

## ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 21 May 2014  
Birlingham Village Hall

### Welcome

- 1) Present: Councillors Morris, Comins and New.
- 2) In attendance: County Councillor Hardman, Footpath Warden Bruce Hayward, Tree Warden Stuart Crowther, PACT Representative Chris Reynard, Steve Conder and Ian Yates.
- 3) Apologies: District Councillor Davis, Councillor Aston, Councillor Hill and Karl Grimston.
- 4) Election of Chairman and signing of Declaration of Office  
Councillor Stephen Morris was elected as Chairman and the Declaration of Office was duly signed.
- 5) Declaration of Interest
  - a) Register of Interests: Councillors are reminded of the need to update their register of interests.
  - b) To declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in items on the agenda and their nature.
  - c) To declare any Other Disclosable Interests in items on the agenda and their nature.
- 6) Election of Vice Chairman  
Councillor John Hill had been asked to be Vice Chairman. Defer to meeting in July as not in attendance.
- 7) Appointment of Financial Support Officer  
Councillor John Hill had sent a message to say he would be pleased to carry on as Financial Support Officer. It was proposed and seconded that John Hill be appointed Financial Support Officer.
- 8) Appointment of Footpath Warden  
Mr Bruce Hayward had stated that he was quite happy to continue as Footpath Warden. It was proposed and seconded that Bruce Hayward be appointed Footpath Warden.
- 9) Appointment of Tree Warden  
It was proposed and seconded that Mr Karl Grimston be appointed as Tree Warden.
- 10) Appointment of Lengthsman  
Mr Carl Brassington was happy to carry on with the duty of Lengthsman. It was proposed and seconded that Carl Brassington be appointed as Lengthsman.
- 11) Planning Group  
The delegation of the Planning Group was agreed. Councillor Comins will continue to steer the Group with Councillor Aston supporting. Three members are required under delegated powers. Therefore co-opted member Councillor Conder would join the Group as the third representative with co-opted Councillor Yates making up the team as and when there is a shortfall or declarations of interest.
- 12) Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting  
The Minutes of the Parish meeting, held on 15 May 2013, were verified by Councillors as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.
- 13) Chairman's Report  
Councillor Morris wished it to be put on record his thanks to Tony Hall the previous Chairman. Councillor Morris then went on to acknowledge the work of the Clerk. He thanked Councillor Hill for a good job. Councillor Comins for expertly doing his role and having a good plan basis.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Conder and Councillor Yates for joining and hoped they would enjoy the year ahead. He thanked Bruce Hayward for the splendid public rights of way which were lovely to walk round. Also thanks to Mark Smith for his assistance. And a thank you to Stuart Crowther for his tremendous work and who the Council were sorry to lose. Chairman's summary of the year was read out, as follows:-

We were sorry to lose Tony Hall from the Council when he resigned earlier this year and I would like to thank him for all his hard work over the last ten years as Chairman. He has made a great contribution to the village and will be missed.

I would also like to thank June Hiden for her continuing hard work and the long hours she puts in as Clerk, without which the Parish Council could not function effectively.

Thanks are also due to County Councillor Adrian Hardman and District Councillor Ron Davis. Although we do not always agree with the decisions made by the two councils and are sometimes frustrated by the amount of time it takes to get things done, we know that both councillors have the interests of Birlingham at heart and always work hard on our behalf.

John Hill has continued to do an excellent job as Finance Officer and has helped to ensure that we keep within budget and spend our parishioners' money wisely. There has been no increase in our precept this year but despite that we have been able to build up a more realistic reserve.

John Comins has again led the Planning subgroup, which has made detailed comments on the more controversial applications. The District Council have not always agreed with our views but we have at least been able to put forward considered views based on sound planning principles. Thanks also to Paula Aston for being part of the subgroup and Charlotte Butler for assisting when required. During the last year, we have seen plans passed for a new house and a live-work unit, as well as several house extensions and other minor developments.

