

Cogenhoe & Whiston Annual Parish Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 28th October 2020, 7.30pm
Via zoom

In accordance with The Local Authorities & Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority & Police & Crime Panel Meetings) (England & Wales) Regulations 2020 this meeting was held by video conference call.

1. Welcome, Mr. Jon Bailey, Chairman Parish Council

Cllr Bailey **welcomed** everyone to the meeting that had been postponed since April 2020 due to the pandemic.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were **received** from Cllr Cunnington, Cllr Packer, Cllr Grubb, Cllr Usher, Maggie Irvine & John Grubb.

15 attendees were present at the meeting (not checked to electoral role as no items that were to be voted on).

3. District & County Councillor's reports

CCllr Michael Clarke **reported** that it had been a very busy year at NCC with 2 main streams of work. The first was to ensure that NCC was on a secure financial footing, with 'the sins of the past left behind' and that money was transferred to reserves to be split between the 2 new unitary authorities. The new shadow authority had been formed and officers had been recruited, with Ian McCord acting as the leader. Unfortunately, as the local elections had been postponed there is no mandate for them to work within but the efforts are to ensure that the 3/4m residents of Northamptonshire notice minimal differences after vesting day. The pandemic has been the second main focus, with NCC working with Public health England to minimize the impact of the virus. Numbers had remained fairly low, and it was expected that would remain the case. He praised the excellent voluntary work that had taken place in the parishes to support residents.

Q Has the £60m debt been cleared?

A This debt relates to capital expenditure not revenue and it was typical for local authorities to have this level of debt which is through long-term loans with low interest rates and a 50 year repayment schedule.

Q How is covid affecting budgets at NCC

A £35 m has been provided from central government to support the costs involved which at present was doing so.

DCllr Hollowell also explained that SNC had been given central government monies to distribute through grants to small businesses via a new website and to cover the cost of officers seconded to NCC to support the county effort.

DCllr Hollowell had circulated his report before the meeting, there were no question asked.

Overall, this has been a difficult year for all of us and of course, because of the Covid19 Virus, it has been an 18 month year since the last APM, hence why this is such a long report.

Re-organisation of Local Government in Northamptonshire

Last year, 2019 should have been an election year when both new parish councillors and councillors for the new West Northamptonshire Council should have been appointed. The initial soundings were that the elections would be postponed for a year. However, the ambition to set up a completely new local authority in just one year was little more than a triumph of hope over experience and there was never any chance that it could be achieved. So, even before the pandemic hit us, it was clear that those of us intending to retire in 2019 would have to go on in what has become a 6 year term with elections for the new district council taking place next May.

The new district council, West Northamptonshire Council, will have county council powers and so will be responsible for delivering all of the services currently provided by South Northamptonshire Council and Northamptonshire County Council. It will be responsible for the areas currently served by South Northants

Council, Daventry District Council and Northampton Borough Council. Northampton will presumably lose its Borough status and, dangerously for us, there will no longer be a boundary between Northampton and Cogenhoe. Northampton itself will only be able to appoint a town council like Towcester, Brackley and Daventry – in effect, a parish council.

Anna Earnshaw started as the Chief Executive on 1st October having won an award as Corporate Director of the Year. Of the new directors appointed to West Northants Council, two are from SNC one of whom, Martin Henry is a very experienced finance officer.

Much of the work of creating the new authority centres on aligning the activities of the current councils including, for example, recycling (DDC and NBC charge for their 'green' bins, SNC do not). Council Tax will also have to be aligned but over a period of several years (at present, SNC Council Tax charges are lower than NBC – as you might expect). There will have to be an alignment of benefits such as Council Tax Relief for qualifying households and many other services.

At the same time, the services currently being provided by the County Council are being 'disaggregated' the jargon phrase being used for splitting NCC in two – half of which will transfer to WNC (the other half passing to the other new council – North Northants Council). Some services will be provided jointly by the two new councils in much the same way as at present.

