

Northiam Parish Council – Chairman’s Report April 2019

This year has been a busy one for the Parish Council with many projects on the go, some proving more successful than others!

We have removed the old timber agility trail in the playground, which had come to the end of its working life, and replaced it with new swings and a roundabout designed for more older children. Playground equipment is not cheap and this work cost us about £19,000. Luckily, we were able to get grant aid for about a third of this sum from the District Council, which was much appreciated. This year’s safety inspection highlighted more equipment that will need replacing soon, and so we will continue to make budget provision in future years. This will include the “Trim Trail”, parts of which we will be removing this year.

Plans to improve the football pitch and create a second pitch for juniors have stalled, as we are having great difficulty in finding suitably qualified companies who wish to take on the work. We are obliged to get three quotes before the work can go ahead as the funding for this is held by the District Council. Hopefully we will manage to progress things this year.

Football brings us onto the subject yet again of dogs. Despite having more dog bins per capita than most villages, there are still dog owners out there who think it is acceptable to not clear up after their dog. I am told by the Football Club that before every game they have to do a sweep of the pitch to check for excrement and almost always there is something to clear up. There are also owners who, if the nearest bin is full, think it acceptable to just drop it on the floor by the bin, rather than take it to another. We already spend 5% of our annual budget on dog bins. If this continues, we may have to seriously consider employing a dog warden to bring recalcitrant owners to heel.

The new gates for the playing field were finally installed in the Autumn after a lot of chasing the contractor, and we have to thank the Conservation Society for their financial help with both the gates and the new plaques on the gateposts.

The plan to improve the library has not gone smoothly. When work started, we discovered that the floor above, upon which sits a snooker table, was being held up by concealed acro-props. This brought things to a halt, a structural engineer was called, and on his advice the library had to decamp. They spent the first few months in the Bowls Club, before moving into the scout hut, which is where you will find them now. Since we announced that the Parish Council were funding the continuation of the library service there has been a steady stream of book donations which has noticeably increased and improved the stock.

The Blue Cross situation continues to progress, albeit slowly. In August the Communities Dept confirmed that our application for a loan had been successful. In November we had a meeting with their executives who updated us on their plans. Their request for planning permission for 125 houses was turned down, so they are now trying to get permission for a smaller number. I understand that they should get an answer to this request by early summer, at which point they will hopefully finally bring the site to market

After a three-year battle we were finally granted planning permission to improve the access to the war memorial, and were able to have the works completed in time for Remembrance Sunday. I would like to thank Mr Julian Luckett for the time and effort he put into this, not only for the design itself, but also for managing the project through to completion. I think we all agree that it looks very good indeed. Once again, the Conservation Society contributed towards the cost.

Over Remembrance week-end we had "Northiam Remembers", which included an exhibition and a concert organised by a committee lead by Mervyn Hayes. This was a resounding success and a credit to all involved.

Mervyn & Lynn have been leading lights in this village for many years, but are now having to move away to be closer to family. I think we would all like to thank them for everything they have done for the village over the years. They will be sorely missed.

After a fair bit of bureaucracy, we have set up a trial "No Cold Calling Zone" at Ghyllside which we will be monitoring for the next year. If it proves to be successful then we will look into extending the scheme into other areas of the village.

Fly tipping in the surgery car park continues to be a problem. We have repeatedly asked the District Council to remove the recycling bins, as every resident already has kerbside recycling, and we feel that the presence of these bins just encourages people to think of the area as a convenient tip. The District Council are still keen for the Parish to take over the maintenance of the car park, but to date have not made us an offer that makes financial sense.

Following resident's concerns about the level of policing, we arranged in January for a public meeting with Katy Bourne, the Police Commissioner for Sussex. We leafleted every household in the village about this, so it was very disappointing when on the night only 90 residents turned up to hear what she had to say.

Some of you will be aware that I was asked to act as "Interim Chair" for the Village Hall Trust following Margaret Jones' resignation. Their AGM is on 23rd April and we are actively looking for people who will be willing to act as Trustees to keep the hall running and improve it for the future. The fundraising for the new chairs has been very successful, and fairly soon the area outside the front door is to be rebuilt to improve the access and drainage. If you think you would like to become a Trustee, then please contact me.

Over the last month there has been major work happening in the cemetery. Several trees that had become dangerous have been removed, and Steve Pratt has done a full clear back of all the overgrown areas. This work will continue over the next few months and may even result in a limited amount of burial space becoming available.

You will have all noticed the sudden burst of activity at the pub. The owner was issued with an enforcement order to repair the premises, which he chose to ignore. This resulted in legal action being started. I understand that he has until the 29th of April to bring the pub back into an acceptable state of repair or be taken to court. Whether this means he will then allow it to open is of course another matter!

It is election time. I would like to thank all the Councillors for their work and support over the past four years. Mr Sitford and Mr Streatfeild chose not to stand for re-election which left us with two vacancies. Mr Tony Biggs was the only resident to come forward and so he will be joining the Council in May. We will have a spare seat at the table, and so will be looking to co-opt someone if we can find a volunteer. If you are interested then please contact the Clerk.

Pete Sargent - Chairman