

Bredon, Bredon's Norton and Westmancote Parish Council

The minutes of Bredon's Annual Parish Meeting held by Zoom Video Conference on **Monday 27th April 2020** at 7.00 pm.

Present:

Cllrs Mr Nick Bradley (Chairman), Mr Rob Bell, Mr Richard Coghlan, Mr Matt Darby, Mr Kevin Falvey, Mr Phil Handy, Mrs Jo Lawlor, Mr Adrian Hardman (County and District), Mr Neil Leyden, Mr Andrew Rhodes, Mr Declan Shiels, Mr Rob Sly and Mr Brod Whiting. Also, Mrs Benedicta Coghlan and Mr Tim Drew (Clerk).

1. Apologies for Absence.

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Mr Adrian Darby (District) and PCSO Julie Pardoe.

2. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting Held 29th April 2019.

The minutes having been circulated were **agreed** and signed as a true record.

3. Parish Council Chairman's Report.

The Parish Council are conducting this meeting in unusual circumstances, in a period where we are required to socially distance, meaning that this meeting is being conducted via video conferencing software.

These are clearly un-precedented times, which are affecting every one of us, being a local, national and international problem that must be faced.

This pandemic is having devastating consequences for those most seriously affected, but at the same time we are also getting to see the best of humanity, with people coming together to help and assist each other. This is clearly no more apparent than here within our Parish, where the community has come together to create support groups to help and support each other and those most in need of assistance.

Unfortunately, a consequence of the pandemic, and in compliance with government advise, it has been necessary for the Parish Council to close the Village Hall during the lock down period. This was a necessary step, but nonetheless difficult, as the Parish Council is acutely aware that the Village Hall provides an essential meeting place for groups and organisations, who provide a valuable service to the parishioners and the wider community.

In taking this step, the Parish Council has protected long term bookings, as well as ensuring charges are not being applied for unfulfilled bookings over the period the Village Hall is closed. We very much look forward to being able to re-open the Village Hall doors again, hopefully in the near future, with it hoped, that when we do, an opportunity will exist to arrange an event that will commemorate the sacrifices of those that have been most severely affected by the pandemic. As well as providing an opportunity to celebrate the heroic efforts of key workers and those who have done so much to protect and help their family, friends, neighbours and society during these times.

Whilst in these challenging times it does not appear important to reflect on the year, but my role this evening is to update you all on the work your Parish Council has been undertaking on your behalf.

The year started with Parish and District elections, with all members of the Parish Council required to step down and put themselves forward for re-election.

As reported last year several Parish Councillors decided to stand down, however I am delighted to have had the pleasure of welcoming 3 new members on to the Parish Council:

- Neil Leydon,
- Jo Lawler and
- Rob Bell.

Each of these Councillors has joined the Parish Council full of passion, enthusiasm and ideas, which I am sure will deliver benefits to the Parish.

Notwithstanding the current pandemic, it has been a difficult year for the Parish, which has been placed under threat of major development, which has the potential to dramatically affect our Parish as we currently know it.

I refer to 3 major planning applications:

- 18/00771/OUT for 500 new homes on the site known as 'Land at Mitton', which is yet to be decided, despite the application being submitted in April 2018.
- This was followed by the published preferred options for the revised South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP), which proposed that the applicant site be extended to accommodate a minimum of 1,000 homes.
- Most recently, the developer for the earlier application of 500 homes submitted a further planning application referenced 20/00008 for a proposed primary school on the lower section of the site.

In response to each of these applications, the Parish Council as always, was keen to consult with Parishioners to understand their views on these proposed applications, so several public meetings were convened to facilitate this. It is heartening to see how many people attended these meetings, on occasion in horrendous weather conditions, to express their opinions and feelings. These public meetings served as a reminder, should one have been required, of Parishioners passion for their Parish.

In addition to these major planning applications for developments in the Parish, the Parish Council has also been involved in the consultation process and campaigning in relation to other developments and proposals which have the capacity to affect our Parish, these include:

- the proposed new Tewkesbury Garden Town, given its scale and proximity to the Parish,
- A proposed new bridge over the railway line, which would unlock development land between Northway and our Parish,
- M5 junction 9 upgrades,
- and modifications to the A46.

