

MURTON PARISH COUNCIL

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MANAGING OUR VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

We are fortunate to live in a very beautiful area. The Parish Council (PC) have a role in preserving this as the PC is the registered owner of the village greens in the parish, and of the cemetery. In addition there are other Parish owned assets, such as benches and waste bins for which the PC is responsible.

Funding for maintenance of the cemetery and other parish-owned assets comes from two sources: the parish precept and income from use of the cemetery. Occasionally individuals make donations of items or funds for specific purchases.

Village Greens

There are areas of village green in Hilton and Murton, and a plan is attached at Appendix 1. Village greens are legally protected to provide areas for enjoyment and recreation by residents. Case law also sets out specific prohibitions: it is an offence to drive over a village green, except in very specific circumstances for access. It is also an offence to damage the green in any way.

Stakeholders

In addition to the commoners mentioned above stakeholders in managing the greens are the PC and the local community. In the wider village environment, the MOD also have a role in view of the close proximity of Warcop range to Hilton and Murton. The PC liaises effectively with the MOD, both through formal regular meetings and as needed to take up any specific issues. Generally relations are good and the MOD receptive to any issues that are raised.

Residents' views

Residents can make their views known at any time by contacting any member of the PC. In addition there is an annual inspection walk round the greens and cemetery and all residents are invited to join this. The PC includes an inspection of trees, to identify and those that are in danger of falling or losing branches.

Current situation

The actions being taken to carry out the views of residents include the mowing of two play areas in Murton, the middle green and an area of the top green. On the top green an area round and path to a bench are also mown. All maintenance work on the greens is carried out by volunteers in order to keep costs as low as possible. In Hilton areas outside some houses are mown by residents to keep the area tidy. The top green is being managed to increase the diversity of wild flowers. It is mown annually in late summer, and is being sown with Yellow Rattle seed to reduce the vigour of coarse grasses and allow more flower plants to become established. Areas around benches are mown to enable the benches to be used. Other areas are left to nature.

Future

There have been requests to mow Murton top green at least annually. So far attempts to find a volunteer to do this have not been successful but The PC will continue to pursue this. A request has also been made to delay mowing round the benches at the top of Hilton for the benefit of butterflies. Mowing in that area is restricted to access to the seating, and that will continue.

There are issues with dog fouling and driving and parking on the greens. Current signage needs to be reviewed and any additional signs considered.

The Cemetery

The cemetery also includes the Parish war memorial.

Stakeholders

In addition to residents' families of the deceased who are buried or otherwise remembered, not all of whom are local, also need to be considered. There are no formal channels for ascertaining the views of stakeholders but specific queries are directed to the Clerk to the PC. There are legal constraints as to what is or is not permitted in the cemetery, and of course a general desire that the surroundings should be attractive as befitting a burial ground. There are two registers: the Burial Register and the Register of Grave Spaces kept by the Parish Clerk who deals with all enquiries about the Cemetery.

Current situation

The cemetery is mowed monthly during the summer, for which payment is made, it is a substantial job. Other maintenance work is carried out by volunteers. Recently this has included cutting back overgrown shrubs, and relaying the gravel paths. Benches are also repainted regularly.

Fees are reviewed annually to ensure they are in line with costs in other cemeteries and because income is needed to maintain the cemetery.

The future

In future the cemetery wall, which has been repaired frequently, may need rebuilding. The PC is trying to build up reserves to meet this eventuality. A number of trees have been felled in recent years; again, further action may be needed.

With the growth in cremations, it would be desirable to make provision for memorial plaques. This would meet the need for people to have a memorial without the expense of interring ashes.

Keeping the cemetery tidy is an ongoing issue. A notice has been put up asking people to remove any litter such as dead flowers. The overall state of the cemetery needs to be kept under review and any necessary actions taken. Six monthly reviews of the state of the cemetery and volunteer tidy up are proposed, ie a spring tidy up before summer growth, and again at the end of Autumn.

Other Assets

Facilities such as benches, notice boards and litter bins are parish assets. Three footway lights are owned and run by the parish. There are also two defibrillators for which the parish is responsible.

Stakeholders

In addition to the PC and residents, visitors benefit from these assets. Many people come to the villages to walk in the area. Benches are used for picnics, information boards give an insight into the history and geology of the area

Residents' views

Dog fouling and parking on the village greens are issues that have arisen recently.

Current situation

There is a register of all parish assets. The assets are checked quarterly to make sure they are there, in good condition, and that necessary repairs are made. Running repairs are carried out on a voluntary basis by residents. There are maintenance contracts for the footway lights and the defibrillators.

Grit bins are provided by the county council but residents need to report when they need to be refilled on the CCC website.

Similarly, garden waste skips are provided in Hilton and Murton by Eden District Council monthly from March until October.

The future

Further responsibilities are likely to be devolved to the PC. The planned reorganisation of local government makes this very probable. The PC needs to ensure they have the necessary funding and expertise to deal with whatever responsibilities are devolved. Communication is ever more important. As an example, maintenance of footway lighting was devolved to parishes. The District council has contributed to running costs for an initial period, but the costs are being devolved to the parish. The PC needs to ensure that the reasons for increasing costs are clearly explained.

Currently communication for parish matters takes a number of forms. In line with national transparency regulations agenda and minutes of PC affairs are publicised on notice boards and on the Parish web site. PC meetings are open to the public as required by law. Further explanation is given via articles in the Villager magazine, and at the annual Parish meeting when the chairman of the PC gives an update on parish affairs, and residents have the opportunity to question councillors.

But the effectiveness of communications needs to be kept under constant review.

It can be difficult to know the views of residents and to find consensus if there are different views, thought needs to be given as to how best to do this, taking advantage of our increasing digital channels, but remembering that we still have a few residents who have no access to digital communications.

Contacts

If you have any comments to make or issues to raise either speak to a Parish Councillor or contact the Parish Clerk. Full contact details are available on the parish website: www.murton.org.uk