

Broadwas and Cotheridge Parish Council

Annual report for Parish Meeting to be held on 15th May 2023

- * The past year has seen the retreat of Covid and a gradual return to something approaching normal, though for some the pandemic has left a legacy. We also saw the late Queens platinum jubilee and then her passing.
- * For the Parish Council the year was not without its challenges and learning points. In April our Clerk of 3 years decided to leave us. Recruitment as many Parish Councils find proved difficult and when we were able to appoint, after a week she decided the role was not for her. So for the majority of the last year we were without a Clerk, though for 3 months we did have some help from a Locum Clerk.
- * As a result despite the valiant efforts of all the councillors and in particular Cllr's Worrell and Cullen, who for the latter part of the year formally held parts of the role on a voluntary basis, it was difficult at times to maintain business as normal.
- * We are pleased that we have now managed to appoint Vid Blakeney as our Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) who commenced work in April of this year.
- * The Clerk/RFO is a required and statutory role and is the Councils Proper Officer. This means that he holds a number of key responsibilities to support the councillors and ensure that the Parish Council undertakes its activities in a lawful and proper way.

- * During the year we were sad to lose 2 Parish Councillors (Cllr Usman and Clarke) as their contributions and support were very much appreciated
- * Towards the end of the year we prepared for the Local Elections, which meant that all current councillors needed to stand for re election. All of the other councillors decided to stand again and following the election on May 4th, have been returned.

- * Although the Parish Council now has a higher number than usual of vacancies, (1 out of 4 for Cotheridge and 3 out of 5 for Broadwas), the present council is quorate and councillors are committed to continuing to support the Parish Council.
- * We would welcome anyone who is interested to approach any of us to talk about this and our Clerk can provide you with information that may help you to decide.
- * From a financial point of view the situation is stable and we are continuing with our 10 year programme to reduce (on the advice of our auditors) the funds we hold. This meant that the rise in the level of the precept was less than it could have been. Although we did not spend as much as we would have done on the Clerks role, our costs as with everyone else are rising. In part the council decided at the beginning of last year that in order to remain competitive we needed to undertake a re grading exercise to re set the salary we offer for the Clerk role. As other planned developments and expenditure did not take place when hoped for, again due to the clerk vacancy, we anticipate that in the coming year there will be some catch up expenditure.
- * As a statutory consultee in regard to all planning applications submitted in the Parish, we maintained through a planning working group our responsibilities. This included the Chair attending the Northern Area Planning Committee to represent the Councils views on a planning application, and some detailed work in respect of a number of others.
- * We have continued to work closely with the District, County Councillors and officers of each authority, principally in respect of planning and highway matters. It is not often understood that the Parish Council has little direct control over these areas, and can only seek to influence, represent local views and on occasions challenge or hold to account how others who have statutory responsibilities choose to make their decisions.
- * We are grateful to Cllr's Walton (MHDC) and Richardson Brown (WCC) for their interest in and attention to matters that are of importance to parishioners.
- * As is usually the case there have been a number of applications that have for a number of reasons, resulted in a need to try and make sure that local views are heard and understood. In this respect although outcomes are often protracted and not always what was hoped for, as a Parish Council we hope we have

become more responsive and worked more closely with involved and interested parties.

- * We have also sought to be persistent as well as patient in respect of enforcement matters, and we maintain a priority list to ensure that our local councillors and officers can provide information about progress or the lack of it to each meeting of the Parish Council.
- * Although we hoped to bring forward a number of ideas about how we might look after Berryfields and make the best use of this in the future, this has not been possible as there simply has not been possible for councillors to find the time. However it remains our intention to work on this and over the next few months our new clerk will report on progress.
- * There continue to be some areas of catch up in terms of the standards required of the Council in terms of administrative standards. So over the coming year the Clerk will work with the Councillors to update these. (E.g a policy and guidance for any continued grant making, regular review of required policies)
- * Thanks to Cllr Cullen we are gradually starting to make better use of the website, it is our intention that this will help make sure that people can find the information they want.
- * At the end of the year we reviewed with Tim Hughes our lengthsman how the first year had gone alongside some feedback from parishioners. This resulted in the Council appointing Tim for another year and Tim agreeing to continue. Tim visits the parish on a regular basis and has a planned schedule of regular things to attend to, and he will also attend to matters which have been reported to the Clerk.
- * During the year there have been low level discussions about whether we can encourage those agencies responsible for highways and road safety, to meet with us to explore an approach which would move us away from the impression many parishioners have, that the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, West Mercia Police , Worcestershire County Council and Malvern Hills District Council, do not take seriously the concerns of parishioners. We have now formally approached Community Speed Watch through the Neighbourhood Police team and are awaiting a response. We will also be moving forward with formal approaches to each of the key agencies to explore what they can do to help us address these issues.

- * Matters relating to the A44 in terms of maintenance have taken up some considerable amount of councillors time. In part because there are some communication challenges, but also it is not always clear as to when and what the response will be. However we continue, when we know about a concern, to support the County Council in meeting high standards both in terms of emergency responses and longer term fixes.
- * During the year we saw the completion of full fibre to premises work completed in Cotheridge and Little Green. Thanks to those parishioners who signed up we were able to claim vouchers from the government and with a further financial contribution from WCC, these parts of the parish now have future proofed high speed broadband. This represented an inward investment into the parish of over a £100,000. Sadly it was more difficult to persuade those who live in Broadwas, and when after much effort we did the government closed the scheme. In the new government scheme rural Worcestershire is included, but as yet they have yet to announce when the new scheme will open. Once they do we will carefully consider whether there is sufficient local support to take advantage of this opportunity.
- * In our efforts to take things forward in line as far as possible where either we have an ongoing responsibility or parishioners have indicated that it is something that is of value. We have had some success and some key learning. We are now working with parishioners who live in Broad Green to look after the site of SSSI.
- * As the Parish Council we hold a particular role in respect of Broadwas Village Hall and one of the councillors (Cllr Worrall) sits on the management committee. We continue to respect and support the autonomy of the committee and to support their ongoing success.
- * During the year we have strengthened our links with the local places of worship, local associations and the school, and this means we continue to have conversations and look for ways in which we can work together to help create opportunities for parishioners and local organisations and businesses to come together when there is a common cause or interest.

