

BREWOD AND COVEN PARISH COUNCIL
WITH BISHOPS WOOD AND COVEN HEATH

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD 14^H APRIL, 2011

The Chairman of the meeting, Mr G.E. Martin, declared the meeting open and welcomed those present to the meeting, including Mr P. Sanders a member of the public. The meeting had been called and advertised in accordance with the requirements of the 1972 Local Government Act Schedule 12.

11 Members of the Parish Council, the Clerk and the Assistant Clerk were also present.

Apologies had been received from Cllr A. Ball, Mrs J. Carr, Mrs L.E. Jones and Cllr M. Hampson.

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th April 2010 were approved and duly signed by the Chairman.

The meeting received the report of the Chairman, Mr G. Martin

Once again it had been a busy year and detailed reports followed which would provide some insight and a reminder to Members, as to just what had been undertaken since the last Annual Parish Meeting, in April 2010, and the finances behind these endeavours.

For the Chairman's Report the Chair took the opportunity to talk more generally about the Council, the local community and our Big Society.

Following the Government Elections in May 2010 there had been much in the news about the Big Society, the opportunities available to local communities to have more say in how services were provided and for residents to work with local councils to deliver against local needs. Whilst Government focus may initially have been on the more deprived communities and tackling social problems around families with complex needs, the necessary Statute would be put in place for all communities to be more involved if they wished and to this end, the Government was consulting on the proposed commitment to consider requests from parish councils to remove bureaucratic barriers that may otherwise stop council's pursuing new initiatives with their local communities.

This had been heralded as a new direction, providing the chance for facilities, services and local communities as a whole to be improved through the voluntary contributions of time and effort from those who lived and worked in the parish, the very people who knew what was needed and who would most benefit.

Whilst such an initiative came as news to media organisations, it contained few surprises for parish councils both locally and across the country. The reports during the evening would touch on some of these organisations but, the Chair noted, any Member of the of Brewood and Coven Parish Council with Bishops Wood and Coven Heath would be able to cite numerous instances where residents regularly contributed voluntarily to the benefit of others.

To consider just some of the areas where this Council itself had worked in partnership with local volunteers, one only have to look at the Voluntary Car Scheme which had been run by the Parish Council since 2002, with the invaluable support of volunteer drivers who in the financial year 2010 to 2011 provided 2,728 passenger journeys for local residents and those of surrounding villages to attend medical appointments. The commitment of time, freely given to the elderly and infirm, from what this year had risen to a team of 20 drivers of which 13 were recognised as active drivers, could not be understated. The passenger journeys were subsidised by an annual grant from Staffordshire County Council which in 2010/2011 amounted to £2,312. Last year also saw the doctor's surgery in Sandy Lane, Brewwood donate a wheelchair to the Scheme and donations towards the Scheme's running costs were also received from grateful users, their families and local parish councils whose communities also benefited.

Many facilities were provided throughout the parish either by local residents in partnership with the Parish Council or independently by local residents seeing a need and getting together to make a difference.

The allotments in Ball Lane, Coven Heath, benefited this year from tenants coming together to form the Coven Heath Allotments Association. They were pro-active in working with the Parish Council, Village Agent and SSCVA to further improve the allotments. There was a further report on the allotments later in the meeting.

The Parish Council's open space off Moors Drive in Coven, called The Bront, saw the Friends of The Bront, comprising of local residents, come together to undertake much needed maintenance work to clear the stream and improve the paths. They had further plans which they would be progressing in the year ahead to make more improvements, whilst maintaining the natural environment enjoyed by the community in Coven. In so doing they would be supported by the Parish Council in practical terms where the opportunity arose.

The provision of sports facilities over the years in the parish had also benefited from voluntary community involvement. The Brewwood Parish Sports Association continued to be run by volunteers to provide adult and junior football facilities. Using land owned by the Parish Council and supported by an annual grant from the Parish Council they had run the facilities, maintained the changing rooms and undertaken much of the pitch preparation for matches at this well used site. Brewwood Tennis Club also continued to provide excellent, floodlit, facilities at the Parish Council's playing field in Engleton Lane and was well known for its work in coaching youngsters in the community.

