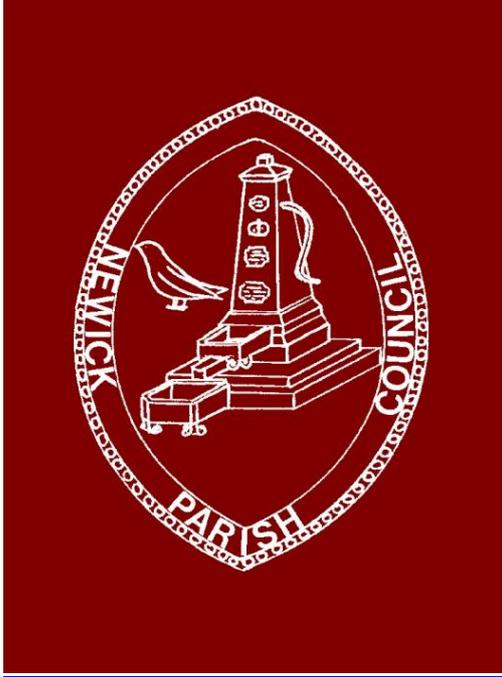


CHAIRMAN'S REPORT; YEAR TO MAY 2015



The Parish Council

Nine of the eleven Councillors elected in 2011 are still in post, these being Cris Allen, Chris Armitage, Ross Houghton, Chris Jago, John Lucas, Jean Sheppard, Jenny Smerdon, Melanie Thew and Cathy Wickens. In addition, Nick Berryman has been a Councillor since his co-option to fill a vacancy in 2012 and Gary Parker was co-opted last year following the resignation of DJ Sprackling.

John Lucas and Nick Berryman have remained as Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the last year and the committee structure has remained unchanged. Chris Jago, Chris Armitage and Jenny Smerdon have continued as Chairmen of the Finance and General Purposes, Playing Fields and Environment Committees respectively. Chris Jago was lead Councillor for Planning until he resigned from that post a year ago and following a couple of months

when the duty was shared, Ross Houghton took over.

This Report highlights some of the main activities undertaken by the Council over the last year.

Parish Clerk

Sue Berry has continued to do an excellent job, often working far more hours than she is paid for. Unfortunately her job has been made more onerous and unpleasant by use of the Freedom of Information provisions and a stream of critical emails. Sue has continued to attend courses and conferences, often in her own time, and has reached the final stage of her Clerk's training programme so should soon become fully qualified. Our previous Clerk, Linda Farmer, continued as Admin Support Officer to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group until last Autumn.

Quality Council Status etc

The Council still has 'Quality Council' status, but that scheme is being replaced by another and the next Council will have to decide whether to apply and, if so, which of three levels to apply for. The Council also still has the 'Power of Well Being', which means that we have greater spending powers than councils without it, but that qualification will cease at the time of next month's elections. However, we expect the Council to be able to adopt the 'General Power of Competence' which gives much the same powers.

Village Appearance

The general appearance and tidiness of the village has been maintained as far as possible, largely due to the Council continuing to take the responsibility for all grass cutting, rather than leave some of it to East Sussex County Council (ESCC), and having the litter cleared and other

odd jobs done by our handyperson. I must thank Cris Allen for doing a great job restoring all the benches around the Village; any volunteers for keeping them clean in future would be welcome.

Damage to grass verges and kerbstones continues to occur, leaving the village looking unsightly. I must again stress that the shortage of parking space at some homes cannot justify desecration of the grass verges.

The Council has not given up on resolving the parking problem in the High Street, as this part of the Conservation Area needs tidying up. The Council has also been attempting to provide a small parking area specifically for those who live or work in the properties and shops around The Green, as this would reduce the pressure on the car parks that are intended for short term use. A further scheme that was previously considered by this council is providing a layby on Oldaker Road opposite Powell Road, as parking on the bend obscures the view, causing a hazard for passing motorists. Hopefully the next Council will be able to expedite at least some of these projects.

The three-yearly inspection of the trees that the Parish Council is responsible for has been carried out and all necessary remedial work has been completed, in addition to which a diseased beech tree on the recreation ground has been made safe.

Rootz Group

Led by Cathy Wickens, this group of local volunteers has continued to maintain and improve our public footpaths. The paths have been periodically cleared of intrusive weeds and branches, stiles have been repaired, and finger posts have been installed indicating clearly the footpath routes. Please contact the Clerk if you wish to help.

Policing / Neighbourhood Watch

Jean Sheppard has continued as leader of Newick's Neighbourhood Watch and still has a large group of residents acting as coordinators. The group keeps in regular contact with the police and issues alerts when there are people about who are known to be or suspected of trying to 'con' residents. As is true across the entire country, there continue to be various scams aimed mainly at the elderly, and some local people have lost large sums of money. Efforts to combat this situation are being made, but it really needs everybody to keep an eye open for attempts to defraud any of their neighbours, friends and relations who might be taken in by scams. Fortunately, the crime rate in the Parish continues to be well below the national average.

Traffic Speed in the Village

Newick now has its own 'speed gun'. Our Community Speed Watch team leader Gary Parker has been retrained and is training the other volunteers in his team. The new gun went into use this week, which was appropriate as it is National Speed Awareness Week.

