

## WELBOURN PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2017

1. 2016 saw the beginning of the process of buying the village forge from NKDC who wanted to shed the nominal costs involved. The purchase cost was funded by a donation from a parishioner while the legal costs were paid by NKDC. The process took unduly long and was not completed until January 2017. As a bonus, however, the Parish Council obliged NKDC to make good all the repairs they had not carried out during their ownership so the building was taken over in good condition. The intention is that the volunteers who have rescued and preserved the forge will continue much as before, although experience may enable some fine tuning.
2. In accordance with the newly approved Neighbourhood Development Plan, the council applied to LCC for a 40mph speed limit past the village. The request was refused on the grounds of expediency. Similarly, an application for dropped kerbs remains on the table. During the year, LCC re-organised the Highways Department as a division of SERCO and assigned our long standing, friendly and effective Highways officer to another area. Re-establishing good communications with the new Serco management team has proved difficult but Highway's new reporting and communications systems appear to work adequately and are improving with experience. The struggle to get potholes filled continues with moderate success. We continued to press NKDC for proper repairs to the wall of Manor Close on Beck Street to reduce the number of shards on the footpath: repairs were finally started in April 2017.
3. Following disagreement, it was agreed to establish a sub committee to oversee the management of Castle Hill. This committee agreed to the phased coppicing of the hazel bush clumps near the main gate which Historic England had suggested were inappropriate on the Monument and should be removed. The parish council arranged the coppicing. More clumps will be coppiced next year. Meanwhile the Council have organised mole eradication on the site to protect the contractor's mowers and have had the NE bank cleared up. The information board frames have been refurbished and a bench cleaned up.
4. The dog warden's contract was not renewed since it was felt he offered poor value for money. There has not been a significant increase in dog fouling but littering has noticeably increased. Our handyman, Rick Thorpe, resigned: it took some time to find a replacement but a local contractor has recently been taken on.
5. An increase in fly tipping was predicted as result of the closure of our local waste disposal site although LCC refused at the time to recognise the probability. Such tipping can be reported online to and is dealt with by NKDC. NKDC's statistics reportedly say it has increased, although in practice it is hard to detect the increase. Reported instances are usually cleared within 5 working days.
6. ArtsNK approached the Parish council early in the year proposing to incorporate Welbourn in an organised walk between Whisby and Sleaford in a so-called Ridges & Furrows project. Artwork in support of an event on the theme was arranged in collaboration with the primary school and Sir William Robertson Academy. The whole culminated in an event on Castle Hill called a Horkey which featured a working threshing box, displays of vintage farm machinery and old farming tools. This was complemented by displays of the children's artwork in the church and in the village hall. Apple juice made from apples from the community orchard was also made and sold: it proved very popular. Although delays in obtaining funding meant that the event did not coordinate with the church harvest festival as had been intended, the day was considered a success. The project is still in being and hopes to exploit Bill Goodhand's village trail in furtherance of the Neighbourhood Development Plan's objective of promoting tourism.
7. During the year, Mrs Laura Conway resigned as district councillor and was replaced on election by Mrs 'Cat' Mills - an Independent from Navenby. Mrs Mills has proved a new broom and has given us excellent support.
8. Councillor Marianne Overton has suggested the defunct Cluster Group be reformed to give more powerful voice to our concerns –specifically over waste disposal and management of the speed indicating device, use of which has fallen into decline. She hopes to chair the Group but it lacks a secretary so there is little apparent progress.
9. There were two instances of complaints based on false information during the year. One related to alleged anomalies in the way the referendum about the Neighbourhood Development Plan had been conducted. In

the event, it transpired that the investigating officer had failed to check his facts and did not understand the relevant law, so the case was dismissed. The inquiry did not affect the Referendum. Knowledge of this highly confidential private letter was leaked to the public: a member of whom demanded to know the contents, quoting the Freedom of Information Act. Since the letter was by its very nature exempt under the Act, the request was refused. But it was a useful learning experience. As a by-product, a caution to members about the need for security awareness was a useful outcome. Another complaint alleged misdemeanour by the clerk by omission but the allegation was judged unproven. However, the Council agreed a formal complaints procedure in consequence.

10. The clerk proposed and described an extension car park for the village hall but there was no funding.
11. It was decided that the village does not need a second notice board but there has been a significant increase in fly posting and considerable barging and shoving for space on the primary notice board with notices placed on top of others. So far only the clerk has complained.
12. During the summer, the owner of Welbourn Hall installed a biomass boiler next to Hall Lane. Unfortunately this included a tall, industrial style, stainless steel chimney to which the neighbours objected as an ugly eyesore wholly unsuited to a Conservation Area. NKDC agreed and considered that planning permission was required and ordered the owner to comply. After many delays, planning permission was refused although the chimney remains in place.
13. During the year the government issued guidelines about transparency in local government to the effect that specified documents and data have to be available to the public. These documents are published on the parish website. The data is published on the notice board, although it is the case that very few people are aware of the website and it gets relatively few hits.
14. There were numerous complaints during the year about obstruction of the highway and footpaths by thoughtless parking but our Constable demonstrated and stated a marked unwillingness to act on such complaints. This unsatisfactory attitude was reported to the PCC but the complaint does not seem to have made much difference.
15. It was brought to Council's attention that building works next to the track to the allotments had infringed the established boundary line. Extensive investigation failed to prove the detail but a new boundary was agreed by negotiation and the allegation was withdrawn.
16. Councillor Mrs Maureen Lunn took up the baton of the call in the Neighbourhood Development Plan for proper improved children's play equipment on the playing field. She has developed the idea by further consultations and has achieved a preferred master plan for an outdoor gym with a specialist company and is now working hard to raise the significant funds required.
17. Towards the end of the year a company approached the Parish Council as landowner seeking permission to put a mobile phone relay mast on the playing field in exchange for a substantial fee. Council consulted the Playing Field committee and it was agreed to consult the village. The village was consulted via a leaflet to all households and a public meeting was held to address village concerns. The meeting disclosed a fear of the perceived radiation hazard from such masts. At the follow-on Parish Council meeting, Council voted against the idea.
18. In January the Jubilee chestnut on Beck Street was observed to be sprouting fungi. Two arboriculturalists agreed the tree was very ill: one recommended complete removal: the other suggested that major reduction might preserve the landmark feature. Meanwhile the County Council assumed responsibility for the tree since it is a tree in the verge and they opted for major reduction. This decision saved the parish council some £3000 in removal expenses but it meant undue delay in any action so the tree will be in full leaf when pruned and is therefore at greater risk and the visual impact of the reduction will be the more severe. The council wants a replacement but one cannot be established with the original in place.