

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 20 May 2015
Birlingham Village Hall

Welcome

Present: Councillors Allen, Comins, Conder, Fitch, Hill, Morris, New and Yates.

In attendance: District Councillor Davis, Footpath Warden Bruce Hayward and Tree Warden Karl Grimston.

- 1) Apologies: County Councillor Hardman as he was attending a meeting at the district council, Lengthsman Carl Brassington and Paula Aston.
- 2) Election of Chairman
Councillor Steve Morris was elected as Chairman.
- 3) Declaration of Interest for Councillors
 - 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.
- 4) Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting
The Minutes of the Parish meeting, held on 21 May 2014, were verified by Councillors as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.
- 5) Chairman's Report
Councillor Morris congratulated the District Councillor on his re-election. He then read out his report as follows:

"I would like to begin by thanking 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.

Over the last year we have taken several decisions regarding our reserves, under the expert guidance of our Finance Officer, John Hill, and over the next couple of years we should find ourselves in a stronger financial position and be able to deal with the exceptional items of expenditure that will inevitably arise. Although we were once again restricted to a 2% increase in our precept, we have been able to produce a budget that not only safeguards our reserves but also allows for the exceptional cost of the Parish Council election.

John Comins has continued to lead the Planning Subgroup, which has made detailed comments on the planning applications that have been submitted over the last year. Thanks are also due Paula Aston and Steve Conder for their considered input to the subgroup, and to Ian Yates for assisting when required.

Ian has also taken the lead on the Village Survey and Marion New's insights are always welcome.

We are sorry to have lost two of our councillors. Paula Aston, a member of the Council for six years, has always campaigned strongly on behalf of the village; and Steve Conder, who has been on the Council for the last year, has impressed us with his carefully considered views on parish matters. Both will be missed but I hope they will continue to be involved in village activities.

I am pleased to welcome Stuart Allen and Ken Fitch to the Council and I am sure they will inject new ideas and a fresh vitality into our proceedings.

Thanks are also due to County Councillor Adrian Hardman and District Councillor Ron Davis, who has recently been re-elected for a further four-year term. Both councillors have the interests of Birlingham at heart and always work hard on our behalf. Although it sometimes seems our constant lobbying takes a long time to see any benefits, we have at last seen the arrival of a new sign to prevent HGVs causing difficulties in Lower End. Problems of flooding in Upper End have yet to be dealt with and Church Street is in desperate need of resurfacing but we continue to press for these items to be resolved.

Bruce Hayward has continued to work hard on maintaining our footpaths, assisted by Mark Smith. Their constant, often unnoticed, work throughout the year is much appreciated.

Karl Grimston has settled well into the role of Tree Warden and continues Stuart Crowther's many years' work on our behalf, ensuring that our village continues to 'grow'. The Jubilee Wood has been replanted, where some of the original trees died during the drought, and hopefully all the trees will start to thrive.

Our Lengthsman, Carl Brassington, continues to maintain our gullies, road drains and footways to a very high standard, as well as keeping our village green in a good state.

Chris Reynard has represented us at PACT meetings and ensures that we are kept up to date with the latest information from the police.

The Parish Council held a well-attended meeting in February to discuss the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan. The initial proposal to go ahead with a Plan was tied and this was followed by a suggestion of a village survey to gauge village views, an idea that was carried unanimously. Since then, the Council have been working hard on preparing the survey and this will be distributed in the coming weeks. Another public meeting will be held later in the summer to present the results and decide what further action should be recommended.

The Village Survey will, no doubt, bring some unexpected results but I am sure the Council will rise to the challenge and use the results to enhance the village over the next few years.

Last year we contributed our New Homes Bonus to Birlingham Cricket Club for improvements to their storage facilities. That work is now taking place. This year, we are anticipating an application from the Jubilee Committee for the purchase of new trestle tables, which will benefit many village organisations. It is to be hoped that the new Government will continue the scheme, which has previously also benefited the Village Hall and provided extra facilities for the community.

The telephone kiosk continues to be 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, although it is always surprising how much rubbish is collected around the village roads. Thanks to June Hiden for ensuring we had the right equipment and that the day went smoothly, as usual.

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.

Last year we entered the Wychavon Parish Games for the first time in many years, and hopefully we will be entering more events this year. Thanks to Denise McGowan for taking overall control of this activity.

The many organisations in the village continue to go from strength to strength, proving that the village has a strong community spirit. An example is the monthly Cuppa & Chat, held at the Village Hall, which attracts growing numbers each time. The village was grateful to the Cricket Club last summer, which opened its bar to residents several days a week while the Swan Inn was closed for refurbishment by its new owners.

