

**ST SAMPSON PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**  
**26 MAY 2015**

Welcome

May I firstly take this opportunity of welcoming you all to this annual general meeting of St Sampson Parish Council. I would particularly like to welcome and thank those who will give a report at tonight's meeting. Their contributions and those of the organisations they represent are greatly appreciated and undoubtedly contribute in a very positive sense to the lives of all those who live in or visit this Parish.

I have said it before that we are very fortunate to have many organisations and individuals in this Parish who do excellent work for the benefit of the community. This is particularly striking in such a small Parish as St Sampson. Even though it may not always be perceived as such, your Parish Council endeavours to support and work with such individuals and organisations and will continue to endeavour to do so in the future to the very best of our abilities.

A Word on Resignations and Appointments

I take this opportunity to thank those individuals who have left or resigned their position with us over the past year. Our thanks to former Councillor David Johns who resigned his position in June 2014 expressing, and I quote, his *'frustration at often being in a minority of one or two on many issues that I feel passionate about'*. Contrary to David's suggestion that some of us might have breathed a sigh of relief at his departure, his contribution to the Council was, in fact, appreciated, certainly by me. In my view, dissenting views on this Council are to be welcomed. It is only by challenging each other do we hopefully make the correct decisions affecting our Parish,. This is one of the reasons why I have openly invited any parishioner who may, like David, have differing passionate views about the issues affecting us as a Parish to request co-option and sit with us as a Councillor to debate and decide those issues going forward. I openly repeat that invitation here.

Our further thanks to former Councillor Judith Campbell-Taylor who left us in late 2014. Like David Johns, Judith clearly cares deeply about many of the issues affecting this Parish and she made many positive contributions to Council Business during her time with us for which we are very grateful. Our thanks also to Barry Campbell-Taylor for his hard work as car park warden which he gave up in November 2014. We do fully understand that it was very often a thankless task but it was one which Barry undertook with gusto. We are very grateful to him for that.

Final thanks to our former Clerk Ali Worth. Ali resigned her position for personal reasons in July 2014. We wish her well for the future.

Two other brief mentions on personnel if I may. Firstly on Councillor Stephen Ratchford who joined us in September 2014. As I originally predicted, Stephen has turned out to be a constructive, engaged and active Councillor.

Secondly, we have been delighted to welcome Sue Blaxley as our new Parish Clerk in October 2014. Sue is an already experienced and established clerk with St Neot Parish Council and she has brought a wealth of experience and knowledge to us. We have really noticed her positive impact on the quality of our procedures and at meetings and we look forward to a long and fruitful working relationship with her.

#### A brief word on Procedure and Conduct

A brief word on procedure and conduct. Having last year adopted the recommended Cornwall Council Code of Conduct for Councillors, your Council will, by the end of this meeting have adopted entirely new, fit for purpose, standing orders and financial regulations. These procedural rules of governance are an essential part of the compliance regime affecting Town and parish Councils on which we had fallen somewhat behind historically. The adoption of these new standing orders is an important, if uninspiring, part of our function as a public body properly accountable to its Parishioners.

In this last year, we have also sorted some very long standing historic parish council documents which had been stored ad nauseum in the back room of this village hall. This was a necessary, if laborious task, done with an eye to the electronic age going forward. For reassurance the task was undertaken in a compliant manner, your Council having first adopted a document storage policy recommended by the Society of Local Council Clerks. If we are to be truly transparent as your Council in the future we need to move away from a back room storage mentality, which incidentally we have been far from alone in doing, and begin to move to more publicly accessible form of document management, on which more later.

#### Assets

A Brief word about village assets. In the last several months, we have entered into discussions with Cornwall Council concerning the renewal of the lease for the Golant Halt car park. The existing lease expired formally expired on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2015. Unless some other accommodation is reached with Cornwall Council, on which more in a moment, we have no real choice on how we move forward on this issue but to take a new lease. An annual rental liability of about £2000 per annum is likely to be charged by Cornwall Council in that event.

Collection of historic rental for the car park has been notably lax. However, in an era of further public austerity cuts, this has changed. It is now evident that Cornwall Council will try more than ever to maximise the return on their assets. If that happens with the car park it will be to the financial detriment of this Parish.

In response to these developments, your Council has begun to investigate an alternative means of addressing the car park issue with a view to retaining as much of the income from it as possible within the Parish for the benefit of parishioners and users. Specifically, we are currently investigating a community asset transfer of the car park freehold to the Parish from Cornwall Council for a nominal fee. This development has naturally reopened the issue of a simultaneous acquisition of the public toilets adjoining the car park as Cornwall Council are very unlikely to be receptive to an acquisition of the car park without us simultaneously taking on responsibility for the public toilets.

The advantages of such a community asset transfer would be that the parish council would acquire the freehold ownership of the car park and toilets for a nominal sum. This would negate the need for a lease of the car park, thus saving

£2,000 per annum on lease rental. It would also give us financial security and complete control over the future of the car park, our principal income generating asset and provide us with the basic means of reopening some form of public toilet facility within the Parish. We may also be able to put part of the toilet building to community use in the future.

The disadvantages of a community asset transfer will be the additional financial outlay falling on this council to facilitate the planning and management of the public toilet building for the future. At this point it seems reasonably clear that while your Council is likely to be able to afford to run a very modest, and at least seasonal public toilet facility, it is very likely to find itself having to look closely at incrementing car parking charges to meet some of that cost and prioritizing capital and income expenditure on the toilets as opposed to other items for community benefit. So, some challenging decisions ahead may be likely.

