

Blofield and Blofield Heath Annual Parish Meeting

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Blofield and Blofield Heath, held at the Blofield Courthouse on Thursday 11th May 2017 at 7.30pm.

PRESENT

Rob Christie (Chair) and the Clerks, Sarah Osbaldeston and Steven Ford presided. Blofield Parish Councillors present –Stella Shackle, Margaret Turner, Rob Christie, Paul Baverstock and Paul Culley-Barber.

In total 12 parishioners were present. County Councillor Andrew Proctor sent his apologies.

1. WELCOME

Rob Christie, Chair of Blofield Parish Council Welcomes everyone.

2. TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 20TH MAY 2016

They were approved by all present and duly signed by the chair.

3. CHAIRMAN / COUNCIL'S REPORT (*Rob Christie*)

This is our report to the Annual Parish Meeting on the highlights of another busy year.

Council

We began and we end the year with 2 vacancies. We co-opted to fill one vacancy last summer but have a second vacancy following the death of Barry Cawkwell in February. The council would like to have more members who live in Blofield Heath and hope there will be some interest in supporting the council.

Generally having 10 rather than 12 councillors is not critical but there are a number of important issues that mean that having a full complement of councillors would be very helpful. Not least is the need over the next year or so to ideas on how best to use the significant amounts of money that are beginning to flow from the developments.

Neighbourhood Plan.

The plan went to referendum last summer and was adopted overwhelmingly.

The policies are now part of the local planning guidance; they should be given weight by the Planning Authority and influence decisions, and the policies certainly help the council when commenting on planning applications.

The problem at the moment is that Broadland District Council is unable to demonstrate that it has a 'five-year land supply' (a complicated calculation effectively of how many new houses are in the pipe-line) and the government's policy is that until Broadland can meet that test all local planning policies are treated as being out of date and planning applications have to be treated on the basis of an assumption in favour of development: that makes refusal extremely unlikely. So until Broadland does better our planning policies – like theirs – have limited impact.

One positive effect of the Neighbourhood Plan's adoption is that the parish will receive 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy paid on the building of new houses that obtained planning permission after the adoption of the plan. That is an increase from the 15% the parish would otherwise receive and the extra represents significant amounts over time.

The Neighbourhood Plan cost a total of £18,607 and was largely funded by grants which totalled £16,038; so the parish spent a total of £2569 over 3 financial years on the Plan. In cash terms that expenditure will be recovered by the additional CIL.

Planning

Another busy year. Every month the council is asked by BDC to comment on planning applications but we have no power of decision: we are asked for our views.

Most applications are extensions or small-scale projects and unless the council is aware of any local concerns or special factors it isn't difficult to agree on our response to BDC.

We have several large or contentious applications that are still working with Broadland; these include:

- The site by Heathlands.
- Broom Boats' proposals for land outside the parish on the old Yarmouth Rd close to the Cucumber Lane roundabout. This will have implications for Blofield parishioners and the planning application is still awaited.
- Manor Park. The new applications for 175 houses and one commercial unit received outline consent and an application for the second commercial unit received full consent. We are waiting for negotiations on the details of the housing application to begin and opportunity to influence the design and requests for community contributions in addition to the CIL they will pay.
- The proposal to build on land adjacent to the Memorial Hall in Brundall has implications for Blofield parishioners and, again, the planning application is awaited.

The larger developments are difficult to understand because of the volume of the paperwork and we've been helped enormously by the policies in the Blofield parish Neighbourhood Plan; they give a framework to assess the applications against and make our comments more focused and relevant in planning terms - the only language the planning officers speak. Unfortunately, the 'five-year land supply' issue is a real problem and seems to us to make a mockery of the government's support for Neighbourhood Planning.

The move to having councillors meeting informally the week before the formal parish council meeting to look at the applications and discuss them at length is working. This means that usually 5 or 6 councillors are able to spend a couple of hours looking at the applications, discussing them in detail, and suggesting a recommendation on each to the council. At the parish council meeting all councillors then have an opportunity to hear the views of parishioners and the recommendations from the group before deciding how to respond to BDC.

I'm sorry for the length of this but it is a big issue in the parish and is unlikely to go away.

