

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston Parish Council held in Wheaton Aston Village Hall on Thursday 3rd May 2018 at 6.30pm.

Cllr. T Noblett was in the Chair.

In attendance: Six members of the public attended.

Parish Council Clerk: Mrs A Watson

Chairman's Report. Cllr Noblett gave a report of the previous year's activity. (Copy attached.)

Apologies: There were apologies from Cllr B Wells, Cllr Millington, Cllr Elson and Cllr Fox

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 17th May 2017. The minutes were approved and signed as a true record of the meeting.

There were no comments from parishioners

The future format of the Annual Parish Meeting is to be altered. All Parish organisations who receive funding from the Parish Council will be invited to present on how these funds have been used over the past year

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and support and closed the meeting at 6.50pm.

Chairman

Date

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT for 2017 - 2018

At the beginning of the Parish Council year the Council had two vacancies available on the Parish Council and adverts were placed on the Council notice boards and on the Parish Facebook site. Four Parishioners applied for the two vacancies and on behalf of the Council I am pleased to announce that Winnie Millington and Anita Anderson were successful and they represent the Wheaton Aston and Stretton wards respectively. I would also like to welcome Karen Daker to the Parish council staff team as the Assistant Parish Clerk.

The Parish Council exists to serve the Parish and my chairman's report covers the following topics of maintenance, village improvement projects, events, funding village groups, legislation and other matters that have been dealt with by the Parish Council during the past year.

Maintenance throughout the Parish is an ongoing commitment particularly grass cutting. Grass cutting is required to keep our play areas, verges, cemeteries and churchyards and all open spaces in an acceptable condition and because of the effects of climate change the season for cutting extends further and further into the Autumn.

I would like to express on behalf of the Parish Council our thanks to our main grass cutting contractor Bloomin' Gardens and Landscapes Ltd for the co-operative and diligent way they carry out their work.

The many black and white finger posts, which are a distinctive feature of our Parish, are maintained with care by Mr R. Cox. Hedges are trimmed, moles are kept at bay and bulbs are planted, all important in their way to improve the look of our three villages.

The Parish Council as you may be aware employs a Village Orderly, Mr Bissell. Mr Bissell completes many jobs throughout the year around the villages and along with Mrs Davies and Mrs Morris, our two Litter Pickers, improves the appearance of Parish. On behalf of the Parish Council I thank them for their efforts. Mr Cadman who, once again has supplied and maintained the floral display outside the Village hall to a high standard, I would like to thank him on behalf of the Parish Council.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers who take time off to plant bulbs, litter pick and the many small jobs they complete in the vicinity of their properties and in particular Mr Darrant for safety inspection of the Primrose Bank play equipment, and the Cobbles Community Action Group headed by Mrs Bailey for their time and effort in planting bulbs and shrubs in the area behind the church turning what was a dumping ground for cans and bottles into a pleasant landscaped area.

All three villages were entered in the annual Best Kept Village competition, run by Community Council of Staffordshire, but unfortunately none of the villages were recommended for any of the category prizes. Many thanks to the children of St Mary's School who produced posters for the Best Kept Village Competition which are displayed throughout the Villages during the competition period. Needless to say the posters were of a high standard and the Councillors who were part of the sub-committee that judged the posters had a very difficult task in choosing the winning posters.

Visits from the Neighbourhood Highway Teams, whilst not as frequent as in previous years, continue and they deal with an extended list of smaller non-safety related problems such as ditch regrading, fencing, weeding, painting and small environmental improvement schemes. If as residents of the Parish you notice a problem with reference to the highways, particularly potholes, please report the problem through the dedicated telephone number which can be obtained by looking at the Village News And Views under Key Contacts or let the Parish Council Manager be aware of the problem.

Several timber structures within Broadholes Lane Nature Play Park had partially rotted away during the years since the park has been opened and these have been replaced and the Willow Dome has been reshaped. The Parish Council decided to revamp the Primrose Bank Play Area and after consultation with both the school and the local residents came up with an agreed scheme that has improved and enhanced the play area. Marston Road Field has seen repairs to the Skate Park and replenishing the bark and sand

Once again loutish behaviour and petty vandalism is on the increase in Wheaton Aston and through this report I would ask all residents to report any anti-social behaviour you see to the Police and not to the Parish Council Manager. Dog Fouling is still causing concern and along with litter dropping is anti – social and is costing the Parish. I urge those minority of people who are guilty of such behaviour to please use the bins provided.

Groups of young people at times are gathering on the Village square and playing loud music annoying the local residents and obviously disturbing the peace. Vandalism at Marston Road Field is on the increase. Fires have been lit on the Skate Park along with damage to the hardwood running surfaces, fencing has been pulled down, bolts have been loosened on the Youth Shelter, benches have been pulled and chopped up, broken glass has been placed just below the surface of the sand within the play builder equipment and so on. The litter problem is a disgrace.