So, as can be seen, it continues to be that Planning is a dominant theme that the Parish Council that Planning continues to have to address, which is ably managed by the Planning Group, which is headed by Councillor Phil Handy. I wish to place on record my sincere thanks for the work the Planning Group has undertaken during this year, which has been un-precedented, with so many major planning applications, which can transform Parish life forever.

With any planning application, the implications are not limited to that of new housing, it extends to the infrastructure and services that will be affected during the construction phase and beyond by the inhabitants of the new buildings.

Consequently, the Transport & Organisations working group have been actively campaigning to ensure that if development is to come forward, so do the relevant provisions needed to satisfy the demand that will be generated. In addition to which, this group has also been working to try and bring about improvements in the existing infrastructure, which has seen them attend meetings with both Worcestershire and Gloucestershire County Council and their Highways departments. The Council's thanks go to Cllr Hardman for helping to facilitate these meetings.

So, I also place on record my thanks for the time and effort that this working group puts into the work it does, chaired by Declan Shiels.

I also wish to thank the following working groups for the work they undertake, which are responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the Parish Council. its Finances, Assets, Policies, and Communication. These are the:

- Executive & Finance Group
- Assets
- Technology & Media, I would especially like to express my thanks to Jo Lawlor who despite being new to the Council, took on the responsibility of Chairing this Group.

I also wish to provide my thanks to Cllr Kevin Falvey who has been responsible for implementing several new special projects for the Council which you may have noticed as you pass around the Parish. They are the installation of defibrillators around the Parish, with Defibrillators now being fitted in each village. In addition to which Kevin has also been instrumental in organising free defibrillator training for Parishioners in case they should be in the unfortunate position of needing to use a defibrillator.

If that were not enough, Kevin was instrumental in the Parish Council purchasing Smart Water kits, so that they could be distributed free of charge to Parishioners. Signage is displayed around the Parish to indicate we are a SmartWater Parish, hopefully this will lead to a reduction in theft locally. Whilst on this subject, I wish to thank Cllr Hardman for his assistance financially in supporting this project.

During the year, the Council as well as addressing its traditional workload, and those matters noted already herein, the Parish Council has also implemented this year.

- Natural Networks – Improving the look, feel and biodiversity of the Glebe Field and lower section of the Playing Field. Special thanks go to Cllr Declan Shiels for his hard work in developing, securing funding and for managing this project.
- Assets of Community Value – The Parish Council has been trying to protect the status of local business assets, this has included the Royal Oak, which has secured the status of Asset of Community Value. This was done with the assistance of a local Parishioner group, so I extend the Council's thanks to them also, specifically John Smith who has acted as their Chairman.
- Village Hall Improvements – In the course of the year the village hall has undergone several improvements, including.
 - The extension and refurbishment of the Parish Council offices,
 - New external doors,
 - Replacement of the hearing loop,

- The installation of a new noticeboard,
- Installation of artwork created by local artists, depicting local themes (special thanks to Cllr Neil Leydon for this proposal and managing its delivery).
- We also now have a wheelchair available at the Village Hall for those with limited mobility, which has kindly been provided by Bredon Care in the Community.
- Now have an Instagram account
- A community Christmas Tree was installed outside the Village Hall this Christmas. This was its inaugural year; however, this is something we hope will be a regular feature in the future. I place on record once again the Council's thanks to those businesses which came forward with donations and sponsorship for the purchase of the tree and lights, etc. I also wish to thank the school and playgroup for contributing the beautiful hand-crafted decorations and for Kevin and Meryl Falvey for their time and effort in decorating the tree.

I also wish to congratulate Councillor's Adrian Hardman and Adrian Darby for securing re-election as District Councillors, as well as placing on record my thanks for the support and assistance they provide the Parish, the Parish Council and myself with.

I also wish to place on record thanks to the Parish Council employees for all the work they have undertaken throughout the year:

- Jo Lomasney for the management of the Village Hall,
- David Gray our Lengthsman, for the work he does keeping the village tidy.

