ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 18 May 2022
At Birlingham Village Hall

Welcome

Present:

Councillors Aston, Byrne, Cook, Griffin, Luff, and Porter.

In attendance

June Hiden, Clerk.

1) Election of Chairman

Councillor Paula Aston was elected as Chairwoman (*the Chair or vice of the Parish Council must preside if present*).

2) Welcome from the Chairwoman

The Chairwoman welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chairwoman explained the meeting saying that it gave residents an opportunity for annual reports of activities and achievements from the County Council, District Council, Wardens, and community groups.

3) Apologies:

Apologies were received from the Parish Council Chairman, Ian Yates, County Councillor Adrian Hardman, District Councillor Ron Davies, Lengthsman Carl Brassington, Footpath Warden Bruce Hayward and Tree Warden Rupert Keys.

4) Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting

The Minutes of the Parish Meeting, held on 19 May 2021, were verified by Councillors as a true record and duly signed by the Chairwoman.

6) Parish Council Chairman's Report

Councillor Yates presented his report:

This report is a summary of the many activities that have taken place over the last 12 months. It has been another restricted year due to Covid which has curtailed some of the usual activities and forced meetings to be held virtually. Never-the-less an extensive list of projects was dealt with and real progress was made on a number of issues important to residents.

As always, I would like to begin by thanking everyone who have given their time for the benefit of the parish; all the members of the Parish Council; Vice Chair Paula Aston, Maxine Cook, Julia Luff, Steven Byrne, Terry Griffin and Michael Porter. They have all been involved in the many different projects undertaken by the Parish Council over the last 12 months as detailed later in this report. A special thank you also to June Hiden for the long hours she puts in as Clerk. Her knowledge and experience is invaluable.

Our thanks also go to those involved in the Parish Council's scheme of delegation; Carl Brassington the village Lengthsman, who has worked hard to keep our gullies, drains and verges clear, significantly reducing the impact of flooding. Rupert Keys Tree Warden who has monitored and

maintained the village trees having taken over from Karl Grimston. Bruce Hayward Footpath Warden ably assisted by Mark Smith who have spent many hours maintaining the parish footpaths.

I would also like to thank the following; County Councillor Adrian Hardman, for his help with organising the work on the resurfacing of the village roads and for arranging funding for 'Cuppa and Chat', speed roundels and telephone box restoration. District Councillor Ron Davis, who despite ill health has continued to keep us informed on Wychavon matters. It is much appreciated that they find time to attend our meetings whenever possible. Thanks also to Steve Morris who continues to develop and maintain the village website, including a page for the Parish Council and amongst his many activities heading up the Jubilee Committee and Birlingham News.

Annual Parish Meeting
This meeting must be held between March and the end of May. In May 2020, due to Covid restrictions, the meeting was held via video conference. It was hoped that in 2021 the meeting would be held in person but that was not to be the case and once again due to restrictions it was held by Zoom.

Covid Volunteers
The pandemic had dominated Parish Council activities during 2020 and the Parish Council put out a call for volunteers that would be prepared to help vulnerable residents. Some 20 villagers came forward for which we were very grateful. With the vaccine rollout in 2021 and the easing of restrictions there was less demand on the volunteers but they remained available to assist wherever necessary particularly in the first part of the year.

Roads and flooding
The Parish Council dealt with a large number of road and flooding issues in the village.

- *Resurfacing work at Lower End. Patching and resurfacing work on Broadway Road at Lower End around to Church Street was completed.*
- *Water Leak in Berwick Lane. There has been a persistent water leak at the top of Berwick Lane near Lower End Farm. This has caused some flooding and is a problem in winter when it freezes. Despite drains being jetted several times it did not fix the problem. In August, a new drain was installed by the Highways Project Team. Unfortunately, the work did not fix the leak! It was thought that the leak was coming from Severn Trent pipework but it has now been established that the problem is being caused by the old pipework not being correctly sealed off. This is on-going.*
- *Grange Road. Road collapse outside Avonside Cottage was fixed and road re-surfaced.*
- *Flooding near the Manor House. Work was carried out to address the problem of water running across the road near the Manor House. However, water is starting to run again and Severn Trent Water have been called out as a result to inspect it further. This is ongoing.*

The Parish Council thanked Worcestershire County Councillor Adrian Hardman, Councillor Julia Luff and Clerk June Hiden for their assistance in getting this work done.