The majority of young people that visit and play on the equipment treat the area and equipment with respect, as always it is the minority that cause the problems. The minority have over the last year added approximately £4,000 to the Precept. As I stated above please report any anti-social behaviour to the Police. The Parish Council are linking up with the Police and South Staffs Council in order to try and overcome the problems noted above.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind Parishioners to please stay on the footpaths when crossing fields that are planted with crops and at all times keep your dogs on a lead when traversing fields with cattle and sheep grazing in the fields.

As we all know the Police are having a difficult time at the moment with all the reorganisation that is going on so we are fortunate to have PCSO Lloyd who works hard on our behalf to try and make the Villages a pleasant and safe place to live.

Another Bus shelter has been erected within the Village boundary on Ivetsy Road but the disappointing news the Council has to report is that following the County Bus review the Saturday Service to Penkridge and return and the "Dial Up" system is to discontinue. Many parishioners are dissatisfied with this outcome and have presented a petition to the County.

Speeding through Wheaton Aston has been brought to the attention of the Parish Council and as a result of a presentation by the Police at the November Parish Council meeting a "Community Speedwatch Group" has been formed and is now on standby waiting to receive the necessary equipment and training.

Housing development in the Village has seen two major applications firstly on Ivetsy Road and secondly at Bridge Farm. The Parish Council understand that South Staffs Council have granted outline planning permission but no final application has been received by the Parish Council. As and when we receive the applications the Council will consult with the parishioners.

A community lottery scheme has been launched by South Staffs Council and its aim is to support the Voluntary and Community sector within South Staffs area. It is a weekly online lottery that takes place every Saturday night and prizes up to £25,000 can be won.

During the year the Council distributed grants to various organisations in the village, for example Wheaton Aston First Responders which ultimately benefit of the local residents.

Many organisations outside the Village receive grants from the Parish Council, for example The Samaritans, Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, Community Council of Staffordshire and Brewood and District Voluntary Car Scheme. All of these organisations benefit our Community. I would like to remind our parishioners that voluntary car scheme is at present short of drivers from this Parish and is looking for volunteers.

The Christmas lights switch on event was even bigger and better than last year. The families and individuals who attended were entertained by the excellent Cannock Citadel Band of the Salvation Army and the St Mary's First School Choir. Nick Collins, our MC for the evening did a great job of ensuring that the entertainment went smoothly and keeping the crowd informed of the programme of events. Santa's Grotto was very popular with the younger generation. Stalls, manned by the Local community groups, selling mulled wine mince pies, crafts, tombola, books etc were present around the Village green as well as in the Church and Village hall. I would like to thank the Christmas Lights Working Group and the Parish Council Manager for their hard work to make the switch on a success.

Our links with our Sister City Wheaton, Illinois maintained by the Cowley family were further strengthened by visit from Teri Ash, a member of Wheaton Council. A reception, hosted by the Parish Council, was held in the Hartley Arms during September and representatives from the church, parish societies and groups met and discussed a variety of mutual topics with Teri Ash.

Outside the Parish the vast potential development on the land bounded by Four Ashes, A449, A5 and M6 known as the Gailey Freight Hub is raising concern in the district. The Parish Council voted to join "The Collective of Parishes" to oppose the development.

During the year the Parish Councillors have had to review and adopt some 17 Policies ranging from Lone Workers Policy to Mobile Phone Policy, a time consuming exercise.

Once again our finances are in order and well managed, and the Internal Auditor has concluded that the Parish Council's system of internal controls are satisfactory. The External Auditor has also passed the 2016/17 accounts and states that there are no issues to raise for the Council to consider. The Auditor recommended the Parish Council for its use of the virement procedure.

Following an analysis of expenditure for year 2016/17 it was recommended by the Forward Planning and Finance Working Group and accepted by the Parish Council that the Precept be increased by 4.90% for year 2017/18 due both increased administration and maintenance costs and, unfortunately the on going vandalism costs. I congratulate Mrs Amy Watson our Parish Council Manager, for keeping the finances in such good order.

The ratio of attendances by the Parish Councillors at the Council Meeting has been very high which has enabled the various points on the agendas to be dealt with in an efficient matter. The public is always in attendance at the meetings and many points raised have found their way onto the agenda and have been acted upon by the Council.

I would like to remind the Parish that Parish Councillors attend not only the regular monthly Parish Council meetings but also some of the Working Group meetings, external meetings and training courses.

Finally, my thanks, as Chairman, to all the Councillors and the Parish Council Manager for the work they do on behalf of us all in representing our interests and welfare and my thanks also, on behalf of the Parish council, to Huw Jones, a diligent and hard working councillor, who has had to resign from the Parish Council due to a career change.