A brief word on car park monitoring and enforcement. Options for policing the car park have been investigated and discussed at length by this Council over recent months and we have made the difficult decision to employ an independent parking enforcement company to undertake that role on a trial basis. We fully understand that many people do not agree this decision. However it has been taken with the best financial interests of this Parish in mind. Our priority as a Council must be financial prudence followed closely by community benefit. On both these measures this decision is the correct one. Further, those who use the car park will be unaffected by this decision provided they pay their way and behave responsibly which we have no doubt the vast majority of users already do.

In the Autumn of 2015, this Council established a sub-committee to review, assess and plan for an improvement of its public assets within the village generally, principally the Village Green and the Golant Halt Car park. The sub-committee has carried out a preliminary assessment of the actions we need to take to improve these assets. Councillor Luddington has been instrumental in moving this particular matter forward. For example she has single handedly convinced Network Rail to take steps to improve their assets which abut the Golant halt car park. Excess signs have been removed, improvements made to fencing and several other matters addressed. In a similar vein this council voted for a root and branch clear up or spring clean to be undertaken in the car park. That is currently underway using contractors employed by this Council. More fundamental works and improvements to the car park are being deliberately held in abeyance pending the outcome of negotiations on its future, to which I have already referred.

On the village green, work has been done to improve the fencing around the children's playground. Our annual ROSPA report has been prepared and the minor actions recommended in that have been identified for action. In the last month your Council has paid for and arranged for the siting of 2 picnic tables with benches and a garden seat on the water side of the village green. It is hoped that these will be enjoyed by as many people as possible in the coming years.

We are very fortunate as a Parish to have public spaces available to us over which your Council has direct control or an interest in preserving or enhancing. Longer term your Council would like to look at further improving its amenity space at the Village Green. Any and all views are on this welcome since this is an issue which your Council remains committed to addressing.

Planning

A word on planning. It is worthy of note that your Parish Council has dealt with two planning applications this year to which we strongly objected, yet Cornwall Council granted planning permission. One of those applications was for a four bedroom detached dwelling on Gumms Lane. The application was passed by Cornwall Council despite a site visit and many representations of objection advanced by the us and residents alike. As a result of this and other rather controversial planning matters over recent years, your council has become increasingly concerned that its views are being given limited weight by Cornwall Council. This is one of the reasons that your Council has committed itself, as sponsor, to the St Sampson Parish Neighbourhood Plan which Councillor Reardon spearheads on our behalf. Having a neighborhood plan is now vital in the assessment of this Council. In effect and in the words of Councillor Reardon herself, it is an opportunity for the whole community to write its own planning policies. Without it our voice is not being heard.

#### Finance.

A comment on finance. At last month's meeting our clerk reported that your Council's accounts stand to our credit with a balance of £26,795.72. This is a healthy position to be in particularly when viewed in the context of our current precept income of £3758 per anum. We are accordingly financially sound and your Councillors and clerk should be given credit for that, albeit metaphoric credit.

Financial prudence has enabled us not only to take steps to improve our assets but also to pay for the public address system for the Carnival Committee over the last year. It has also enabled us to commit to funding the entire annual maintenance charges for the defibrillator recently installed in Golant Village for a period of 10 years. This is something we are particularly proud of being able to achieve.

Financial prudence has also enabled us to look seriously at taking over responsibility for the public convenience facility in Golant Village.

#### Website.

*In this report to last years's AGM I commented : " In an age where electronic communication and immediate access to information are common place, your Council recognises that it needs, in the words of one of your Councillors to 'work smarter'. We are looking at how best to meet this challenge since it is likely to increase our efficiency, broaden our accountability and provide a better service to you the Parishioners. Watch this space".*

I am now pleased to confirm that your council has agreed to establish its own website. The Minutes of the relevant meeting at which this decision was made state:- *"Councillors specifically agreed that a parish council website is in the interests of the public and goes some way towards addressing the concerns of parishioners in that it raises the profile of the parish council, makes parish councillors more accessible and increases the transparency of the business of the parish council".*

Further and thanks to the sterling efforts of Councillor Luddington and Sue Blaxley, the site itself is now live, albeit in the early stages of development. Do visit us on [www.stsampsonparishcouncil.org.uk](http://www.stsampsonparishcouncil.org.uk).

Finally, some words of thanks. My thanks to Sue Blaxley, our clerk. Sue has proven herself to be a huge asset to us. She is highly competent and organised and has a quiet steeliness to her character which I have found to be very useful in getting things done since she arrived with us 6 months ago. I look forward to working further with her and certainly won't risk crossing her at any point soon.

I would also like to publicly thank Councillor Judith Luddington for the sterling work she has done for no charge to the Parish in effectively standing in as acting clerk for some four months after our previous clerk Ali Worth left us and Sue Blaxley joined us. Without the dedication and hard work she put in to that role we would not have been in a position to move ahead seamlessly with Sue as our new clerk in October 2014.

My thanks also to all your Parish Councillors for their hard work on behalf of the Parish over the last 12 months. I have said it before. Most of us, me included, forget that Councillors are volunteers who put themselves forward to do the job that they do in the public interest. Each of the individuals sitting here has, I believe, a fundamental sense of civic duty which I think ought to be commended. Very often this extends beyond the call of duty and I really do think we all ought to be very grateful for that.

.

.