



Annual Parish Meeting

Thursday 15th June 2023

Amenities & Open Spaces Report

As you may be aware, the Amenities and Open Spaces working group is responsible for proposing and researching both the Council's and residents' suggestions for all of the open areas of the village, from the recreation ground to the pond, footpaths and verges. We are also responsible for trouble-shooting any issues which may arise and generally trying to make sure that those areas of the village are maintained and optimised for the enjoyment of all.

It has been a particularly busy year for this working group as we have exceptionally organised two Royal celebrations as well as managing a serious drought in amongst the usual village business.

The late Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Our celebration of the long reign of our late Queen Elizabeth II took place on 4 June 2022 thanks to a village-wide collaboration. Representatives from the parish council and the Jubilee Committee (made up of hard-working residents) combined with the efforts of the Bowls Club, BRIG, the village hall, the WI, St Peter's Church, the Scouts, JezO (who seems to be a village institution in his own right), Barton businesses and the village shop and post office. A wonderful celebration took place on the Recreation Ground which saw approximately 500 residents and friends partying all afternoon and night to the accompaniment of food trucks, photo booths, a fancy dress competition, tug of war, JezO's magic show and compering and a fantastic band playing music from every decade of her late Majesty's reign. It was so lovely to have the village back together, emerging from the cloud of Covid to show the best of Barton's spirit. Over £1000 was raised from the sale of raffle tickets which was paid to the very worthwhile Barton Village Trust and a lasting commemoration continues to flourish in the Leys section of the Recreation Ground, in the form of the Queen's Oak. The commemorative plaque in the "Royal triangle" in the centre of the village will serve to remind future generations of the celebrations which took place in Barton.

The drought and pond-gate

Whilst the weather for the Jubilee was celebrated, we were soon tipped from celebration to crisis as a serious drought took hold. Barton village pond, which had not dried up in living memory, fell victim to the drought which blighted all of the green spaces of the village. Despite both the Environment Agency and the RSPCA writing off the pond inhabitants as beyond salvation, a village-wide effort was led by John Boocock and David Hodge to rescue the fish – 700 of which moved into John's garden rescue tank for many months whilst the pond, itself, was rescued.

The depth of the village pond had reduced due to a build up of silt over many years and it was agreed to increase the depth by removing the silt layer, in the hope that it would make the pond more drought-proof for the future. Professional testing of the silt was carried out, to ensure that it was not classified as contaminated (which happily it was not) before a licence was obtained to remove the silt and deposit it on the Drift. Barton Village Trust generously provided a grant to assist with the cost of these works.

John Boocock kindly took advantage of the empty pond to carry out maintenance to the silt trap and access steps before the autumn rainfall saw the newly increased pond refill. The fish were eventually returned to their habitat (with thanks to their saviour and fish-sitter) and the pond is thriving with the spring seeing new ducklings and moorchicks taking up residence once again. I would particularly like to thank Councillors June Woolhouse, Shelley Arora Tailby, Amy Winterbourne and Andy Martin for their herculean efforts which took over most of their summer last year!

Restoration of the pond

A happy by-product of the drought was that it reinforced the importance of the pond to the residents of Barton. We are looking to improve the pond and its surrounds as well as its safety – a life buoy will soon be placed under the footpath map and a woven willow retaining fence will soon be installed thanks to the generosity of Tim Radford and Foxcotte. Following its installation, we will be looking to improve planting to make the area one in which people can enjoy the pond and its wildlife.

Sad passing of the late Queen Elizabeth II

September saw the sad passing of the late Queen Elizabeth II and, in addition to the condolence book provided by St Peter's Church, we provided a mobile condolence book which was situated in the school, post office and taken to the homes of those with impaired mobility to ensure that Barton's condolences were recorded and her late Majesty's memory honoured.

Christmas festivities

The winter of 2022 saw what has now become the much-loved village tradition of a village-themed decoration (this time, elves) and a village Christmas tree on the green next to the pond. Decorations were provided by both residents and the children of Barton Primary School (with our thanks to all involved) and carols were sung during the lighting of the tree by the Barton Primary School choir. Mulled wine, hot chocolate and mince pies were kindly donated and served by some familiar-looking elves. It was a lovely afternoon, bringing the village together for a brief respite from our individual festive preparations.

