

Santon Downham News

The Parish Council Newsletter for Santon Downham Villagers

August 2015 Number 26

Well, I hope you have all had a good summer, perhaps with an enjoyable holiday. The last few months have seen my grass go from spring green to brown with lack of water (I like it brown as it doesn't need cutting!) and now back to lush green (and boy oh boy does it need cutting). Dare I say roll on winter?

We are taking the opportunity in this newsletter to explain about the workings of your Parish Council and the Village Hall. It is important for villagers to understand what their role is and what their limitations are, so we hope this will help. *Derek Toomer, Editor*

Forthcoming Village Hall Events

Coffee mornings are back!

With the return of autumn, Maggy's popular coffee mornings are back.

The first one is on 7 October, 10.30am to 12 noon. Come along for a chat and some gentle entertainment.

They will continue through to December, on the first and third Wednesday of each month.

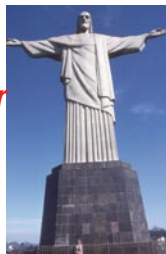
Don't forget to bring your own mug, and 50p.



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Final reminder – Brazil – a talk by Derek Toomer, Friday 23 October, 7pm. £2 (Note: date in last newsletter 'Dates for Your Diary' was incorrect.)

Brazil is one of the fastest growing 'third world' countries. It has recently hosted the Football World Cup, and



next year they will host the Olympics. It isn't a country just covered in Amazon rainforest. This talk will cover other attractions – Atlantic coastal forest, huge open grass lands, extensive wetlands, one of the largest waterfalls in the world, and, of course, some of Rio's sights.

Come along and be transported to another world.

Thursday 31st December New Year's Eve Party 7.30pm to 1am, £15. Theme = 1950s and 60s

Our New Year's Eve parties have been very successful over the last few years. Fancy dress is optional, but I hope to see you looking the part. We would love to see a few more villagers at this year's party, so phone 01842 815213 to reserve your tickets.



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The Parish Council and the Village Hall

So what is the Parish Council and what does it do?

Our village has its own Parish Council, which given the number of inhabitants is surprising. What is good about having a Parish Council? As a Parish Council we are able to call upon a Precept (financial contribution) on an annual basis. This Precept is based on the number of houses in the village, and each household pays a small amount of its Council Tax towards this.

Why do we need a Precept?

The Parish Council owns the internal private roads, the large village green, the green opposite the village hall (including the trees), the land and building known as the Village Hall and The Breckland Club, and a few pieces of land throughout the village.

The village greens, trees and private roads are maintained by the Parish Council, although the Village Hall makes a large annual donation towards costs, because of its use of the greens for the car boot sales, and this is something we do feel our villagers should be made aware of.

The main village green is maintained by Council Chairman, Mick Mackender, taking a considerable amount time and using his own tractor. We feel we should remind our residents that the Parish Council takes no responsibility for vehicles parked on the green, and this is especially important to note during grass cutting times. These cuts are carried out in line with the weather conditions and when our Chairman can carry out the work.

The smaller green is maintained by Michael Finch, again using his own equipment. The land around the Village Hall complex is maintained by the individual tenants of this building.



Our lovely village green looks well cared for. It takes Mick Mackender 5 hours each cut.

There are other pieces of land that belong to the Parish Council, that are not maintained. The frank answer to why not is that there are insufficient funds, and the current volunteers cannot be expected to take on anything more. We are aware some village residents do cut back some of the areas, and our thanks go to them for this, but we regret that the Parish Council are unable to do it all.

The Lease Agreement on the property asset owned by the Parish Council

This we believe has provided a small measure of misunderstanding and the Parish Council would like to address this issue. Going way back into the archives, copious records were made of entering into legal agreements over the two tenancies of the village hall building, but nothing was ever undertaken. There are documents in existence, but no leases. This is just one of the legal issues that the Parish Council has been working on.

Insurance

The Village Hall, encompassing the Breckland Club has in the past been insured separately by each of the tenants. The Parish Council whilst dealing with the issue of the Leases, were advised that this was not in the best interests of any party and therefore this year the insurance has been undertaken by

the Parish Council. Naturally, the costs will be proportionately charged to each tenant, who also have to insure their respective contents separately. Each tenant is responsible for the internal and external maintenance of their portion of the building.

