

Parish Assembly

Tuesday 27th April 2021

Meeting held by videocall 7:00pm

1. **Present**

Councillor Liz Macdonald (Chair for the meeting), Councillor Richard Drake, Councillor Richard Lloyd, Councillor Kay Howles, Councillor Keith Tindall, 5 members of the public, 3 being a Balsall Parish elector

The Clerk to the Council was present to take the minutes

2. **Apologies**

Councillor Marion Keeley

3. **Chairman's Report 202/21 – Acting Chair Councillor Liz Macdonald**

It has been a strange year dominated by Covid-19, which has impacted on all our lives.

To start I would like to thank our residents for their compliance with the safety guidance of hands, face and space, which has helped to keep our community safe. While there are families that have been affected by Covid-19 and some who have lost family members for which our heartfelt condolences, relatively our community has been a safe place. I would also like to thank and give appreciation from the community to the

- * essential workers who have kept things going over this period
- * the volunteers who have helped neighbours, those isolating with shopping, medication and just a friendly face/voice to talk to, with particular thanks to Andrew Burrow who volunteered to be the Covid Champion for the community and has kept us informed of the changes
- * staff and volunteers at the surgery for running a professional and efficient vaccination program which is still going on.

One positive thing from the year that I hope we can retain when things become more normal is people acknowledging each other whilst on their walks, runs, cycling around. It has been noticeable that people have been more open to saying hello with a smile. This is an important part of being a community.

What else has been going on during the year. Well, we have had changes on Balsall Parish Council

- * one of the biggest changes was the shift to remote working from June 2020 after the government gave permission for councils to meet remotely. Since then the council has met using zoom and members of the public were welcome to attend the meetings. This has meant getting to grip with new technology - a challenge for some of us. We had hoped the government would allow remote meetings and when safe to meet indoors hybrid f2f / remote meetings to continue but the government decided not to extend the option after 7 May. However, there was such an outcry and legal action that the government is consulting on their continuation into their future.
- * the resignation of our Chairman, Andrew Burrow whose hard work and energy are missed by the council but he is still working hard for the community as he continues to chair the joint village centre improvements group,

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- * the retirement of Judith Parry-Evans, our parish Clerk after 4 years of professional, sterling service making sure the council operated effectively and that our services were delivered, the recruitment of a new, experienced Clerk - Tracey Carpenter who started in late March. While there was a handover between the Clerks, please bear in mind that she is still learning our systems
- * a new councillor Michael Ellender was co-opted with at least one more application to be considered - we still have a couple of places if anyone else wants to apply to become a councillor
- * as the lease on the Parish Council office expires this year we took the opportunity to look for alternatives and have agreed to move the office as this will improve the facilities available to the Clerk and save the council money.

During the year the council has:

- * Kept the precept for this year at almost the same level as last year - 1p difference
- * Commented on over 100 planning applications - as the parish council is a statutory consultee we consider it important to respond even if it is no comment on those which are within permitted development or tree pruning (we leave these to the tree wardens)
- * HS2 - both parish councils have had informal meetings with HS2 and its contractors to try to mitigate their construction proposals, recently we have commented on their proposed haul routes that involve use by c200 LGVs a day on the A452 Kenilworth Road and Kelsay Lane as well as on Hallmeadow Road. The council has supported a leaflet produced by a resident to raise awareness of the proposals and an alternative that is believed to be viable, the council met half the leaflet costs.
- * Responded to a number of government (national planning policy changes) and Solihull consultations including on Backyard development
- * The Balsall Neighbourhood Plan should have gone to referendum last year but as all elections were cancelled in the first lockdown the referendum was deferred to this year. However, in the interim SMBC planners and planning committee have taken it into account when considering applications affecting the parish. The good news is the referendum is now being held and you can vote on it either by postal vote or in person on 6 May. We have been leafleting and putting up posters to highlight the referendum and we hope that you will vote in favour as it has been the result of ideas and consultation with the community, if there is a majority in favour it will make it a legal document that developers and planners must take into account and will give the community a greater share of the Community Infrastructure Levy from future developments so that we can decide locally how to spend the money on capital projects.
- * SMBC gave the council £7058 for Covid grants funding and this was used to give grants to Heart of England (£5000) and Lady Katherine Leveson primary school (£2800) for IT to support distance learning by less advantaged students, disease control measures and Berkswell Primary school (£3000) toward the cost of their Community Family Mentor as they had been unable to do their normal

