

## Minutes of the Thorverton Annual Parish Meeting held at 7.30pm on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021 by way of Zoom

Present: 12 parishioners and representatives of the football and cricket clubs.

The Parish Council Chairman, Neville Lane, welcomed those present and apologised that the meeting was being held remotely rather than face to face. However, this was a step up on 2020 when no meeting at all had been held, although the Chairman had issued a report that spring. The Chairman welcomed Paul Webb and Jack Stirling, representing the football and cricket clubs respectively, and apologised that David Lovell of Heritage Homes was not able to be present to update on the new housing development, due to unforeseen family circumstances.

### a) Report on the activities of the Parish Council in 2020/21

The Chairman reported on the Parish Council's activities as follows:

*"My report last year was not able to be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting because, like so many councils, we were unable to hold a meeting last May given the Covid restrictions. However, I hope that you were able to read the report either on the Parish Council's website or in the village magazine, Focus.*

*This year, while I am again not able to present a report in a face to face meeting, at least I am able to report through the wonders of Zoom. As with last year, rather than give a strictly chronological report, I will again use the main headings of the Council's aims statement.*

*First though, I should explain the changes in the make-up of the Council. I am sorry to report that there has been some turnover amongst councillors. Over the course of the past year Bob Deed, Rob Flatt, Keeley Wells and – just recently - Sam Fice have all resigned as councillors. Adam McKee and Trevor Sanders have come onto the Council, so there are currently two vacancies. If you are interested in becoming a parish councillor please see the application form on the Council's website, which must be completed and returned to our clerk, Alison Marshall, by 7<sup>th</sup> May. The other councillors are Stuart Crang, Andrew Foster, John Hodge, Adam McKee, Trevor Sanders, Graham Sims, David Waldron and me.*

*We will also shortly be losing our clerk, Alison Marshall, who has been snapped up by Bradninch Town Council. She has done sterling work for the Council over the past six years and has ensured that we keep an even keel, following procedures and not allowing matters to be overlooked. I wish Alison well in her new role. If you think that you might be interested in applying for the role of clerk to Thorverton Parish Council do contact me for further details.*

*Now to my analysis of our progress against our aims (which were last updated and published in February 2021):*

#### i) To care for the wellbeing of the community

*We took the decision early on last spring that, while the Council would set aside some funds for use if necessary, any support for the community through the Covid pandemic was probably best delivered by a separate group, which could react more quickly than the Council to what were likely to be fast-changing situations. I took a coordinating role with three others on the C19 Support Group. I hope that you will be aware of the structure that was set up, with a network of neighbourhood volunteers offering support as necessary. In the past few months those volunteers have been in far less demand, but since November we have offered Virtual Community Coffee Mornings and the opportunity for people to have someone Walk and Talk with them should they feel lonely. There is also Lucy's Larder in the parish church porch, offering people some essential food supplies.*

*I mentioned in last year's report that the pandemic had exposed some of the inadequacies of our Emergency Plan. Nevertheless, there are some useful elements in the Plan, particularly in response to flooding and to snow and ice. I hope that we will be able to revise it, with the help of Devon's Resilience Team, in order that it might be more widely used. We have built in a Snow Plan, under which our handyman with the help of other volunteers did some work earlier in 2021 to keep main paths safe.*

We have been very conscious of the potential dangers on our small roads. We have been investigating with Devon County Council's Highways department how we might improve the safety of the junction of School Lane with Bullen Street/The Bury; we have continued to support the Speed Watch team (although their monitoring has been necessarily reduced during the periods of lockdown); and we are currently considering the practicalities of making motorists more aware of speed through the village with a Twenty's Plenty project.

We have also been keen to improve safety for pedestrians along Silver Street towards the cricket ground. We had hoped that we might be able to make a path down from the access road above Silver Street, to a point on the road almost opposite Hulk Lane. This has been put on hold while the District Council consults residents of the houses along that access road.

ii) To engage with the community and encourage community activities

Communication has been quite a challenge over the past year, given the Covid restrictions. Nevertheless, we have continued to have open Parish Council meetings on Zoom which the public can join, and we have started making more use of Nextdoor and Facebook - thank you Keeley Wells and Adam McKee - to gather views on things that the Council might want to consider.