Parish Council costs

This year the Parish Council has undertaken some further tree work, already this year two trees had to be taken down, and still to come down, the very large Leylandii in front of the Village Hall. The tree work alone will cost some £3,000 but is an essential part of the maintenance responsibility of the Parish Council. The legal issue relating to the Leases will cost around £1,000 and, is something that the Parish Council really could not continue to ignore. The elements have been kind to us over the past couple of years and the road works have been minimized to a few pot holes, which Mick Mackender and Michael Finch have kindly filled in, thereby saving the Parish Council at the very least some £2,000! However, this type of volunteering effort cannot continue, and it is likely that in the near future, this work will have to be undertaken by a Contractor.

The Parish Council are aware of the various back tracks in the village that have never come under the official banner of repair, but regret there would never be sufficient funds in the kitty to undertake such extra repairs. To set new precedents would not be viable or sustainable.

And what else?

Your Parish Council is here to answer queries and assist ALL of its village residents with issues that may arise. It does not enter into neighbourly disputes, nor does it interfere in the day to day management of its Tenancies, other than to ensure that things are done legally.

It would be difficult to involve our residents in a continuous update of what is going on and apart from attending Council Meetings, this newsletter is perhaps the best way to keep you all informed.
Sylvia East, Clerk to the Parish Council.

The Village Hall and some essential changes

We haven't said much about what is ongoing for a while so here is a quick update.

After six plus years of hard slog our volunteers have decided it is time to scale down. This year with quite a number of cancellations through illness, couples splitting up etc., some weddings bookings have either been cancelled or moved on

to 2016. The result, has been that the Village Hall volunteers have managed to have a summer that they can almost call their own!

It has given us the opportunity to take a deep breath and to begin making inroads into several legal issues we knew had to be tackled.

We have been involved in separating certain shared

utilities. Why? In looking for answers as to the correct way forward, opening a can of worms has inevitably opened a bucketful!

The Fire alarm motherboard was only accessible via the Breckland Club, which following a Fire inspection was raised as a probable problem should any Insurance Claim become necessary. The Village Hall paid for this to be separated and for the Breckland Club to have a new motherboard. The Village Hall and the Breckland Club are now on a separate system, interlinked to cover the possibility of one side having an issue without the other knowing!

New commercial freezer and reflooring the Store Room

The existing layout of the store room had served us well, but like all such rooms, it was due a major sorting out. But more important, was that it had been carpeted. As food was kept in freezers, Food and Hygiene meant this had to be changed. The old carpet was unstuck and a commercial vinyl flooring was professionally installed.

At the same time, the old small upright freezers and the chest freezer were replaced with a larger commercial freezer, which is far better for storage and retrieval.

We are happy to say that some Locality Funding, available only to Village Halls, paid for at least 50% of this.



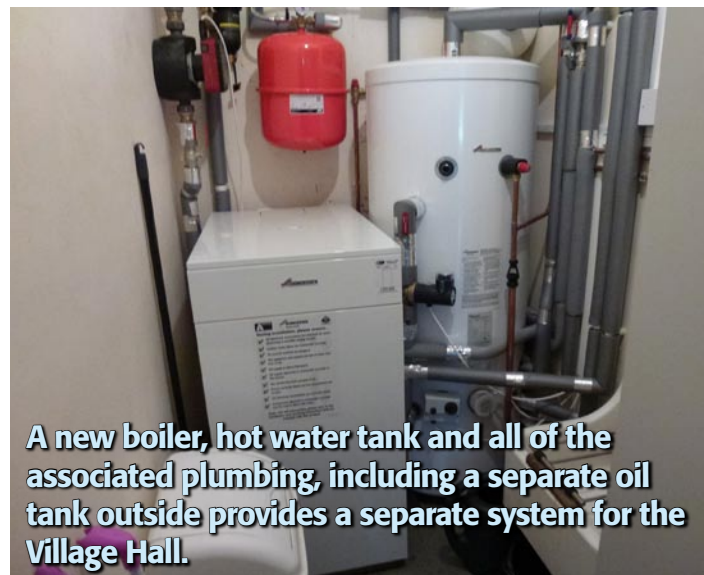
A hygienic new floor and a sensible sized freezer in our store room.

