

Branston & Mere Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Branston Hall Hotel, Lincoln Road, Branston on
Monday 11th April 2016 at 7 pm.

Chairman: Cllr Peter Lundgren.

Clerks: Mrs S Stead & Mrs V Sparkes.

Members of the Council: 10

Members of the Public & guests: 64

Item 1 Welcome.

The Chairman welcomed everyone saying that it was good to see so many people and thanked the hotel management for the use of their excellent facilities.

Item 2 Guest Speaker – Malcolm Ross – The new Community Library.

The Chairman said that it had been a huge challenge to secure the future of the library and introduced Malcolm Ross.

Cllr Ross said that the days when libraries were quiet and forbidding places had gone. He said that the struggle to maintain the facility had been worthwhile and had given the community the opportunity to step in.

Branston's library was unique in that it is based in a school rather than standalone or within another business. That had presented additional challenges; working around its occasional use as a classroom and public sessions being shared with students during lunchtimes. There had been challenges with several IT failures and a boiler breakdown during the winter to deal with.

The Parish Council had formed a partnership with the Community Academy and had employed a Volunteer Coordinator, to support the volunteers and develop the service, in the form of the enthusiastic Lesa Appleyard.

Branston had been able to reopen the library after just one week of closure, the fastest turnaround in Lincolnshire and the only one to reopen with the same number of hours. He praised the volunteers who had all undertaken training and DBS checks and had brought a variety of skills from various backgrounds. He praised their commitment and suggested that they were enjoying meeting and engaging with people from the community. He said that so many people had volunteered that there was now a waiting list; unlike at Washingborough where there had been too few people willing to volunteer and their library had closed.

Several new clubs had been formed with more ideas coming forward, giving the library a new lease of life and bringing in new customers.

He said that it had become more than just a library and that the Parish Council was committed to its long term financial support.

Item 3 Guest Speaker – Richard Naulls – Update on the Speed Device.

Cllr Naulls said that the Parish Council regularly received complaints about speeding through the village and that it was quite an emotive issue. He conducted a quick straw poll on how many of those present had ever exceeded a speed limit; almost all had.

He said that during the previous five years, 14 accidents had been reported on the B1188 (3 serious) and 9 on Station Road (1 serious). He said that there were many minor collisions that went unreported. There were National Guidelines for speed limits which were then modified by LCC to reflect the county's roads; forming Lincolnshire's Speed Limit Policy.

The speed device purchased by the Parish Council acted as a deterrent and provided a range of statistics. A snapshot of the data was displayed. He said that the Council had campaigned for a reduction of 10mph on the current limits; suggesting that it 'felt right' and inviting motorists to test it. He said that some traffic calming measures, like speed humps and chicanes, created other hazards but that 'gating systems' had been trialled by other villages and appeared to work. The Parish Council hoped to install gateways during the year. Cllr Naulls said that he would be working to collate the data and would form comparisons with other villages to present to LCC and he welcomed concerns and suggestions from residents.

Item 4 Guest Speaker – Sarah Stead – Parish Plan ~ 5 year review.

The Parish Plan had been launched in 2011 and had considered improvements requested by residents under six themes. During and since the Plan was completed, improvements had been made and new facilities gained: new play equipment, the skate park, the Christmas Market, extended Coop store and History Group mosaic, Village Hall refurbishments and events and the fact that the evidence provided by the Questionnaire and Plan had helped to secure £260,000 in grants since 2007, declaring the Plan a success and very worthwhile. The full report is available on the website.

Item 5 Guest Speaker – Vanessa Sparkes – Neighbourhood Plan update.

The Chairman introduced the new Assistant Clerk, Vanessa Sparkes, who would be supporting the committee working on the Neighbourhood Plan. He said that it was becoming increasingly important for communities to produce a Plan that would work alongside the emerging Local Plan and have a legal standing on future development; guiding and shaping but not stopping the necessary development.

Mrs Sparkes reminded residents of the workshops held during 2015 and said that she would be helping to relaunch and reinvigorate the process. She gave a reminder of the themes to be covered and the mission statement.

The government required 40,600 new homes to be built in Greater Lincoln by 2026. The 362 homes given outline permission in Branston should be sufficient to meet Branston's quota. The need for new or larger facilities, heritage protection, transport and employment would also be given consideration.

Moving forward, there would be further consultation, gained through going into the community, to schools, clubs and social occasions and through the website. A questionnaire would be used to gather specific evidence for the Plan. Once drawn up, the Plan would need to be approved by NKDC and needed to gain 50% support by those who vote in a local referendum. If successful, it will become part of the strategic development plan and receive consideration by the planning department and Planning Inspector when deciding applications and appeals.