There will also have to be a rationalisation of offices and depots as the new Councils re-organise themselves in the most cost effective ways. At present, there are district council offices at Daventry, Towcester and Northampton. There is also the NCC headquarters at George Row and the new offices at One Angel Square. All four councils have a variety of depots for highways, recycling and other services.

Finally in this section, elections will be held – somehow, next May for parish councils and for WNC. There will be 3 new councillors on WNC responsible for all of the villages at this end of the present South Northants district, including Grange Park. I shall at last be able to retire but, at present, I only know of 3 people who are preparing to throw their cap in to the ring to represent us on the new council. One is an experienced district councillor from Blisworth, one is another experienced district councillor from Towcester and the third was a district councillor but was disqualified due to failure to attend meetings. So, if anyone is interested in standing for West Northamptonshire Council, either as an independent or for a party, now is the time to start fact-finding.

Covid-19

For many councils, this has been an extremely challenging time as normal office work was suspended during the lock-down period in the late Spring. South Northamptonshire Council though, had already adopted mainly paperless systems since moving to the new offices in Towcester just over five years ago. Officers work on laptops which can be used either at home or at any available desk in the offices where they can use larger screens. The system also includes a digital telephone system. This meant that at the lockdown, office work continued from kitchens and studies across South Northamptonshire almost uninterrupted. Residents telephoning officers would not have noticed any difference in the level of service because our staff had immediate access to records as normal. The only restriction during the lock down itself was when officers were not allowed to attend site meetings.

Some of the senior officers were transferred to the County-wide task force managed by NCC and so, for example, it was an SNC officer who organised the temporary mortuary at Wollaston. Meanwhile at The Forum in Towcester, the Council offices were virtually empty with just a small skeleton staff all consolidated on to one floor to reduce energy costs. Throughout this difficult period, the SNC 'bin men' continued at their normal run, emptying our wheelie bins and helping to keep us all safe and healthy. My unreserved thanks go out to them as they do to all the medical and care staff who helped us all – often at risk of their own lives. I am sure as well, that we are all grateful to the volunteers who fetched and carried groceries, prescriptions, sent out newsletters and liaised with the local authorities, giving support to the elderly and vulnerable.

Planning and Development

As I sit on both the Planning Committee and the Planning Policy and Regeneration Committee (rather a mouthful). I will give a brief update on where we are and where things might develop under the new council.

The Planning Policy Committee are responsible for overseeing the making of some of the planning rules for South Northamptonshire and the Planning Committee are responsible for overseeing how these rules are applied to planning applications. Most applications are dealt with by officers acting under delegated powers. Major applications though come to the Committee with a recommendation. The rules are complex and consist of some statute law and some locally agreed policies. The local policies are called collectively, the Development Plan. Usually, all planning applications have to conform to the Development Plan but there are exceptions. Two important elements of the Development Plan are the Joint Core Strategy for West Northamptonshire – which is an over-view document and the South Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2 which adds in the detail for South Northamptonshire (DDC and NBC have their own). This Plan has just been adopted during the Summer after a process that took nearly 7 years. Many people in Cogenhoe will remember the parish meetings in 2014 when we discussed and voted on village confines and also on possible developments outside the old confines. That was all part of the process.

Two important issues have arisen this year. First, on three occasions, applications for, what I will call, 'village extensions' have been applied for in other parts of the district and after a long process of negotiation, have been referred to the Planning Committee by officers recommending consent. All three applications, including one for 300 houses and a 2-form entry primary school between the M1, Grange Park and Quinton were all outside village confines i.e. in open countryside and hence, contrary to the development plan. In all three applications, after deep consideration, the members of the Committee unanimously rejected the recommendations and refused consent. The first of these applications, the Grange Park one, has been appealed and a (virtual) public inquiry is currently being held to test our decision. The outcome of this decision will be an important test for other developers hoping to build in open countryside. We are anxiously awaiting the outcome of the inquiry – particularly me as I moved the resolution to refuse! Public inquiries cost the council-taxpayers a lot of money but since they set precedents for development outside village confines, most of us believe that we have no option but to keep holding the line for as long as possible.

