

# **Broadwas and Cotheridge Parish Council**

## Annual report for Parish Meeting to be held on 22 May 2024

- ➔ On behalf of the Parish Council I would like to submit this report. Its purpose is to provide a summary of how the Parish Council has sought to fulfil its responsibilities during the year, and how any learning may inform the coming year.
- ➔ I would like to thank all the local organisations for their reports, which demonstrate the importance of what they do and how they contribute to parish life.
- ➔ This year we have been able to successfully fill 2 key roles, that of Clerk/RFO and the lengthsman. Lisa Law joined us in August and Jeremy Moore in October.
- ➔ Lisa is a qualified and experienced Clerk, and has made significant progress in ensuring the Parish Council catches up, from the period of time when it was not possible to fill the role on a permanent basis.
- ➔ Building on the work of our previous lengthsman (who stepped down for health reasons) Jeremy has deployed his extensive experience for the benefit of the parish. All drainage points and gulleys have been inspected and where necessary cleaned and or reported to the County Council. Jeremy has a regular programme for cleaning road signs, checking the speed cameras and strimming.
- ➔ The Parish Council is appreciative of Lisa and Jeremys work and formally thank them.
- ➔ Councillors Jeff Guest, Magda Cullen, Jacqui Wirral and Monica Longley have diligently and actively undertaken their role. This has included responding to parishioner requests, making site visits, representing the parish on other bodies and at meetings. Magda as Vice Chair has helped ensure that the Parish Council remains focused on making a positive contribution.

- ➡As chair I am immensely grateful for their loyalty and hard work.
- ➡Through the year we have continued to try to recruit parishioners to become parish councillors, as we currently have 4 vacancies (1 for Cotheridge and 3 for Broadwas). This places an added pressure on the existing councillors, and can mean that it is difficult to ensure meetings are quorate.
- ➡Many local organisations face challenges in attracting volunteers, so continued efforts will be needed to encourage people to consider becoming a parish councillor.
- ➡In late 2020 the parish council voted to reduce its reserves to 12 months of its expenditure rather than continue to increase the Precept by the maximum allowed each year. This has meant a continued reduction in the level of the precept, which although only a small proportion of the overall council tax bill, has hopefully made a contribution to those who face difficulty as a result of the “cost of living” crisis we have taken around £15,000 less from residents of the Parish. It also means that the Parish Council is not collecting or holding funds that it has no specific purpose for.
- ➡The Parish Council has continued to ensure that how it spends and distributes its funds is undertaken with transparency and pays due account to high standards and legal requirements.
- ➡As a result of the internal audit last year the Parish Council agreed and formally published “a statement of intent” in respect of financial regulations and standards. This is intended to provide the Parish Council with targets to meet in order to demonstrate that it meets the standards expected of it. This year's internal auditor has been asked to provide feedback in light of this statement.
- ➡Both in terms of administration and activity, the last year has seen an opportunity to get settle down after the disruptive effect of Covid and a long period with out a permanent Clerk and RFO.

- ➡ The Parish Council reviewed in the year its facility for considering requests for grants from organisations in the parish, and continues to consider requests. A number grants were awarded.
- ➡ As an official consultee for planning applications and related matters, the Parish Council has continued to consider all such requests and submit responses where this is deemed appropriate or necessary. This has included responding to local views and working closely with our District and County Councillor.
- ➡ Our Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) expires later this year and therefore will be subject to review by the Parish Council. Despite some of the wider uncertainties in the planning and policy environment, the NDP remains an important expression of local priorities and conditions in terms of any proposed developments.
- ➡ The Parish Council has actively worked with and reported concerns to the District Council Planning Enforcement team. As previously we are grateful for the efforts of the enforcement officer who deals with the Parish, but we can find it difficult to fully explain to our parishioners why there are not always clearer outcomes.
- ➡ As in previous years, there has been occasions when the Parish Council has found it difficult to have full confidence in both the District and County Council. In terms of how they discharge their duties and responsibilities planning. Parishioners have reported their concerns as to the time taken, the approach to customer service and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system and process.
- ➡ The Parish Council will continue to engage in a constructive way with the District Council in particular, in looking for evidence that the standard and quality of this service is improving.
- ➡ In a similar vein the Parish Council has, despite concerted efforts with the District and County Councillor, remained frustrated at the response of the County Council, the District Council, West Mercia Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner, to the concerns

held locally about safety and speed on the A44 as it runs through the parish.