Marion New has been a great asset to the Parish Council and her thoughtful comments are always welcome.

Charlotte Butler has now left the council following her move to Cheltenham but played an important role while she was a member.

We are pleased to welcome Steven Conder and Ian Yates to the Parish Council and I hope they will enjoy their time on the council. It was very encouraging to have four people put their names forward for co-option and to have several others also being willing to be considered. It is to be hoped that when we have an election next year we will have a real contest for the seven places, which can only be good for the village.

Bruce Hayward has continued to do an excellent job on maintaining the footpaths, assisted by Mark Smith. Our footpaths are a pleasure to walk, unlike some of those in neighbouring parishes, and their constant work throughout the year is much appreciated.

Stuart Crowther has worked hard as Tree Warden over the last eight years, planting and caring for about forty trees in the village. Although we are sorry to see him step down, his legacy will continue for hundreds of years, something few of us can say. I am delighted to welcome Karl Grimston as his successor and I am certain he will continue Stuart's good work.

It is disappointing that our trees have again suffered damage from hedge trimmers. However, we will continue to pursue our claim for compensation for the destruction of the most recent tree and I hope that we can work positively with Revills to ensure that this sort of accident does not happen again in the future.

Carl Brassington has maintained our ditches and verges to a very high standard and we should think ourselves lucky to have such a conscientious lengthsman. The work he does in keeping our village green tidy is also much appreciated.

Chris Reynard continues to represent us at PACT meetings and ensures that we are kept up to date with the latest information from the police, which is an important role.

The Parish Council is still pursuing the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan. This is likely to take several years to complete but should give the village a far greater say in future developments.

Last year we contributed our New Homes Bonus to the Village Hall as part of the cost of a new microwave oven and, with the scheme continuing for at least another year, we are now looking for ideas for how to spend this year's bonus.

The telephone kiosk is currently being used to very good effect by the Flower and Produce Show to advertise the show and provide a base for their seed exchange.

The annual litter pick was well supported as usual, leaving the village tidy for another year, and was also extended to Nafford and Swan's Neck; both areas are popular with walkers and visitors and had suffered badly from debris that was left after the winter's floods but are now looking attractive again.

A permanent Jubilee Committee has recently been formed. The committee is considering ideas for helping village organisations to co-operate more effectively and is formulating a plan for a large event next year that will raise funds for all organisations in the village. The committee has also taken responsibility for the future maintenance of the Jubilee Wood. Although the trees suffered badly in last year's heatwave, the survivors are now growing well and it is planned to do a certain amount of replanting in the autumn.

The village website is now being run by an independent Website Group, which has more freedom to offer advertising to local businesses. The revenue will be passed to the Jubilee Committee and used to benefit the village as a whole. The Website Group has also taken on responsibility for the village email, which has just distributed its 50<sup>th</sup> edition.

We have continued to pay a grant to Birlingham Village Hall, which is a major asset to the village, and we are grateful to them for allowing us to use the hall for our meetings.

Signage to prevent HGVs causing difficulties in Lower End and problems of flooding in Upper End have yet to be dealt with but we continue to press for these items to be resolved.

The last year has seen the centenary of Birlingham Cricket Club, a second Family Sports Day and a successful Christmas Show, and this summer we will be entering the Wychavon Parish Games for the first time in many years, all of which shows that the village is thriving.

Finally, I would like to thank the Clerk and members of the Council for their support over the last few months. I may not be physically present in the village for much of the time but the magic of the internet and emails make that a matter of little importance.

The Parish Council has been the driving force for several new proposals over the last couple of years, all of which have benefited our residents, and I hope that this positive attitude will continue well into the future.

14) Footpath Wardens Report

The Footpath Warden, Bruce Hayward read his report which was circulated. Report as follows:

Birlingham has 2 volunteers who, together with local landowners, look after the Parish footpaths on behalf of the County Council. The County Council meet any small expenses incurred, and will often supply 'furniture' (e.g. gates, stiles etc.) that needs to be replaced.

