

WEASENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk: Mrs Gail Robinson

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Annual Report of Weasenhham Parish Council 2024 & Invitation to the Annual Parish Meeting 21st May 2024

Commencing at
6.30pm in the Community Building on the Recreation Ground
Off Massingham Road

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024

Dear Resident,

It has been an honour and a privilege to have served the Parish of Weasenham over the past 12 months during which time much has happened. The new Parish Council took over from the outgoing Interim Council on 18th May 2023, and immediately began looking at things in the village that needed attention or could be improved. Dirty or damaged street signs, signs buried in vegetation, blocked drainage, the filthy bus stop and potholes on the roads through the village were some of the early things to get fixed, often by rolling up our sleeves and getting our hands dirty rather than waiting for other agencies to remedy these faults. This is an ongoing process and we welcome your input, so please continue to bring faults to our attention and we will do the best we can to assist in getting them fixed.

Another immediate issue was the plan that had been approved by the Interim Council to spend £28,000 (this includes interest charges over 7 years) on a new path located between the recreation ground car park and the Community Building. As a new Parish Council, this was of great concern to us because it would inevitably overcommit our finances making it extremely difficult to bring about positive change within the village for many years. Is this what the Parish wanted? We decided to advertise a series of Public Consultation Events. These were sufficiently well attended to get a strong sense of the view of the Parish through comments in the visitor book and questionnaires. The feedback clearly showed the vast majority of respondents were not in favour of spending £28k on this project (only one respondent favoured the loan option), but were supportive of a new path being achieved via a Community Project (DIY and volunteers). We as a new Council therefore used this judgement to cancel the Public Works Loan application and planned to implement the Community Project. However, a local businessman offered to build the path for us using his contractors and at no cost whatsoever to the Parish. On completion of the new path the Parish Council obtained quotes from electrical companies to install bollard lighting along the 80m length of the new path. The lighting work was finally completed in February 2024 and looks fabulous, allowing people to get to and from the Community Building without fear of tripping over in the dark. The old path has been lifted, the matting sold, and we are in the process of reinstating the ground to its original condition.

In August 2023 our Clerk who came to Weasenham with the Interim Council

was offered extended hours elsewhere therefore she resigned her post at Weasenham. Fortunately, by early September, Mrs Gail Robinson joined us on a Locum basis (Clerk & RFO). After several months of working with the new Council she was appointed as our permanent Clerk and RFO. Mrs Robinson came to us very highly recommended by Norfolk Association of Local Councils and is highly qualified for the role she performs. She has been an excellent addition to the team and Councillors continue to draw from her expertise and experience.

In May 2023, the new Council was formed of just three elected (unopposed) Councillors. You may be aware that there should be seven Councillors for the Parish of Weasenham. There was an obvious need to run a co-option process to fill the remaining four vacancies. Running the Council with just three Councillors is not sustainable in the long-term. We need more local people to help organise local matters. The first co-option drive was successful, in that we gained two new Councillors. Sadly, this was not to last, and by Christmas we were back to just three.

At this point I wish to place on record our sincere thanks and gratitude to the two Councillors that left us for their hard work and strong commitment whilst serving on the Council, particularly for their valuable contributions to planning the budget for 2024/2025 and for the work that was done in developing new policies and updating old ones. We wish them well. Consequently we are still in the position of needing to co-opt four more people to join the Council, people with a positive mind-set and good interpersonal skills who can help to promote community spirit and serve the Parish and strive for better opportunities for all parishioners. If you wish to find out more about joining the Parish Council, contact the Clerk and ask for a co-option application form.

Being on the Council is about fighting for the rights of local people therefore when the announcement came at the end of August 2023 that the Primary School was to be closed at Christmas, the Parish Council did as much as it could to intervene by writing to the MP for Mid-Norfolk, Bishop of Norwich, the Secretary of State for Education, County & District Councillors and others in an attempt to block the closure or at least negotiate a fairer timeline if closure became inevitable. And of course there was much encouragement given to the whole Parish to pick up their pens and write to complain about the proposed closure. Sadly, the fate of the school may have already been decided behind closed doors months beforehand and despite everyone's best efforts the school closed at the end of December 2023.

