

Minutes of the Meeting of Belbroughton Parish Council held in the Jubilee meeting room at Belbroughton Recreation Centre on Monday 7th January 2013

Present: Cllrs K Green (Chair), J Bradley, I Dalziel, C Hine, A Hood, A Ince, T Jones, J Kitson, A Mabbett, S MacDonald, D Roberts, C Scurrrell and P Shotton.

In attendance: Mrs C Limm, Clerk; County Councillor Ed Moore, District Councillor Janice Boswell and ten members of the public also attended.

PC Tim Burling attended for the item on police matters.

001/13 Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Hartill. Cllr Scurrrell apologised for his late arrival. District Councillor Brian Lewis also sent his apologies.

002/13 Declarations of Interest

All Parish Councillors declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to discussions concerning the setting of the Council's budget and precept since they all had a home within the parish. The Council had agreed a dispensation to enable Councillors to take part in discussions and to vote on these matters.

Cllr Kitson declared an Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the item relating to the Council's investments through Prosperity; the Council had granted a dispensation to enable him to take part in the discussions concerning these investments.

003/13 Minutes of previous meeting

The Minutes of the meetings held on 3rd and 17th December 2012 were approved. The minute book was signed by the Chairman.

004/13 Police Matters

PC Burling had taken over from Chris Lord. His patch included Belbroughton and Bell Heath. He gave the Clerk a copy of recent local crime statistics for circulation to Councillors. PC Burling informed the Council that he would be holding an informal PACT surgery in Hagley on 30th January at 10.00 am. He would be happy to arrange a similar event in Belbroughton if the Council thought this would be useful.

005/13 Reports

Chairman's report

The Chairman thanked the Clerk and the Belbroughton Councillors who had done a great deal of work in connection with the collapsed wall in Belbroughton at a difficult time of year.

Finance Committee

Minutes of the meeting on 10th December had been circulated. Cllr Kitson informed the Council that the one year investment of £25,000 with the Bank of Cyprus had now been made.

Clerk's report

- i. The planned discussion with the footpath wardens about priorities for footpath work had been deferred until the February Council meeting.
- ii. Discussion of the lighting working group's recommendations had also been deferred until February.
- iii. Purchase of new grit bins had been approved in principle if the County Council would refill them once a year. This was not the case - WCC would only supply grit to a

central store. New bins had not therefore been ordered. The Finance Committee was asked to explore arrangements for refilling the existing bins.

- iv. Cllr Boswell had followed up the request for repair of Belbroughton street signs. BDC had indicated that they could supply material if the Parish Council could undertake the repairs. An inventory was being organised done by the District and they would then respond with detailed proposals.
- v. The National Trust had invited the Council to nominate a representative to the Clent Hills Advisory Committee. This would be an item for the next agenda.

006/13 Parish Council budget and precept for 2013/14

The Clerk said that under the new council tax arrangements the District Council had been given a total subsidy of £52,000 by central government to pass on to parish councils. She had been told by the District's revenues officer that Belbroughton's share of this should be £3,800 but this was subject to endorsement by District Councillors. The grant would offset the reduction in the Council tax base and reduce the precept that would need to be collected from Belbroughton Council residents. The result should be that the Parish Council would receive the amount of precept requested whilst residents would not pay any extra Council tax.

The Council confirmed the budget and precept that had been endorsed in principle at the December Council meeting provided the District Council confirmed the payment of the £3,800 grant.

007/13 District Ward Boundary Review

A number of members of the public spoke on this item to oppose the Boundary Commission's proposals to place Bell Heath in a new Romsley district council ward. Concerns were also expressed about the timing and publicity for this consultation which had meant that residents were not necessarily aware of the proposals and able to submit comments by the required deadline. The Council Chairman acknowledged that consultation had been difficult to organise over the Christmas period and that the Council shared these concerns.

In relation to the proposals for **new Parish Wards** the Council was opposed to the recommendation that Belbroughton Parish should be divided between 3 wards comprising Belbroughton, Bell Heath and Fairfield. Bell Heath, although physically separated by the A491, regards itself as part of Belbroughton. Locals regard the hill between Bell Heath and Romsley as much more of a geographical and psychological barrier than the A491.

Bell Heath residents look to Belbroughton for services, amenities, the school, the church and social activities. Of over 100 households visited by Cllr Hood to discuss the proposals only one felt that they had a connection with Romsley. All the rest considered themselves to be part of Belbroughton. Residents were concerned that being represented at District level by a District Councillor who also represents Frankley and Romsley would mean that the interests of their smaller population would be overlooked.

The Parish Council considered that placing Bell Heath into another District Ward for administrative convenience would be to the detriment of its Bell Heath residents. The Council agreed to put forward the suggestion that a better way of achieving the electoral equality sought by the Commission would be for the part of Hagley destined for Belbroughton and Clent ward to be included in one of the Hagley Wards. This would increase the electorate there and provide scope for Bell Heath residents to be included in Belbroughton and Clent ward.

The Boundary Commission's recommendations for **parish electoral arrangements** if 3 wards are created in the parish were that Belbroughton Parish Council should comprise 14 Councillors representing three wards : Belbroughton returning 6 members, Fairfield 6 members, and Bell Heath 2 members. Members of the Parish Council representing the current wards took different views on these proposals and agreed that their respective cases should be put forward to the Boundary Commission.

