



North Leigh Parish

Covering North Leigh, East End, New Yatt and Wilcote

Parish Council Newsletter - October 2021

View from the Chair

Although weather is now turning autumnal, I hope you have managed to enjoy the summer and the new-found freedoms to gather and socialise. We are fortunate indeed to have the two pubs in North Leigh, the brewery in New Yatt and El Antojito which is now operating from the Mason's Arms. What better reason do you need to meet friends old and new at these local establishments?

The Parish Council has continued to meet through the summer months, and meetings are now being held in public again at the Youth Centre on the second Thursday of the month.

Hopefully you found our first newsletter interesting. We intend the newsletters to be published on a regular basis to keep you informed on Parish matters. In this issue there is an explanation of the powers and responsibilities of the Council. Whilst we work to maintain and improve the parish, we only have an advisory role in the planning process with no power to approve or block planning applications. In fact, as a member of the public, you have the potential to sway planning decisions that are made by the District Council. Representations of objection or support from the public are considered seriously by the planning authority.

I am especially pleased that work is progressing on the planned improvements to the children's play area, and I thank all those who have been involved in the consultation regarding the equipment and layout. I hope that work will begin on the improvements this year, however this will mean that the playground is closed for the duration of the work so please make the most of it now and look forward to the new configuration and equipment!

Lastly, we are revamping our website so keep an eye out for the new design. We are making it easier to sign up there to our mailing list to receive updates on local matters such as road closures, planning news and events etc.

Perhaps I'll see you over pizza and beer at the brewery!

Greg Matthews

Chair

North Leigh Parish Council

Parish Councils – An Introduction to its Powers and Responsibilities:

A **parish council** is a civil local authority found in England and is the lowest tier of local government. They are elected corporate bodies, have variable tax raising powers, and are responsible for areas known as civil parishes, serving in total 16 million people.

North Leigh Parish Council (NLPC) is the first tier of Local Government and exists to help the village. The Council is a corporate body, a legal entity separate from that of its members. Its decisions are the responsibility of the whole body. North Leigh Parish Councillors are elected or co-opted. The Council has 9 seats and there are currently 2 vacancies.

The Parish Council meets on the second Thursday of every month at 7:30pm in the North Leigh Youth Centre at the Memorial Hall. Everyone is welcome to attend, and the agendas are published on the NLPC website as well as on the noticeboards in North Leigh and East End. Time is allotted at the start of the meeting for comments and statements from members of the public.

The Annual Parish Meeting is normally held around the beginning of May each year and is the Council's opportunity to report to the parish as to what it has been working on over the year and for residents to raise anything of interest to the community.

The Parish Council raises funds by the annual precept which forms part of the community charge bill and is collected by the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC). The amount is set following discussion of a draft budget at the December or January meeting.

The Council takes responsibility for a number of functions including the grass cutting of certain areas, North Leigh Cemetery, maintaining and inspecting the Children's and Adventure playgrounds, caring for trees on land owned by the Council, and the Parish Council website. The Council also looks for new projects to enhance village life such as our current project of new bus shelters and refurbishing the Children's Playground. The Council often creates small working groups of Councillors to focus on such projects.

Planning

The Council is automatically consulted on all planning applications within the parish that have been submitted to WODC. These amount to 30-40 per year and vary from "single storey rear extension" to "erection of 50 dwellings".

Most of course attract 'no comment' since they come from residents wishing to improve their properties, while larger housing developments can generate widespread comments from villagers. All planning applications are put on the Council's agenda and discussed at public meetings where anyone can attend. Any comments submitted to the planning authority by the Parish Council must be considered by officers and when formal objections are made the application must be referred to WODC Lowlands Planning Committee.

The Parish Council cannot make final decisions on and has no further influence over applications. The larger developments may generate quite large amounts of funding for parish projects such as new play/recreation areas, bus service infrastructure and public art which are some of the items currently in consideration.

The funds are raised through planning agreements between Local Authorities and developers. These agreements are laid out in Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Library, North Leigh Youth Project and West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice.

Donation Requests

The Council considers donation requests quarterly, looking to donate to charities and organisations that benefit the parish. The Council has currently been supporting organisations such as the North Leigh Library, North Leigh Youth Project and West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice.

Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

The Council has Standing Orders and Financial Regulations which can be found on: www.northeigh.org.

These documents are the Council's governing documents and give an understanding as to the operating of the Council. Harmonious villages depend on interaction by the residents, and more input from villagers would be most appreciated by the Parish Council. The Parish Council would encourage residents to be in contact with any comments about the village. Even if the issue is not a Parish Council related item, the Council can often provide an avenue for residents to pursue their issue.

If there is anything you would like to raise with the Council, please do feel free to come to a Parish Council meeting or email the Parish Clerk.

northleighparishclerk@gmail.com

Grass Verges and Footways

The Parish Council has, over the last 2 years, assumed responsibility for the grass cutting some of the verges and small areas within the village. This enables the cutting to be carried out at the most appropriate time. One major benefit of this approach is that it allows us to help our Bee and other pollinator populations in the Spring, when there is a shortage of flowers providing the nectar that is needed. This year the Parish Council participated in Plantlife's "No Mow May" campaign (<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/about-us/news/how-to-mow-your-lawn-for-wildlife>). Not mowing in May allows the dandelions, daisies, primroses and clover which thrive in the grass verges and grassy areas to grow, and these provide some of the Bees' favourite 'nectar stops'. The decline in our Bee population has become a countrywide concern and the Plantlife campaign has been backed by the National Trust and other organisations and has been widely reported in the media. The campaign encourages families to help arrest the decline by planting Bee friendly flowers, setting up a small area in gardens for wildflowers and making homes suitable for solitary and other Bees.

Bees are an important component of the food chain, pollinating flowers for fruit, vegetables and trees. Blossom and leaves are used by Bees for nectar and building homes. So please try and bear with the 'untidy grassy areas' in May that help our Bee population grow.

The Council is also asking residents to try to refrain from cutting their hedges from February through to July if possible as many species of birds are nesting between these months. However, the Council would request that if a footway runs past your property, the hedges etc on the property do not grow to the extent that the path is obstructed.

Although the hedges may look a bit wild towards the end of June and July, they will provide more protection for the birds and other wildlife.

Footpaths

Footpaths are important to access the fields, woods and countryside, and provide many villagers with much enjoyment. During this last year the increased usage during the Covid restrictions and the heavy and prolonged periods of rain has meant they have become very muddy and slippery underfoot.

Improving the state of the parish footpaths is on the Parish Council's agenda, however the maintenance of footpaths is the responsibility of the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and landowners. The Parish Council is researching various ways of working with OCC to ensure the footpaths are kept in a healthy state.

Speedwatch

A major concern identified in the responses the Parish Council received from the survey carried out in 2020, and from conversations had with many villagers, was the speeding traffic through both North Leigh and East End.

Finding a solution to this problem has been a focus for the Parish Council over the last few years.

In order to provide data to support measures to reduce traffic speeds in the villages, the Parish Council has organised a small number of volunteers into a Community Speedwatch team which, conditions allowing, carries out spot checks on vehicle speeds. Excessive or inappropriate vehicle speed is a major contributing factor in many, if not most, traffic incidents and anything that can be done to encourage motorists to observe speed limits and drive according to road conditions should be welcomed.

To this end the main aim of the Council's Speedwatch policy is to try and educate drivers in order to make them recognise and abide by the speed limits on our village roads rather than to report them. This said, the registration numbers of vehicles travelling at speeds which exceed the speed limit are forwarded to the police for further action.

In June 2021 the Council arranged for the OCC to carry out traffic monitoring in two locations in the parish, Common Road and East End, and the headline results of these two surveys can be found on the parish website.

Carried out over a seven-day period the survey showed that 43% (Common Road) and 49% (East End) of vehicles were travelling above the permitted speed limit of 30 mph with the highest recorded speeds at each location being 73mph and 57 mph respectively.

These figures have been sent to the OCC and the Thames Valley Police Commissioner for comment. You may also have seen them used in the Oxford Mail article of the 26th of June.

