

## Ellisfield Volunteers Group – Chairman’s Report of 2016

Once again welcome to the Volunteers AGM.

2016 proved to be even more eventful than the previous year with the winter floods which I referred to in my last report. However, since then things have moved on which I will cover a little later.

During 2016, we again had a good turnout for volunteers. For 2017, there will be a few changes to the schedule at the request of some you recognizing peoples abilities and that being a volunteer for some of the areas requires lifting heavy loads (Lower Common for example). I’ve tried to reflect this in the new schedule. In terms of volunteers we have had a two new people join and I would like to welcome Chris and Sharon Hack. It is however with great sadness that I am reporting the passing of Mick Walker at the beginning of this year. In addition to his duties as the Parish Clerk, he, along with Linda became a volunteer last year and recall him attending the last AGM. On behalf of the EVG, I would like to express my condolences and thoughts to Linda.

I’d now like to briefly return to the floods from early in 2016. These extraordinary circumstances affected not only Ellisfield but many of the surrounding villages as well. At this time many villagers responded to a Parish Council request to help with clearing the deposits left by the floods and a followup request from Paul Turner to address the blocked ditches by Lower Common. Whilst not a specifically a volunteers activity, I would like to express my thanks to the many of you who responded to these requests.

In recent months, the Parish Council has embarked on a review of the flood defences around Ellisfield. Joining forces with Preston Candover, Axford and Highways, the current plans are to look at Green Lane flood plain behind Lower Common, Cannon Close and the bottom of Green Lane. You may have noticed that a number of the trees have been cut down behind Lower Common to allow access for Highways to dig out the channels running into the flood pit and also deepen the ditch running parallel to Green Lane. A number of you have also come forward to help with clearing the trees (thankyou). Should you still wish to volunteer to help with this activity, please contact me in the first instance. The flood defence activity will continue in 2017 so please contact the Parish Council if you would like more information.

Last year, I mentioned that Hannah had requested to step down as Secretary as soon as we could find a replacement. I’m pleased to say that Janette Bacon has volunteered to take over the role with immediate effect.

On behalf of the committee I would very much like to express my thanks to Hannah over the last 10 years and her dedication to the role recognizing the support she also provides to the rest of the village (for example EVA) and other rural organizations. At the same time I would like to welcome Janette who I know will be a great asset to the team. Janette can’t be here tonight but has already started the process of

handover with Hannah. With respect to the rest of the committee, there are no other changes to report.

On the equipment side we had planned to replace the hand mower at Lower Common. This will now happen in 2017 along with the replacement of the mower at the Gravel pits. This will ensure bring the age of the main equipment for all green areas (apart from the Ride-on mower) to less than two years old and therefore puts us in a good position for the next few years of having reduced maintenance costs.

On the safety side, I can confirm the Risk Assessments and Instructions have been through their annual check by the area co-ordinators. With the work being done to Lower Common to dig out the flood pit, we will need to find another area to dump the grass and tree cuttings – most probably in an area adjacent to the flood pit.

Regarding the burial ground we have been assessing the build-up of detritus just outside of the main entrance. It also appears as though there are also deposits from sources not related to the burial ground. I've discussed this with my co-ordinators Paul and Graham and believe we need to have an enclosure to hold the grass cuttings to keep it tidy. The next step is to put together a cost proposal for a medium size enclosure accessible from the burial ground and discuss it with the Parish Council.

In 2016 we had exceptional 'growing' conditions which meant on a couple of occasions we had to cut the grass more than every 2 weeks. This took its toll on the mowers and often required a different usage and safety approach to using the equipment e.g. setting the blade high on the ride-on mower for long grass. Going forward if you encounter this situation and are not sure of the best approach, please do contact the co-ordinator in the first instance (phone number on the website) for advice not just to preserve the equipment but just as important for your own personal Health and Safety.

With respect to the grant for 2017, we have requested the same amount as last year which will cover the two mowers and any eventualities. To put this in context we have now maintained the same level grant for the last three years whilst being able to refresh the much of the equipment. Zani will provide more updates in her report.

Finally, I'd like to thank YOU the volunteers for your on-going commitment to the group for which it would not exist.

And finally, I would also like to thank the EVG committee for their support in the day to day running of the organization. I've been quite busy myself on the home-front this year and haven't been able to devote as much time to the EVG, so I'm very grateful to have such an excellent team to support me.

Andy Swanston, EVG Chairman

February 24, 2017