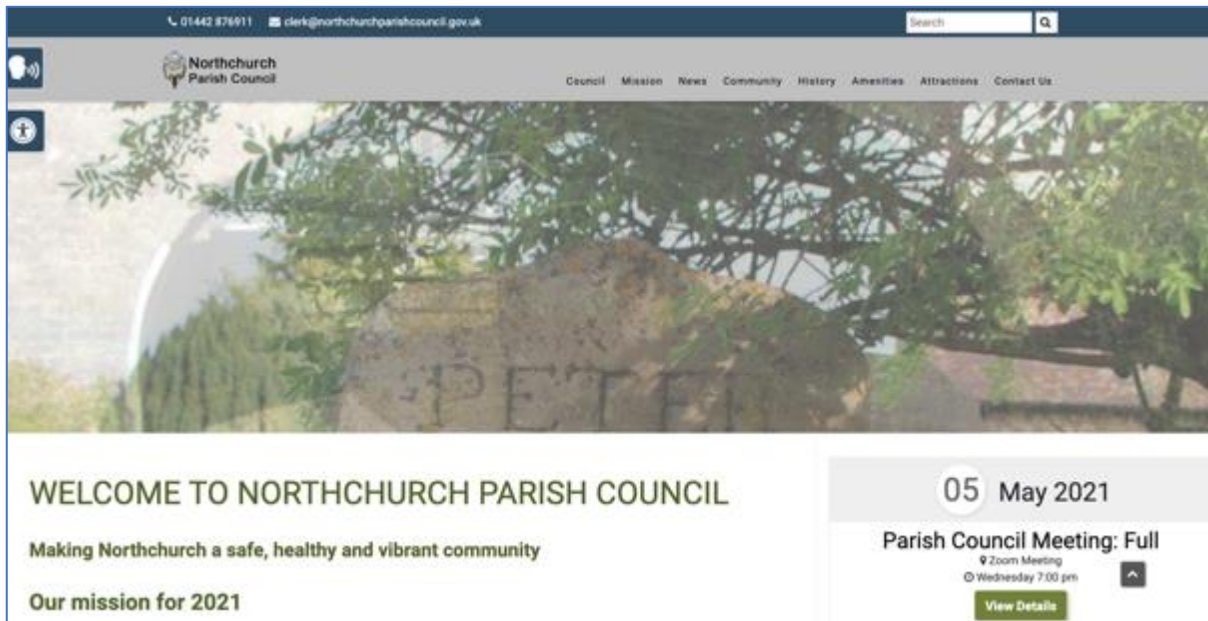
We also applied to Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) for an order to prevent the George and Dragon secretly selling the premises. We did this because the pub is a community asset valued by local people. However, DBC rejected our application.



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

We have a new website full of useful information about Northchurch and the council's activities.



We have restructured our committees, updated our policies, and streamlined our maintenance contracts. For example, we owned 36 expensive-to-maintain and aging streetlamps: it cost us £400 every time a bulb needed replacing which was a huge drain on our budget. So we transferred these lights to Hertfordshire County Council. We have transferred some riskier investment funds to safer accounts, and moved out of our office in the High Street to a combination of home working for our clerk and free document storage at Sunnyside Rural Trust.

Merry Christmas to you all

I hope you can see how busy my fellow councillors have been over the past year and a half: Mark Somervail, Neil Pocock, Gordon Godfrey, Michela Capozzi, Lara Pringle, Susan Rees. All are volunteers and devote their time and energy towards making Northchurch a more pleasant place to live. I would also like to thank Usha Kilich our wonderful and highly qualified clerk, Bob and Jean Farrer who maintain our beautiful flower beds, and Trish



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Pocock who we awarded £500 in recognition of her 21 years of outstanding service to our Recreation Ground.

Northchurch Parish Council can look forward to a great 2022.

Cllr Jon Clarke