Finances

After many years without an increase in the parish precept – largely a result of pressure from Broadland Council - we have increased the precept by a small amount this year. The finances are healthy, but we have increased commitments and costs and it makes much more sense to ensure the parish council is properly resourced in the future. CIL money is coming to the parish from new-build houses but there are restrictions on how we use it and it will not cover all the improvements we might want; and any improvements are likely to mean future maintenance costs. We are building up cash reserves, both to meet inevitable maintenance and repair costs, but also to help fund improvements – both to what we already have and by way of new projects.

Projects

The council has a number of projects ongoing:

Churchyard Wall. We are responsible for the upkeep of the churchyard. A recent survey identified urgent repairs and these are now in hand. The project is being managed by the church's architect and the works should start in June. Further work may well become necessary.

Footpath through churchyard and replacement gates. The details of the improvements to the footpath are being finalised with the Parochial Church Council.

Churchyard tree survey and management plan. The protected trees have been surveyed and work as recommended will be carried out. A long-term management plan for all the trees, shrubs and hedges will be prepared and the council will be able to plan for works over a period of years.

Courthouse new doorway to rear garden and associated works. The project comes from the Management Committee and the council is happy to support it and contribute to the costs. The committee has obtained a commitment from Norfolk Homes to support the landscaping work and the council is very appreciative of the committee's efforts.

New Community Land. The council is waiting to hear when the land will be handed-over by Norfolk Homes; the terms were included in a legal agreement between the company and Broadland DC.

Allotments entrance. Improvements are required advice is being obtained.

Establishing a Public Right of Way in Hillhouse Lane/Clarks Loke. Evidence of use has been obtained from a significant number of local residents and consultation letters are being sent to the adjoining land-owners.

We now have a lead councillor for each project (apart from the churchyard wall where an architect is acting for us) who helps the clerk, attends meetings etc. - but these projects, and others that will come forward, take a considerable amount of clerk and councillor time and we would benefit from two more councillors with time to devote to this sort of work.

What else?

- We have been in correspondence with Highways England over a possible sale of Plantation Wood. They were willing to sell but had to offer the land to the original owner; if they don't want to re-purchase it would be offered on the open-market. Unfortunately, the proposed improvements to the A47 at N. Burlingham mean that HE are unable to proceed with any land disposal in the locality. We hope that once the N. Burlingham route is decided it may be possible to revive the disposal.
- The second Speed Awareness Sign to be used outside Hemblington and Blofield schools is in use and the data it collects is being analysed monthly. Paul Culley-Barber puts a lot of effort into this.
- The plan to replace dead/dying trees along Blofield Corner Road had to be abandoned when Norfolk Highways said the existence of utilities meant new plantings could not be approved. This was a very frustrating outcome.
- The parish council decided to agree to the responsibility for the play area and the other open spaces on the Keir development being passed to a private management company. Broadland DC gave us advice, and this management structure is becoming common. The play area and open spaces will be open to public use in perpetuity.

- The parish council website was updated and we hope it is more user-friendly.
- The council declined Norfolk Homes' request that we agree to a 'land swap' that would provide the parish with a different, and slightly larger, area of community land between Wyngates and the A47 and which would enable Norfolk Homes and Norfolk County Council to build about 40 houses beside and to the rear of the surgery, instead of the 14 for which NCC has planning permission.
- The Neighbourhood Plan suggests a number of projects; if any are to be taken forward they will have to be costed and prioritised and then decisions taken on what is done and when. This is work that will need input from local groups and individuals as well as councillors over the next few years.
- We are exploring possible additional areas of land for community use; the discussions with one current owner are at an early stage and are confidential. If anything looks to be viable the proposal will be aired in public.
- We've supported the Brundall and Blofield Good Neighbour Scheme with Pat Wilson championing it in this parish. Please look out for information on what the scheme can offer and – very importantly – how you could help. Pat assures me that the time commitment need only be very modest.
- We've had meetings with NCC Highways and Highways England to talk about congestion issues and the planning of the dualling of the N Burlingham section of the A47. The consultation happened in a hurry and a decision on the route and any junction at the east end of Blofield is expected by the autumn.
- We had proposals to create raised crossing points by the surgery and close to the shops in The Street in Blofield. The one in The Street will not be taken forward on cost grounds; the one by the surgery may be possible when/if the small development beside the surgery is built - as costs can be saved then.
- Another acknowledgement – our two District Councillors, Frank O'Neill and Chris Harrison, have been very supportive and it's good to have ward councillors taking an interest in our parish.
- Our clerk, Sarah Osbaldeston, returned from maternity leave in January. The council agreed to a job-share arrangement and we've been very fortunate to retain Steven Ford as our assistant clerk. Basically, Sarah deals with finance and the council meetings and Steven deals with projects and most of the correspondence. I'm grateful to Steven for putting up with us over the period of Sarah's maternity leave.

