

North Mundham Parish Council

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CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

It was very disappointing to find that the playing fields were invaded by travellers again, on the evening of Sunday 11 April. With the experience of the previous incursion, we were able to liaise effectively with the police district commander, and they were served with a Section 61 order requiring them to leave - they left on the Tuesday. We are all very grateful to those, both members of the playing field committee and local residents, who helped clear up the mess that was left behind.

It is not clear why travellers seem to favour this community's playing fields and car park over others. The police gave some advice about how the defences of the car park and playing field could be further strengthened. We have to contend with potential intruders who have a range of equipment at their disposal to break in. The playing field committee are looking at ways that the police advice could be put into practice - it is not an easy task to reconcile the problem of keeping out those who should not be there while allowing easy access for legitimate users.

I know that many of you are frustrated that the police do not take more immediate and forceful action. However, although the police powers appear to be well-defined, they are constrained in the way they use them by a host of other considerations. I would be happy to discuss this further with anyone who wants to explore the issue.

As I write, it is still not quite clear whether the era of virtual meetings is behind us. In normal times, regulations require us to hold parish council meetings in public and face-to-face, and we have only been able to meet on line because of a specific exemption which ends on 6 May. We are aware that there is a legal challenge that seeks to extend that exemption, but meanwhile we assume it will not be renewed, and so we are looking carefully at how we will manage meetings after that date, and what precautions we need to put in place.

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