Millennium Bench.
Having removed the bench from around the plane tree on the village green to prevent damage Councillor Maxine Cook identified a carpenter to restore it. Work was delayed by the lockdown and also the extent of the restoration which was much larger than initially thought. The carpenter kindly agreed to carry out the additional work in his own time and at his own cost. Rupert Keys kindly volunteered to do the groundwork so that the bench could be re-sited around the time capsule and the installation is now almost complete.

Parish Council Financials
In November, a budget meeting was held to discuss setting the parish precept for 22/23 based on government guidelines. It was agreed to submit an average annual increase equivalent to £3.02 per property.

Each year the parish council makes provisions from their budget to cover possible future costs in three areas. These are:

• *For the plane tree on the village green which due to its size may require surgery at some point in the future.*
• *To cover costs that the parish council are charged to run an election.*
• *To build a community fund to support village projects.*

Provisions for the plane tree are now considered sufficient for likely surgery costs so provisions that would have been allocated to the plane tree will now go to the Community Fund so providing additional money for village projects. My thanks to Councillor Terry Griffin and Clerk June Hiden for their management of the parish finances.

Jubilee Wood tree planting
The Parish Council were made aware of the Queen's Green Canopy scheme which is a tree planting initiative to mark The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. The Woodland Trust made tree saplings available free of charge and it seemed a great opportunity to try and improve the Jubilee Wood which has suffered with a number of dead trees. Steve Morris from the Jubilee Committee ordered 210 saplings and in snowy conditions in November they were planted by some 15 volunteers. The Parish Council thanked Rupert Keys for managing the planting, the volunteers for braving the cold conditions and Steve Morris for coordinating the project.

War Memorial – Frederick Quarrell
You may recall that during some research into the First World War it was discovered that Frederick Quarrell, a villager who died during the war, did not have his name included on the Birlingham war memorial. The Parish Council therefore decided to apply for funding to pay for his name to be added. This work was somewhat delayed due to Covid and the need to get planning permission as the war memorial is a listed monument. However, the Parish Clerk June Hiden has identified a stone mason who will now add the inscription.

Full Fibre Broadband (Fibre to the Premise – FTTP)
Councillor Ian Yates received an email from a resident enquiring about the Government's Gigabit Voucher Scheme that can be used to fund the provision of Full Fibre Broadband to homes as part of a community project. Full Fibre Broadband (also known as FTTP) replaces the copper telephone cable that runs between the telephone cabinet and house with a fibre optic cable. The benefit is higher speeds (up to 1Gb/s) and a more reliable service. An explanatory leaflet was circulated by the Parish Council with the Bystander to all properties and the response was very encouraging with more than a third of the village interested. A quotation was received from OpenReach but subsequently they were unable to commit to the project before the Worcestershire County Council deadline. An alternative provider called Airband was proposed as they were already installing full fibre to local villages. Thanks to the efforts of Councillors Steven Byrne and Michael Porter this proposal was accepted minutes before the deadline and full details will be made available to residents starting in May.

Dog/litter Bins
The Parish Council has included funding for three additional bins in its 2022/23 precept. Wychavon District Council, who empty the bins, have approved the proposed locations which are the junction of Broadway with Grange Road, top of Sherpool Lane (junction of Broadway with Shorthill) and junction of Shorthill with Church Street as these are areas popular with dog walkers.

Telephone Kiosk - restoration
The telephone box has been in a sad state for some time. It is no longer owned by BT and was adopted by the Parish Council a few years back and there have been discussions about its restoration. Councillor Maxine Cook found a company that specialises in this work. Councillor Adrian Hardman kindly agreed to fund 50% of the cost with the balance coming from Parish Council's project fund and the Jubilee Committee. The box will be removed from site for approximately 10 weeks while it is fully restored.