- ➔ It was possible to meet with the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner at the instigation of the District Councillor, regarding the need to address more effective preventative measures and controls where the A44 passes through Cotheridge.
- ➔ Despite efforts by both the District and the County Councillor it remains the case that the responsible bodies (the LA and the Police) have yet to come forward with some proposals for parishioners to consider. This in fact mirrors the experience of the concerns raised over a number of years about other stretches of the A44 and in particular Broadwas.
- ➔ It is difficult not to conclude that the well articulated concerns and patience of parishioners, are not being taken seriously. The Parish Council continues to make efforts to invite key leaders to and host a public meeting. It has also been suggested that a local petition be commissioned and this is something the Parish Council will consider shortly.
- ➔ It is also fair to report some “positives”, for example we have seen an improvement from the County Council Highways department in their attention to drains and gulleys, and timely response to reports re road surfaces and conditions. The District Council continue to empty the bins efficiently, and respond to other requests re rubbish removal.
- ➔ We are grateful to our County Councillor (Scott Richardson Brown) and District Councillor (Barbara Jones Williams) for their attendance at meetings and willingness to raise on our behalf questions and concerns.
- ➔ The parish has a number of what are called “community assets”, these are the Berryfields recreation ground, a responsibility for the common land at Broad Green (specifically in respect of its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest) , the Defibrillator

located outside the Royal Oak in Broadwas, and its role as Custodian Trustee for Broadwas Village Hall.

- ➔ The following work has been undertaken and is being continued:
- ➔ **Berryfields:** Repairs to one of the gates and fencing has been completed. The hedges have been cut. The Play and adult activity equipment was inspected.
- ➔ A new contract has been awarded following a public tender exercise (as is required) and this now includes the annual cutting of hedges. This contract commenced on the 1st April 2024 and the Parish Council is working closely with the new contractor to ensure that this works as intended.
- ➔ The Parish Council is currently contacting firms to request an estimate for a schedule of work to maintain and upgrade the play and activity equipment. Once a number of quotes have been obtained, the PC will be in a position to determine affordability and if necessary identify additional funding.
- ➔ The right of way with the County Council across the school car park is due for renewal this year. The Parish Council has also received a number of representations as to the condition of the car park. There is a small working group that is meeting to look at how best to maintain and improve the facilities, in order to then consult as widely as possible.
  
- ➔ **Broad Green SSSI** - The Parish Council has for the moment paused the intended works re new signage. This is in part because our available resources have had to be focused on working with the Rural Payments Agency who act on behalf of Natural England, to regularise the contractual arrangements between them and the Parish Council.
- ➔ For many years the Parish Council has been grateful to Geoff Winkworth and Colin Hemming for the work they have done to ensure the green is cut and maintained to Natural England specifications. Sadly and for understandable reasons they have stepped down this year, and our Clerk is in the process of finding a successor.
  
- ➔ The **Defibrillator** has recently been serviced and re registered. We are taking advice as to whether or not a new cabinet which is required, is cost effective or whether given its age a new

defibrillator should be obtained. Broadwas Sports Association have recently installed one. The Parish Council is keen to support the placement of other defibrillators (for example at Laylocks Garden Centre) and to help facilitate awareness raising and training.

- ➔ **Broadwas Village Hall** - Cllr Worrill has represented the Parish Council on the Management Committee, and the Parish Council has received regular reports. At the last AGM of the Village Hall Management committee, there was a clear plan declared to attract more volunteers, focus the offer of the village hall and to try out new ideas. The Parish Council has welcomed and supported wherever possible this positive approach, and looks forward to the next AGM.
  
- ➔ Whilst a Parish Council is understandably measured by how it meets its legal duties and seeks to make best use of public funds. It is also important to acknowledge the other ways in which parish councillors and parishioners work together. For example during the cold weather as in the pandemic a number of parishioners came forward to offer help. Although not always the most exciting event of the month, we are grateful for parishioners who take the time to attend and contribute to meetings.
  
- ➔ **The coming year.**
  - The Parish Council remains vulnerable due to the number of unfilled councillor positions. This impacts on what can be achieved and also means that it is not always possible to meet when it was intended. Therefore it is to be hoped that we will be able to welcome some parishioners into this role.
  - Subject to funding, this is the year when we need to get ahead in terms of the play and activity equipment, and bring it up to standard. At the same time we need to find time and space to identify some proposals for the future of Berryfields
  - Planning and enforcement, remains the responsibility of the District Council, and as such responding to consultations will remain and continue to be a priority for the Parish Council.

- In addition this year we need by September to review the Neighbourhood Development Plan. (This provides for some support and protection for the parish in terms of future developments).
- There continue to be a number of past agreed actions and commitments that need to be progressed, and it is hoped that in the year the progress already made will be built on in order that this backlog is reduced.
- Continue to improve and promote the website.

Richard Burrows

Chair and on behalf of Broadwas and Cotheridge Parish Council .