We have again set out our aims, so that parishioners can feed back to us if they feel that we are focusing on the wrong things. The version that we published in February represented a refinement of the aims that we had set out more than a year previously. In November we carried out our second annual Satisfaction Survey. This gave us a better understanding of how parishioners viewed the Council. Uptake was considerably improved with the survey being available through social media. It was apparent that we need to make some changes if we are to improve perceptions of the Council and what we do.

I hope that you will recall the Thorverton Archaeology Project which took place in 2019. This was a great community activity, involving an archaeological survey on a field off Dark Lane which the Parish Council was interested in buying for use as a new cemetery. I am pleased to report that Council has subsequently agreed to purchase part of the field, subject to planning permission being granted for its use as a cemetery.

The Parish Council has considered all planning applications, and made comments wherever Council felt it appropriate to do so. I should explain that while we are a consultee, it is the District Council that makes decisions on planning applications.

iii) To maintain the appearance and environment in which we live, ensuring that changes do not cause future harm

Neville Matthews, as our handyman, has continued to take pride in keeping the village looking good, regularly cutting grass and tidying up some areas that might otherwise get out of hand. The Barliabins area, above the Quarry Car Park, is one such area. This patch is owned by the Council as an area open to all, so please make use of it. It also now has the benefit of a lovely seat in memory of Sybil Tulloch. We have also been very fortunate that the Thorverton Branch of the Royal British Legion volunteered to keep Jubilee Green looking in good shape last summer; what a great job they did.

We did not hold a Village Tidy-Up Day in 2020, but are considering one for 2021, so as to involve the community in helping tackle some further tasks around the village to help it look great. We are also encouraging people to take part in a Thorverton in Bloom competition this June, with each street vying for the title of Thorverton's Most Floral Street. I do hope that you will get together with others in your street to make a great display of floral colour.

Over the past year we have needed to rent a garage at the end of Broadlands in order to store equipment, including a trailer. We would far prefer to buy our own store and the possibility of having this in the Quarry Car Park is currently being investigated.

The Council owns the Recreation Ground (through the trustees) and ensures that play and exercise equipment is regularly checked. I am grateful to Graham Sims for continuing to keep a watchful eye on the situation. I mentioned in last year's report that the mower used to keep the Recreation Ground in good condition was in need of

replacement. I am pleased to report that we recently purchased a new mower for the Recreation Ground, with the financial help of Viridor.

I noted last year that we needed to replace the fallen part of the wall in Dark Lane. Given the condition, it was not considered practicable to repair the stonework, so we settled on railings instead. I hope that you are as pleased as I am with the final appearance.

iv) To be well managed, providing sound governance and financial management, and to be an exemplar employer  
We have our clerk, Alison Marshall, to thank for ensuring that our governance documentation is up to date, complying with legislation and following good practice. Alison has also done a great job in ensuring that all documentation is available on our website. We want people to be able to understand not just the decisions made by Council, but also the basis for those decisions being reached, so transparency is key.

Probably the longest discussion that the Parish Council had over the past year was when reviewing the budget so that the precept (the amount that the Parish Council requires through Council Tax) could be set. The final amount was higher than it had been for the past two years – though less than each of the two years before that. This was largely due to provision being made to repair the weir above the village which feeds the watercourses through the village, and provision of grant to be available to help support the community as the Covid restrictions are eased and we return to something closer to normality. We don't yet know whether such grants will be needed, but we felt it prudent to have a small amount available.

I hope that this summary is useful. Please do feel free to comment, because without comments we may miss out on the views of those we were elected to represent, Thorverton's parishioners. In closing, I must thank our councillors again for their hard work over the past year – let us not forget that this is unpaid - and our clerk for so successfully making sense of our decisions and implementing them as appropriate."

