

**FARTHINGHOE PARISH COUNCIL**  
**Annual Parish Meeting**  
**Village Hall**  
**20.00 8<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

I would like to start by welcoming everyone attending the 2015 Farthinghoe Annual Parish Meeting. I am also delighted to welcome back this year our County Councillor Ron Sawbridge and our District Councillor Rebecca Breeze.

Firstly I would like to thank all of my fellow councillors both past and present for their personal support and the considerable amount of hard work and time that they commit for the benefit of this parish. I would also like to thank our parish clerk Pip Clayton who has revolutionised the administration of the Parish Council since joining us in October. Pip took over the role from Sue Shepard, who resigned from the post in September 2014 after having served the Parish Council since November 2005. We would like to thank Sue for her guidance during her time with us and for the ongoing support she has provided to Pip as she took over the mantle.

This year has certainly been one of change with a significant turnover of councillors. As such I would like to welcome our new Councillors, Mick Morris and Henry Bankes-Jones who were both co-opted in November. Sadly this year also saw the retirement of Ian Hunt. Ian joined the Parish Council in the 1980's serving for 25 years, 10 of which as Chairman. Ian's dedication and hard work on behalf of the parish has simply been incredible. 2014 also saw two new chairmen with Professor Mellor resigning in May and his successor Neil Downing also resigning in September. I would like to thank both past chairmen for all of their hard work on behalf of the Parish Council.

**Farthinghoe Parish Council Aims and Objectives**

With change, new ideas and initiatives often follows. When Neil Downing was appointed Chairman in May 2014 he stated, "confidence needs to be built up in the Parish Council and it should not hide away". This is very much the theme that my fellow Councillors and I have continued since my appointment as Chairman in October. As a result the parish council felt that formal aims and objectives should be put in place to provide real focus and direction over the short to medium term. The ultimate goal however is to install trust and confidence in the Parish Council whilst adding true value to the parish.

**Objective 1: Communication**

Strong communication is essential in order to help build trust and confidence but also in order for the Parish Council to maximise its effectiveness. Improved communication between the Parish Council and Parishioners is therefore one of our main aims moving forwards and we have already made numerous improvements, these being:

- Parish Council Minutes are now drafted, approved and uploaded to the website within 10 working days in order to give parishioners a clear and up to date understanding of what is being discussed.

- The Farthinghoe Parish Website has been totally rebuilt with the day to day management being brought in house. Not only has this saved over £200 per annum but it now allows us to regularly update and improve the site in a timely manner without being reliant on third parties and associated costs. Further improvements are planned to provide dedicated pages for both the Village Hall and traffic issues.
- Contact details have now been added to the website for all Parish Councillors, along with greater clarity as to their specific roles. This is to enable parishioners to have access to all Councillors but also to direct specific queries to the relevant people who are best positioned to assist.
- Speed of communication within the Parish has proved to be a major issue, specifically at times when the subject matter is of high importance and time critical, for example in relation to the proposed Solar Farm. To date, the Farthinghoe Chronicle has been the only way to communicate with the whole parish at once. This does however create a delay of up to 1 month. Given this, the Parish Council has now introduced an email database to which parishioners can sign up in order to receive high priority Parish Council communications. High priority communications have initially been defined as the three main areas of major planning applications, significant traffic and infrastructure disruptions and criminal activity. I am pleased to report that a number of parishioners have already signed up and I would like to encourage as many people as possible to do so either through the contact page on the Parish Council website or by emailing [updates@farthinghoeparishcouncil.org](mailto:updates@farthinghoeparishcouncil.org). Sign up forms are also available here tonight.
- Turning specifically to the Farthinghoe Chronicle, I would like to thank Shirley Downing for editing the Chronicle over the last two years. Shirley did a fantastic job of providing interesting and relevant content that has been greatly enjoyed by the whole parish. Sadly since Shirley resigned as editor in February we have been without a formal editor despite numerous appeals to the village. The feedback we always receive from the parish is that the Chronicle is invaluable. As such we have kept the Chronicle going for the last two months with Pip Clayton stepping in to help out. This is however only a temporary measure and without support from the village and at least one editor coming forward in the very short term, the Parish Council will be faced with some tough decisions. It was suggested at this meeting last year that the cost of the Chronicle to the parish is zero. The true net cost however, after revenue generated from marketing, is circa £660 or 10% of your Council's annual precept, which is certainly not insignificant. I would appeal for anyone who is concerned that the Chronicle should be maintained and who is willing to help out to approach Pip or myself directly. This does not have to be an individual responsibility; it could work well as a team effort.

