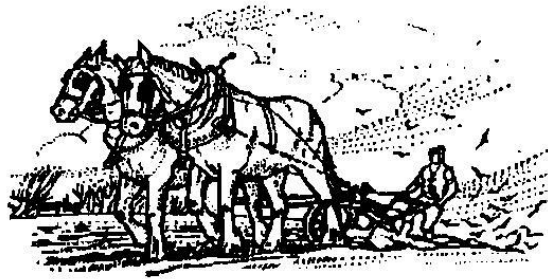


# Bentley Pauncefoot Parish Council



## 2000

Firstly, I would like to use this opportunity to thank the councillors and clerk for their input over the last 12 months. I am immensely grateful for their dedication to this beautiful place and for the skills that they bring to the job.

Our clerk, Clare Wood, has been a tremendous support over the last year. Her communication and attention to detail has been a godsend and we owe her a debt of gratitude for all the extra time she has put in this year. It has been a pleasure to work with her, and I thank her for her patience, reliability and for keeping me up to speed.

The winter that has only just past felt interminable, but it must have felt a whole lot longer for our lengthsman Chris Cooke. He has done an incredible job keeping the parish moving in the face of both biblical climatic conditions and the frustrations of communicating with the County Highways department. They boast that

*the overall public satisfaction score for Worcestershire [highways department] was 51%; slightly higher than the national average public satisfaction score of 50%.*

I doubt such a statistical success for their department is a great deal of comfort to those on the front line.

Thank you also to Barry Spence for staying involved through his work for Tardebigge Relief in Need & Sickness, and to Roz Bewsher who has continued to be so available to support councillors, with her in-depth knowledge of pretty much everything we do.

It important to reiterate that sitting on the parish Council is entirely voluntary and requires something of a sacrifice of our four councillors.

Nick Rands has been a reliable and solid presence as vice chair and I want to express my thanks to him, particularly for his handling of the finances.

Andy Boss has again brought his invaluable intergenerational knowledge and insights of this place. His direct action on the Banks Green drains, or lack thereof, was a saving grace.

Matt Morgan has continued to keep a hawklike eye on the condition of footpaths, gates, stiles and trees, that are such a defining characteristic of our landscape here, keeping County Council informed. Thank you too for keeping us up to speed on Village Hall activities.

Thank you to Ben Coleman for agreeing to take on the Curr Lane speed limit petition. He had immediate success as he managed to wring the long awaited report on the proposed 40mph speed limit on Curr & Copyholt Lanes out of County Highways.

This topic leads me into some of the past year's activity.

This speed limit report had been expected over a year before its arrival, but when it was finally provided to us, it was both partial and counterintuitive and, despite all the time that had passed, contained little beyond their expressions of the previous year. Bizarrely it reiterated that a speed limit lower than the existing 60mph would increase danger to road users.

The Department for Transport states that *The needs of vulnerable users must be fully taken into account* in such cases, and having been both a horse rider and a cyclist it is disconcerting that such a claim about danger is coming from those who are responsible for our safety on these lanes. It would appear that so called 'sustainable transport' is not a priority on Curr and Copyholt Lanes that are being optimised as the Bromsgrove Webheath rat run.

Ben has put forward some practical ways of continuing the campaign that I look forward to supporting.

As was the case with the Foxlydiate development, publication of traffic information is delayed and delayed, reducing potential for public scrutiny.

On the topic of Foxlydiate, this past year has seen the developer St Philips put out a consultation on the first tranche - 222 houses on Foxlydiate Lane on land behind the Foxlydiate Hotel.

The information provided with the consultation raised more questions for us than we were invited to answer and the proposals did not appear to sit well alongside the Bromsgrove District Plan. We pointed out their lack of provision for, and information on, affordable housing, the proposals' rejection of the distinctive character and vernacular of the area and site features, and the peculiar orientation and design of the houses, among other points.

Thanks to the work of the Foxlydiate Working Party in previous years, the main access to the site off Birchfield Road will need to be constructed more promptly, before the occupation of the 200th house, so when this tranche comes forward for full planning and then construction, it will incur this.

The outline planning application for the Foxlydiate Hotel remains outstanding while the site decays with increasing rapidity. We have been keeping an eye on it and have contacted the case officer with concerns.

Continuing on the theme of *delay after delay* we are told that the *Bromsgrove District Plan Review is expecting to publish a consultation document this summer which will set out the planning strategy for Bromsgrove District for the next 15-20 years. The full details including the summer consultation dates will be confirmed shortly.*

*The [District] Council is still awaiting further information on how the plan making reforms included in the Levelling up and Regeneration Act are to be enacted.*

With the current goings on at central government level we will not hold our breath, but given the site submissions across Upper Bentley, Lower Bentley and Norgrove, the Parish Council has a critical role to play in monitoring this process given its destructive potential. The kind of landscape that we can assume the District Council is keen on appeared on the cover of the booklet *Bromsgrove Extra* that accompanied our recent council tax bills. The illustration of proposed new housing at Burcot was

strikingly bland, soulless and lifeless, and was a stark contrast to the beauty, biodiversity and character that we as a parish council have the honour and privilege of standing for.

Over the past year the Parish Council, as a statutory consultee, has responded to planning applications, consultations on the new first school, the Green Belt Review and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which aims to agree the priorities locally to end the declines that make this *one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world*. This is a space where we have already highlighted (and the design of the scheme allows us to continue to do so) the critical importance of all that this landscape supports, and its latent potential given its location at what was once the absolute heart of the ancient royal Forest of Feckenham.

Staying on the topic of development in the parish, it was disappointing that Councillor Karen May withdrew from her evening at the Village Hall just a few weeks ago, having so effusively proposed such an evening herself and in her offer to come and speak to us. When I had met with her, she had spoken so supportively and enthusiastically about coming to inform our community on how, when development came forward for full planning, we could gain through the Section 106 Agreement and involve ourselves positively and proactively - I hoped very much in the spirit in which Roz, Barry and the Foxlydiat Working Party had led in previous years.

Despite using her very words in the invitation to the evening that was sent out the Village, following the last-minute cancellation I was repeatedly informed by her office that the wording that I had used was “inappropriate”.

This delay and rowing back means the Parish Council continues to keep a Community Governance Review on the table given

*A review may need to be carried out, for example, following a major change in the population of a community or ... to re-draw boundaries which have become anomalous, for example following new housing developments being built across existing boundaries.*

*In many cases making changes to the boundaries of existing parishes ... will be sufficient to ensure that community governance arrangements continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. For example, over time communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours. In such circumstances, the council should consider undertaking a community governance review.*

*Parish councils continue to have two main roles: community representation and local administration. For both purposes it is desirable that a parish should reflect a distinctive and recognisable community of place, with its own sense of identity.*

We are so fortunate in Bentley Pouncefoot to have such a very distinctive and recognisable sense of community and place. Moving forward, with ongoing development pressure pushing in on two sides, and increasing political pressure on agriculture rising in our midst with the end of the Basic Payment Scheme, this may well represent the Parish Council’s most effective lever to enhance the character of our parish and therefore the quality of life that it gives. Living in this place, there is so much to feel grateful for, and so much that can bring joy, pleasure and health to many more beyond the parish boundaries who need it.

I wish Nick all the best in taking up the chair and it is great to be leaving the role in such a safe pair of hands.

Thank you, Ronnie Cheape - 21/05/2024