

Thornhaugh Parish Council
Chairman's Annual Report for the year April 2020 to April 2021

During the past year the Parish Council meetings have continued, albeit very differently. We have been unable to have face to face meetings and have therefore resorted to technology to keep us connected to village activity. In my last report I wrote about the strangeness of lockdown and the devastation that has hit the world in the form of Covid, not anticipating that a year later we would still be in the grips of the pandemic, although hopefully with the great strides in the vaccination programme and everyone playing their part in abiding by the recommended rules, we are seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, even being able to hold our first face to face meeting, even if we do risk hypothermia by having to hold it outside. Let's hope this is the start of getting back to some form of normality.

Work for the Parish Council has of course continued, and good things have been happening, as well as "business as normal".

Planning Applications

Planning applications have continued, albeit less than last year. These have covered finishing of building projects, new applications for building alterations, tree surgery and removal, etc. All of these have been reviewed by the Parish Council and comments submitted as appropriate.

Footpaths

Thanks go to Martin Witherington whose persistence I am delighted to say, has successfully got the footpath alongside the chicken farm opened and available for use by the public. He and other Home Farm residents have worked tirelessly to make this happen and we can now all benefit. Not only is it now available for the public to enjoy the walk, there is now a better physical connection between the centre of the village and Home Farm – certainly easier access when delivering leaflets!

Out thanks also go to Peter Sharpley, Mr & Mrs King and other local landowners for keeping footpaths across their land accessible and clear. Thanks also go to Augean and Mick George who have been very responsive in dealing with footpath issues adjacent to their sites.

Finances

We continue to be vigilant in managing Parish funds and bear in mind at all times that this money comes from your Council Tax so needs to be spent and accounted for appropriately. Although we are not required to have a formal (and very expensive) external audit, the expenditure and income is audited by Karen Jones as an independent review and transparency check of the PC finances, thank you Karen. The accounts are always reviewed at every meeting. Copies of the accounts can be obtained at any time from the Clerk to the Parish Council. The financial year-end accounts are posted on the PC Website.

We have not requested an increase to the precept this year, bearing in mind the financial difficulties all Councils are experiencing. Having received donations to cover the majority of the costs for refurbishing the notice board and Book Exchange, and also to cover the Autumn hanging baskets, plus of course the continuing support from Nicky Rogers for the Christmas Tree, the finances are looking good at the end of the year. We will hopefully be able to spend some on a village "get-together" this year, regulations permitting, and see our neighbours face to face for the first time in what seems an age and get a chance to welcome new residents properly.

This year, we have had a suggestion of jointly funding new footpath signs, and we may wish to look at repairing or replacing the Home Farm notice board. Residents are encouraged to let the Council have any ideas for projects during the year that would benefit the community.

Other Matters

We are still pursuing Highways England to make the A1 entrance/exit into and out of the village safer for all. Sad to say we have received information once again that they do not view this as a priority since the number of serious or fatal incidents does not warrant the cost of making changes. We will continue to persist with this and with trying to get the layby just before the turning closed to at least make visibility better.

Peterborough City Council have responded to a number of issues with storm drains this year, helping to alleviate local flooding. They, and the police, have also been very supportive in trying to get illegal scramble bike riding in the Aggregate Industries Quarry stopped. Aggregate Industries are working closely with the City Council and have now installed more secure gates at the A47 entrance and 24/7 CCTV. They are continuing to work on other access areas to the quarry.

The Autumn hanging baskets this year were paid for by a donation from Xanthe Pitt, whose family used to live in the village. The summer baskets will also come out of that donation, with grateful thanks. Thanks also to all those who help to keep the baskets alive and looking beautiful.

The newly re-furbished Thornhaugh Book Exchange is still doing well, with thanks to Penny Lewin Watts for keeping this not only tidy but also managing the replenishment of the books in a covid-safe way. Although the Book Exchange was closed during lockdown, it was opened as soon as it was safe to do so and a hand-sanitiser station was installed outside to promote continued safe usage.

The Defibrillator Project is almost complete. The very generous donations from a number of residents have made it possible to install this life-saving piece of kit. My thanks also to Louise Molesworth who has made this happen.

The "Litter Pick" initiative, started by Nikki Higgins, still continues. Thank you Nikiki who has continued this through lockdown and whatever the weather.

Joint efforts between residents, the police, Peterborough City Council and Aggregate Industries have seen remedial action taken at the disused quarry on the A47 to stop illegal use by scramble bikes.

The Heritage Project, whilst obviously being affected by COVID restrictions, has still seen information collection taking place and a lot of interest from residents. Hopefully this can resume more actively once restrictions are lifted.

Thanks to Joan and Alan Frost for leading the John Claire conservation project for us. Our involvement in this is still in its early stages but will no doubt be widely supported by many residents who are passionate about the environment, locally, nationally and world-wide. We can all play a part. Peter Sharpley has already offered to discuss what he is doing in terms of wild-flower meadows and re-planting.

The City Council elections have just taken place and we have a new representative on the Council – Gavin Elsey has now replaced Diane Lamb as our representative. Parish Council elections are scheduled for May 2022 when all positions on the parish council come up for election. If there are any resignations prior to then these can either be left vacant or filled by co-option.

Finally, but not least, my thanks as always go to our long-suffering Parish Clerk, Deirdre who works hard to keep the Parish Council running efficiently and effectively.

If we have gained anything from the last year, it is that we are a pretty resilient bunch and have managed to say contacted with humour and innovative ways of communicating. I hope we can spend more normal time together as a community this year.

Your Parish Council is here for you, as always. Please don't hesitate to contact if you have any issues or suggestions.

Christine Smith
Chair, Thornhaugh Parish Council
17th May 2021