The majority of Councillors at the Council meeting (7 Councillors representing Belbroughton ward) did not support the recommendations. Their view was that they would reduce electoral equality and worsen an already inequitable situation. Currently the ratio of electors to Councillors in Belbroughton ward is 168:1 whilst for Fairfield ward it is 129:1. The proposed new warding arrangement would result in ratios of 176:1 for Belbroughton; 129:1 for Fairfield and 141:1 for Bell Heath. Belbroughton Councillors considered that it would be more equitable, and consistent with the democratic principles adopted by the Boundary Commission for the District review, that the allocation of Councillors should be 7 for Belbroughton (a ratio of 151 electors per Councillor), 5 for Fairfield (155:1) and 2 for Bell Heath (141:1). Belbroughton Councillors also noted that new small scale housing developments proposed for Belbroughton will increase the electorate there.

The 6 Parish Councillors representing Fairfield supported the recommendations for parish councillor allocations. They considered that since no changes were being proposed to the boundaries or population of the parish there was no reason to change the respective numbers of Belbroughton and Fairfield Councillors. They suggested that Fairfield ward covered a large rural area with scattered residents and that this justified a higher ratio of Councillors. Fairfield Councillors argued that since Bell Heath identifies closely with Belbroughton there would effectively be 9 Belbroughton Councillors if these Councillors voted together. Fairfield Councillors considered that reducing their numbers to 5 would reduce their ability to represent their residents effectively and the influence that Fairfield could have on parish council decision making.

Cllr Bradley made the point that there was no guarantee that Bell Heath Councillors would always vote with Belbroughton Councillors and he suggested that in the past voting had rarely been along village lines.

008/13 Wall at Sylvesters Corner, Belbroughton

The work to make the collapsed wall safe was almost completed. The next step would be to discuss with the District's conservation officer the longer term solution for the area. It was agreed that Mr Symonds should be retained for this next stage of the work.

The options would need to be considered but at this stage the Council favoured a solution with a lower wall and slope with grass and planting. The final cost would depend on the further work agreed – full reinstatement of the wall would be the most expensive option.

Some problems with road signs whilst the work was being done were noted, but the Council recognised that this had been an emergency road closure with, by definition, little time to plan. Lessons could be learnt if a further closure was needed when further work was done.

009/13 Investment with Henderson Fund

Cllr Kitson introduced this item. His background paper about the options had been circulated to the Council. The Finance Committee had considered the options for the money invested in the Henderson Fund and had concluded that the investment should be maintained for the time being. The fund should continue to be monitored by the Committee in line with the Council's investment strategy. The Council agreed this recommendation. Cllr MacDonald said that his support for this was with the proviso that he would like the Henderson fund to

be drawn down to fund work on the Queens Hill wall. It was agreed that the Council would need a separate discussion about the funding of work on the wall in due course.

010/13 Parish Council Agricultural Land

Cllr Hood reported on the Allotments Committee held on 21st November 2012. The Council endorsed the recommendation to change the name of the Committee to the Agricultural Holding Committee to provide a more accurate description of its remit. It also agreed that the Clerk should consult the Council's solicitor about the terms of the tenancy agreements.

The Committee had sought the County Council's advice about current rents charged for their agricultural land. The County had indicated that rents had increased on average by about 20% since the last rent review and that the Parish Council should now be considering a rent of around £85 per acre. The Committee had recommended that a rent increase of £15 per acre (from £70 to £85) should be phased in over 3 years from September 2013.

A proposal to accept this recommendation for a phased increase was not carried. A proposal to increase rents to £85 per acre with effect from September 2013 was agreed subject to any comments from the Council's solicitor about the process. Cllrs Bradley, Hood, Kitson, MacDonald, Roberts, Scurrrell and Shotton voted in favour with Cllrs Green, Dalziel, Jones, Hine and Mabbett voting against.

011/13 Minerals Local Plan and Sandy Lane Landfill

Discussion of the development of a new Minerals Local Plan was deferred until the next Council meeting.

The Council discussed the letter sent to Cllr Sheila Blagg by Veolia about monitoring arrangements at the Sandy Lane Landfill site and about the company's proposed new planning application for the site. The Council agreed that new liaison arrangements with the firm and with Chadwich Quarry were desirable. Cllrs Hood, Ince and Hine said that they would be willing to be involved. Further discussion was deferred until after the Veolia open day on 18th January.

012/13 Councillors' Items

- Cllr Boswell mentioned her charity concert on Friday 25th January.
- Cllr Scurrrell reported that the outline planning application by Cala Homes for Hagley had been approved by the District Council.
- Cllr Hine said that the illuminated speed sign at the Stoneybridge entrance to Fairfield was not working.
- Cllr Dalziel asked for a future discussion about communication. He was asked to email the Clerk with any initial thoughts on this topic.
- Cllr MacDonald suggested that the Council's planned review of risks should be started as soon as possible and should include the installation of a second handrail on the bridge at Dark Lane.
- Cllr Hood raised concerns about continued speeding in Heath End Road. He agreed to speak to Cllr Moore in the first instance, but item noted for a future agenda.

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm.

SignedChairman