Conclusion

I may have missed things; all councillors have worked on issues over the year and it's unfair of me to name individuals.

We can do some things better, perhaps most obviously our communications. Whilst we've made changes no-one ever gets that 'right' and I'm sure we have room to improve.

I'll end by repeating the request for help – we have vacancies and we'd like to fill them with people who want to help make the village an even better place to live, and we'd particularly like to hear from residents of Blofield Heath.

Thank you.

4. BLOFIELD FUEL CHARITY REPORT (Brenda Dawson)

The land at Blofield Corner Road consists of 37 acres and is let out to two farmers who pay rent twice a year in April and October. The shooting rights have not been used this year.

In September notices are put in the church magazine and Focal Point and two post offices. Forms are collected from the two post offices and then I collect them at the end of October, sort them out and then have a meeting with the trustees to decide what amount they can receive.

If they live alone 5 units are allocated, if they live together they receive 4 units. Last year 64 people applied and the amount last year was £50 for 5 units and £40 for 4 units.

We have 5 trustees and the clerk. These are the chair - Shirley Rose, Vice Chair – Mrs G Butler, Mrs Pat Wilson, David Pilch and Rev. Kevin Billson. Brenda Dawson is the Clerk.

5. BLOFIELD RELIEF IN NEED CHARITY AND REVE FOUNDATION (Kevin Bilson)

6. REVE FOUNDATION REPORT (Kevin Bilson)

The two charities have been combined with a balance of £892 in 2016.

6 written applications for educational grants were received, all were awarded a grant from the combined charity. There were 4 grants made of £50, 1 of £150 and 1 of £350, decisions were made based on need and income.

7. HEATHLANDS COMMUNITY CENTRE REPORT (Claire Norton)

Last year I advised you that Heathlands were planning to bring the Community Centre into the 21st C. The building is very dated and we are going to try to improve the appearance, it's not the most attractive building in the village. The plan is also to extend the Social Club, change the bar and cool room round to make it more easily accessible and a better layout inside for functions. All the roofs need replacing and there is no insulation and the cost of that exercise alone is huge.

The total estimate for all this upgrading is a staggering £194,000, of which over £30,000 is VAT. You know that Mr Snelling left us, and others in the village, a very generous donation so we have a good start. The Committee did feel that if we just spent that £50,000 on the roof, then apart from the village not really seeing any benefit, we felt that Mr Snelling would like to see something that could be remembered. He was after all, a great supporter of Heathlands in his time and we just felt that this was the proper thing to do. I hope you can now understand how this all came about, and the reasons why.

You may remember that we employed Sarah Carter who specialises in making HLF grant applications. The forms are really just too complicated but with Sarah's help we managed to get our initial application accepted in December last year. We were then invited to make our Stage 1 application for the actual funding. This was submitted in March this year and we are anxiously waiting to hear if that will be approved. We will still have to make a stage 2 application, but if the Stage 1 is accepted that means the funding has been secured, so you can appreciate we are all on edge but with our fingers crossed.

We try not to think of our bid not being accepted, as doing nothing is not an alternative. The building is tired, badly needs a new roof and the village needs a modern Community Centre. Our Secretary already has a full diary of functions for this coming year and we will have to find a way of working around that, as closing is not an option either.

Moving on, on the 4th June last year we had a marvellous celebration for the Queen's 90th birthday, the weather was brilliant and the whole village turned out. Apart from the Queen and Prince Phillip actually turning up; well two very good look alike's anyway; all members of the Monday Luncheon Club were transported into their special VIP marquee and all the children had a free tea, with cakes, buns and lots of orange juice. It was a really good day and everybody had a wonderful time.

Unfortunately the cooker in the kitchen had to be replaced last year but the Monday Lunch Club managed to get grants, to which your council and Hemblington Parish Council both contributed, so thank you for that. Heathlands made a donation too and so we now have a very smart new cooker, complete with the latest extract system.

The Summer Fair and Beer festival last year were both good events, which all helps in our fundraising. Again we were blessed with good weather and whilst it is really, really hard work to put on, it is rewarding to see the whole village turn out and enjoy themselves. It is perhaps one of the few times throughout the year, when being part of a village is a good feeling.

