

Parish of Berkswell – Assembly

Minutes of the Parish Assembly held on 24th May 2018

1. Attendance and apologies

Forty-three people attended the assembly. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dave Bell, Parish Councillors Edwards and Cambage, and residents Jim Ellis and Michael Palmer. The PC Clerk was not able to attend due to special domestic circumstances.

2. Minutes from 2017 Parish Assembly

The Chairman showed on the screen the minutes of the 2017 Parish Assembly (see attachment 1). These were agreed as a fair record and the Chairman stepped through the action points from that meeting.

- a. **Virgin media.** Complaints had been made. Some rectifications had been made and the project by Virgin appeared complete
- b. **Waste lane/Hodgett's Lane bus stop. West Midlands ITA (ex.Centro)** had agreed that they would put a concrete hard stand but have yet to do it.
- c. **Balsall Common bypass.** A meeting had been held with our local MP on the Solihull Plan and as part of that the nature of the Balsall Common bypass and the impact on Hallmeadow Road and Station car parking had been explained
- d. **Local PCSO's.** The Council had discussed local crime but there are no proposals for local PCSO's funded by the parish councils. A clear need for such a high cost solution had not been established.

3. Chairman's report

The Chairman (Councillor Richard Drake) gave a report on the parish council's activities for the year to end April 2018. A summary is shown in the attachment 2. Councillor Drake invited the audience to join him in thanking Councillor Burrow for his considerable and continuing service to our Parish and there was a fulsome round of applause.

4. Issues discussed

a. The Well

A resident expressed concern that the well was not flowing away properly and was concerned that the level was high enough to represent a danger of drowning. Councillor Burrow responded that the Well was not owned by anyone although the PC did mow the grass and residents did some gardening work. Severn Trent had cleared the outflow pipe of roots and he had been to inspect it that morning with Bill Bailey and found that the outflow grill was partially blocked. It was explained that a resident had for years undertaken cleaning work in the well and ensured the outlet was clear but regrettably that resident was no longer with us. Councillor Burrow sought a volunteer to be "well warden" and after the meeting a volunteer came forward. (Note a working party of 4 residents cleared the outflow, debris from in and around the well on Saturday 26th May)

b. Parish Governance Review

There was a lively debate on the parish boundary review with various views expressed. The Chairman explained that the parish council did not have a view on what the outcome should be but felt strongly that residents should express their view to Solihull Council.

c. Buzzards

A resident expressed concern that several nesting sites for buzzards had been abandoned. He had found a dead polecat at the base of one nesting tree and found that its belly had been sliced open and the intestines removed. It was possible that this was poisoned bait and the police and RSPCA were involved.

d. HS2

It was reported that HS2 Ltd were considering/proposing to use Hallmeadow Road as a haul route to avoid the centre of Balsall Common and a change to the haul route in Barrett's Farm outside of the Act limits which would require legislation.

Updated 11th July 2018 based on a residents input.

Appendix showing 2017 minutes that were projected on the screen

Berkswell Parish,
Parish Assembly 25th May 2017
Minutes of the Berkswell Parish Assembly held at the Hornets
Clubhouse, Lavender Hall Road, Balsall Common at 8.00PM

1. Attendance – a total of 35 people were in attendance.
2. Apologies – Kay Howies, Richard Wilson, Malcolm Harkin, Ken Allsopp, David Birt, Jim Eric, Alison Cartmidge and Keith Tindall
3. The meeting was chaired by Andrew Burrow with Richard Drake taking the minutes.
4. Chairman's Report – The chairman presented his report. Matters reported included:
 - a) An analysis of the 2016/17 cash expenditure of the Parish Council totalling £42,316. In addition there were 4 cheques totalling £3817.07 that had not been cashed by recipients at the year end. The analysis demonstrated that the funds are spent for the benefit of all residents broadly in line with their location. (52% of spend for the benefit of Balsall Common residents who make up 63.6% of electors). The key financial slides are shown in the appendix to these minutes.
 - b) The accounts had been audited with no adverse observations.
 - c) A summary of work undertaken by the Parish Council during the year including the adopting of the Railway Station & planting of fruit trees on Huddings Hill (both jointly with the Berkswell Society), refurbishment of the Kelsey Lane bus stop, new posts on The Green, removal of dangerous trees and ongoing mowing/trimming.
 - d) Other activities have included planning consultations, work on traffic issues, local footpaths, The Well pollution and aircraft routes.
 - e) The Berkswell Parish precept is the lowest locally following a decision to reduce our reserves. As well as a number of specific reserves earmarked for projects we have a General Reserve of £57,848. The Parish Council will continue to monitor our reserves to ensure we maintain a prudent but not excessive level.
 - f) Major issues for 2017/18 are to undertake an NDP for Berkswell Parish and to engage consultants to challenge SMBC's approach to developments on Greenbelt and Brownfield sites.