Community warm spaces

On a less cheerful note, Winter also saw the first bite of the cost of living crisis, with many families facing a very difficult winter with increased energy and food prices. The parish council worked with the generosity of the Hoops and Barton Baptist Church to provide weekly warm community spaces in December and January for residents to drop in and enjoy a free cuppa and a biscuit in a cosy heated room.

The King's Coronation Street Party preparations

January saw the forming of a new village committee, this time to organise a celebration fit for a king (and new queen). Representatives from the main village organisations met frequently, sharing ideas and pooling resources to plan an old-fashioned street party which would take place on 7 May 2023 in School Lane. As the actual party fell after the end of the council year being discussed this evening, this is something of a cliff-hanger as you will have to wait until next year for the full report. As a tiny spoiler, though, it was a roaring success!

Recreation ground play equipment appeal

We have been approached by various residents over the last 6 months with requests to update the facilities at the recreation ground to include more diverse activities which will appeal to a more diverse audience. Specifically, we have been asked to provide cricket nets, a table tennis table, disability-inclusive play equipment, static exercise equipment and, more generally, equipment suitable for young adults.

We have researched the various options available and their respective costs, which are high! It was therefore decided that fund-raising and grant applications would be required to meet this demand.

It was decided that the fundraising appeal should begin with the Coronation street party (the results of which fall outside the council year being discussed) with incredibly generous donations being made. The fundraising appeal is ongoing and will continue throughout the next council year.

More routine matters

Aside from the excitement/drama of these exceptional events, business has continued as usual from the Amenities and Open Spaces working group, with the following being the main activities:

1. New Leases to be granted to the recreation ground organisations

The Parish Council and BRIG have worked together with the Charity Commission over many months to undo a filing error which was blocking the grant of all of the new leases over the recreation ground. This matter has been successfully resolved and we are working closely with the Council's legal team to progress the leases and their related documentation.

2. Grass verges

a. The parish council carries out a 4-yearly review of the village grass cutting contract to ensure that we are getting the best value for our residents' money. This was slightly delayed during the pandemic but was completed just before the end of the council year with the contract being awarded to a new contractor with a considerable savings being made.

b. A public meeting was held in March at which plans were available for residents to add their comments on how we can make the village more biodiverse whilst still remaining tidy and, importantly, safe for road users. We had some great comments which are being passed forward to the new contractors.

3. Sports activities

We continue to have various sporting organisations using the recreation ground for training and sports events, most regularly Comberton Crusaders football team. We are reviewing whether a second, smaller pitch can be created to accommodate a second more junior team.

4. Pavements around the village

The pavements on Wimpole Road have fallen into a terrible state of disrepair. Consistent lobbying of Cambridge County Council from both the council and the residents has finally paid off, with work scheduled for later in the year to repair the pavements.

5. The old pavilion

The old pavilion is an under-used facility which has had many items left unused and gathering dust over the years. To bring it back into use as a storage facility, an inventory was taken of its contents and village organisations will shortly be invited to attend the pavilion on 1 July to claim items which are theirs and are still wanted. Any unwanted items will, on a later date, be offered to residents as a "Barton recycles" open day.

6. The playground

Routine maintenance has continued to be carried out to the playground in line with the recommendations of the annual playground inspection report. Particular thanks to Councillor Andy Martin who has undertaken many such repairs, especially the huge project of resurfacing the very popular skate ramp.

7. Dog poo crisis

The pandemic saw a large increase in the number of dogs in the area. Disappointingly, this has had a knock-on effect on the number of dog poos being left, resulting in an unsanitary and unpleasant mess. By way of illustration, before one football match, 20 bags of dog poo had to be removed before the children could play. We have applied to SCDC for more dog poo bins, to make it easier for dog owners to clean up after their dogs, but have been told that, following a policy change, SCDC no longer provides such bins as it considers all litter bins as suitable for dog poo. This is an ongoing problem which we are taking very seriously and which we will be taking steps to improve in the next few months.

Chloe Langford

Amenities and Open Spaces, Barton Parish Council