The other important matter was the issuing of a white paper – a discussion document, by HMG regarding planning for the future. The Prime Minister said at its launch that he wanted to tear up the planning book?

The proposals in this paper are quite profound and very worrying. It includes, amongst other things, automatic outline consent for house-building on vast areas of land – which could include, what we in SNC class as, open countryside. SNC are responding to this consultation and I have already submitted one of my own. The two largest parish councils in my ward – Yardley Hastings and Cogenhoe and Whiston are also preparing responses. In view of what is happening at Grange Park, and also that the boundary between Cogenhoe and Northampton goes after next year, and also because there are moves to re-write the Core Strategy (under a new name), the years ahead are quite worrying.

4. Signing of Minutes of last Parish Meeting 24.4.19

The **minutes** of the meeting held on 25th April 2019 were **approved & signed**.

5. Matters arising

No matters arising.

6. Police Report

No report received and no attendance.

7. Chairman's report

The Chairman **reported**

Welcome to all for attending and good to see so many villagers. You will hear (unfortunately) rather a lot from me but to start here is my Parish Council report for the past year. Previously planned for the 23rd April but given the lockdown it was cancelled but now allowed to be held online.

This report covers April 2019 to October 2020

Changes for Parish Council

Iris Sher resigned from the council in November after many years great service to the council.

I would personally like to thank the Clerk (Deborah Rush) for her great efforts over the last year which have resulted in the Village Hopper continuing to run and the parish council to continue to be run very efficiently.

We do have a vacancy on the parish council and if anyone is interested in contributing to the village through the Parish Clerk.

Village Hopper

The bus has continued throughout the COVID with a very much reduced number of passengers about 30% of the usual numbers. We have had grants from the County Council to cover the lack of concessionary fares and until recently Bus Service Operators Grants to cover the other cash fares. This grant has temporarily stopped but we have applied to restart this. With these two grants we can continue to provide the service. We do have sufficient funds to continue (along with these two grants) to continue with the service for the foreseeable future.

We also had a £3,000 grant from the Coronavirus Response and Recovery Fund at very short notice in the early days of the lockdown and subsequently a grant of £10,000 by the National Lottery Awards for All Fund,

We have added a plexiglass screen between the bus and driver and implemented tap and pay to reduce the use of cash and regularly clean the bus with sanitizer.

A tracker added to the bus so you can through the parish council website see (in real time) where the bus is.

We continue to be very grateful for the two main drivers (Lisa and Gary) who have continued to drive throughout the crisis and been very flexible in helping us when we have had to take the bus off the road.

We had a long period running over Xmas when the bus was off the road as it had a mechanical fault. This took a long time to fix and cost us a lot in hire charges for a replacement bus. The clerk worked very hard to recover a lot of the excess charges.

The Tesco shoppers' bus was discontinued last year. We modified the VH timetable to enable trips to Weston Flavell but due to the very low take up this has now been discontinued.

Fares were increased in October 2019.

COVID related

Street Champions set up with great support from villagers. 30 volunteers to cover the whole of the village who have contributed greatly to support our more vulnerable villagers. NACRE recently gave us a Community Champions Award for 'For their hard work and dedication supporting their community during the COVID-19 pandemic'.

We have had two great volunteers (Matthew and Sarah) who provided a very useful twice weekly prescription collection service from Denton Surgery. This has recently had to be stopped but we are looking to see what might be possible in the future.

We switched to online Zoom meetings in April. A number of other parish councils took some time to get organised but we managed it quickly.

VE Day celebrations cancelled along with Party in the Park but an event is currently planned for July 11 2021.

Elections in May 2020 cancelled.

Other Achievements

Move to Unitary. We have been updated regularly by CC Clarke, DC Hollowell and NCALC.

An information lectern was installed with a village map now located on Station Road near Whalley Grove - £1400.