Investigations were still progressing, albeit slowly, towards what hopefully would be bowling green facilities also at the Council's playing field in Engleton Lane. If the potential drainage problems could be addressed satisfactorily and the intentions of the bowling club could be realised then yet another example of the community and Council working together would benefit the wider community in the longer term.

The Council's changing rooms at its playing field in School Lane, Coven which opened in July 2009, had received many compliments for the standard of the facilities provided. 2010 saw interested parties come together to form the Coven Football Management Committee which it was hoped would assist in the overall management and development of the facility.

And new in 2010 were the Council's partnerships with the Bishops Wood Park Committee and the Brewwood Phoenix Youth Group; two groups committed to identifying the play equipment

requirements for the play areas in Bishops Wood and Brewood and working with the Council to redevelop these sites.

These were but a few of the examples of partnership working and voluntary involvement of our local community and made no mention of the valuable contributions made by the likes of the Best Kept Village committees, the regular litter-pickers who turned out each week in Coven and Coven Heath, the three Village Hall Management committees, Coven Heath Community Association, the four Christmas Lights committees and the many organisations who run clubs and events throughout the four villages.

The residents of this parish had a great deal to be proud of. The commitment of this community to a Big Society, to caring for the local environment and to improving the quality of life was undeniable. The Parish Council was committed to working with the local community, to continue to make a positive impact on the facilities and services provided, identify new opportunities and in so doing continue to work together as a Big Society.

Mr Martin reported that it had been an honour to serve as the Chairman of Brewood and Coven Parish Council with Bishops Wood and Coven Heath and he took the opportunity to thank his fellow Members of the Council for the support and guidance they had given him over the last year.

The Chairman then handed over to Sue Groom, the Clerk to the Council, who presented the Clerk's Report.

Clerk's Report – Mrs S. Groom

The Clerk reported that as well as all the work undertaken across the parish to maintain and develop the Council's playing fields, amenity areas, open spaces, allotments and facilities such as the public conveniences and changing rooms, last year saw the Council implement a number of internal procedures to further improve its working practices. For example, its systems of internal control were now fully documented in-line with the computer based accounts package implemented in 2009. The Council's financial procedures had also been defined to an operational level thus not only saving time in managing the Council's finances but also further de-risking the Council's endeavours in undertaking its duties; this supported the Council's strategy of sharing the knowledge and skills required to carry out the business of the Council and avoid dependency on any one individual.

The Council's budget continued to be managed at a detailed level, working with around 200 income and expenditure budget headings, and the computerised accounts package meant these were now automatically maintained as expenditure was incurred and income was received. The improved level of detail enabled the Council to easily ascertain the cost of running, for example the public conveniences in Sandy Lane and the Council's changing rooms in Coven. With the increased analysis available opportunities were identified to negotiate better utility contracts and the transfer of the Council's Small Business Rates Relief from the Council office to the public conveniences in Sandy Lane to reduce costs.

The introduction in 2010 of a formal budget review process by the Council within the first quarter of the new financial year provided for even better management of the Council's funds and for the new budget to be adjusted to take account of the Council's actual balances and ring-fenced reserves carried forward from the previous year.

Last year also saw a number of changes to the Council's work force. Mrs Jean Cook, caretaker to the Council's allotments in Coven Heath and cleaner for the Council offices retired after 15 years service. Mrs Valerie Turner also retired having served the Council as Assistant Clerk for over 16 years and was, the Clerk noted, going to be a hard act to follow. The vacant post of caretaker to Coven playing field and changing rooms, temporarily covered by Mr David Barker, was filled following the appointment of local resident Mr Michael Neylan. Mr Alan Lawrence was appointed to the position of caretaker to Coven Heath allotments and Mrs Elaine Glead to the post of cleaner for the Council offices. The Voluntary Car Scheme Co-ordinator, Mrs Caroline Cumming, left to go on maternity leave in August 2010 having trained Mrs Tanya Postles to undertake the role of Car Scheme Co-ordinator in her absence.

