

## **SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

This year has once again been a very busy one for your Parish Council. Perhaps the most contentious issue facing us in the year ahead is the Local Development Framework, which will shape the future development of our village in terms of additional housing. It has been well documented in the press and in my recent letter to you that the Parish Council has serious misgivings about the way Breckland Council has managed this process. Recently the Clerk and I were successful in arranging a meeting with the Chief Executive of Breckland Council to discuss this issue. We were not happy with the response we received to our formal complaint and as a result of our meeting we have asked him to write to us with further answers. We will keep you updated on this important matter when we know more.

In the last year we have continued to communicate more regularly with parishioners by way of our ‘Mardler’ newsletter, website and Saturday morning ‘surgeries’. In the last year we received our “Quality Council” status in recognition of the improvements we have made in both communication and our management systems. In September I had the privilege of attending an awards ceremony at County Hall, at which Swanton Morley again received the runner up award in the EDP Pride in Norfolk Awards. At the same ceremony our Clerk – Faye Lebon received her runner up award in the Norfolk Clerk of the Year competition. I would like to place on record my thanks to her for her hard work and dedication particularly over the last eighteen months whilst she has worked to overhaul our management systems and communication with parishioners.

In the last year we have again managed some large projects which will benefit our village for many years to come. We have also introduced our grant scheme using the proceeds from the sale of the old village hall and so far we have earmarked over £25,000 for village groups. We are currently working closely with the village hall management committee in an effort to produce a scheme of long term improvements for the hall. Once the scheme has been finalised the Parish Council will consider offering financial assistance to be used as match funding for grant applications to other bodies. The plans for these improvements will be discussed in more detail at the annual parish meeting.

As always in Swanton Morley there is a great deal of work being done by volunteers, businesses and councillors to improve and maintain our facilities and services. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for your hard work in making our village a special place to live. It has once again been my privilege to be your Chairman over the past twelve months.

### **YOUTH & PLAYING FIELDS**

Since the last annual parish meeting the Gooseberry Hill playing field was officially opened with children from the school and village playgroups in attendance. The event gained considerable local interest and was featured on the front page of the Dereham Times as well as Anglia TV. The parish council has since replaced the entire chain link fencing to create a safe and secure environment for children to enjoy. The playing field continues to be very well used and this is very pleasing for everyone involved with the project.

Having successfully completed the Gooseberry Hill playing field project, the team are now investigating the possibility of building a floodlit all weather sports pitch and a teenage meeting shelter at the village hall. Both of these items featured prominently in the responses received in the village appraisal.

As part of our ongoing programme of maintenance and improvements we have once again this year budgeted to paint all the seats throughout the village.

### **STREETLIGHTING**

The streetlight replacement project is now almost complete with just two columns requiring energy transfers to be carried out by EDF Energy. In the last year the parish council has replaced/repositioned a further nine lights along Rectory Road, Gooseberry Hill, Manns Lane, Greengate and Ainsworth Close. A team of parish councillors recently volunteered to cut back the overgrown trees and vegetation along Rectory Road. This has greatly improved visibility and the effectiveness of the new streetlights.

### **CHURCHYARD & BURIAL GROUND**

In the Hoe Road burial ground, work has been completed on the construction of a rose memorial garden. The parish council is very grateful to Bernie Marsham who carried out the construction work free of charge. The project has been well received by parishioners and relatives are now able to plant a rose in memory of their loved ones. An additional fibre deck footpath has also been constructed to accommodate future graves for several years to come.

At the churchyard the poor state of the west gate and boundary wall continues to give cause for concern. We are waiting for the B1147 (Mill Street) to be widened at this point before we undertake to carry out any significant repair work.

### **HIGHWAYS**

The Parish Council has again worked closely with the Highways Department at Norfolk County Council (NCC). In the last year a 30mph speed limit has been approved and appropriate signs installed in the Woodgate area. Residents of Gray Drive have in the last year benefited from the construction of brand new footpaths. In the forthcoming financial year there are plans to resurface the footpaths and repair/replace kerbs along Worthing Road (from Hannah Road to Robertson

Barracks) and Greengate (from Dereham Road to the pedestrian crossing). We have also recently been informed that Highways are also planning to carry out significant resurfacing work to the bends on Dereham Road.

Highways have now finalised a scheme to carry out much needed permanent improvements to the B1147 Tuddenham Road (first 400 yards from the Dereham Road bends). The scheme to widen the road on Mill Street near the church has been finalised and both these schemes have been programmed for construction at the end of this financial year subject to reaching agreement with the neighbouring landowners.

Experience tells us that highways issues can be very frustrating for everyone and that they take some years to resolve; nevertheless we continue to press for action. The Parish Council continues to work closely with NCC and we believe that the good relationship which we have nurtured with them over the last few years is starting to benefit the village.

### **COMMON LAND**

The Parish Council has been granted Higher Level Stewardship over Mill Common. This area now generates a small income for the village in exchange for keeping it well maintained. You may have read in the press that the Parish Council has been working with Natural England to carry out a project of improvement work at Burgh Common. The construction of glides and riffles in the river, which will improve the habitat for juvenile fish and other river creatures has been completed. The ground works for proposed wheelchair/pushchair access to the river along with additional seating for anglers has been completed. Unfortunately we have been thwarted in our attempt to install the boardwalks by planning officers at Breckland Council and Norfolk County Council. We recently held a site meeting with their planning representatives and hope that common sense will prevail and that their objections can be overturned. For those of you who are wondering where these commons are located, they are both found along the road to Worthing. They are beautiful locations which can be better enjoyed by everyone thanks to the work of the Parish Council and volunteers.

### **ALLOTMENTS**

The Parish Council is very pleased that so many people have expressed an interest in having an allotment. We are still actively looking into obtaining land for this purpose. Unfortunately our progress is slow due to the reluctance of landowners to make suitable land available because the Local Development Framework has not been finalised. We will keep you updated on our progress via the Mardler newsletter.

### **FINANCE**

Looking to the future, you will be aware that the Parish element of your council tax bill has increased this year by 10.76%. A Band D house in Swanton Morley will pay £1.05 a week (an increase of 11p) for all the services that the Parish Council provides. 83% of homes in Swanton Morley are in Bands A, B or C and will therefore pay less than this for Parish Council services.

**IN CONCLUSION, THERE ARE MANY CHALLENGES FACING OUR VILLAGE IN THE FUTURE AND I DO HOPE THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO ATTEND OUR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON MONDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> APRIL AT 7.30PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL, WHERE YOU CAN OFFER YOUR OWN VIEWS AND SUGGESTIONS, OR JUST FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE WORK THAT WE DO ON YOUR BEHALF.**

**ROGER ATTERWILL  
CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**