Of course, none of the above would be possible were it not for the hard work and dedication of our Clerk and Financial Officer, Tim Drew. As it is Tim who manages the day to day running of the Parish Council and acts on the instructions of the Parish Council. I wish to extend my own personal and sincere thanks for the support and assistance Tim provides me with when I am undertaking the functions of Chairman.

I consider myself to be very privileged to live in such a beautiful area and community, especially in such difficult times. It is an honour and privilege to serve on the Parish Council and represent the community. I am extremely fortunate to work with such a group of dedicated and committed Parish Councillors who I am grateful and pleased to work with. I appreciate the assistance and words of encouragement they have shown to me, since joining the Council and during the period I have been fulfilling the role of Chairman. My thanks go out to you all for the time and effort you put in as Parish Councillors, I look forward to working with you all in the future.

4. County and District Councillor, Mr Adrian Hardman's Report.

Where I can be little doubt that this has been a very exciting year to be in local government. This time last year I was standing for re-election to Wychavon District Council and the ballot took place on the Thursday after the AGM and I was delighted to be returned for another four years as your district councillor as was Adrian Darby for the Westmancote area of the Parish. It has been a year where dominant events have tended to drown out all other features of the work of local government. It is easy to forget that we had a general election in December which saw Boris Johnson returned as Prime Minister with an increased majority.

The themes seem to have been either planning, flooding, coronavirus, or local government finance. I was hoping that the question of 1000 houses on Mitton bank would have been resolved one way or the other; but this is not the case as currently the Highways Agency continue to have a holding objection due to the pressure that the new homes would bring to jct 9 of the Motorway. This is of

course a scheme that I oppose not only because I dispute that the house is are needed for the Tewkesbury plan but also because this development right on the edge of the County brings a whole host of other issues such as schooling, health, policing, and traffic congestion. I think it is a pity that Wychavon have continued to put this allocation of housing into the emerging local plan. It is vital that we find a way to remove it. It has been a tremendous help that the parish has been so vigorous in protesting to the officers about this idea. After some 16 years the traveller site on the Eckington Rd is due to be determined on Thursday and this will not be a decision that will meet with approval by some of the parish I suspect.

From September the weather turned against very wet and we had Seven months of above average rainfall and this filled up the groundwater on the Hill and caused the Springs on the Hill to start flowing again in Bredon's Norton and Westmancote. it also meant that Dock Lane was impossible to cross at times as the Avon rises much faster than it used to. There was some flooding of housing in the Queensmead area due to a blocked drain which meant that the water got onto the road and nearly severely flooded some houses in Queensmead .But the work that the district and County councils have done since 2007 in improving the drainage in the area pay dividends and we did not see the flooding to the extent that we have in the past in Kinsham and the bosses of Queensmead and in other locations. This is a feature of the changing climate we live in today.

This was also meant to be the year that local government finance was changed to a much more local system that relied less on central government grant add more on business rate retention within the County and council tax. It is worth remembering that 82% all the money that the County Council spends is raised buyer council tax. The growth in housing meant that Wychavon was able to freeze it's council tax again for another year but the County Council continues to face a problem increasing demand in the areas of children's social care and care of the elderly. It had to raise its council tax by the maximum allowed under law. But the parish council did an excellent job in freezing its precept for I think the 7th year.

Moving on to the topic of the moment the virus is a tremendous problem to us in local government. I think we have been handling the situation well. I was impressed by how we were able; almost at the flick of a switch; to move from a very office-based culture to a remote and flexible working one. This was due to the investment that we had put in over the years into improving broadband in Worcestershire and gave the new IT system at the County Council a real test for the first time. We perhaps do lack some bandwidth still at County Hall, but we have been able to keep the absolute key systems working. Sadly to observe social distancing an at the behest of government we have had to close waste sites and our libraries but I am hopeful that we will be able to reopen in early May household waste sites on a booking basis to try to keep the numbers down since the police seem unkeen to have large numbers of people waiting outside Hill and Moor. At the moment the highways resurfacing program is paused but I am pressing as hard as I can to get that restarted, since due to the lockdown traffic volumes are so light that it would make sense to do as much work as we could for instance in Worcester or any of our towns at this moment. And I hope that after we have persuaded Tarmac to reopen their facility, we will be able to progress this idea.