The Council normally employed eight members of staff (2010 being an exception with additional cover required to cover maternity leave), covering ten part-time posts in support of the Council's duties. These posts had all been filled by people from the local community.

The preceding 12 months, since the last Annual Parish Meeting, comprised of 22 scheduled meetings of the Council, excluding special meetings of the Full Council and the Council's committees and working parties. During this time there had been no changes to the fifteen Councillors that made up the Council.

The attendance figures at the scheduled meetings of the Full Council were reported as:

| | | | |
|-------------------|----|---------------------|----|
| Moira Alden-Court | 16 | Mrs Jan Jeffries | 20 |
| Cllr Andrew Ball | 21 | Mrs Lorna Jones | 17 |
| Mr Fred Barrett | 17 | Mr George Martin | 21 |
| Mrs Jan Carr | 20 | Mrs Yvonne Millward | 18 |
| Cllr Ivor Clay | 15 | Dr Richard Taylor | 20 |
| Mr David Evans | 16 | Mr Mac Webb | 15 |
| Mrs Anne Holmes | 17 | Mr Ian Westwood | 12 |
| | | Mrs Jo Wright | 8 |

The Clerk took the opportunity to personally thank the previous Assistant Clerk Mrs Valerie Turner who left in May 2010, Mrs Tanya Postles who seamlessly took over the running of the Car Scheme while Mrs Cumming was on maternity leave and Mrs Maggie O'Brien for all her hard work and support as Assistant Clerk. And finally, the Clerk thanked Members for their support over the last 12 months and for the invaluable contributions they had made to the Council and the community it served.

Finance Report

Read by Moira Alden-Court in the absence of Mrs. Lorna Jones, Head of Finance.

The Council's budget for the financial year to 31st March 2011 had initially been forecast as £304,482. After making due allowance for income and funds carried forward this had required a precept of £142,707, a reduction of £0.76 on a Band D property when compared with the previous year's precept of £143,766. In July 2010 the budget was reviewed following the 31 March 2010 year end and the budgeted expenditure was reduced to £291,047.

In support of this budget the actual additional income received, excluding the precept of £142,707, totalled £31,195. This included:

- £2,578 rent from the Royal British Legion and the Day Nursery in Coven
- £1,600 towards the salary costs of the Car Scheme Co-ordinator
- £1,039 allotment and grazing land rental
- £1,360 on the hire of Coven's football facilities
- £6,991 of reimbursements to the Council from the Christmas Lights committees
- £3,439 of reimbursement from the contractors following the water leak at Coven changing rooms in 2009/2010 and from South Staffordshire Council following the removal of Coven tennis court from the ratings list
- £571 Community Paths grant from Staffordshire County Council
- £7,000 from Roseclaim which is distributed by the Parish Council to Bishops Wood organisations for the disturbance experienced by local residents during the annual V Festival. The following grants were paid out in February on behalf of Roseclaim:
 - Bishops Wood Community Fund £100
 - St John's PCC £130
 - Community First Responders £150
 - Bishops Wood Village Hall £150
 - Bishops Wood Neighbourhood Watch £200
 - St John's Nursery and Out of School Care £3,000
 - Bishops Wood park committee £3,000
 - Towards the refurbishment of the adopted phone kiosk in Bishops Wood £270

The final actual expenditure was £179,132, net of VAT with £46,160 balances available to carry forward and £84,876 ring-fenced reserves for projects to be carried forward in to 2011 / 2012. This included:

- Staff salaries, including all on-costs, represented 37% of the net expenditure at £67,638. Members do not receive any remuneration other than £20 phone expenses once a year
- A further £12,563 was spent on administration and associated overheads
- Maintenance of the Council's playing fields, amenity areas and open spaces cost £16,188
- And £8,864 was spent on one-off projects including work on Brewood changing rooms, urgent tree works on the A449 and the reinstatement of grazing land to allotments at Coven Heath
- The three village halls in the parish and Coven Heath Community Association received £3,160 with a further £4,760 being carried forward in to 2011/2012
- £10,312 was spent on Christmas Lights of which £5,160 has been reimbursed to the Council from the respective committees
- £17,429 was distributed as miscellaneous grants including £12,180 from the 2010 Roseclaim grant and including the accumulated Roseclaim grant transferred to the Bishops Wood Park committee

- £21,964 was also spent on capital projects including perimeter fencing at Coven playing field costing £16,408 and an outstanding payment of retained charges of £4,029
- And finally, loan repayments in 2010/2011 cost the Council £13,495

The running costs of the Council's main facilities, excluding associated salary costs, were:

- Brewood playing field £1,483 although some of this was reimbursed from the tennis club
- Coven playing field £4,161, much of this relating to the changing rooms
- Bishops Wood playing field £170, reduced this year awaiting the redevelopment of the site
- The Council has not to date been charged by South Staffordshire Council for the grounds maintenance of its three playing fields. Unfortunately this will change from 1 April 2011 when charges will be phased in over a three year period
- The Bront £2,143, largely being grounds maintenance charges
- Public conveniences £1,722 although this excludes the mileage costs also incurred in ensuring the conveniences are locked and unlocked seven days a week

And that concludes the Finance Report for this evening.

Planning Report's – Dr R.C.H. Taylor

The Council had been consulted on 119 planning applications. This included five notifications of appeals. 31 of the planning applications were for commercial properties; 19 of these were for the Lion Hotel in Brewood. Five applications were received for Green Belt permission from Travellers.

We were consulted on tree works, mostly appertaining to the Conservation Area. We wrote to applicants urging replanting/replacement on a two for one basis.

Social housing provision stalled during the year due to lack of land being offered in the Green Belt at affordable cost.

We had been especially concerned for the residents of Coven Heath by the impact of the i54 development, clearance of trees and junction changes on the A449/M54, Featherstone 2 prison building, nuisance from Motocross bike rallying and finally with intrusion into the Green Belt of permanent caravans.

We also continued to monitor potential development on the Common at Coven Heath.

We were consulted and made representations to South Staffordshire Council on changes to the Conservation Area, the Local Development Framework, Equestrian Policy and the Travellers, Gypsy and Travelling Showpeople Policy.

The County Council consulted on transport plans and electoral boundary changes.

We were grateful to the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for the efficient handling of all this work; with deadlines for responses are always being met.

Playing Fields Reports

Bishops Wood

Read by Mrs J. Jeffries.

The Council's playing field continued to be a well-used and popular venue. The area was kept generally tidy and weed-free, and had been maintained well, especially in view of the age of the equipment. Parish Councillors thanked Mrs Jeanette Edwards for her reports to the Council.

As indicated in the last Annual Report, villagers combined to form the Bishop's Wood Park Committee which adopted a formal constitution and held the funds from Roseclaim set aside for the purpose of re-furbishing the Park. The Chairman, Louise Shaw, had attended Parish Council meetings to update Councillors on the progress of plans, and to ask for Council's support in both making a grant application to the Staffordshire Environmental Fund and in financially supporting and overseeing the work. A Planning application was submitted and approved to raise the height of the largest piece of equipment, and personal consultations were held with local residents.

The Parish Council agreed that the Clerk, Mrs Sue Groom, would be project manager and Mrs Jan Jeffries represent the Parish Council on this Committee. While the decision of the Staffordshire Environmental Fund was awaited on this matter, sufficient funds existed from both the charitable donations and from the Parish Council to undertake at least some refurbishment, and all concerned looked forward to an upgraded facility in the near future.