As you know, Heathlands is completely self funding and that is what we have to put all our efforts into. I'm sure that whatever organisation you belong to, you are all aware of how hard it is to keep raising money. Fortunately our 50/50 Lottery, Bingo sessions, Jumble sales and Open gardens all do well, as did last years Christmas Fair and our recent garage sale. Somehow we manage to keep going forward and with the increased popularity, upgrading Heathlands is so important.

As you may be aware we are trying to complete the asphalt to the front of the car park. There is just one area left, but it is so bad, especially in the winter, we are hopeful that your Parish Council may still have the contacts that could perhaps help to fund some or all of this work. We do have a quote for £8,000, which is from one of our residents who specialises in this sort of work and he is prepared to do it at cost, so it would be great if we can get it done before the winter.

Pre-school is still very popular in the village, last year they managed to raise sufficient funds to make a "Forest School" in the woods at the end of the playing field. It had to have a few trees attended too and all fenced in but it does give the children the opportunity to get closer to nature, at least when the weather is good.

Heathlands did manage to get £750 from the EDP Community Chest which was opened last year, but that money has already been earmarked to replace some of the worn out safety mats around the play equipment which was highlighted in the latest ROSPA report. Diverting now away from Heathlands, as you will no doubt be aware that Mr Jenkinson lost his appeal for a new access beside Heathlands, but even so he is back again with another try. This saga has been going on for 4 years and it is just so frustrating that he keeps trying to steal a small piece of our land without even offering to talk to us let alone offer any money. It goes to committee in June and we can only hope and pray that justice will prevail.

To conclude this year, I must just mention that Heathlands did it's first big wedding reception this year. Everybody pulled out all the stops and the hall looked wonderful with all the decoration. The bride hired a coach to transport guest from the Hemblington church and it really was a super day, so much so that we have another booked for August!! Finally, I have to say thank you to your Parish Council again and not just for the financial help you give us, but also your support and we would like you all to know how much both of these are appreciated.

8. MARGARET HARKER HALL REPORT *(Sarah Russen)*

Good evening Mr. Chairman, Members of the Blofield Parish Council & members of the Public.

We have had yet another good year for the Margaret Harker Hall, Blofield, and our finances are in good health and at this point I would like to say `Thank –you` to the Parish Council for their continuous support. We haven't been able to do any major works to the Margaret Harker Hall this year but we are in the process of organising the car park to have some new surface. We are still correlating the information required for a big major project in the near future. As most people are aware these things take time to organise. The Hall & its Clubs are doing well and this encourages people to use the field and its facilities. We have visitors from other areas whom come and use the field with or without children and we continue to maintain the field to a good condition. The vandalism has been low but irritating; although we have had some remnants of drug taking and this has been passed onto the authorities.

We, the Committee, will continue to provide a play facility and `Open Green` space for the villagers, for as long as possible.

The regular users groups continue to do well and our `one – off` bookings means we do not have many available sessions for new groups. The Bad Players, (Drama Group) have used the hall for several years now for their productions, and it is good to see it being used for a different type of entertainment.

The new lease for the Blofield Tennis Club was eventually completed and we are now in the throws of renewing the Blofield United Football Club's lease.

The Committee continue to require new members, as like many other committees, to carry forward the work of Margaret Harker into the future. If anyone is interested please contact me.

This brings me to the end of my report for 2016-2017.

9. BLOFIELD COURT HOUSE REPORT (*Robin Bunce*)

Our aim in 2016/2017 has been to raise the profile of this historic Grade II listed parish building. Our bookings are the main source of income and increased by 30% in the year and we welcomed several new groups to the Courthouse.

The Committee continued to run our successful Village Screen which is now in its 8th year and continues to be as popular as ever. We have also held quarterly Jazz evenings which again brings a different set of people to the Courthouse.

In September 2016 we took part in Norfolk & Norwich Heritage open day which was very popular and the children were fascinated by our holding cells. We found this to be very rewarding as it encouraged interest in the history of our Parish Building, in all we had some 200 visitors. The whole committee was involved and we even had the last Blofield Bobby who dressed up in a Victorian Police Uniform kindly loaned to us by the Madermarket Theatre.

We have a maintenance programme in place and last year we had a full electrical test and service which complies with current legislation. We also aim to have some damaged brickwork replaced and some repointing carried out to the building.

Our next project is to replace the two doors facing the car park and create a new doorway which will lead to our much forgotten garden. The door project is being fully funded from Courthouse funds that have been raised by the Committee.