The main work in the past year has, as usual, been the controlling/clearing of undergrowth and repairs to stiles and finger-posts.

All the footpaths in Worcestershire are shown on the Public Rights of Way web map which is maintained by the County Council Countryside Service; visit [www.worcestershire.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/countryside) and click on Public Rights of Way and then Interactive Map. (There is a link from the village website).

If anyone has any concerns or suggestions regarding the footpaths in the Parish, please contact me at Tadpole Cottage or via the Parish clerk.

15) Lengthsman's Report

The Lengthsman's reported that he was happy to continue for this financial year and that his rate would remain the same.

16) Tree Warden's Report

Stuart and Karl had attended meetings at the John Stokes Tree Centre and also Worcestershire County Council. The seminar had given advice on diseases, particularly ash die back; it was believed that this could not be stopped. There are a lot of ash trees in the village. Stuart had planted six. The older trees in the Jubilee wood are ash but not the new whips.

Karl to seek advice from Countryside Services. Signs of the disease should be reported to the landowner who has the responsibility to respond.

Karl is keen and knows a lot about wood as it is his area of interest.

The Jubilee Wood should have 25% of trees survive; hawthorn, dogwood at least will make a bush.

Must think about replanting.

Stuart was happy to assist.

Stuart has enjoyed his time as warden.

The Chairman gave Stuart a small token of appreciation and it was hoped he was happy to remain involved.

17) PACT Representative's Report

Chris Reynard had attended several meetings but there was really no change since his last summary.

PACT send emails. The contracts meeting in April hadn't taken place.

Chris was willing to continue and he was thanked by the Chairman for keeping the Parish informed.

18) Democratic Opening (Open Questions)

The finger post on Withy Walk is leaning – Footpath Warden would look into this.

The Footpath Warden was aware of the change of ownership of the land affecting the footpath on the Eckington Road to Bakers Hill.

There is the intention of removing the rubbish at Nafford.

Birlingham Jubilee Committee.

A permanent Jubilee Committee was formed earlier this year and the committee has taken responsibility for the future maintenance of the trees that were planted in November 2012 as part of the Jubilee celebrations. The committee will also fund any future costs relating to the maintenance of the wood and will keep the Parish Council updated on progress.

The current plan is to form a working group to monitor the wood and make decisions on future maintenance. This group will comprise members of the Jubilee Committee plus other interested parties, such as the landowner and the Parish Council's Tree Warden.

Although a large number of trees died during the unexpected heat wave early last year, a survey of the trees earlier this week found that 237 trees are growing well. (420 were planted originally.) There are also a number of self-seeded trees in the gaps, mainly oak and hawthorn.

Given that the trees would have had to be thinned out eventually, only a limited amount of re-planting will be necessary and this is planned for the autumn. It is hoped that the trees can be obtained from the Woodland Trust, who provided the original trees, and that a suitable replacement can be found for the Jubilee Oak, which did not survive.

The grass around the trees is not thought to be a problem now that the trees are established but Stuart Crowther has recommended that an area of grass be cleared around any new plantings. David Kew has offered to help with the clearing of the two large patches of brambles along one side of the planted area and this should be done in the next few weeks.

There has been some new damage by deer to the older trees but this does not appear to be a major problem.

The next stage is to produce a detailed plan of the area, showing locations and types of trees. A decision can then be made about how many trees will need to be replaced.

Wychavon District Council do not feel that the wood is sufficiently established at this stage for them to protect it with a Tree Preservation Order but we should be able to pursue this idea in the future when the trees have made more growth.

At some point a plaque will be placed at the entrance to the site. The name of the wood is still the subject of debate but no final decision on this need be taken until the plaque is installed.

Closure – with nothing further to discuss the meeting closed at 7.35pm. **The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting in May will be posted when arranged.**

Signed: ..... Steve Morris, Acting as Chairman

Date: .....