Further defibrillator training took place in September. A small number attended but all those who did so found it useful.

Crime prevention event held in village hall in October. Only a small number of villagers attended but thanks to PCSO Pete Firth for a very interesting talk.

Parish Council notice board installed outside the Village Hall. Unfortunately, Anglian Water recently damaged it. We await money from them to enable us to replace it.

After comments on Facebook and a discussion at parish council a portable speed monitoring device has been purchased. We await delivery. This device can be moved around the village to enable us to monitor different roads. A number of other related actions were carried out including the police visiting the village to monitor car vehicle speed. This did not 'catch' any speeders but the new device will provide data to help the police enforce the speed limits as necessary

The village booklet was reissued at the end of 2019 5 years after the previous edition - £362.

Two larger dog bins installed at village hall £460 + VAT

£210 for cost of village Xmas tree.

Whiston telephone box refurbished and book swap facility installed.

The vegetation around the path from The Piece to Church Street was cleared. We have had a donation and we are planning to plant bulbs in that area. Leaf blower purchased to enable council to keep this path clear of leaves.

Village Hall

The clerk managed the total process to upgrade and improve the play area at the village hall for the village hall committee. More info later. Play area opened on 21st September feedback very positive.

The parish council took over the running of the village hall earlier in the month after a village consultation.

Grants Made/agreed

£400 towards to cost of a compere and sound system for the 2019 Party in the Park held on 13th July 2019.

Cogenhoe Football Club for £500 towards new portable goals & nets for new youth team.

Planning

Application for 9 houses at the bus garage was approved.

Finances as at October 2020

Parish Council Precept

This year's precept was £34,750 which was a small increase on the base precept but an additional £10,000 towards the cost of the refurbishment of the village hall play area.

Usually I would present the year end accounts but given that we are in October I would just like to report that the accounts show

Parish Council
Current balance £26,400
Audited – excluding £3K for village clock

Village Hopper
Current balance £20,913
Audited – 4 months running costs

Village Hall
Current balance £32,558
Unaudited – excluding £10k skate board park grant

Reminder

All meeting minutes are published on website and all council meetings are public currently on Zoom. Anyone is welcome to attend to address the meeting or simply to listen.

No questions asked.

He then gave a **report on behalf of the Village Hall & Playing Field Management committee;**

Parish Council and COVID

The main news regarding the operation of the village hall is that the parish council took over the running of the village hall and the playing fields this month. The membership of the management committee of the hall has not changed and in many ways nothing will change. However, the management of the hall and playing fields will now follow the regulations that apply to the running of the parish council. This will have little impact on the users of the hall.

I would like to thank in particular Elizabeth Packer who has done a fine job helping run the village hall in particular with managing the users of the hall and managing the bookings and finances. Thank you.

I would also like to thank Jean Grubb for being our secretary – she has done a fine job but her role has now ended.

Deborah Rush (Parish Clerk) has taken on the role of Clerk to the village hall which includes the bookings and the finances.

We have just taken on someone to manage the day to day operations of the village hall.

Play Area

Due to COVID restrictions we had to close the play area on 24th March but were pleased to be able to re-open in early July. We intend to keep the play area open subject to government restrictions.

The new play area opened on 21st September. Supplied by KOMPAN.

Almost universal praise for the new facility. Deborah Rush is almost single handedly responsible for this happening as she filled out endless forms on behalf of the village hall to enable us to get a fantastic grant of £40,000 from BIFFA AWARD, as part of the Landfill Communities Fund. The other £10k came from the villagers as part of their council tax.

COVID

We shut the hall and play area on the 24th March. All events and regular users were cancelled. We welcomed back our first users, the Cogenhoe Pre-school at the beginning of July. A number of other users have since come back, all of who have to follow their own organisation guidelines along with those that the village hall requirements. These include Slimming World, Table Tennis and Mature Movers plus a number of dog groups.

We welcome any new users subject to them following the guidelines, though we have very few future bookings. We have our own guidelines that encompass the government ones.