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fundraising. As you may notice this comes to more than the sum received from SMBC the balance is part of the council's own grant budget. We also gave the Balsall and Berkswell Football Club a grant of £2694 towards 2 new aluminium goalposts.

Significant projects running during the year:

- * Balsall Common village centre improvements - Balsall and Berkswell parish councils are working jointly on this project with Balsall taking the lead on managing the procedures. This involved drawing up the brief for the work, running the tendering process and awarding the contract to Arups. The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership agreed to provide us with a grant of £25,000 toward the cost of the masterplan. Phase 1 of the work is on-going and I hope that you got involved in the various focus groups that have been held to generate ideas on what the community wants and then to consider design options that will be used to create a detailed design brief for the next phase of the work.
- * A safety and security working group was set up during the year and carried out surveys to assess the problem and to look at the problem and identify possible solutions. The council has raised with SMBC the short term solutions to fix the broken light, particularly in the library car park - there has been a lot of buck passing re an unclaimed light fixture - and to have a 20mph traffic zone in the village centre, the latter is to be included in SMBC consideration of a 20mph policy across the Borough due to be considered in the next few months. Longer term options such as CCTV to be considered as part of the village centre improvements.
- * A Cemetery Working Group looked at improvements that could be made to our management of the Temple Balsall cemetery. The council agreed to an area of the cemetery being given over to a natural burial site. Also, to move over time to a lawned cemetery. To improve record keeping to digitally map the cemetery records - this involved our Clerk in considerable work in data cleansing and checking to get the records onto the Epitaph system. Good progress has been made but there is still more work required to complete the task. When finished it will allow us to operate the cemetery more efficiently and we hope to make the information accessible to the public.
- * Despite Covid-19 the council again arranged for the Christmas tree and lights in the village centre but without the usual switch on ceremony or Santa Claus appearance
- * The grounds contract was also tendered during the year and it generated 21 bids, many thanks to the councillors and Clerk for evaluating them, the new contractor is Fairways
- * Managed the annual inspections and safety checks of the play equipment at Willow Park and Oakley and carried out any necessary remedial work. A tree survey of the parks, playground and Temple Balsall cemetery was carried out and arrangement for work to be carried out where trees were found unsafe.
- * Supported proposals by Friends of Willow Park to improve it, including putting in cycle hoops, to encourage its use by the local residents and their families.

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4. **Proposal** to approve the Minutes of the Parish Assembly held 23rd May 2019
Resolved to approve minutes as a true record

5. Discussion of issues of interest raised by Electors attending the Assembly
Natural Burial Ground – a resident asked how long it is going to be before this is developed as there is competition from the one opposite. Does a lawned cemetery require the removal of existing headstones and kerbs?
Chair advised any changes to existing plots would be discussed with the owners beforehand.
A resident asked if the Memory Wall built in the cemetery for plaques had been blessed? Also, said that the block wall looked unattractive as do the gabions and could possibly benefit from the addition of wild flowers, however, was aware that the parish council had a lot on presently.
Councillor Drake advised that the council had previously made a decision to defer the cemetery project due to change over of Clerks.
As the resident was also church warden she was asked and agreed to help and give guidance once the cemetery project was due to commence.
Social Media – a resident suggested that a social media platform be used to reach a wider audience to encourage more attendees at the parish council meetings – noted something to look into
Office Move
A resident asked the address of the new office – 295/297 Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common

6. Date of next meeting later this year Covid restrictions permitting.

The meeting finished at 7:54pm

Signed: **Date:**.....
Liz Macdonald
Chairman