## ***Objective 2: Enhance Farthinghoe***

### ***Traffic***

One of the major issues impacting our Parish continues to be traffic. As such, traffic remains a high priority to the Parish Council and I would like to thank Councillor Grant for his hard work on behalf of this parish in relation to this ongoing issue. Councillor Grant really has dedicated huge amounts of

time to this issue over many years. I believe that the positive advancements in this report are a true testament to his efforts.

By way of update, the manhole cover exiting the village on Main Street towards Banbury that was previously collapsing has now been fixed. In addition we have now been informed by Northamptonshire County Council that highway improvement works will be carried out on Main Road in early May. The work will involve reconstructing the existing carriageway and refreshing road markings, between the 30mph derestriction signs at each end of Main Road.

Moving forwards the Parish Council will be focusing on the ever increasing number of road accidents in and around the village and also on enhanced efforts to obtain a weight restriction through the village with the ultimate goal being a bypass. As ever, the Parish Council will make every effort to achieve these improvements, however the full support and resources of the whole parish are required if we are ever going to make any progress. A traffic page on the Parish website will be set up to provide more information, regular updates and most importantly contact details for relevant MPs and Councillors. We will also look to provide template letters so that parishioners can easily canvas the relevant officials.

#### *Playpark*

Significant progress has been made in relation to the much needed upgrade to the playpark. The playpark committee currently has access to £17,300 and has recently applied to Viridor for £20,000 of grant funding. The outcome of the application will be received in the middle of June and, if successful, will allow development to start this summer. I would like to thank the playpark committee for their continued efforts to make the playpark re-development a reality.

#### *Village Hall*

The village hall is a massive asset and benefit to this village. However in recent years it hasn't been utilised as much by the village whilst the Village Hall Committee hit a low of only 4 members last year. Given this, the Parish Council has become increasingly involved in the Village Hall since November 2014. Moving forward at least one Parish Council Member will attend every Village Hall Committee meeting. We are also offering input into setting clear aims and objectives, a marketing strategy including dedicated web page, budgets and financial reporting. Ultimately the Village Hall will only remain a prized asset and receive the ongoing enhancements that it requires if it is supported fully by us all as villagers.

#### *Superfast Broadband*

Given the almost daily visit of Openreach to the village, I am sure that everyone is now fully aware that Superfast Broadband is now available to a large percentage of the Parish. This is a fantastic asset to both residents and businesses and I would like to thank everyone that has been involved in driving forward this development over the years.

Finally, the entire Parish Council would like to say a particular thank you to Jim Jones. I am sure that everyone will agree that we have one of the cleanest villages that is totally litter free. There is no doubt that a great deal of this is down to Jim, who is constantly seen walking the village picking up litter.

### ***Objective 3: Protect Farthinghoe***

#### *Solar Farm*

There are always going to be major threats to this village and perhaps the most significant in recent times has been the proposed Solar Farm. The Village made it very clear to the Parish Council through almost unanimous petitions and strong turn outs at public time that they were heavily against the development.

The Farthinghoe Parish Council worked extremely hard alongside the South Northants Planning Department to try and make sure that the development was rejected by the planning committee. However, given that this was not a guaranteed outcome, we applied considerable pressure on Green Energy to back up their verbal community monetary benefit through a legally binding agreement. Whilst we worked with Green Energy on multiple drafts of the legal agreement which was completed ahead of the planning committee meeting, the fully executed legally binding agreement was never forthcoming.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014, the proposed solar farm development was rejected by the South Northants Planning Department. Green Energy now has until the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015 to make an appeal. Whilst we are now almost 5 months into that appeal period, there has been activity reported on the proposed solar site in the last few weeks and we must therefore remain diligent.

Given this, I would once again like to appeal for as many people as possible to sign up to our email database after this meeting. If there are further developments on the proposed solar farm then matters are likely to progress very quickly. The only way that your Parish Council can act with equal speed and efficiency is through our email database.

2015 is an election year for both the nation and this Parish, resulting in an opportunity for other members of the parish to run for election. I hope that more people will be motivated to put themselves forward this year. However I also trust that existing councillors or potential new councillors will only run for election if they are truly committed to the whole community whilst also having sufficient time, energy and personal drive to dedicate to the role.

Thank you to everyone for attending tonight's APM. I apologise for the length of my update but I do believe it is testament to the significant amount of work that has been undertaken by your Parish Council. We are at the start of a major project to revolutionise the Parish Council and bring real benefits to the community. Given this, I very much hope that, should there be an election next month, we will receive your vote and be allowed to complete what we have started.