Finances

We had a COVID grant from SNC of £10,000 at the beginning of the pandemic and this has enabled us to continue to have good reserves.

Village Hall Development

We have not moved forward with this very much due to the virus and then the imminent changeover of the running of the hall to the parish council.

We aim to produce an agreed plan (in conjunction with the current users) in the next 2 months. The next stage will be to get quotes and we hope to be able to fund the first set of changes ourselves.

We intend to change the internal layout of the building so we will then be able to make better use of the hall during the weekdays. We plan to employ someone to enable this subject to the lessening of the COVID restrictions. We are also looking into the provision of a parish council office and a village archive.

As a first step, the stage area was removed in April 2020 at a cost of £2,980 plus VAT.

Cricket Club

Cogenhoe Cricket Club have recently asked us if they could use the playing fields and hall starting next year as a new base for their team. We have agreed in principle to this. We are working through exact details of the lease and the siting of the new wicket and various other details but we expect this to happen.

Football pitch

We have a new team, Delapre AFC who are playing regularly at the park on Sunday mornings.

Other points

Rural Cinema continued to run monthly on last Wednesday of the month at 4pm. Average attendance is about 25 with a maximum of 40. This was cancelled though we do plan to start this up again subject to restrictions.

A Party in the Park to be held this year on the 13th July 2019 This was very well attended. We had a DJ (the Big Bopper), a beer tent (courtesy of the Sports and Social Club), a craft fair in the hall and various food and attractions in the field. The raffle/tombola made sufficient money to pay for the running of the event. We did plan another one for this July but this was of course cancelled. We do plan a similar (If allowed) for next July.

Following a survey of the trees in the playing fields it was decided that we had to cut the top third off all the poplar trees and prune a number of the other trees. This was done during October at a cost of £3,850 plus VAT.

Meetings and Questions

All meeting minutes are published on website and all council meetings are public currently on Zoom. Anyone is welcome to attend to address the meeting or simply to listen.

No questions asked.

8.Reports from Village Organisations

Neighbourhood Watch – Lawrence Howes, coordinator of Cogenhoe Neighbourhood Watch

Due to Covid-19 the past year has been static for the village scheme. It has 131 members and is one of the largest membership schemes in Northamptonshire. This is very positive as villages with large schemes are proven to have a lower crime rate.

Volunteers from Neighbourhood Watch stopped picking litter from within the village boundaries in February due to the crisis.

The Police continue to send out messages to our members relating to Northamptonshire as a whole, however you can opt-out of these as I repeat any relating to Cogenhoe or its surrounds.

Cogenhoe continues to be a low crime rate area. You can help it remain that way by taking sensible precautions and by being in Neighbourhood Watch. If you are not already a member it is easy to join up online though do make sure you select the Cogenhoe scheme. Alternatively, you may give your details to the Parish Clerk and I will contact you. I would like to thank all the Neighbourhood Watch members for continuing to be part of village life and I especially thank the Parish Council for their constant and invaluable support.

The Chairman thanked Lawrence sincerely for his efforts and offered to publicise the scheme further in the Outlook magazine.

St Peters Church, Cogenhoe & St Mary the Virgin, Whiston

Revd. Eddie Smith reported that due to Covid-19 all churches had been closed during lockdown but had re-opened in July 2020. During the lockdown services had continued on-line via zoom & youtube. A commemoration for VJ Day had been held and a low key Remembrance Event with an online service was planned. Planning was underway for lockdown Christmas, however throughout the pandemic the Church has remained a visible presence of God in the Community.

He also reported that Whiston has a new vicar, Revd. Morna Simpson who had joined from Leicestershire diocese.

Pre-School – no attendance

Pocket Park – no attendance

Footpath warden - Terry Coles, footpath warden.

Footpaths in the parish have been particularly well used during the summer. Unfortunately, Short Lane, which is a footpath not a bridleway, is regularly used by horse riders. During dry weather this is not so bad but when the ground is very wet horses can create potholes and these cause a risk that walkers might turn an ankle. Signs which say “NO Horse riding” have been defaced and ripped off completely in some places.