She closed by saying that the process would not be quick or easy and needed the support of the community and help of volunteers to help develop the plan and raise public awareness and participation.

Item 6 Guest Speaker – PC Pete Hanson – Local Beat update.

PC Hanson confirmed that North Kesteven was the safest place in the country for the second year running. He said that his team of four PCSOs covered 18 villages.

He stated that between April 2015 and 2016 there had been 50 reported crimes in Branston compared to 48 the previous year. Theft topped the list with 12 reports followed by 9 reports of Criminal Damage. He said that there had been 16 counts of Damage to a Vehicle but the damage reported had not necessarily taken place in Branston.

He spoke about the recent spate of armed robberies, including at the Co-op in Branston, suggesting that it was not linked to those in Lincoln and had been carried out by someone familiar with the cashing up and backroom procedure at the store. DNA evidence had been found but had not been on the system and the investigation was ongoing.

PC Hanson said that the police were not the solution to speeding, although they did carry out enforcement when resources allowed. PCSOs are permitted to stop vehicles and take details but cannot issue tickets. He said that offenders tended to be travelling through villages rather than locals.

PC Hanson said that the skate park had been a Godsend in resolving ASB issues, as it gave officers somewhere to direct kids to.

He recommended that residents did not engage with door knocking, travelling workmen and suggested that residents obtain other quotes and seek recommendations from friends or through the approved traders list. He also warned about scams to obtain bank details, saying that such details should never be given and any issues be reported to the Police and Trading Standards. Leaflets were made available covering scams and thefts from sheds and garages.

Item 7 Notes from the APM held on 27th April 2015 to be approved as the Minutes.

Acceptance of the notes was proposed by Malcolm Ross and seconded by Tony Hunt. There were no matters arising.

Item 8 Chairman's Annual Report.

It hardly seems a year since we were all here last and I'm pleased to report that your Parish Council continues the good work on your behalf, to improve your community.

We've had some changes in the Parish Council this year and we've been joined by three new councillors. It's been my pleasure to welcome David Lowrie, Greg Tebb and Richard Naulls who bring a wealth of experience to the Parish Council. We also have a new Assistant Clerk – Vanessa Sparkes - and as you've already seen and heard, Vanessa brings a wide range of skills and masses of enthusiasm to our Council. It was very pleasing to note that we had a very positive response to the vacancy, with a number of extremely good candidates - and we were fortunate to be able to select Vanessa from a very strong field. Vanessa joined us when Lesa Appleyard, our former assistant clerk, took on the role of Library co-ordinator.

Whilst we're talking about changes, Sarah Stead has recently become a Cilca accredited clerk. Cilca is the Certificate in Local Council Administration. Achieving this qualification has been a lot of hard work for Sarah and goes some way to formally recognise her skills and abilities. Sarah's achievement in becoming Cilca accredited also means that the Parish Council can now apply to become a Quality Council. No decision has been made at this time but becoming a Quality Council would allow the Parish Council to 'do whatever an individual can generally do' – although it has to be said that individuals can be reckless and feckless so we'll try to avoid that. As a Quality Council we could, amongst other things, lend money or set up a company to provide services to others.

Last year I reported that the County Council had proposed cuts to the library service and were promoting the establishment of a service run by volunteers - and if the community couldn't take on the library it would be replaced with a mobile library visiting once a fortnight for a couple of hours. It was obvious to the Parish Council that a co-ordinator would be required to ensure the smooth operation of a volunteer library service and to that end Lesa Appleyard was appointed to the job. The library closed as a County Council run facility in September last year and I'm pleased to report that it was only closed for about a week before reopening with our wonderful volunteers. A number of libraries in Lincolnshire have closed because of a lack of volunteers willing to take on the burden and I'm incredibly grateful to each and every volunteer who has come forward, willing to give up their time to save our library. It hasn't been all plain sailing for the volunteers, with the IT in particular making life extremely frustrating for them, but they have persevered. My thanks go to the Branston Academy for their support in allowing the service to continue in their building, to Lesa Appleyard and my sincere thanks go to all the volunteers – they are an inspiration to us all. You've heard tonight how successful the library has become in a short time and the Parish Council will continue to support this facility.