We have had landscape plans drawn up for the garden with the help of Norfolk Homes who have agreed to fund the landscaping. We hope that this will be an additional attraction and lead to further bookings.

I would like to thank all of the Courthouse Committee members for their time and effort in raising funds for building improvements and also the Parish Council members who attend our meetings.

10. BLOFIELD ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION REPORT

No report was provided.

11. FOOTPATH WARDEN REPORT (*Peter Mackness*)

Blofield Heath:

The two Blofield Heath footpaths were walked in July 2016. Footpath **Blofield FP1** between Pedham Road and Bonds Road was perfectly walkable and in good condition, it is still being well used. Footpath **Blofield FP2** between Blofield Corner Road and Hall Road was also clear and walkable. This path has a stile at the Blofield Corner end of the path which seems to serve no useful purpose as there is no matching stile at the other end of this path. This possibly discourages people from using the path which is a shame - could removal be considered?

Blofield:

The walks in Blofield were undertaken on various dates in July & August.

Blofield FP5 & FP7, these two paths cross a field adjacent to the A47 that was formerly arable but is pending development and is now dense with waist high weeds. Footpaths at present are roughly in their former locations however users are obviously deviating from the true paths due to the dense vegetation. As mentioned in last year's report, there is no doubt that eventual development will have an impact on these footpaths and the Parish Council may like to pay especial attention to their retention in any planning application, including the requirement for any developer to provide adequate "Public Footpath" signage.

Footpath **Blofield FP7a** is in effect the existing tarmac Shack Lane and thus poses no difficulties

Blofield FP3, this is the path that is the continuation of footpaths FP5 & FP7 (see above) but on the north side of the A47. Commencing from the A47 end of FP3, this footpath crosses a small rough field where Alder saplings continue to grow and now completely block the path. Steep steps descend off this field and down onto Shack Lane – these steps have been reported for two years running as being overgrown and difficult to negotiate and they must be considered as dangerous. I repeat last year's comment; *A low branch of an adjacent oak tree adds to the difficulty in negotiating these steps – removal of the branch (quite a simple task that does not require climbing) is almost essential*. FP3 continues north from Shack Lane, alongside The Red House towards the open field. The part of this path that runs along two of the boundaries of the Red House is now impassable to any casual walker due to vigorous nettle growth and overgrowing hedges. Once the open field is reached the path is excellent

Footpath Blofield FP4 which runs along the top of the south embankment parallel to the A47 was passable only with difficulty as brambles and grasses are now overgrowing the path.

Footpath **Blofield FP4a** is the continuation of FP4 (see above) but on the north side of the A47. A larger part of this path is currently planted with Sugar Beet and no discernible path can be seen in the crop so it will be checked later in the year once the beet has been lifted.

The path **Blofield FP8**, parallel to Garden Road, is once again passable only with difficulty. The former hedge at the Globe Lane end which was collapsing into the path has now been replaced with a fence which is a great improvement however a Buddleia shrub has become established at around the mid-point of this path and is close to obstructing the path. The vegetation on this path quickly re-grows after strimming so if permanent access is desired then regular clearing will have to be scheduled. The finger-post for FP8 at The Street end of this path probably fell over many years ago and is now leaning against a low brick wall serving no purpose at all. The provision of a fresh new finger-post at The Street end would be very helpful if we are to see this path come back into use.

Footpath **Blofield BOAT11** is a Green Lane and is an often-used dog-walkers lane – it is easily passable and needs no attention.

Footpath **Blofield FP12** runs alongside Blofield Church and is probably the Parish's most frequently used path – no attention is needed.

Commentary: Footpaths, bridleways etc. may appear to be relatively unimportant community-assets however they are part of our heritage and deserve to be kept in fair condition even though the reasons for their existence are no longer as pressing as they once were. With the projected increases to our two villages it is going to be important that ways and means are available for residents to enjoy, and have easy access to the countryside and footpaths are an important aspect of this.

It is unfortunate that the creation of the A47 Blofield Bypass over two decades ago resulted in making two of our more significant paths almost unusable on road-safety grounds. This lack of use, as evidenced by this report, is leading to overgrown vegetation and the virtual abandonment of historic paths. It is encouraging however to see that footpaths which are regularly used e.g Blofield Church path and the Blofield Heath/Pedham Road path need little maintenance. In conclusion, it is appreciated that financial constraints are a fact of life today but it is too easy to lose this important amenity by indifference or neglect. This is therefore an appeal that the Parish Council encourages Norfolk County Council Highways and other bodies to help keep our paths in fair condition. Because

"new" footpaths are extremely unlikely ever to be created these days our few existing footpaths deserve to be supported to the best of our ability. Perhaps a significant sum for the provision of new footpath signage & major footpath clearing could be a candidate at some time for CIL money?