The footpath between Church Street and The Piece has been cleared of vegetation and a new fence erected which has improved it immensely.

The footpath between Station Road and Orchard Way has been removed from the definitive map although it will continue to be a path for pedestrians only.

I discovered recently that we now have a signposted cycle route which follows the bridleway from Whiston, across the ford towards Nat’s Barn and then around the quarry to the back of Cotton’s Farmhouse and out onto the Whiston Road. There it is signposted towards Whiston.

Comment was made that some horse riders have permission from the Estate to use the Short Lane footpath.

WI (emailed report Maggie Irvine)

We are a group of 20 ladies who meet on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.45 pm in the York Room at the village hall. We have a variety of speakers at our meetings and the talks are followed by refreshments and social time. We have organised outings in the past which have been enjoyed by members and their family and friends. We are part of the national organisation The Women’s Institute who are active nationally with important projects voted for by members. Last year these were, ‘To promote Stem Cell Registration’ and ‘To Raise Awareness of Modern Slavery in the UK’.

The organisation is run in the county from WI House in Moulton. The local committee organise courses, visits and social events for members to take advantage of if they wish. A monthly newsletter keeps everyone informed. This had been a most unusual year because of the Covid 19 pandemic and we have had no meetings since March. In the hope that things will improve next year a full programme of speakers will be arranged for 2021.

We always welcome new members and if anyone is interested please contact me as secretary. Each month and article about our activities is published in St. Peter’s Outlook.

Ladies Fellowship – no attendance

Cogenhoe Discussion group – group now dissolved.

Heritage Society – emailed report received after the meeting, Peter Alexander Chairman

During 2019, our popular monthly meetings continued with speakers giving presentations on various topics ranging from Health and Hygiene in Medieval England, The History of the Carry On Films to the Compelling Story of the Cogenhoe Brand (with more to follow).

However, as 2020 started, the threat of Covid-19 increased which resulted in the cancellation of all of our meetings after March 2020, when lock down took effect.

Despite the on-going restrictions , the Society has not been idle, as we started a monthly newsletter for our members in March, which has been very successful. It is a revival of a publication called “Heritage Matters” that was discontinued many years ago. Our thanks go to Robert Vaughan for producing well researched articles on Northamptonshire history. Also thank you to all those have have contributed articles for Heritage Matters.

During July 2020, the Chair Peter Alexander carried out a recorded interview for the John Griffe show on Radio Northampton that was transmitted on Sunday 26th July. It was a welcome piece of advertising for the Society.

At present, I do not know when we will be able to re-start our monthly meetings, but we will be back with more excellent speakers and varied topics. Please come and join us if you are not a member, you will be very welcome. You can contact us through our website www.cogenhoeheritage.org.uk and use the link to the Chairman or follow us on Facebook.

Reports from other organisations who have received grants from the Parish Council

Gary Deer, Cogenhoe United FC

“The purpose of the grant was to assist in the purchase of new mobile goal posts as part of the establishment of our Youth Football Teams. The Grant application to yourselves was one of 3 grants we applied for towards a total project cost of over £5000.00. One of the three applications was turned down at the first application and the second was passed on to the next review period to be carried out in November 2020. Due to the pressures being put onto Sports Clubs and all the extra work required to manage our organisation through the Pandemic the project has had to be put on hold. This will be reviewed in November when the second application is considered. However the £500 kindly given to us by the Parish Council has been ringfenced and will be until such time that we are able to fulfil our project.”

9. Open forum

Comment was made about large gravel lorries travelling through the village early in the morning. Cllr Brown who acts as the Parish Council liaison with Hansons, offered to speak to them about this if number plates and times could be provided.

Comment was made about dust clouds from the concrete crushing plant. It was agreed that if photographs with dates could be provided the Clerk would speak to SNC environmental protection about this.

There being no further business the **meeting closed at 8.50pm**