

North Mundham Parish Council

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CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

It was nice to see a good turn-out for the Meeting of Electors on 5 March, despite the poor weather, and councillors welcomed the chance to talk to those who were able to stay after the meeting. For those who missed it, and in advance of the formal minutes, here is a brief summary of the key points

The Meeting of Electors is the annual event where the Parish Council reports on what it has been doing over the past year, and where the electors have an opportunity to ask questions. This is in contrast to the routine Full Council meetings every other month, and the monthly Planning Committee meetings. These routine meetings are all advertised in advance, and they are all public meetings which anyone can attend, but the opportunity for members of the public to speak is limited to a specific item at the start of each meeting.

It is worth reminding you all once again that we are currently short of one councillor and we need to co-opt an additional member. The Clerk or I would be happy to discuss what this entails with anyone thinking of joining, but you will need to complete a form available from the Clerk before 23 April. You can contact the Clerk at clerk@northmundham.org or by telephone 01243 203050.

We noted that the financial pressures on the Council's budget have led us to increase the precept for the coming financial year, though any increase attributable to the Parish Council is just eight pence a week for a Band D property.

The Parish Council is still very keen to progress the project to provide a shared-use cycleway and footpath from Brookside to the farm shop. However, at the moment it is proving difficult to plan the project. Some of the funding opportunities that we hope to exploit have a limited life, and we need to liaise further with WSCC to get the project under way while the funds are still available.

You will be aware from earlier reports that we are looking closely at how we manage the Village Hall. At the moment the position is complicated by the fact that the hall is owned and managed by the Parish Council, although built on land that belongs to the Playing Fields Trust. The Trust and the Council have different financial rules, different funding opportunities, and different tax regimes. One solution that has been proposed is for the Council to transfer the ownership and the responsibility for managing the village hall to the Playing Fields Trust, which would need to alter its charitable objectives to reflect this additional responsibility. However, we are very conscious of the inscription in the entrance that records the hall was built 'by the village, for the village' and we will need to be confident that its future is secure.

David Maclean spoke about our relationship with the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group (MWHG). In the past year they have made a significant contribution in two areas, leading the work to improve the old canal and Camic Pond as a habitat for wildlife, and surveying the ditches in the parish as part of their FLOW Project (Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands) to improve our understanding of the state of the drainage system. We need to ensure that we continue the good work in future years, and David has volunteered to act as the key contact for this work.

Finally, John Ashley, who is chairing the Steering Group, updated us on progress with the Neighbourhood Development Plan. A number of people expressed their concern that the local area will be covered with large developments of new houses. John made the point that the best way to counter this is to develop a robust plan with strong evidence in support, which can then be adopted as part of the local planning policy. We are working towards that aim.

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