Speed advisories
The Parish Council discussed with Worcestershire County Council the installation of speed advisory roundels. The existing 30/40mph roundels located near the entrance to Birlingham Nurseries were completely worn away and needed remarking. Due to the ongoing traffic problems and

speeding in the narrow section of Upper End near Court Barns, consideration was also given to the installation of 30mph repeater roundels at each end of the narrow section. This work was carried out earlier this year with thanks to Adrian Hardman who agreed to fund the installation.

Planning
The Parish Council commented on several planning applications during the year. This is to provide Wychavon District Council who are responsible for planning decisions with a local perspective based on the residents' feedback in the Village Survey and Village Design Statement. My thanks to Councillor Steven Byrne who as Planning Group coordinator was responsible for collecting comments and summarising them for WDC.

Defibrillator pad and battery replacement
The Birlingham defibrillator, mounted on the side of the village hall, first became operational in 2018. The defibrillator's pads have a shelf life of 2 years and the battery 4 years. Both pads and battery were replaced following the defibrillator's use in 2019. As a result, the pads needed replacing again and the Parish Council agreed to contribute 50% of the cost from its Community Fund.

Ukraine
Councillor Julia Luff led discussions on ways in which the Parish Council could support refugees and families from the war in Ukraine and in particular any that become resident in Birlingham. There are a number of initiatives being considered by village organisations and it was agreed that any support offered should be coordinated. A letter of support was sent to RedStar who normally employ a large number of workers from Ukraine.

Permissive Footpaths
The Parish Council received a number of comments from residents regarding new Permissive Footpath and No Public Access signs that went up around the village just before Christmas. The Parish Council contacted landowners and as a result the new restrictions on Sherpool Lane to the John Bennett memorial pond and on Ash Plantation to the wetlands hide were removed. My thanks to Councillor Julia Luff for her efforts in drawing up maps to clarify access.

Remembrance Day
The Parish Council provided wreaths for both the Eckington and Birlingham remembrance services which was again restricted by Covid. However, Councillor Terry Griffin laid the wreath in Birlingham and Chris Reynard in Eckington.

In conclusion, although 2021 was still restricted by Covid the Parish Council was able to carry on with a large program of activities on behalf of villagers and the community.

The Chairwoman recapped on the thanks that the Chairman had given to everyone. She again mentioned Bruce Hayward and Mark Smith for volunteering and it was appreciated that they continued with the maintenance of the public rights of way. Rupert Keys for his work as Tree Warden. Carl Brassington for a lot of work despite the Covid restrictions and for offering to continue as the parish Lengthsman. She thanked Steve Morris for maintaining the website, and for continuing to participate in so many ways. Much has been done in the last 12 months and the Chairwoman thanked everyone again for engaging in projects and in their community.

Councillor Porter gave a note of thanks to Councillor Yates for his role as Chairman. The Chairman has participated in all the activities during the past year and has been a credit to the Parish Council and the village.

7) To receive annual reports from elected representatives

County Councillor

County Councillor Adrian Hardman gave the following Annual Report 2021/2022:

"It gives me great pleasure to be back with you again after the election in May 2021 but not in person tonight, because it is the annual meeting at Wychavon tonight.

I'm very sad to say that I seem to be talking about the same topics as I talked about this time last year before the election. COVID-19 is still very much with us, and as I write this we have 93 people from across the county in our two acute hospitals which is just over 3 wards of very ill people but the better news is that currently in the past seven days we had just under 60 people per 100,000 with the virus in the two district wards to the north of Bredon hill and this puts us at the middle of the league table, and the good news is that we only have two people with COVID-19 who are in the intensive care unit.