12. KEEP BLOFIELD SPECIAL REPORT *(Peter Mackness)*

Keep Blofield Special is a small group of volunteers who undertake monthly litter picking for an hour or so in our two villages. An average of seven people participate twice each month with the exception of January, thus the villages get 22 days attention per year. The past twelve months have been no better and no worse for litter than previous years, the majority of litter being food packaging, drink cans and take-away food packaging. KBS also undertakes modest annual maintenance of the various benches around the village which usually require just a light sanding and the application of wood preservative. These benches seem to be in good condition and the regular maintenance should keep them in good order for some years to come.

The bank between the Library and Blofield School which was cleared and planted by KBS has matured nicely and is especially attractive in Spring. It is regularly maintained by KBS and now provides summer and autumn colour too.

The Spring daffodils donated three years ago and planted at the various entrances to the villages continue to bloom and add to the pleasant aspect of Blofield and Blofield Heath. KBS keeps an eye on the few public spaces in the villages, especially Town Pit in Blofield Heath, and works with the Parish Council if attention is needed at any time.

Looking ahead, KBS is happy to play its small part in keeping our two villages looking attractive and will always welcome suggestions and new members. It is a very informal group of people and can always be contacted via the Parish Clerk.

13. TREE WARDENS REPORT *(Richard Codling & David Pilch)*

Plantation Wood

The unresolved matter of the transfer of Plantation Wood to the parish from Highways England continues to be a source of frustration and a wasted opportunity to use this valuable asset for its educational value. As the only remnant of ancient woodland in the village it should be treasured. The display of woodland spring flowers particularly that of ramsons, is testimony to its thousands of years of history. It is a resource that would be readily available to the adjacent school through the Forest Schools Initiative. I urge the parish council to renew its efforts to achieve this transfer as it will have little priority from Highways England unless we do so.

Churchyard work

A large multi stemmed Ash was felled by tree surgeons as it posed a danger to the church and surrounding grave stones. We moved the left brushwood by dragging branches to the bottom of the churchyard where they will rot down and create a wildlife haven.

We used some of the branches to protect a recently planted hedge from damage by grazing horses in adjoining field.

During the winter we inspected the wooded area at the bottom of the churchyard and spent time clearing some scrub vegetation that was encroaching on some gravestones.

TPOs have been placed on a number of trees within the churchyard

Norwich Fringe Project

During 2016 the running of the tree warden scheme was handed over from Broadland District Council to The Norwich Fringe Project who oversee a number of woodlands and conservation sites.

We attended a number of very informative meetings during the year, although because of the change of leadership we now only meet 4 times a year. We will make every endeavour to attend these meetings as they a great opportunity to find out what's happening tree wise in the broadland area.

The project funded the supply of 5 new apple trees for the New Millennium orchard. They are Norfolk Dumpling, Dutch Mignonne, Red Falstaff, Red Ellison and Norfolk Royal. They are all Heritage Norfolk varieties. Now there are 42 different Norfolk fruit varieties in the orchard.

Cherry trees Blofield Corner Road

As tree wardens this was going to be a great project to plant 16 flowering cherries along Blofield Corner Road . The funding was agreed and varieties chosen but alas we were refused a planting licence by Norfolk County Council due to the proximity of underground utilities. Such a shame for all concerned especially the residents.

Broadsheet and TPOs

John Fleetwood , Freethorpe tree warden produces the publication Broadsheet every month and this now contains all Broadland District Council applications for work on TPOs . So as tree wardens we are kept informed of any works in our parish.

14. BLOFIELD ORCHARD CONSERVATION GROUP *(Richard Codling)*

The orchard is looking very good now which has been a major achievement. In February 2016 the new bench arrived and was placed at the top of the orchard. This is a great asset to the orchard and lovely place to sit and enjoy the efforts of our labours! The blossom walks in 2016 and 2017 were well attended by parishioners.

The apple harvest was low in 2016 although we were able to supplement our apple stock with a crop from a property in Shack Lane. We received a donation of £100 from the Postwick Green Group which was put towards the purchase of two scythes. The scythes have been used to cut the wild flower areas in the Autumn.