Throughout the rest of the financial year 2023/2024, the new Parish Council have been involved in other projects for the benefit of the whole community. One legacy project was to try to get the village pump fixed after it had been knocked down by a reversing delivery vehicle back in December 2022. The interim council had initiated the process of trying to get restitution from the company responsible, but the claim had not progressed. The new Parish Council chased the claims company and was finally awarded the full amount for the repair using a local engineering company. Your Councillors physically collected and re-installed the pump. Since then, there have been negotiations with Norfolk County Council to obtain permission to erect posts and a barrier around the village pump to protect it. NCC have agreed and soon you will see the protection in place, and none too soon as one of the smaller temporary posts has already been struck by another vehicle. We would like to place on record our thanks to the residents of the Old Police House who have volunteered to install the protective posts, at their own cost, and thereafter maintain the piece of ground on which the pump sits.

Another project centred around applying for a Parish Partnership Bid to obtain a 50% funding grant from NCC to pay for a set of Village Gateway signs on the A1065 at each end of the village, if they were deemed to be affordable and good value when we received the quote from Highways. The original idea came from a parishioner and the Council thought that it could be an opportunity for reinforcing the 50 mph speed limit to calm traffic on that straight section of road. Sadly, the quotation came in at over £7000 hence we felt this was not a good use of public money so the Gateways project has been shelved for the time being. Our Clerk suggested that she could ask if our original Parish Partnership Bid application could be reallocated to something else. Other parishioners have been asking for more street furniture in the village with one suggestion for a new bench to be placed near the old Ostrich Pub on a walking route.

'Party in the Park' (PitP) was another hugely successful project at the end of last summer that saw more than 100 residents attend a wonderful afternoon in early September with live music, refreshments, ice-creams and children's games plus amazing raffle prizes, a tombola, a book sale and a DVD/CD sale. The event raised over £700 for the village and we look forward to hearing your ideas about how that money should be spent. It must be stated, the PitP was not primarily intended as a fundraiser event. Instead, the main objective was to bring the community together and share hours of fun, chat, banter and generally enjoying the moment of spending time together. It was

very satisfying to hear people talking about the event several months later, saying how much they had enjoyed the day and how they had been able to catch-up with neighbours they hadn't seen for a long time. That was the most satisfying part, witnessing the strong sense of community spirit.

As for future projects, we have a few in mind, but these are just ideas at the moment to be investigated, planned and decided upon. We would like to do more by way of public consultation to hear from YOU the residents of Weasenham on what you want in your village and how we should allocate money from the Solar Fund. It's really important that you talk with us so that we can spend our limited funding on things that we want or need in the village. One idea that we are looking into concerns the car park area at the recreation ground that ends up as a muddy quagmire in the wetter months. The carpark itself requires a more solid base and the fencing surrounding it is rotten and in need of replacement or refurbishment. We would also want to investigate the possibilities of installing suitable lighting for the winter months for anyone attending the Community Building. This would offer the perfect opportunity for parishioner involvement if it became a community project. Ideally, we would like to revitalise the appearance of the storage container next to the car park with a much needed coat of paint and perhaps a suitable design image. This could also be a community project. And please, if anybody knows of a way of disposing of six very large tyres, let us know!

Budget 2024/2025: Many weeks were spent working together (five Councillors at one point) thrashing out ideas to carefully consider the requirements for this year's budget, taking into account the forecasts from last year and expenditure across 2023/2024 plus development across 2024/2025. In January 2024 it was left to the remaining three Councillors to set the budget and we hope that we have struck a good balance between rising costs and understanding that family budgets are being overstretched during this cost of living crisis. The precept for financial year 2024/2025 is set at **£16,996.00** which represents a very modest increase on last year's precept figure of £16,776.24. For a **Band D property**, this works out at just **£3.55** more in 2024/2025 or explained a different way, just **7 pence extra per week**. In percentage terms, it represents a 1.3% increase on last year's figure but is still marginally lower than the precepts of 2020 to 2022 despite rising costs, especially in energy bills and it is significantly lower than inflation. Any additional increases in council tax will be due to District Council budgeting and not due to the Parish Council budget.

