

Annual Parish Meeting of Much Birch Parish

Held on Thursday 7th May 2009 at 7.30PM in Much Birch Community Hall

Present: John Jones (JJ), Dave Davies (DD), Mr G Simms (GS) Ms V Short Mrs A Cook (AC) Mrs M Swift (MS))

In attendance Parish Clerk Kath Greenow

Also present 5 parishioners, C.S.O Fiona Witcher

1. Apologies

Cllr R Smith

2. RESLOVED: To adopt Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting of Much Birch Parish 01/05/2008

3. Chairman's annual report

On behalf of Much Birch Parish Council, who plays an important role in representing the needs and interests of the community it serves, I am pleased to report on the activities of the Council for the year 2008 to 2009.

During the year, with almost an 100% attendance level, Councillors met on a regular basis for the monthly meetings and other sub-group activities, site visits relating to planning issues, plus highway and footpath inspections and road safety matters.

Parish Council Activities

Councillors in conjunction with the Parish Clerk identified areas of work which needed attention by the Herefordshire Council or the local Lengthsman such as ditching, hedge cutting and road repairs. The severe winter weather left a legacy of damage to the roads and lanes throughout the parish. These will require urgent remedial action in the near future.

On a positive note following approaches by the Parish Council, resurfacing of Forge Bank and lengths of Wigglesbrook Lane were carried out as well as the installation of a new bus shelter near Much Birch School.

The Budget for the Parish

The precept for the year 2008 to 2009 was £9,000. Following a spend of £6,696.50, an under spend of £2,303.50 was carried over to current financial year.

In addition the council received a lengthman's grant allowance of £1,019.12 for the same period, which was totally expended on necessary ditching, hedge cutting and other allied road works.

Planning Applications

The Parish Council during the period received 21 planning applications for consideration and comment. Many applications required site visits to gather relevant information so that an objective view of the application could be made.

Review and Update of Parish Council Policies and Procedures

The Parish Council Finance Working Group carried out a review and consequently updated the Council's Financial Standing Orders, which included matters relating to risk management. In addition the Communications Working Group, with assistance from Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, updated the Parish Council's Communications Policy document.

It is important to record that the Parish Council is indebted to Terry Cook, our Webmaster, for the management of and diligent updating of the Much Birch Parish Council website.

Road Safety Issues

Following observations of Councillors and expressions of concern by parishioners with regard to the excessive speed of traffic on identified roads in the parish, six sites were identified as particularly presenting risks to all road users consequently speed data was collated from those sites. Four sites were then identified as locations where the installation of Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) would be of benefit. The equipment was subsequently installed at those sites for random periods of time with good effect. The device not only draws the attention of a driver to the speed they are travelling but also collects information relating to traffic management.

The A49 also gives much concern regarding the excessive speed of traffic and the number of tragic incidents which occur... Lobbying of the Highways Authority for remedial measures in reducing the speed of vehicles will remain a priority of the council.

Parking and Traffic Congestion outside Much birch School

The concerns of residents, the Headmaster, and motorists were raised during the year and have been the subject of extensive discussions relating to the parking of cars and congestion which occurs at certain times during term time due to the lack of parking facilities. The Parish Council is working in close working relationship with the Headmaster, the Highways Authority, Police Officers, and the Bus Company in an attempt to resolve the problem... To date additional road marking have been installed and in the near future it is intended to introduce drop off zones and other measures, the success of which is dependent upon the co-operation of all concerned. This issue is of paramount importance to the safety of the children and members of the public.

Footpaths

Proactive approaches of ensuring footpaths remain open, accessible, and safe for all to use, has been adopted. Councillor Glen Simms and parishioner Mo Ross have taken lead roles in undertaking a regular and comprehensive inspection of the paths, with their detailed reports being submitted to the Parish Council and as a result repairs and works have been carried out.

Conclusion

The Councillors and Parish Clerk recognise the responsibilities placed on them to respond to the needs of the local community where possible, and to strive to achieve that objective. I would like to place on record my personal thanks to all the Councillors for giving of their time and efforts, and to the Parish Clerk for her help and guidance. Finally I wish to express thanks to County Councillor Richard Smith and the local policing team for their help and support.

Chairman also thanked Terry Cook webmaster for maintaining & placing information onto the Parish Council website.

We look forward to the review of the Parish Plan to commence in June 2009, which will take place in consultation with members of the community.

John H.C. Jones

1st May 2009

4. Ward Councillors Annual report Financial Issues

Even before the credit crunch set in, pressures on the Council were increasing: adult social care budgets continue to be stretched; we receive 20% less funding from central government than the average unitary authority; and our schools are the third lowest funded per pupil in England. Yet we have continued to achieve 3% efficiencies in the budget year on year, without any major reductions in services and without affecting things like the community buildings grant scheme: Llanwarne Village Hall received a grant very recently.

Now, the Council has had to face a double whammy. First, a sharp reduction in income of about £2M this year compared with last, mostly from interest on investments. And second, from the need to find more money to combat homelessness through the Mortgage Recovery Scheme, to contribute to the low-cost home ownership scheme and to bring empty properties back into use.

The Council's longer-term approach is focused on steadily improving efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The Herefordshire Connects programme is one such project, delivering savings of £700,000, and the recent Amey Service Review is another which offers savings of a further £900,000. And we are looking to reduce the number of buildings from which we operate.

Regeneration

The Council continues to work hard on very many fronts for the future of Herefordshire, a few examples of which follow. Last year we built and opened the Rotherwas Access Road, to support over 2,500 jobs and to open up more opportunities for businesses. We are supporting the regeneration of the Cathedral Close, moving the retail open market into the City centre, working towards the refurbishment and relaunch of the Buttermarket and

investing in our smallholdings estate. We have bid for £60M from Regional Funding Allocations towards a new outer distributor road beginning in 2013.

Key Ward Issues

The A49. The long-promised A49 road safety report from the Highways Agency was finally received in January. If anyone would like a copy I can email it to you, but I'm afraid it was deeply disappointing. It covered turning accidents but not any other category of accident; it was confined to records from the period January 2002 to December 2006; and it failed to recognize, much less address, the particular dangers where recent tragic fatalities have occurred. I have now persuaded the Council to tell the Highways Agency that the report is unsatisfactory and that further thought and action is required: I will keep up the pressure.

Roads Maintenance. The Council's Chief Executive, Chris Bull, recently spent an afternoon with me to be shown around the ward and I carefully planned the route to expose him to the worst of the potholes and collapsing edges. I sense that things are actually starting to improve, including Church Lane Llanwarne which was 'done' in January and Glasshouse Road from St Weonards to Garway which was repaired in April. Particular problems should continue to be reported to the Council's StreetScene Team (01432 261800) and the Clerks to the Parish Councils know that I will always pitch in to add my support when necessary.

Schools' Swimming Provision. It recently came to my notice that arrangements for school-children's swimming lessons at the Hereford Leisure Pools complex were unsatisfactory. After a short but vigorous campaign, acceptable facilities will now be in place for the Autumn term.

PACT Meetings. Our PACT meetings are now firmly fixed on Much Birch Community Hall: the next one is at 7pm on May 26th.

6. Matters raised by Parishioners.

Road issues raised were that there were a number of potholes on the loop road near the callow end of the Parish.

Parishioners asked that the Parish Council kept up the pressure on Highways agency regarding the problems of road safety on the A 49.

Signed.....

Dated.....