Installing a new and separate central heating system

When the current 'new' hall was built, the central heating boiler and cylinder were shared with the Breckland Club. In the main, this worked satisfactorily. However, when we were looking into insurance issues, it was clear that a shared central heating system was a major problem. The decision was made to have a new and separate

oil tank, boiler and hot water tank. This was quite a major task, but it has been completed with a minimum of disruption to the Hall or the Breckland Club.

This was at considerable expense, but funds resulting from the long-term voluntary running of the Village Hall meant that costs could be covered with no outside financial assistance. Mick Mackender and Michael Finch, with some help from a Rotarian, did all of the preparation works to keep costs down.



A new boiler, hot water tank and all of the associated plumbing, including a separate oil tank outside provides a separate system for the Village Hall.

Reducing the effort

The Village Hall is in a very good situation both in standard of accommodation and finance.

The volunteers have done a sterling job in saving the village hall from its almost bankrupt state, and will continue for a while yet, albeit at a much lower level of bookings.

It has been asked why the Village Hall does not run more village events. What can be said, we have TRIED but social attitudes have changed and with limited support for participation in and organising events, the burden always falls on a tiny group of volunteers. The vital factor is that the Village Hall has survived.

Just to round up

It is often remarked " why cant things be as they used to be?" The answer is that things have changed. We all know of the Woodcutters Gala and the Fireworks evenings. The Woodcutters Galas were run at a time when the village was mostly Forestry worker orientated and the event itself was run and managed by the Forestry Commission. Such events these days are tied up in red tape, mountains of Insurance and Public Liability issues that render so many things unviable, not to mention that there is always the issue of volunteers.

Dates for Your Diary

(In the Village Hall, unless stated otherwise)

2015

Sunday 6th September	Car Boot Sale	8am to 1pm	
Sunday 4th October	Car Boot Sale	8am to 1pm	
Wednesday 7th October	Coffee Morning	10.30am to 12 noon	50p
Wednesday 21st October	Coffee Morning	10.30am to 12 noon	50p
Friday 23rd October	Brazil – a talk by Derek Toomer	7pm	£2
Wednesday 4th November	Coffee Morning	10.30am to 12 noon	50p
Wednesday 18th November	Coffee Morning	10.30am to 12 noon	50p
Wednesday 2nd December	Coffee Morning	10.30am to 12 noon	50p
Wednesday 16th December	Coffee Morning	10.30am to 12 noon	50p
Thursday 31st December	New Year's Eve Party <i>Theme = 50s and 60s</i>	7.30pm to 1am	£15

Parish Council Meetings

(In the Village Hall)

Monday 12th October, 2015 Parish Council Meeting 7pm

St Mary' Church – can you help?

We are missing Sue Benton, who cleaned our church once a week for many years. St Mary's Church has served this village for over 900 years – so many people have spent time within its walls. Many families have celebrated Baptisms, Marriages, and have mourned their loved ones at Funeral Services.

It is so important to preserve Santon Downham's Heritage. Usually, we appeal for donations, but this time I am asking for volunteers to join a small team of 'cleaners' who may be male or female. If you would like to help, call me on 812985. Thank you.

Margaret Kedar, Church Warden

Dog fouling still a problem

We hate to labour a point, BUT, dog fouling is unpleasant, especially to those amongst us who like to walk across our greens, and, of course in



Internet image

public areas dog fouling is also against the law!

We of course understand that the majority of dog owners are responsible, but we are calling on everyone to join in the fight to keep our village greens and roads and pathways clean. We have established that it is not cost effective to install dog litter bins, but for the sake of carrying a couple of plastic bags in one's pocket and then simply tying a knot in the bag and taking it back home to dispose in one's refuse – what is the problem? Please help to keep this village clean of dog litter, and if you should see anyone from out of the village not doing the right thing, take the time to note their car registration and do report them to Forest Heath, or to anyone on your Parish Council.

Village Websites

Don't forget to look at our two websites relating to the village, maintained by Tim Kaye.

www.santondownhamcentre.co.uk;
www.santondownham.org

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