The Worcestershire health system has performed Better than I would have expected, and it appears that the peak of the virus is past in Worcestershire. We are seeing numbers in hospital falling but very sadly we are seeing several outbreaks in our care home system continuing to rise, and with it we are having a rise in mortality figures in these homes. I am putting all my efforts into trying to stem this tide by directing our PPE stocks and our testing facilities to test all patients and all staff over the next 2 weeks. We will be able to isolate anyone who has the virus and ensure the safety of the residents of these homes. I have asked the army to aid us in this considerable task.

Just to move onto a few local issues: this year Church St was resurfaced, and I do think a reasonable job was done which will last for a long time. I look forward to finding a solution to church walk but the intermediate work that has been carried out at least filled in the potholes. We still have a plan to resurface the footpaths in Malt house Lane and the footway that runs from the school down to the dock and to rebuild the footway alongside Dock Lane down to the parish council car park. Due to the outbreak I am unable to give a sense of timing for this work. I would just like to reassure the residents of Bredon's Norton that they are not forgotten, and it is my intention when the lockdown is lifted to visit the village with our local highways engineer so we can get a clear plan of action in place. The school continues to deliver excellent education and I have been able to help get them some extra funding in the form of grants over the past year.

I continue to enjoy working with the parish council and we are lucky in this parish that we have such an excellent Clerk and a dynamic team of parish councillors who are looking to the future.

5. District Councillor, Mr Adrian Darby's Report.

In Cllr Adrian Darby's absence, the Clerk read the following report on his behalf:

Since my ward includes Westmancote I am submitting this report to the A.P.M.

The year on which I am reporting divides into two halves. Pre Covid-19 and Post Covid-19.

Up until February everything progressed predictably from the events, I reported on a year ago. I continued to serve on the planning committee and the Joint Advisory Panel, overseeing the revision of the South Worcestershire Development Plan, and to act as Wychavon's Heritage Champion.

The major planning issues are still unresolved. In 2018 there was an outline application for 500 dwellings at Bredon's Hardwick/Mitton which has not yet come to the planning committee. Part of the reason for the delay was the question of school provision and this year there was an additional outline application for a primary school to serve this development. Since I am a member of the planning committee, I must keep an open mind and must not predetermine the application. This does not apply to Councillor Hardman who can represent your views freely.

However, the situation is complicated by the fact that the preferred options for the SWDP revision were put forward last autumn and these contained a proposal for 1000 houses on the edge of Tewkesbury at Bredon's Hardwick. That is, it proposed the land already applied for plus a further 500 houses. I felt able to respond to the consultation, both in my capacity of Heritage Champion and neighbouring ward member, pointing out the obligations which such an allocation would be required to meet under the National Planning Policy Framework. I also urged that the allocation at Bredon's Hardwick/Mitton should have its own development plan document, as is proposed for the other strategic sites including the one at Rushwick which is no bigger than Mitton.

The whole issue of Tewkesbury's expansion, both at Mitton and at Ashchurch Garden Town is tied up with the problem of access to the M 5 at Junction 9. This is further complicated by the grant of £8.1 million to provide a bridge over the railway at Northway to replace the level crossing. I am very concerned that this may increase traffic along Cheltenham Road through Kinsham into Bredon and the South Bredon Hill villages as motorists try to avoid traffic jams at Aston Cross. There were meant to be presentations on the bridge project on 16 and 18 March but these have been postponed because of Covid-19.

There were several minor planning applications in Westmancote which were approved. I do not think the Parish Council had objected to any of them. The only one, to which it had submitted an objection, was an application for a two story four-bedroom dwelling at The Pound. In response, I had asked for this to go to the planning committee after a site visit. The application was refused on the grounds that "The proposed dwelling is not considered to be of high-quality design and would fail to integrate effectively with its surroundings and would harm the significance of the conservation area."

There was one proposed modification to the SWDP which would have an effect on Westmancote. That is that Category 4 settlements should no longer have defined settlement boundaries. I am not sure whether there were any objections to this proposal.