The Apple Day at North Burlingham in October was a success with lots of visitors and the weather was kind to us. We had a big display of all our ripe varieties on sale.

The regular working parties were well organised and proved to be a good way to plan and then get the necessary work done throughout the season.

We applied for grant funding to both the district council and Parish Council, this was successful and we are now in the process of installing the interpretation board at the top of the orchard. The board will be used to display a large descriptive map of the orchard.

The large hedge to the right of the orchard was pruned successfully and buddleia were planted along the area which seem to have survived. The top of the hedge was cut by a local contractor free of charge with his tractor mounted hedge cutter.

We carried out a winter survey of the trees to check for disease, pruning needs and relabeling. Only one tree appeared to have some canker and having recently checked another sample 20 trees there appears to be no other signs of pests etc. at the moment. Five new trees were donated by the Norwich Fringe project and planted in the Autumn so we now have 32 apple varieties, 2 pear varieties, 2 cherry and five gage giving a total of 41 different varieties of Norfolk heritage fruit.

The Nursery beds are growing well with the newly grafted trees showing signs of life. Our aim is to keep at least 1 extra tree of every variety in case any of the larger trees die.

As from May 7th this year the orchard is now open to all on Sundays 10am until 4pm and mown walkways make it easier to explore the site.

15. POLICE REPORT

Nothing received.

16. COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILOR'S REPORT *(Andrew Proctor report read by Rob Christie)*

Norfolk & Suffolk should have taken the opportunity of the devolution deal offered by central government – something the area missed out on and will regret.

We all strive to deliver the best services we can but we also know that the money we have to do that is not a bottomless pit.

2016/17 saw ever increasing pressure on budgets at county, district and for that matter town and parish level across the county and country.

NCC increased their share of council tax by 4.8% although that includes 3% dedicated to Adult Social Care costs. BDC increased its share by £5 per annum. The increases were made to ensure both authorities could continue to deliver high quality services.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Children's Services has its problems primarily to do with looked after children but notwithstanding what is being said:

More children than ever are being educated in good or outstanding schools - with Norfolk the fifth most improved county nationally for the proportion of pupils at good or outstanding secondary schools over the past four years, and the 18th most improved for primary schools. Norfolk's colleges and sixth form colleges are all rated 'good' by Ofsted. Provisional GCSE results for 2016 have put Norfolk above the national average for the first time in a decade. **Our Local schools are good.**

A new partnership is being developed between Norfolk County Council and Barnardo's supporting more children to remain at home with their families (where it is safe to do so) as opposed to coming into the care.

We're also supporting children's learning by **investing in school buildings**. We're also growing a bank of talented social workers and developing them through their entire career and have launched our own social care academy.

NCC's aim is to reduce the amount of people having to go into residential care or remain in hospital. An ageing population across Norfolk has put huge pressure on Adult Social Care. The 'Healthy Homes Assistance' project is helping to facilitate early hospital discharge, reduce admissions and / or readmissions and provide preventative measures to reduce risks around the home.

The latest tranche of Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) will see high-speed broadband coverage reaching more than 95% of Norfolk homes and businesses by spring 2020. The total investment in the BBfN programme is £68m since it launched at the end of 2012. Currently, 87% of households and businesses in Norfolk can get a superfast broadband service, more than double the number four years ago (42%).

Work on the **Norwich Northern Distributor Road** is going well, with most of the 1.5m cubic metres of bulk excavation complete, three roundabouts in use at the western end, bridge beams installed or imminent on four of the eight bridges and nearly 9km of carriageway complete to base asphalt layers. Planting of the 300,000 shrubs, trees and hedgerow plants is well under way. The business case for a **Norwich Western Link** is being formulated.

Throughout 2016 we have been lobbying Highways England for early delivery of three sections of dualling of the A47, as well as junction improvements. A bypass for Long Stratton would benefit residents and road users alike and is firmly on our list of priorities. The Library and Information Service won the national Libraries Change Lives Award for its pioneering work in partnership with Norfolk Public Health to promote healthier lifestyles. In 2016, the potential of libraries as cultural hubs started to be realised.

17. TO HEAR AND DISCUSS ANY MATTERS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

It was agreed to hold the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Parish in Blofield Heath at Heathlands Community Centre.

18. CLOSING COMMENTS

The meeting closed and was followed by light refreshments.