

ELTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING, 9 APRIL 2024

Welcome and thank you all for coming along to the Annual Parish Meeting of Elton.

Just a reminder that this is NOT a meeting of Elton Parish Council; this is the annual meeting for all of the people of the civil parish of Elton.

The meeting will include:

- A review by the Chair of Elton Parish Council.
- Brief presentations by some of our local community groups, including Richard Whitticase for The Elton Society; the Rev. David Parkes for the Methodist Chapel, “Elton Hub At The Chapel” and “Wednesday Welcome”, and David Parkes regarding the defibrillators; Mark Holman, Warden of All Saints parish church, for the Parochial Church Council, with an introduction and welcome for the Rev. Diane Kutar, the new Vicar of Elton; and, Nadia Ross for the Elton Community Speed Watch Group. Kerry Rew has a report about the short mat indoor bowls held at Highgate Hall, and Kevin Durham can tell us the latest about Elton Park Cricket Club, including the next fixtures.
- Reports from our Huntingdonshire District Councillor, Cllr. Marge Beuttell, and our Cambridgeshire County Councillor, Cllr. Simon Bywater.
- But, the main part of this meeting is for YOU, the residents of Elton to raise and discuss any matters of interest, make suggestions and comments, and say what you would like to see happen in the village and throughout the parish and the surrounding area.

Review by the Chair of Elton Parish Council

- How the parish council gets things done.
- How the parish council is financed.
- What has happened since last April.
- What lies ahead during the coming 12 months and beyond.

How does the parish council get things done?

- The parish council works for the benefit of the residents of the civil parish of Elton; so, the parish council welcomes suggestions, requests and comments from residents. The parish council consists of only 9 unpaid parish councillors and the Parish Clerk. To be effective and to be inclusive, the parish council needs the input of residents and local businesses and community groups.
- The parish council is involved with planning applications. The parish council must be consulted by relevant local planning authorities such as Huntingdonshire and, occasionally, North Northamptonshire, regarding planning applications that may have an impact on Elton. Planning applications may vary from something as simple as building a porch at the front of a house; but, planning applications may also be for massive developments in the parish or neighbouring parishes that could have a major impact on Elton. Bear in mind that the parish council has no actual planning power – the parish council does not approve or reject a planning application, the parish council can only submit comments or objections; however, the opinion of the parish council has usually been accepted by Huntingdonshire District Council.
- Most other issues that arise are usually the direct responsibility of either our district council or county council. The parish council notifies Huntingdonshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council of matters requiring attention or issues raised by residents, such as required road repairs.
- The parish council liaises with many other organisations regarding matters that affect Elton, such as North Northamptonshire Council; Ingrebourne Valley regarding Elton Quarry; the Environment Agency; Cambridgeshire Constabulary; and others.
- For local issues, the parish council has certain specific powers, such as providing and maintaining street lamps; planting flowers or trees on public highways verges; maintenance of the parish-owned bus shelter, former telephone kiosk, and the two registered village greens; providing and maintaining seats (wooden benches); and many other local matters.

- And, for other local issues, we have a great “*catch all*” to get things done: Section 137 of the Local Government Act enables the parish council to spend money on many things for the benefit of the area or all or some of the inhabitants, such as supporting local community groups and charities.

So, although a parish council is the lowest tier of the local authorities, and for most things, the real power is with either Huntingdonshire District Council or Cambridgeshire County Council, the parish council is the closest to the people, can get things done, and will always act on behalf of the residents of Elton.

How is the parish council financed?