Throughout the pandemic this year the County Council has been able to continue to deliver its services either online or in a slightly different way and while we have not made as much progress in some areas as I would have wished; it is reassuring that we head into the end of the financial year very slightly overspent in our living disability's budget but generally there will be a minor call on reserves this year. In this year's budget but we had a 3% rise in the adult social care levy and a .9% rise in council tax making 3.9% for 2022 / 23. This budget means that we are fully funding all our adult social care and children's care pressures and currently have no waiting lists for social care. But there is little doubt that the government social care reforms will put considerable pressure on the County Council to administer them and I just hope that we are able to fully fund them all and don't end up in the position that Scottish councils by themselves in.

The situation in Ukraine continues to worry the County Council deeply and we are in the process of welcoming the Ukrainian guests that are undoubtedly going to end up in the county. This will be by working in partnership with our District Council colleagues and re purposing our "here to help scheme" so that if you take a Ukrainian guest into the home do you have a degree of support if it is with translation services or indeed just providing schooling. At the moment we find it very hard to gauge the amount of support or indeed the numbers of guests that will be arriving in our county.

I am aware that we still have some work to do in the area but generally I feel that the roads are in a satisfactory state. I hope the renewed roundels are having some effect on speeding traffic. The Eckington Bridge will be closed for a week at the start of the school holidays.

The middle school and the first school remain in good heart, and I would point out to the parish that we are amid having a review of the Pershore pyramid which could well result in it going two tiers."

The Chairwoman thanked Councillor Hardman for his help and support with all the matters in Birlingham.

<u>District Councillor</u>

District Councillor Ron Davis, Wychavon District Council, had circulated a report as follows:-

"*It is very unfortunate that the Wychavon Annual Council meeting is also this evening commencing at 1815hrs. Due to my illness last October I had been given Doctors orders to reduce my community activities and regain my strength. So, my attendance at meetings has been somewhat reduced. I have, however, been contactable by email or telephone and maintained contact with the Parish clerks to my 4 Parish Councils.*
Regretfully, I was forced to stand down from my position on the Executive Board after 7 years and had to handover my portfolio of Resources and Investments a position I thoroughly enjoyed. I was pleased, however, that my recommendation to freeze for the 5th year the Wychavon element of this year's council tax.
It has been my privilege to serve the Eckington Ward for another year and I trust I can continue for the next 12 months- health permitting.
We have a difficult year ahead which will require patience a clear and positive strategy Wychavon have the Resources and very sound investments to get through including good management and good Governance.
As I have stated in previous reports-Covid is still out there so take good care of yourselves."

The Chairwoman thanked Councillor Davis for his support, updates and information.

8) Annual Reports from representatives

The Parish Warden reports were given.

Footpath Warden

Bruce Hayward reported, as follows:

"*Birlingham has 2 volunteers who, together with local landowners and others, look after the Parish footpaths on behalf of the County Council. The County Council meet any small expenses incurred, and will often supply 'furniture' (e.g. gates, stiles etc.) that needs to be replaced.*

The main work in the past year for the volunteers has, as usual, been the controlling/clearing of undergrowth and repairs to stiles and finger-posts.

At each Parish Council meeting a report is made of work undertaken during the previous two months.

All the footpaths in Worcestershire are shown on the Public Rights of Way web map which is maintained by the County Council Countryside Service; visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/countryside and click on Public Rights of Way and then Interactive Map. (There is a link from the village website).

If anyone has any concerns or suggestions regarding the footpaths in the Parish, please contact me at Tadpole Cottage on 751382 or via the Parish clerk."

Bruce was thanked for his continuing work and the best footpaths locally.

Lengthsman

Carl Brassington reported, as follows:

"Apart from the very strong winds this winter it has been mostly uneventful in the village. The winds brought down several trees and branches but all were quickly cleared with help from the farm and Michael Porter.

The flooding issues did not prove as bad this year so perhaps it was a fairly dry winter. There are the ongoing outstanding items which are monitored by June but no major new issues to report.

The rut across the road in Upper End has been filled halfway across the road for some reason leaving half still rutted. The soil wash-ff from the fields is still an issue as is large vehicle traffic squashing the verges into the gully grids and filling them.

