

Chairman's Report 2018

Our Principal Authority Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council are conducting a Community Governance Review this year looking into a boundary change and one of the questions they are asking residents is what is the value to the community of having Parish Councils?

There are approximately nine thousand Parish and Town Councils in England. Over sixteen million people live in communities covered by these local councils, which is about 25% of the population. Approximately eighty thousand councillors serve on these councils. Balsall Parish Council has ten Councillors with no vacant positions. Councillors are elected every four years and cooption of Councillors is a valuable procedure to fill vacancies between elections. Councillors volunteer their time but are held accountable as public officials. Balsall Parish Councillors serve on many committees that are necessary to ensure proper functioning of the council and to be accountable to residents as follows:

1. Full Council,
2. Finance and General Purposes Committee,
3. Staffing and Communications Committee,
4. Neighbourhood Development Plan Committee,
5. Planning Committee,
6. Facilities Sub-committee,
7. Staffing Sub-committee,
8. Willow Park Development working group,
9. Balsall Common Centre working group,
10. HS2 working group,
11. Solihull Area Committee,
12. Birmingham Airport Consultative Committee,
13. Knowle United Charities,
14. The Lant Charity in Balsall Common,
15. Balsall Common Village Hall.

Your Council strictly follows the National Association of Local Council (NALC) guidelines. Full Council meetings and all committee meetings where most decisions are made are held in public to be a complete open and transparent process.

Parish and Town Councils act as the first tier of local government and are statutory bodies. By their nature they have close links to their community. We have 7 Councillors who live in Balsall Common, 2 Councillors in rural Berkswell Parish and 1 Councillor from the rural west. Balsall Parish Council has created close working relationships with volunteer residents groups such as "Friends of Willow Park", "Warwickshire Conservation Volunteer Trust" and "Friends of Temple Balsall Cemetery". Thank you to the volunteers who have given their time to improve our parks and cemetery.

Improving community engagement has been a specific aim this year. Your Council has invested in a digital strategy improving community engagement targeted to increase engagement with our residents in the 25 – 55 age range. Councillors talked to people at length at the Balsall Common Festival last summer about why they don't engage more with the Council. Nearly everyone said they would be happy to engage but can't come to meetings because they are working, driving down the M6 home and putting children to bed when we hold meetings. Councillors asked if your Council set up a Facebook page would residents contribute and look for our information posts. All agreed it was a good idea as they follow Facebook themselves to find out local information.

Your Council has posted information on the following in our first six months of operation: Willow Park - shared posts from Friends of Willow Park updating residents with progress on the refurbishment there; Changes at our Cemetery in Temple Balsall; Local activities round Christmas with the Lions; Updates on HS2 and changes to the Greenway with information on road closures when work was carried out; Broken boilers during the cold snap and how to

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resolve issues your selves, that post reached 1400 residents; Barclays Bank closing, that post was read by over 6,700 residents; Florist closing and La Delicia opening; The Governance Review and plans for new housing reaching 1900 residents; To our surprise we had 3600 views on a post about bridges in drains to allow newts and frogs to escape; 6978 people viewed our film about the NDP when we republished it to tell residents to come to our exhibition publishing the results of the NDP questions; 250 residents then attended the exhibition; We posted the information that Domino's were asking for planning permission to convert our Florist and make changes with change of use of the premises, 8700 people saw this post, 38 left a comments and 23 people shared the information to other Facebook users.

Your Council contributes and associates with our friends on the Community Watch site and with them monitored when travellers turned up in our village. Within moments of posting information 1600 residents had seen the information and responded with comments all weekend. The travellers were rapidly moved on by SMBC and the police.

A new website has been launched BalsallParishCouncil.gov.uk linked to a new interactive social media platform. Community engagement has already been improved significantly with a much wider and diverse demographic being reached though the social media platform. Communication is now made with thousands of local residents through this medium. This will be an important channel for local information from HS2 Ltd and feedback from residents with issues during the construction of HS2.

Community engagement also means meeting residents and my fellow councillors and I often go out into Balsall Common, Fen End and Meer End and knock doors to listen to the views of our residents and give an opportunity to answer questions face to face on current issues.