The following matters were raised in response:

1. A parishioner asked when work might take place to repair the weir so that the watercourses through Thorverton could flow again. The Chairman said that a more thorough examination of what was required by way of repair was necessary and that the Parish Council had this very much on their radar, but did need to ensure that any repair would be long-lasting.
2. A parishioner stressed the urgency of a satisfactory solution to improving the safety of the junction of School Lane onto Bullen Street/The Bury. The Chairman said that he and David Waldron had recently met DCC's Highways representative, who had made some suggestions; however, the Parish Council did not feel that these would have sufficient impact and had written to ask for a site meeting to review further. A parishioner suggested that a speed bump might be worth considering.
3. A parishioner asked whether there were currently any other plans to use Section 106 money, should the Silver Street footpath not go ahead. Neville said that the Silver Street path was certainly not yet dead, and so the Council had no other firm proposals for using the money, which it was understood were not in danger of being lost. Another parishioner said that it would be lovely to have a path from Silver Street, almost opposite Court Barton Close, alongside the field edge and over the stream to connect with the Millennium Green. The Chairman said that this had been an earlier proposal, but had run into difficulties, not least because our District Councillor had indicated that he would not support the proposal as it would need to share the access path running towards the attenuation pond; Cllr Andrew Foster added that the management group of Court Barton Close had similar concerns.

#### b) Football Club

Paul Webb, secretary of Thorverton Football Club, gave an overview of activities. He explained that there were now two teams playing in the Exeter and Devon League, with the first team currently top of the league.

The club was keen to attract volunteers and new committee members. Obviously the restrictions over the past year had made things more difficult, but the club had received some grants. The club had spent a few thousand pounds to

improve netting to prevent balls from going into gardens. The layout of the clubhouse had also been improved, including the toilets, but some further improvements were likely to be needed, in particular to the dug-outs and to the roof of the clubhouse (which is currently asbestos), if the club was to go up a level. This might mean a request for using Section 106 money. Paul said that the club was currently looking at costings and possible Football Association grants. The club was pleased with the new mower which arrived recently, and was most grateful again to Cllr Graham Sims for his help and support. Paul also thanked the Council's clerk, Alison Marshall, for being so good to work with in resolving issues.

Cllr David Waldron asked whether there was any possibility of increasing youth involvement, perhaps using half of the pitch for five-a-side games. Paul acknowledged that this was a good idea and that this would be worth investigating further, although it did bring with it the need for greater safeguarding. He said that currently the ground was being used on Saturday mornings by Pinhoe Under 13s, and that this might be developed further, although finding volunteers to help is not always so easy.

The Chairman thanked Paul for addressing so positively any problems that had arisen over the year and for his input at this meeting.

#### c) Cricket Club

Jack Stirling, Vice Chairman of Thorverton Cricket Club, gave an overview of activities. He explained that the club had about 50 senior members and more than 60 between 5 and 15 years old. The first team was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division of the Devon League, which was a very good position for a village of this size. Last season was heavily affected by the restrictions and so the club played mostly friendly matches, but did win a 20/20 championship.

Jack felt that the ground was now very good, with the practice nets renovated, thanks to grant from Viridor, and an electronic scoreboard, thanks to section 106 funding. The fence at the river end of the ground had been replaced and there were plans to extend this.

The ground was likely to see far more use in 2021, with more children being involved and with plans for a women's team this season. The Chairman asked whether some further promotion, perhaps through posters in the village or at the ground, might encourage more villagers to get involved. Cllr David Waldron asked how plans to significantly upgrade the facilities were developing. Jack said that there were ongoing discussions, but that the initial very ambitious plans were likely to be scaled down somewhat.

The Chairman thanked Jack for giving this update on what appears to be a flourishing club, which the village could be proud of.

#### d) Final comments/questions

A parishioner asked that thanks be passed on to Neville Matthews, the Parish Council's handyman, for his work in keeping the village looking tidy.

A parishioner asked whether there was any news on when a new vicar might be appointed. This was, of course, not a matter for the Parish Council, but it was understood that this was unlikely to be until 2022.

The meeting ended at 8.25pm