Brewood

Read by Mr M. Webb.

Over the last year a considerable amount of work had been carried out with a view to replacing worn out and out dated play equipment in the younger play area. A working party consisting of Brewood Members, the Clerk, and Nicky Parsons of the Phoenix Youth Group formed the committee. Mr Webb thanked everyone concerned, particularly the Clerk and Nicky Parsons for their hard work. The renewing of the equipment would be in three phases; the first phase would be for the younger age group. £20,000 had been precepted although it was noted that part or all of it may be required for match funding. We were in the process of applying for a grant from Veolia, which again, a lot of time and work had been completed by the Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Nicky.

Drainage exploration was still being investigated with a view to siting the bowling green at the north end of the field. The Council was holding £10,000 towards the project for the Bowling Club to call on when required.

Replacement of the perimeter fence was delayed until the position of the bowling green had been fully agreed.

No large amounts of vandalism had been reported, but the site suffered from the invasion of older youths on various nights, who left various items of litter strewn on the field.

Coven

Read by Moira Alden-Court.

Following the opening of the new changing rooms in 2009, the last 12 months had seen the facilities well used by Brewwood Old Boys, Coven FC and Wolverhampton Casuals.

The Council was extremely grateful to Jo Wright, Member for Coven, who had kindly managed the bookings and co-ordinated the arrangements for white-lining and ensuring the availability of the caretaker for matches. All this and stopping to have a baby in the midst of it all! The Council understood that Jo now needed to stand down from this role and new arrangements would be made in due course.

The Council also received support from the newly formed Coven Football Management committee, comprising of representatives of the teams who used the facility and the Parish Council. The initial meeting of the committee was proactive in identifying further improvements and opportunities to further develop the use of the facility. As a result a kissing gate was installed in the south perimeter fence to provide safe and easy access to the surrounding land for lost balls. As the season drew to a close, arrangements would be made to re-grade the goal mouths in preparation for the new season.

The site's new caretaker, Michael Neylan, has settled in to the job well and with the assistance of the Council's handyman, managed to avoid the site freezing up during the long cold winter.

The play equipment appeared to be wearing well although elements of the adventure trail and the multi-play unit had to be replaced in 2010. The site continued to be well used by the local community who utilised the play equipment as well as the casual use of the pitches by children. Last year saw the Council purchase goal posts to support mini-soccer which, when required, could be set-up and pitches marked out. The provision of new perimeter fencing and gates to the west and south of the site has improved the security and appearance of the site and removed a potential health and safety risk where broken and rusting metal had become a cause for concern.

The Council's attention for the year ahead would be on the use of the changing room's south facing wall as a kicking wall which was causing serious problems with roof tiles, guttering and down pipes being regularly damaged. The condition of the surface of the tennis courts was also being monitored; weed treatment had been undertaken last year to reduce the damage being incurred by weeds growing through.

Coven Heath Allotments Report

Work took place during the winter of 2010 and the spring of 2011 to clear and re-instate allotments at the northern end of the site. Water had been provided via stand pipes to serve the 11 new allotments that had been created. These allotments were now being cultivated. The track serving all allotments had received some attention at the entrance and a new turning point had been established at the new north end. The car park was cleared of scrub and brambles and trees around the internal perimeter were trimmed back. The charges for the year were £10 for half a plot and £20 for a full plot. Coven Heath Allotments Association had been formed and was liaising with the Clerk to ensure that the best interests of the allotment holders and the Parish Council were maintained. The issue of fencing at the northern end was currently under review and avenues of funding are being investigated by the Association.

Any Other Business

The Chairman thanked the caretakers and the handyman/janitor for their work throughout the year.

Mr P. Sanders, on behalf of the general public took the opportunity to thank the Clerk and staff for their time and advice over the preceding year.

The Chairman concluded by thanking those present for attending and called the meeting to a close at 7.30 p.m.

Chairman.....