Road Surfaces

Allington Road has been completely resurfaced and repairing of potholes has been done elsewhere, with work on Oldaker Road scheduled soon. The Council will continue to press for our roads to receive more attention, but we do know that ESCC has insufficient funds and is proposing that the cost of some projects is shared with Parish Councils. That would put a strain on our budget.

Future Housing Development

Lewes District Council's (LDC's) proposed Core Strategy has been

through its independent examination and Parish Councillors attended and spoke at the six public hearing sessions relevant to Newick. The inspector's report is awaited, but the good news is that despite calling for a significant further increase in planned housing across Lewes District, the inspector has already indicated that he was impressed by our Neighbourhood Plan and sees no need to increase the housing target for Newick. There has been much discussion about the fact that the Core Strategy now calls for 'at least 100' new homes in Newick rather than simply '100'. However, we have been assured that this wording change, which applies equally to all other numbers stated for areas of the District, is simply intended to leave room for limited 'windfall' development within the planning boundary, plus any development allowed by government outside the boundary, i.e. at present the re-development of agricultural buildings which was made 'permitted development' last year.

Neighbourhood Plan

Over 1400 areas now have a Neighbourhood Plan in development, but only 52 plans went through a successful referendum before Newick's. It's pleasing to be able to report that, compared with the averages for the first 52 plans, Newick had a far higher voter turnout (49% against 32%) and a higher 'yes' vote (89% against 88%).

The work involved in producing the Plan proved greater than expected, partly because we went to greater lengths than some Councils to ensure that Newick's residents were fully consulted. I would like to thank for their hard work, the Councillors who joined me on the Steering Group that developed the Plan, Cris Allen, Jean Sheppard, Jenny Smerdon, Melanie Thew and Cathy

Wickens, and Linda Farmer who acted in an admin role.

As with most things, you can't please all of the people all of the time. Inevitably there are some residents who don't want a development near them and there are some landowners and developers who think their sites should have been selected rather than those that were. However, the referendum result demonstrates that the high level of local consultation ensured that the Plan meets the wishes of the majority. There is no doubt that without the Plan, there would have been considerable pressure on LDC to agree to the development of many sites around Newick, including most or all of those permitted under the Plan, with many more new homes being built than the 100 now allowed. With LDC having an inadequate housing land supply (by government definition) until their Core Strategy is adopted, which will not take place for some time yet, planning application refusals in areas without a Neighbourhood Plan are likely to be overturned at appeal.

The Neighbourhood Plan already carries considerable weight in determining planning applications in Newick and it is expected to be formally adopted by LDC in July, following which it will be 'planning law' until 2031. The delay is due to the fact that important decisions are not taken in the period before an election and have to wait for the new District Council structure to emerge.

Affordable Housing

There is still a high demand for Affordable Housing in Newick for people with Newick connections. Of the 100 new homes permitted under the Neighbourhood Plan, 39 will be Affordable. Most will be for rent but a few will be for part buy / part rent. People living in or connected with Newick will be given priority when

the tenants and part purchasers are selected.

Allotments

The Council has continued its attempts to find land for more allotments but, so far, has found none for either purchase or rent that would be considered economic by the allotment holders.

Newick Village Festival

The Newick Village Festival was enjoyed by all and I must thank Jenny Smerdon for chairing the organising committee, Sue Berry for ensuring that the legal and insurance requirements were met, and the many helping hands from various village organisations. I must also thank the generous sponsors of the event who between them contributed £850, thus reducing the burden on Council finances and allowing more entertainment to be provided.

Play Facilities & Skateboard Area

Subject to the outcome of a few small grant applications, the children's play facilities in the recreation ground are expected to be greatly improved later this year.

In addition, when the new housing development off Newick Hill is constructed, a further playground will be provided at the far end of the site, by the footpath that runs from The Green past Alexander Mead and Cricketfield. This will be designed specifically for children under five.

The reduction in the mechanical noise of the skate ramps has helped, but the residents at the end of Allington Place want more to be done to reduce the noise level of that area. The emphasis is now mainly on stopping the foul language used

in the area late at night. The possibility of installing a noise-barrier fence is being investigated and a renewed attempt is being made at finding a more suitable location for a possible new facility. It would be unfortunate if the Village has to lose its skateboard facility completely.

Council Finances

The Council has again avoided any increase in its share of the Council Tax for the year 2015/16, which leaves residents paying almost the same as they were four years ago. The marginal increase in individual bills results from the fact that the central government grant has been reduced again plus a few demographic factors. As stated last year and the year before, the economic situation seems unlikely to ease over the next few years, so the Council is trying to be prudent with its expenditure to allow it to build up some reserves. A summary of the Accounts for 2014/15 will be published on the website once they have been audited later this year, and there will be a summary in the next Parish Council Newsletter.

Parish Website

The Parish Website www.newick.net has been upgraded and it continues to promote all activities in the Parish. It is the ideal medium for advising residents of current issues and it's free! If you have any queries about how to use it or would like an item included, please contact our Clerk.

John M Lucas, Chairman,
Newick Parish Council, 12 April 2015

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