

## **Dingley Parish Council**

### **Chair's Report to the Annual Village Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

Each year the Parish Council (PC) is required to hold an Annual Village Meeting, to report to the community what actions the Council has taken over the year, and to invite discussion of issues affecting the village and how the Parish Council and the community might approach them. This year the meeting was joint with the Village Hall Committee (VHC) AGM, thus bringing together the two main organisations supporting and enhancing the community. The VHC could be seen as the 'internal' body – for example organising events within the village, while the PC on the other hand is the 'external' group – a channel of communication from village to the outside world – Kettering Borough Council (KBC), Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), local MPs and national government. The PC has little power, but is recognised by these bodies who consult us on many issues – planning, highways, policing, and so on. Where we are invited to comment we are listened to and can influence decisions. We also co-operate with neighbouring villages especially along the Welland Valley where there are shared issues – such as broadband supply.

The Parish Council is therefore important, and especially now in these uncertain times of cuts in services, and the collapse of the County Council, which will only be carrying out 'statutory' duties – mainly children's services and adult social care. Increasingly the message to parishes seems to be 'you're on your own.'

#### **Highways**

The Parish Council has a responsibility to monitor the highways in the village, and to take up any matters with the county authority (highways are a county, not local, responsibility). The village is bisected by a major trunk road, which has the added disadvantage for us of being a through route for emergency vehicles, which prevents any plan for traffic calming. Dingley is also the first village encountered by traffic on the road from Corby, and its speed limits and bends can be unexpected. In the recent Village Survey conducted for the PC by Rob Hinxman, the A427 was not surprisingly top of community concerns. As a result we invited the County highways team to visit Dingley last summer, and they spent several hours with us on a 'walkabout' and agreed to act where they could to help. There was little they could offer for limiting the heavy traffic on the main road, but they agreed to help alleviate the use of the minor roads – Braybrooke Road and Sutton Lane – by installing signage to deter heavy lorries.

The serious fatal accident early this year led us to contact the police and highways, on both the dangers of the A427 and on the problems of using the minor roads as diversions. We also have written to our MP. The police response was thoughtful and concerned, but in the end it proved impossible to make any changes to the road or modify road markings. We do all we can to minimise speeding and danger on the A427, and we are especially grateful to Maureen Anderson and others who volunteer for the Community Speedwatch.

#### **Footways and footpaths**

Footways are the raised pedestrian pavements beside roads; footpaths are away from roads – across fields, for example. We report problems with the footways to the Borough and County authorities – for example overgrowth of vegetation or slippery moss. Owing to the severe cuts in services such work at county level will be very restricted. Tony Lucas as footpath warden keeps an eye on the footpaths, though this year his report was limited by the severe recent weather conditions. The Parish Council does all it can to address problems with our roads, pavements and footpaths, but we recognise there is always more to be done. We are as vigilant as possible

on all matters on concern; we very much welcome comments and suggestions from the community.

## **Capital projects**

The great improvements to the Village Hall were noted, and the external cladding of the building was maturing to an attractive finish. Internally the hall also was greatly improved, and villagers were reminded that the hall is very much a community asset and is there to be used by all. In this respect the departure of Cllr Anita Linsell and her consequent resignation from the PC were noted, and Anita was warmly thanked by the meeting for her great contribution to the village. The main project this year has been the installation of a defibrillator at the Village Hall. There will be a training event organised in the near future.

Even in these tough times there are occasional small pockets of funding available, mainly from Kettering Borough Council, and we are always pleased to hear of suggestions for small scale projects ready for us to apply to funding sources when they occur. We are grateful to 'our' Kettering Borough Councillor David Howes for advising us in this respect.

## **Dingley Park**

We are pleased to report that the 'Friends of Dingley Park' scheme is again active, and access to the Park for members is now open. We are still awaiting clarification from Hall about access across the Drive, so for the present please use the Sutton Lane entrance.

## **Transport**

The withdrawal of the bus service is the result of the ending of subsidy by NCC. We are advised that there is a Desborough community bus, and we have been invited to participate. We don't know how many people would actually use this service, nor do we know what is offered, but we can pass on any requests for information.

## **Litter Pick**

The Litter Pick this year was on 29<sup>th</sup> April. Luckily the awful weather relented, and as a result we had a very good turnout of volunteers. It is a dismal job to have to do, but satisfying once done, with the appearance of the village greatly improved for passers-by. Our thanks to all who made this such a success.

## **Neighbourhood watch and Policing**

Rob Hinxman, NW co-ordinator, reported:

At last year's AVM it was reported that Dingley remained a largely crime free village although in the preceding 12 months of 2016-17 there had still been 7 reported incidents. The picture for 2017-18 is similar. Based on reports to the Police or to Neighbourhood Watch at least 11 incidents are known to have occurred. There would not appear to have been any burglaries in the Village during the year but there have been thefts from the outside of properties, some car and van break-ins and a couple of acts of vandalism/criminal damage. The police have also responded to "domestic incidents" on at least three occasions. More recently lead has been taken off the Church roof. The incidents that have been reported occurred throughout the Village – Harborough Road, Home Close, Sutton Lane, Church Lane – so please remain vigilant and take note of anyone or anything that you think is suspicious. Record make, colour, and registration details of vehicles, descriptions of people, their clothing, time you saw them. The information and your watchfulness may help to solve or even prevent a crime. If you are a victim

of a crime, no matter how trivial please do report it to the Village Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator and to the Police. It contributes to the picture of rural crime and can influence the allocation of resources.

Despite the threat of such events the Village Survey undertaken in 2017 indicates that nearly all Dingley residents feel relatively safe and secure from crime. Equally important is Neighbourhood Watch's role in supporting vulnerable or isolated people living in the Community, all the household members who completed questionnaires indicated that they had someone to whom they could turn for support if ever they were in need.

Rob has been the village NW Co-ordinator for a long time and would very much value a volunteer to take over this important role. Ideally there will be 'patch' co-ordinators for each road in the village, as well as the overall co-ordinator. There have been two expressions of interest, but do please contact Rob if you would be willing to take on one of these roles. We are a low crime village, but with the strain on police resources, and our location right on the edge of the county, it would be good to have as much local resource as we can.

### **Emergency Planning**

Related to neighbourhood watch is the question of emergency planning. The Grenfell Tower disaster alerted all local organisations to the question of what plans might be in place if such an event happened locally. This includes parish councils too – several neighbouring parishes have such plans in place. The AVM discussed this at some length, and it was agreed that we do not need anything elaborate, but should consider a modest plan in case of an emergency –for example a serious lorry fire in the village. The PC will produce a plan, drawing on the examples of other villages in the county.

### **Vacancies**

We are a very small village, and our maximum number of councillors is five. We are very pleased that despite our size we are recognised in local government as a very effective Parish Council. We now have a vacancy. Do please let me know if you are interested. The PC is more important than ever in these times when support and resources from local government are reducing. Being a Parish Councillor is not particularly onerous. If anyone would like to know more, do please get in touch with myself or another of our councillors. We would very much like to hear from you.

Finally, I would like to thank:

Borough Councillor David Howes, County Councillor Allan Matthews; Parish Clerk Justina Medwell for her invaluable support and guidance; The Village Hall Committee; Everyone in the village who has helped us, and my personal thanks to my fellow councillors.

Bill Jones Chair, Dingley Parish Council May 2018

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