Your Parish Council has continued to work on improving the Jungle and wildflower area in the old cemetery. We again secured help from the National Citizen Scheme – a scheme that runs every summer for 16 year olds including a fortnight helping local communities. Often we are dismissive of the younger generation but these young people never fail to impress me – and the Parish Council was pleased to support the initiative – whilst benefiting from some enthusiastic free labour.

The Branston Christmas market and switching on of the Christmas tree lights continues to grow in size and popularity and my sincere thanks go to Rob and Marie Ford and Sarah and Marcus Stead for the work they put into this brilliant event, that is now established as a highlight of the year

I reported last year that your Parish Council had been extremely busy studying three very large planning applications for housing – in total 362 homes. All three developments gained outline planning permission but your Parish Council continues to lobby, during the ongoing application process, for the type of housing that we need within our community – housing suitable for independent elderly, higher care elderly and starter homes - and your Parish Council continues to lobby for realistic s106 contributions towards the cost of providing the infrastructure – village hall, sports pavilion, doctors surgery etc. – that will be needed to support the increased numbers living within our community.

Whilst thinking about the Strawberry field development, I want to mention Thomas Clarke who initiated the idea of a memorial to R5489 – the Lancaster bomber that crashed on the site during WWII. The Parish Council was very happy to support Mr Clarke in his efforts to secure a memorial and I'm pleased to report that the plans for the development include a prominently positioned memorial garden close to the crash site along with street names that commemorate the crew and those who helped in the rescue attempt.

There have been a couple of other planning applications during the year that created concern amongst parishioners. It was good to see so many turn out for a public meeting to discuss the proposals – and I'm sure

the message from that meeting played a role in the applicant's decision to withdraw the application – it certainly helped Cllr Cucksey and myself when discussing our concerns with planning officers.

One trend that the Parish Council is becoming increasingly concerned about is the number of applications to remove trees in the Branston conservation area and also the number of unprotected trees that are disappearing from the street scene. The Parish Council understands that trees become old and diseased but there is a growing intolerance to trees that inconveniently shed leaves or might damage buildings should they drop a branch or roots that might get into drains or lift patio stones. This situation is being exasperated by unscrupulous 'tree surgeons' touting for work. We don't have that many trees growing within the curtilage of the village and those that we do have form an important role in creating a pleasant place to live. I just hope parishioners will recognise the benefits – indeed the privilege – of living with beautiful mature trees and value these trees a bit more than a lifted patio stone or a broken gutter, which can be easily repaired or replaced, whilst replacing a mature tree is not so easy and takes generations.

With budget cuts to services both nationally and locally, your Parish Council strives to deliver value for money. The Parish Council voted to increase the precept again this year. We make no apology for the increase because it is becoming increasingly obvious that County and District councils are unable to give financial support to the services we want within our community. If we are going to deliver benefits for our community into the future, we have to have the resources to do it ourselves and I hope that this evening we have demonstrated that parishioners are getting value for money from their parish rate.

My thanks and appreciation goes to the support given during the year by my fellow councillors. I think this evening you will have seen from the various presentations and the information materials at the back of the room, the range of abilities that councillors bring to the Council. And in particular I would like to thank my vice-chairman Malcolm Ross for his support and tireless hard work, promoting community initiatives and supporting Sarah and Vanessa.

My sincere thanks also go to our County Councillor Marianne Overton and our District Councillor Ray Cucksey, with whom I have the pleasure of representing Branston and Mere at NKDC

I would also like to mention the splendid work of our handyman Rick Wilkinson in keeping the village tidy and for his time spent supporting initiatives like the National Citizens programme. And also Ben Wilson from Hill Holt Wood for his work in the Jungle.

My sincere thanks and appreciation go to our Proper Officer, better known as the Parish Clerk. Sarah works far beyond the call of duty and I thank her personally for her support and guidance over the past year. And also to Vanessa Sparkes who, amongst other things, supports the neighbourhood plan and planning committees.

Finally may I remind you that the Parish Council welcomes members of the public to the monthly meetings, at which parishioners have the opportunity to address the Council on parish matters. The meeting agenda is publicised before the meeting, that is held on the first Monday of the month and there is an open forum at the beginning of the meeting where parishioners are free to raise any issues. Your feedback is important to keep councillors aware of issues that affect the parish, so please don't be shy and I urge you to come to Council meetings or contact us through the Parish Council website.

It has been a pleasure to present this report and I'm happy to confirm that your parish council is in good order and is ready to meet the challenges of the future. In conclusion I commend this report to the meeting.

Item 9 Public Forum.

There were no further issues raised.

The meeting closed at 9.13pm.