Parish and Town Councils have the ability through the Precept to provide services and facilities for their communities in addition to or to supplement the services provided by the principal authority. The expenditure of administering a Parish or Town Council relates to the employment of a qualified and competent Clerk. The clerk to your Council Judith Parry-Evans has had an extensive career in local Government working previously for Birmingham City Council for over 25 years. Our clerk has completed her Certificate in Local Council Administration qualification in her first year of employment demonstrating a broad knowledge of roles and responsibilities, the law, procedures, financial planning and community involvement.

Balsall Parish Council has the General Power of Competence which gives local authorities wider powers to deliver more services. Balsall Parish Council established a Cemetery in Temple Balsall in 1921, the clerk manages Temple Balsall Cemetery which provides an income to the Council, effectively subsidising general overhead down to approximately 20% of total expenditure. The clerk also manages a playing field and two parks with children's play facilities on lease from SMBC at Fen End and Willow Park in Balsall Common. Every year the Mayor of Solihull switches on the Christmas Lights in the village centre organised by your Council and the Balsall Common Lions financed through the precept. Your Council organises the flowers in the village centre financed through the precept. These are just an overview of the major services that Balsall Parish Council provides for residents.

Balsall Parish Council is an important local grant awarding body having granted £62,000 in the last four years to local community organisations:

1. Lady Katherine Primary School
2. Jubilee Community Centre major refurbishment project
3. Centre Stage Drama Group
4. Balsall and Berkswell Rugby Football Club
5. Heart of England School
6. Balsall Common Library

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7. St Peter's Hall
8. Balsall and Berkswell Football Club
9. Balsall Common Festival
10. Balsall Common Lions
11. U3A senior citizens community group
12. Balsall Common Primary School
13. Hornets Football Club
14. St Peter's Toddlers group
15. Berkswell Scouts
16. Balsall Common Scouts
17. Berkswell Cricket Club

Parish and Town Councils are able to assist with and influence decisions of principal authorities. They are also able to provide support to their principal authority on important matters. Balsall Parish Council is producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) to supplement the Solihull Local Plan. Members and the clerk regularly meet with SMBC officer Gary Palmer regarding the Solihull Local Plan and our NDP. Members are consulting with SMBC officer Ashley Prior and his team on a project to improve the village centre with a shared space concept. Consultations by Balsall Parish Council have been organised to gain the feedback from hundreds of residents to provide SMBC with input into the Solihull Local Plan.

Balsall Parish Council have continued to lobby Solihull Borough Council to press the case for our whole community, that any new housing for the settlement of Balsall Common as a whole should not be built until after the construction of HS2 is completed in 2026, to avoid what Solihull Deputy Leader Councillor Ian Courts described as a potential "double whammy". Your Council continues to press Solihull Borough Council and HS2 limited to secure a continuous haul route, to be utilised by HS2 construction traffic, thus avoiding the need for hundreds of heavy goods vehicles to travel along the Kenilworth Road and our local lanes through the village.

Stratford District Council was engaged to conduct independent research for our Neighbourhood Development Plan and described the associated marketing and promotion to local residents by Balsall Parish Council as "best practice". Stratford on Avon District Council use Balsall Parish Council as a case study and members have advised other parish councils on completing an NDP. Almost forty percent of households responded to the research conducted across the whole of Balsall Common, Meer End and Fen End, providing excellent evidence of local knowledge to formulate a plan. Councillors have also had focus interviews for more detailed discussions with local schools, organisations and community groups.

This year your Council has been working with Birmingham Airport management to produce an improved Night Time Flying policy, achieved with your Council collaborating with other rural parish councils. Solihull Borough Council has now approved this new policy.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Balsall Parish Councillors who volunteer significant amounts of their personal time to work for the good of our community. I am honoured to be trusted by them to be re-elected as Chairman of your Council for a third year. In May 2019 there will be Parish Council elections to elect the Council for the next four years. If you are interested in standing for the Council then please do get in touch with us.

Councillor Mark Tattum, Chairman Balsall Parish Council

31 May 2018