

Annual report 2024



HEMPNALL
PARISH COUNCIL



Chairman's report

As always it has been a busy year for the parish council.

We continue to pursue policies that will protect our village and the local countryside from over development and have made our views known during the various consultations on planning including with regard to the GNLP (the emerging new local plan for South Norfolk, Broadland and Norwich), the South Norfolk Village Clusters Plan and the NPPF.

Our policies recognise the need for some new housing in the village and it is important to re-state what this means. The Parish Council considers that the 45 to 50 new dwellings that have resulted, or will result, from: the development of Willow Drive (23 houses); the social housing scheme proposed alongside Millfields (around 15 extra dwellings) and infill developments (known as windfalls) of around 10 houses is the right amount for the village.

50 new houses represents around a 10% increase in the total number of houses in the parish and this number of new dwellings can be accommodated without the village being swamped by too much development which would result in a loss of community and rural character. Because we think 50 extra houses is enough we have opposed the inclusion of any new housing estates for Hempnall in the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) or the South Norfolk Village Clusters Plan and although these plans have not as yet been fully adopted it looks as if our viewpoint has been fully taken in to account.

We have asked our District Councillor (Martyn Hooton) and our County Councillor (Alison Thomas) to support us on these matters.

We are actively pursuing, together with Saffron Housing, an extension to Millfields and these plans are progressing well. A recent needs survey has just been conducted and this will also help decide what type of social housing is to be built on this site. The Parish Council will continue to press for these new dwellings to be "truly" affordable and for the needs of older residents and families with the greatest needs to be prioritized.

The Millfields development is on a Rural Exception Site but elsewhere the Parish Council seeks to restrict new development to within the current development boundary (Settlement Limit).

We also consider it very important that the character of the conservation area of the village is protected against inappropriate development.

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Unfortunately, in spite of us presenting a strong case against the proposal, the South Norfolk Council Development Management Committee approved (by one vote) a major expansion of the strawberry producing industrial polytunnel complex and its associated infrastructure at Hempnall Green.

Plans that we have developed in partnership with the Environment Agency in an attempt to instigate natural flood protection measures that will prevent the kind of severe flooding that has had such a major impact on a number of households in the village are progressing well. The involvement of a local landowner has enabled these plans to proceed. The Hempnall scheme is being “flagged up” at a CPRE Norfolk flood prevention conference on May 22nd as an exemplar as to how other parishes might approach this issue.

At the moment the measures will apply to the feeder streams and ditches east and south east of the village but we are entering in to discussions (including with Fritton and Morningthorpe PC) to introduce similar measures to the southwestern streams and ditches to lessen the risk of flooding to properties on the B1527 at the west end of Hempnall

On a more negative note the Environment Agency (EA) flood risk maps for Hempnall have inaccurately identified some properties as being at risk of flooding when they are not. This can cause problems for those affected when they seek to sell or insure these properties. We have written to the EA in an attempt to resolve this problem but so far the EA has shown a reluctance to change the maps.

The ambitious plans to expand and improve the play area at the playing field are complete and an impressive opening ceremony was held in September. The new play area is proving to be very popular and I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank the team of local volunteers and those parish councilors who have put in a considerable amount of time and effort to create such a successful play park. Sarah Bachelor, Katie Barnes, Richard Delf and Peter Workman deserve a very special mention.

The Parish Council has made a substantial contribution to the total cost of the play area with the remaining money (a very considerable amount) coming from grant applications and fund raising activities.

It is encouraging that so many of us continue to use the footpath system that is treasured and valued by so many – it really plays an important part in maintaining our mental and physical well-being. Our paths are generally reasonably well maintained and open and work to widen the footbridge to the south of the Street to facilitate access for wheelchairs to Swan Meadows is completed.

Speeding in the village continues to be a major concern. Our SAM 2 machines show consistent law breaking and some truly horrendous top speeds. The 20 mph limit is not observed by a large number of drivers. We are campaigning for traffic calming measures to be implemented and for the B1527 to be declassified in order to enable chicanes to be put in place. Unfortunately Norfolk County

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Council Highways Department has said that it lacks the financial resources to even investigate the possibility of de-classification.

As reported previously the safety improvements we have managed to achieve along the B1527 continue to offer positive benefits. A very high accident rate has been reduced considerably as the change of surface material seems to provide a better grip and the lack of road markings does encourage at least some drivers to drive in a more cautious manner. However, very significant, and potentially dangerous, collisions (between vehicles and to properties) continue to occur.

We would like to see a 20 mph speed limit throughout the village but the Parish Council has at least secured partial coverage. The picket gates installed at 2 entrances to the village and the flashing sign warning of a sharp bend at the bridge at the western end of the village were proposed by the parish council.

I would like to thank the Hempnall Speedwatch Team for the work they do in monitoring speeding in the village. The team would benefit from more volunteers so please consider joining and translate your concerns in to positive actions to help tackle the problem of speeding vehicles in Hempnall. In this context I would like to highlight the efforts made by Councillor Robert Elliot (a member of the Speedwatch team) on this issue and to thank him for bringing the concerns of our "North End" residents, especially in regard to flooding, to the attention of the parish council.

Councillor Mike Turner does a great job looking after our Sam 2 speed monitoring devices – Mike - these efforts are very much appreciated by all of us.

All my fellow councillors undertake good work on behalf of our village. Hamish Rose was until recently our Footpaths Representative and I would like to thank him for all the work he undertook on this issue. Phil Bates has taken over this role – thanks Phil for all you are doing and thanks to Joan Cann for representing us on the Village Hall Committee and to Richard Delf and Peter Workman for their work helping to look after the playing field and the children's play area and for their very constructive involvement with the team planning the play area expansion.

Being a parish councillor can be a thankless task – we have a say in decisions but our views are often overlooked or ignored by higher level authorities.

In this report I have only mentioned just a few of the things your councillors do in the course of the year. They are a good team and it is a privilege to be their chairman.

And finally, as always, a huge vote of thanks to our clerk, Ian Nelson, Ian does an enormous amount of work on behalf of this village. He keeps the accounts (and us) in pristine order. He produces the agendas, the minutes, writes numerous Emails and letters and does so much more in the pursuit of our objectives. He is a great source of support to me as chairman.

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Please feel free to ask any questions in regard to the matters I have mentioned during the discussion period. I will refer to the tree planting the parish council has organised on the playing field and to our desire to secure a piece of land for re-wilding in the Tree Warden report

David Hook – 19th March, 2024