- The main source of income for the parish council is the “precept” or “parish council tax”, the precept is paid to Elton Parish Council from your council tax collected by Huntingdonshire District Council. The precept for Elton this financial year is £18,000, which is equal to 60 Pence per week from each adult. Most local authorities seem to increase the council tax every year, but the parish council tax for Elton has not increased for the last seven years.
- The other major source of financing is from Cambridgeshire County Council towards local highway improvement projects - the parish council submits an application for a specific project, such as the speed table by the Black Horse on Overend, and if the project is selected, the parish council makes a substantial contribution but the county council does the work and pays for most of the cost.
- Another source of income can be from the Community Infrastructure Levy (“CIL”) which is collected by Huntingdonshire District Council from developers. The parish council received CIL payments from development at Elton Furze Golf Club, plus Huntingdonshire District Council used CIL funds to give a substantial contribution to the cost of the speed table on Overend by the Black Horse.
- Both Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council paid small fees to Elton for the parish council to cut the grass on behalf of the county council and district council. But, this year, Huntingdonshire District Council has taken that responsibility “in house”, so the parish council will no longer receive the grass cutting fee from the district council.
- And, parish councils are allowed to reclaim VAT, so all the VAT paid by the parish council is reclaimed.

What happened over the last year?

- During 2023, we had three new parish councillors join – Cllr. Justin Hawkesford; Cllr. Jan Speechley; and Cllr. Brett Walsh.
- Suggestions and requests from residents are always welcome. Back in May 2023, the parish council invited suggestions from residents for projects to include in the budget (the invite will be repeated again soon to update the 2024-2025 Budget Revision). During November 2023, the parish council also invited residents to submit suggestions for local highways improvement projects.
- After a few years of effort, the traffic calming speed table was finally completed on Overend by the Black Horse during May 2023, with an additional parish-owned street light by the Black Horse.
- Following comments from residents about traffic speeding along Duck Street and Back Lane, and the traffic situation on Middle Street by School Lane, the parish council submitted an application to the Cambridgeshire County Council 20 mph initiative to cover the main residential area of the village, from School Lane, Middle Street and Highgate Green all the way to the exit from the village on Duck Street, including all the streets between. The application was successful, the details of the 20 mph plan have been worked out, and the public consultation is presently ongoing until the 25th April; the actual work will likely take place during September.
- During July 2023, the parish council was notified that the earlier application to the Cambridgeshire County Council Local Highway Improvement (“LHI”) programme had been successful for an effective traffic calming scheme on the Wansford Road. This scheme will include extending the present 30 mph zone; having a 40 mph ‘buffer zone’ north of the village; clearing some of the overhanging tree branches to allow better visibility on the approach to the village; and constructing a traffic island lane restriction with “Give Way” for traffic coming into the village and priority lane for traffic leaving the village, with a cycle bypass on the inside of the traffic island.

- The parish council committed to financially support the public-access defibrillators, reimbursing for spare parts such as batteries and pads.
- Throughout the year, the parish council continued to report many faults to Cambridgeshire Highways, with some success (the lime tree outside of the chapel on Middle Street was cut back as it was obstructing visibility, many pot holes have been repaired); but, with no progress on many issues, much to the frustration of residents and the parish council.
- As you may have read in national newspapers, Barclays Bank has been particularly awkward with small businesses; charities; local community groups and sports clubs; and small parish councils such as Elton. After a lengthy process, the parish council switched bank accounts to the Unity Trust Bank which specialises in online banking for parish councils and charities.
- The parish council submitted objections to the planning application for massive additional warehouse development near Titchmarsh near the west end of the A605 road. Although this development is not in Huntingdonshire and is quite far from Elton, warehouse development would lead to thousands of additional trucks coming along the A605 road, and more trucks using Elton as a 'rat run' to the northbound A1 highway.
- Huntingdonshire District Council commenced the lengthy process of updating the Local Plan for the district. As part of the Local Plan update, there were a number of public consultations; the parish council submitted comments to the various public consultations and encouraged residents to do likewise - **the revised Huntingdonshire Local Plan will have far-reaching and significant impact on Elton.**
- The planning application for a large solar farm on the hillsides of the Northern Wolds in the neighbouring parish of Haddon finally reached the Development Management Committee of Huntingdonshire District Council. Over the last two years or so, many residents and Elton Parish Council, with the full support of our two district councillors and our county councillor, submitted objections to this proposed development. The Planning Department of Huntingdonshire District Council recommended approval of the solar farm. The development committee meeting was held in Huntingdon on 18 December 2023, speakers against the project included Brett Walsh, me as Chair of the parish council, both of our district councillors and our county councillor. The development committee voted to reject the planning application, and the refusal of planning permission was issued to Wessex Solar Energy in January 2024. The success of the campaign to protect the countryside of northern Huntingdonshire could not have been achieved without the dedicated efforts of Cllr. Brett Walsh, our two Huntingdonshire District Councillors, Cllr. Marge Beuttell and Cllr. Tim Alban, and our Cambridgeshire County Councillor, Cllr. Simon Bywater, many thanks to them.
- Other matters included preventing CityFibre from erecting another telegraph pole on the parish-owned registered village green of Stocks Green; continuing with the grass cutting of the parish-owned village greens and most of the county-owned grass verges; maintaining and repairing the parish-owned street lamps; repairing the recurring damage to the village green caused by car parking; notifying North Northamptonshire Council to keep the footpath clear along the River Nene from Elton to Warmington Lock; and many other issues.