Open Forum – a summary of matters raised by Electors

Virgin Media work – a resident commented that a lot of dirt was left on pavements in Balsall Common and that this would end up being washed into drains, potentially leading to flooding. There was also problems with the placement of cabinets. Residents were requested to provide photographic evidence of issues to support engagement with SMBC and Virgin. It was also suggested that direct complaints via the Virgin Media Twitter feed might generate corrective action.

Waste Lane/Hodgetts Lane Bus Stop – a resident suggested that this was unsafe. Andrew Burrow and Richard Lloyd agreed they would review to understand the issue and consider what action the Parish Council could take.

Timing of local plan – a resident asked about timing of the next stage of the local plan and how the Parish Council intended to respond to the next round of consultation. The meeting confirmed support for the engagement of consultants to enable an informed challenge of SMBC proposals for Greenbelt development and the rejection of Brownfield options.

New settlement – a resident asked what had happened to the proposal for a new settlement at Curness End. It was advised that SMBC had not seriously considered this as they lacked the necessary resources to support a completely new development in parallel with their UK Central plans.

Balsall Common bypass – a resident asked the Parish Council to consider writing to our local MP as he appeared to not understand the nature of the proposal.

Local PCSO – a resident asked if the Parish Council would consider contributing to the cost of a PCSO for the local area. This request was linked to the closure of the Police Shop and the consequent reduced visibility of Police Officers locally and concerns about anti-social behaviour.

Attachment 2 - Berkswell Parish Assembly, 24th May 2018.

The Jordan Room, Berkswell Village

Parish Chairman's Report

Financial

In the last financial year your council spent £87k. After income of £39k, this resulted in a deficit of £48k, which has reduced our reserves to £62k. This was a deliberate decision of your council. For a number of years we have had reserves higher than necessary. We decided to reduce the precept (the amount of money we take from you) by c50% to £26k. Our reserves are still higher than we think necessary and we have decided to leave the precept at this low level for another year. It is your money, we shouldn't keep it "just in case". We will still have adequate reserves in keeping with recommended guidelines.

Full details of our expenditure can be found on our website together with the audit report. We are lucky to have a qualified accountant as our clerk and our finances are managed to a very high standard.

Council Activities during the last year:

Neighbourhood Development Plan

A committee of 3 councillors as well 4 residents (2 from Berkswell Parish and 2 from Balsall Parish) have been extremely busy working on this for the last year.

We have been well supported by local volunteers and an excellent consultant. This is progressing well, we have had a great response to the recent consultation and we hope to have this completed in the next 12 months. We had 923 responses to the consultation, 95% support our Vision and Objectives, 311 people wrote over 600 additional comments for us to analyse and consider. An NDP will help mitigate the impact of any new development(s) and entitle us to a larger share of the developers' contribution to local infrastructure costs. (**NB** an NDP cannot prevent development(s), that is down to SMBC, neither can it make decisions on roads, schools or transport).

Local Plan: We are committed to resisting any development in Greenbelt land.

Solihull's timetable continues to slip. Lobbying from local residents in addition to councillors has been successful in getting local PDL (brownfield) sites registered. Your council has also engaged professional consultants to advise us in challenging erosion of the greenbelt and especially the Meriden Gap in our parish.

Berkswell Village Traffic Calming

Local consultations have taken place on a number of options suggested by the consultants. 152 forms were filled in. The results are being analysed and will be published in due course.

Local election

Thanks to intervention by councillors this year's local elections were held at the Church which meant Berkswell School did not need to close for the day. This is a permanent change saving at least a day of schooling each year. Popular with parents if not the children.

The Well

This long running saga is finally drawing to a close! Councillors have been involved in a long running and tortuous communication with Severn Trent which has finally found the problem which is now being sorted.

Planting

Your council has supported the work of the Berkswell Society and many volunteers in helping to keep our parish so colourful.

Berkswell Station

We have adopted the station. With the Berkswell Society we stock and maintain 5 planters with the help of volunteers.

Christmas Trees

This year we financed the placing of Christmas Trees at several locations around the parish. They were tended by local volunteers and were well received by our residents and visitors.

The bench on the Green

Special mention must go to one of our residents (Alistair Dymond) who spent many hours refurbishing the bench around the tree. This has now been replaced (7 strong locals helped with lifting and positioning) and on my travels through the village seems to be well used by our visitors on sunny days.

Grants

We have continued to support local organisation with a range of grants, including, the Heart of England School, The Hornets, Berkswell Scouts, St Peter' Hall (for Balsall Common U3A), The Jubilee amongst others. We seek to support activities for young people and the work of volunteer organisations.

Volunteers

I cannot finish this report without making special mention of the people in our community who work voluntarily on a wide range of activities. Over 40 people have helped on the NDP alone, from delivering leaflets/surveys or helping with events to spending hours reading and analysing responses. Some of those activities are mentioned above but there are many others. Your council would certainly cost you a lot more without their support and the community would be poorer in many other ways as well.

Richard Drake, Chairman