The road surface in the lane between Grange Road and Broadway Road is in poor condition and is the only one not to have been recently re-surfaced.

The footway in Eckington Road is badly encroached by the vegetation but this is not unusual for a rural route.

There have been a couple of small fly tipping issues which have been cleared but the pull-in off the A4104 still attracts lots of rubbish."

Carl was thanked for his continuing work on the highways.

Tree Warden

Rupert Keys had forwarded the following report:

"Would it be possible to mention to the highways/ council if they could leave verges left uncut on the straights and only cut on blind spots, please? Rather strange during 'No Mow May'. It will also help wildlife, promote wildflower and help any bulbs to flourish better next year.

I will try my best to get the bench base in between shows. Apologies I have not got around to it yet!

The Chairwoman thanked Rupert for his support.

9) Community Groups

Groups and organisations were invited to send their reports. They are as follows:

Jubilee Committee

Steve Morris, Chairman of the Jubilee Committee, reported:

"*The Jubilee Committee has continued to be involved in a range of activities.*

The current emphasis is on the Platinum Jubilee in June. We have organised four meetings and now have nearly 40 volunteers to help with three days of events, including a team of 15 who are leading the events and activities. The events will include a Quiz Night, Street Party (with village photograph), Pudding Fit for a Queen children's competition, Celebratory Church Service (organised by churchwarden Adrianne Woodward on behalf of the PCC), Pram Race and Treasure Hunt.

Birlingham News is delivered to over 90% of households, as well as many former residents. We deliver two issues per month on the second and fourth Wednesdays. Thank you to the many people who now contribute on a regular basis and particularly Ian Yates for his extensive Parish Council reports.

We are trialling an online PDF edition of Birlingham News, which allows us to include photographs, items that would not normally make it into the email and detailed reports.

In the last twelve months we have produced a further two issues of the Birlingham Bystander and our eleventh edition (Issue 87) is about to be delivered.

The village website continues to receive many visitors but more volunteers are needed to take on specific groups of web pages. The Village Forum is no longer being used.

Another 210 trees were planted in the Jubilee Wood by 15 volunteers. These are now all showing new growth. A number of people have volunteered to help with future maintenance. Huge thanks to Rupert Keys for co-ordinating the planting effort, providing the equipment and generally advising on the upkeep of the wood.

Our stock of equipment includes a water boiler (currently on loan to the church), 25 trestle tables, bunting, 30 camping chairs, 26 plastic chairs, heaters, glasses, music stands and road signs and, all of which are available for village residents and organisations to borrow for private or public functions.

Work on Birlingham in the Second World War and the Birlingham Memories Project was interrupted by the pandemic but we hope to get going on these again soon.

We are hoping to recruit new members of the Jubilee Committee over the next few months, to help spread the workload and bring in fresh ideas.

Thank you to the many dozens of people who have been involved in all these various activities over the past 12 months."

West Mercia Police

A report was received from PCSO Julie Pardoe, Pershore Rural North and South, Safer Neighbourhood Team, as follows:

"*Please note that from the 26 May I will no longer be at work due to undergoing an operation on my knee.*

I do not know when I will be returning to work but expect to be off for a number of months.

To my knowledge there will be no extra coverage for the area, so please keep in mind that the team has now been reduced to PCSO Ashley Smith and PC Daz Riley who will be covering the area running from Whittington to Bredon."

The Pershore Team were thanked for their ongoing help and support to the village.

A newsletter from the Safer Neighbourhood Team is now circulated for Evesham and Pershore. There is also a newsletter, The Rural Beat distributed by South Worcestershire Police Rural and Business Crime Team produced by John Campion, Police and Crime Commissioner, West Mercia. The aim of the information and advice is to assist the community.

10) Open Session

The Chairwoman said it was hoped that there would be the ability to implement an event for the village later in the year. There were no further issues to discuss in the open session.

Closure – with nothing further to discuss the meeting closed at 7.15pm. **The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting will be in May 2023.**

Signed: . . . . . Paula Aston, Chairwoman

Date: . . . . . .