What about the year ahead?

- As previously mentioned, a 20 mph speed limit will be placed throughout the main residential part of the village, and traffic calming features will be put on the Wansford Road.
- We will hear in July or August whether a local highway improvement application has been successful or not for double yellow line parking restrictions on the section of upper Middle Street from School Lane up to Overend.
- The parish council will continue grass cutting of the parish-owned village greens and many of the roadside verges on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council; and the parish council will continue paying for repair of the recurring damage on the fringes of the village greens caused by car parking. Also, the parish-owned former telephone kiosk that houses one of the defibrillators will be repainted.
- The parish council has purchased an additional speed sign, with solar power, which will initially be placed on the Wansford Road.

- Various other projects will be supported throughout the village, including a village information board (organised by the Elton Society); continued support to buy spare parts for the defibrillators; maintenance and repair (or removal if beyond repair) of the wooden benches, whether owned by the parish council or not; a small contribution to the repair and upgrade of the public footpath through the churchyard; support the request from some residents and a local community group to plant more flowers in various parts of the village; and support the planting of more wild flower areas in various parts of the village.
- Thanks to the efforts of Cllr. Jan Speechley, an Elton Flood Group is forming to organise assistance during flooding.
- And we should make progress with the Elton Neighbourhood Plan which has been dormant for the last year, the next steps being a public awareness campaign and organising an initial public meeting.

However, these local village matters are quite minor issues compared to the threats ahead from potential mass development on 'greenfield' sites in the open countryside surrounding Elton.

As part of the review and update of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan, there was a "Call for Sites" for landowners and developers to propose potential sites to be included in the Local Plan for future development. Four sites were submitted for possible small housing developments within Elton, along with one site to be preserved for 'biodiversity-net-gain'. A large site proposed for the so-called "Sibson Garden Community", a massive new settlement of over 5,000 houses just two miles north of Elton; and Newlands Development resubmitted proposals for warehouse developments, either side of the A605 road, immediately west of the A1/A1(M) highway. As previously mentioned, the planning application process continues for additional warehouses at the west end of the A605 road near Titchmarsh. And, although the planning application for a large solar park in Haddon was rejected, Wessex Solar Energy has 6 months, until July 2024, to appeal against that decision, so that struggle may continue.

These plans for massive, urban developments for over 5,000 houses, warehouses covering the landscape, and a large solar park, would drastically change the rural setting and have a major impact on Elton if the developments proceed. So, the years ahead will be very busy for Elton Parish Council, we know we have the full support of our district and county councillors, but we will also need help from YOU, the residents of Elton, to resist these massive developments that would destroy our countryside. However, we also need to be reasonable and accept that the village will need some small scale, gradual growth over the coming years to provide suitable homes for our local, young families to remain in the village.

To conclude, I would like to thank our hard-working Parish Clerk, Kerry Rew, and my fellow parish councillors; as always, our district councillors, Cllr. Marge Beuttell and Cllr. Tim Alban, and our county councillor, Cllr. Simon Bywater, for their continued support and assistance; and thank the many residents of Elton who give their time helping others, either individually or with the primary school, the parish church, Methodist Chapel, Highgate Hall, Elton Society, the defibrillator team, Speed Watch, and other groups, and all the others who together make Elton such a great place to live. Thank you all!

Cllr. Ian Ross, Chair, Elton Parish Council