As mentioned above the Speedwatch monitoring is carried out by a small band of dedicated volunteers and in order to increase the Speedwatch monitoring we need more members. This will certainly be the case if Thames Valley Police decide to proceed with their current plan which involves using communityspeedwatch.org.

If you would be interested in helping – a couple of hours is all that is required - then please contact:

Councillor Andy Clements via the Parish Clerk or directly by email to andyc.nlpc@gmail.com

District Councillor Report

Climate Change

WODC recently announced it is about to launch a “Net Zero Carbon Toolkit”, produced jointly with Cotswold and Forest of Dean District Councils with help from specialists in the field. This is a guide for householders, builders etc on how to make our homes better insulated and energy efficient, ideally carbon emission neutral or better. Given that over the next 10 years the fuels and methods we use to heat our homes are going to change, we all need to start thinking about how we are going to deal with these changes.

The Toolkit is available on the WODC website and is recommended reading – it is a comprehensive guide and provides much useful information.

It may be accessed via the below link:

www.westoxon.gov.uk/netzerocarbontoolkit

Housing

WODC continues to deliver over the annual target number of affordable homes in the District. However there has been a growth in the number of longer-term empty homes in the area and so an officer has been appointed to improve that situation.

Planning

The Oxfordshire 2050 Plan is being consulted on from now to 8th October and another Oxford/Cambridge Spatial Strategy Plan is being consulted on at the same time. Both of these plans could impact how WODC’s own Local Plan evolves when it starts being reviewed later this year. It was adopted in September 2018 and is due a 5-year update in 2023 - so the lead-in process starts shortly.

With the likelihood of a new Planning Bill coming through Parliament later this year and with these other Plans looming, the need for our own Neighbourhood Plan for North Leigh parish is becoming more relevant. A group of volunteers has been created to do this and we hope to start discussing the way forward this autumn.

Fibre Optic Broadband Roll-out

Those parts of the village where fibre optic was not available already, have now been covered by Gigaclear who have finished the laying of cables. Gigaclear held an event online on Tuesday 17th August to explain how those wishing to upgrade their connection can learn what is involved. This work has been part funded by the Government, the OCC and WODC to ensure modern standards of connectivity in rural villages such as North Leigh.

Leisure

The Parish Council is working with WODC leisure team on how best to spend the S106 funds on recreation facilities in the village. Bellway and Bewley are both obliged to provide a children’s play facility on their respective developments.

There are also further funds available that could possibly be used to deliver a facility for older children, teenagers and adults.

For those wanting to enjoy open air swimming, the Woodstock Pool has recently reopened.

North Leigh Common

WODC recently recruited an officer to focus on the longer-term management of all the land it controls including North Leigh Common. A management plan is being worked on for this important open space which is enjoyed by many people from both in and outside the parish.

The Friends of North Leigh Common volunteers recently recycled a large oak tree that fell down on the Common last winter. The idea was proposed by Andy Killingbeck a resident of North Leigh. After the tree's trunk had been sawn into four substantial logs, he and a group of volunteers, with assistance from local farmer Robert Crocker and his teleporter forklift, manoeuvred the logs into place around the open areas of the Common. This initiative has provided more places for visitors to the Common to sit and watch the world and nature go by, picnic or chat with friends and family.

The Friends will be holding more working parties this winter starting in October, so if anyone wants some exercise please come along – all are welcome.

The working parties are usually on Friday mornings from 9.30am until 1pm, weather permitting.

Nature notes

Butterflies have been out in force including silver washed fritillary, peacock, brimstone, comma, marbled white, speckled wood and skippers. The green woodpeckers have been active on the ants' nests in the open areas. A number of lizards have been observed on the logs by the car park sunning themselves.

The Common has had a good show of heath and lady's bedstraw, mallow, agrimony, lesser St John's wort in addition to a number of spotted and pyramidal orchids on show in May/June. The bracken encroaching on the edges is being cut back as much as is appropriate.

Policing Matters

The Witney based PCSO team wishes to remind all residents that if anyone is experiencing any problems that involve policing or observes any suspicious activity that should be reported to ring 101 for non-emergency issues and 999 for emergencies.

The Witney team may also be emailed on the below address:

witneyNHPT@thamesvalleypnn.police.uk