The last regular Wychavon Council meeting was held on 19 Feb. The principal business was to approve the Council Tax and I will leave Cllr Hardman who is chairman of the Audit Committee to report on that. It was agreed to leave Wychavon's element unchanged although the Lib Dem group had proposed an increase of 1% to avoid budgeting for a small deficit. If we had known what was coming, we might have decided very differently.

By the time of the Planning Meeting on 5th March the virus was already started to spread. I was unable to attend because I had to go to an old friend's memorial service and Councillor Charles Tucker substituted for me. The application for 5 Gypsy pitches (10 caravans) on the edge of Eckington (which is actually just in Bredon Parish) was deferred until the next meeting, to allow for revision of the site layout to include a buffer landscape strip at the front of the site.

On 18th March there was a special Council Meeting to appoint Vic Allison as joint Chief Executive of Malvern Hills and Wychavon Councils in succession to Jack Hegarty who is taking early retirement on health grounds at the end of July. It also decided on the Council's response to Coronavirus, and it was agreed that there should be no more public speaking at meetings. In fact, there are to be no meetings at all for the present, except for virtual meetings by telephone or Zoom. I and many of the older members who were self-isolating by this date did not attend the meeting.

There will be a series of meetings held remotely on 30th April, including a lengthy planning meeting which will have to deal with eight weeks' business, after the meeting, due to be held on 2nd April, was cancelled.

Wychavon has given each councillor £500 to be paid at their discretion to groups who are helping to relief hardship in their ward. I am not yet sure how to distribute mine, but I will pay at least half of it to Tewkesbury Foodbank if the relevant council officer agrees that it qualifies.

6. Police Report.

In PCSO Julie Pardoe's absence, Cllr Falvey read the following report on behalf of the Pershore Rural North and South Local Policing Team:

The last 12 months has seen a change of Safer Neighbourhood Officer to PC Daren Riley and one of the teams PCSO's has left to have a baby. Whilst this has reduced the team to two, we have continued to maintain patrols of an ever-expanding area. As of the start of March we are once again up to full staff numbers with the welcome arrival of PSCO Faye Allen-Carter.

Whilst we have not been able to attend the village surgeries as regularly as we would like we have been actively involved with numerous village events especially with the launch and registration of SmartWater in several our villages. This seems to have had a positive effect on significantly reducing

the number of burglaries over the autumn/winter period. Neighbourhood Watch Schemes are also seeing a resurgence which positively assists us in sharing and gathering information.

We have seen a recent increase in coverage of the rural areas with the introduction of several Rural and Business Crime officers and there has been an increase in police officers generally as promised by the PCC.

The team remain committed to tackling all levels of crime throughout the area including rural crime and poaching and providing security advice and support to victims and vulnerable residents.

This report is based using the recorded crime figures between 20/03/19 and 20/03/20 the comparison is relating to the corresponding dates in 2018/19.

Overall, the police recorded 245 incidents that were reported by members of the public this is compared to 247 incidents reported the previous year.

Of the 245 incidents the Parish had 69 recordable crimes (incidents where a specific offence has occurred) this was in comparison to 76 recordable crimes the previous year.

The breakdown of offences is as follows:

	2019/20	2018/19
Burglary Residential (includes garages and sheds)	3	21
Burglary Business	2	2
Theft of Vehicle	0	2
Theft from vehicle	5	5
Theft other	7	6
Vehicle crime	2	1
Arson	1	0
Criminal Damage	2	4
Deception/Fraud	2	0
Other Offences (Includes mostly concerns for welfare or domestic related incidents and assaults)	45	35

The 'other offences' incidents are increasing throughout the West Mercia area as police are dealing more often with vulnerable people and mental health issues. We do not normally mention these on the monthly crime reports as they have little or no impact on other residents or the community in general and further information is not released into the public domain due to GDPR.

The team would like to offer our thanks to the Parish as a whole for its continued support of the local policing team and for the numerous calls we have received relating to suspicious activity, all we ask is that you continue to do this.

7. Questions from The Floor.

Several issues were raised and discussed including travellers' sites in the Eckington Road, pending planning applications and Rooftops' grass cutting at Queensmead. The Chairman asked Cllr Hardman to pass on the parish councils thanks to both Worcestershire CC and Wychavon DC for their excellent and supportive performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.