For easy comparison, here are the precepts of previous years:

Precept Amounts 2020 to 2024				
2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
£17,000	£17,000	£17,000	£16,776.24	£16,996.00

We keep being reminded by parishioners that the Solar Fund is not absolutely guaranteed for a number of reasons. For this reason we have listened to and acted on the budget training advice provided by Norfolk Association of Local Councils to include a reserve fund in the budget for contingencies and in this case that includes planning for the loss of the Solar Fund. Through careful financial control and identifying savings in 2023/2024 we are in a position to now set the Parish reserve at £9000 which still isn't enough to cover all of our costs if the Solar Fund disappeared altogether. We are not informed about the grant allocation until around June each year hence the need to fix this in the January budget. It is our intention in subsequent years to gradually increase the Parish reserve to finally match the predicted income from the solar agreement. This will ensure financial security going forward. We still want to hear from parishioners about how you would like the Solar Fund money to be spent therefore please contact any of the Councillors or the Clerk in writing to share your views and ideas.

It would be quite wrong of me to finish without mentioning the fantastic work that is done for this parish by your Parish Councillors and our new Clerk. In particular I would like to thank both Councillor Jackie Hargreaves and Councillor Tom McClenaghan for their loyal service to the community. Please remember these are voluntary unpaid roles, giving up personal time to try to make a difference and a better place to live for everyone. They work away in the background on a huge number of tasks every week in order to address local issues and to ensure the Parish Council runs as smoothly as possible.

In closing, I echo the words of former Chairman Atterwill from last year. "Weasenham is a lovely parish, and it has been my sincere honour to be its Parish Council Chairman" over the last 12 months.

Martin Romanovsky, Chairman

Weasenham Parish Council

9th May 2024

Weasenham Parish Council – Financial Summary

Income	Actual £ 2023/24	Budget £ 2024/25
Precept	16,776.24	16,996.00
Solar Farm Grant	11,901.86	Est. 11,901.86
Community Building Hire Fees, Events & Sales	1,174.30	300.00
Bank Interest	152.52	155.00
HMRC VAT Refund	1,800.65	1,800
Donations Accepted & Other	145.00	0.00
Polling Station Charges	150.00	150.00
Public Works Loan	0.00	0.00
Totals	32,100.57	Est. 31,302.86

Expenditure	Budget £ 2023/24	Actual £ 2023/24	Budget £ 2024/25
Staff Costs	8,109.84	5,918.94	7,878.72
Clerk & Council Training	596.00	225.00	600.00
Councillor Expenses	313.00	26.10	£0.00
Democratic/Council Election Costs	924.46	292.46	1,100.00
Website	408.00	420.46	200.00
Office Costs (excluding Parish Insurance)	220.00	36.40	130.00
Grass Cutting & Maintenance	7,000.00	5,400.00	7,900.00
Parish Insurance	700.00	753.56	825.00
Community Building Costs (excluding Utilities*)	32,357.40	4,573.19	1,946.00
Utilities (Electricity & Water)	Unspecified	1,088.92	1,300.00
Subscriptions	1,495.80	1,580.28	1,635.00
Donations made	375.00	500.00	700.00
Auditing Fees (Internal & External Auditors) and ICO.	1,200.00	1,763.30	1,705.00
Communications (Inc. newsletters, printing; excl. website)	270.00	594.63	910.00
Community	1,750.00	250.00	750.00
Legal Advice	500.00	0.00	500.00
Parish Asset Maintenance	2,000.00	0.00	1,750.00
Contingency & Parish Reserve	1,000.00	0.00	9,000.00
Totals	59,219.50	23,423.24	38,829.72

Notes

* Utilities were probably included in this figure of £32,357.40 in the 2023/2024 budget but were not precisely specified in the budget.

** The £28,000 public works loan (including interest payments over 7 years) formed the major part of the £32,357.40 in the 2023/2024 budget. This was overturned by the new Council after a Public Consultation process.

Parish Clerk: Mrs Gail Robinson

Email: parishcouncil@weasenhams.org



Invitation to Attend

THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING will be held at the Community Building, Weasenhams (off Massingham Road) on

Tuesday 21st May 2024 at 6.30pm

All persons whose name appears on the Electoral Register have a statutory right to speak and vote at the meeting. The electors may give others who attend, the opportunity to speak.

The meeting is open to everyone.

AGENDA

1. To Receive Apologies for Absence
2. Chairman's Report—Mr Martin Romanovsky, Chairman of Weasenhams Parish Council
3. Reports from Village Organisations (Order to be agreed by the Chairman)
4. Report on the Management of the Community Building
5. Parishioners Questions
6. Date and Time of Next Annual Parish Meeting