At the beginning of May, we had elections for the Parish Council, for the first time in many years. While most parishes in Wychavon District, and even Pershore Town Council, were unable to find enough volunteers to fill the available places, Birlingham had ten candidates for its seven seats. The turnout in Birlingham was 82.03%, second only among Wychavon villages to Bishampton (82.28%). This is, I hope, an indication of how the Council has raised its profile in recent years and been seen to be an essential part of village life.

The Parish Council provides an important forum for villagers' concerns and a link between residents and other authorities. It may have limited powers, and this can sometimes be frustrating, but it is able to lobby for improvements and to ensure that the village's interests are promoted.

In recent years, rather than just reacting to situations as they arise, Birlingham Parish Council has become more proactive. It has purchased the phone box (currently used as the Flower & Produce Show information centre) and set up a Lengthsman scheme, which has resulted in a cleaner and tidier village. The Council kick-started the Jubilee celebrations, ultimately resulting in the formation of the permanent Jubilee Committee, launched the village website and initiated the village email newsletter. All these things have helped sustain an active and vibrant village.

While the legislative restrictions on parish councils make it difficult for them to manage activities in the long term, I believe the Council is an excellent body for promoting new ideas that can be taken on by other village organisations and I hope that Birlingham Parish Council will continue to be innovative in the coming years".

6) To receive annual reports from representatives

Footpath Warden's Report

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

"Birlingham has 2 volunteers who, together with local landowners and others, 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 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 as quickly as possible or via the Parish clerk".

The Chairman stated that the footpaths are a pleasure to walk and you can easily find your way. Bruce does a tremendous job.

Lengthsman's Report

The Lengthsman, Carl Brassington has reported that he was happy to continue for this financial year. Carl had sent a brief report, as follows:

"All quiet on the western front. Despite a wet and mild winter there has been little flooding in the village. The work on the highway drains seems to have paid off to a large extent. There is still sometimes an issue in The Avenue, I believe due to tree roots partially blocking a drain but it has not been too onerous.

The roads are in reasonable repair and apart from the complete waste of money sending out gangs of men to fill small holes with cold tarmac which washes out again, all seems well"

Tree Warden's Report

Karl Grimston had circulated his report, as follows:

"During the past year work has been done on Jubilee Way. There were a large proportion of the trees initially planted that has died or were growing very slowly. The dead trees were being removed and a further allocation of trees was obtained from the Tree Council. Approximately 100 of these were planted in March 2015. These consisted of Rowan, Beech, Maple and Cherry and all are growing well so far. In addition to this approximately 20 other more mature trees that were donated from within the village were planted in the same area. Some of the remaining trees were planted alongside the footpath running adjacent to the barns at the end of Whitehall Lane. Further trees are being grown on for planting this coming autumn. I am not aware of any trees being damaged by hedge cutting. However, the farm has made it clear that they will not tolerate any trees that impede visibility at access to fields etc. this does not appear to affect any existing trees".

PACT Representative's Report

Chris Reynard had attended meetings of PACT. He reported as follows:

"There have been no incidents to report as far as the Parish of Birlingham is concerned at the PACT meetings in the last 12 months. Other than some fly tipping now and again.

The village was represented by Chris Hermon, Graham Chidlow and myself.

Outside the village speeding in Eckington was raised at most of the meetings and the Police were doing regular enforcement checks there.

These PACT meetings will continue to be attended by myself but the Police would prefer that a member of the Parish council attend".

7) Community Groups

Jubilee Committee

A report was read out, as follows:

"The Jubilee Committee has recently taken on responsibility for the village website and village emails. This should ensure a long-term future for the Website Group and provide it with financial security.

The Committee has agreed to apply for charity status, ensuring that income from the website and future events will be efficiently used for the good of the village.

The Committee is also responsible for the maintenance of the Jubilee Wood. Earlier this year, an additional 105 trees were planted to replace those lost during the hot summer of 2013, along with a number of locally grown trees. Thanks are due to Karl Grimston and his helpers for planting the new trees and to David Kew for clearing the patches of brambles that had taken over in a couple of places. It is to be hoped that the trees will now begin to make good growth and they will be monitored over the coming months.

The Committee intends to purchase a set of trestle tables for use by village organisations, as the existing tables are now in a poor state of repair. The Committee will be paying a substantial proportion of the cost but also intends to apply for assistance from the New Homes Bonus. Currently, the application is on hold while the future of the New Homes Bonus is decided by the Government, but the intention is to buy the tables in plenty of time for the Flower & Produce Show in September. Birlingham Cricket Club has agreed to provide secure storage for the tables, making them easily accessible for village organisations.

Plans are also being discussed for future activities that will benefit the village over the next two years".

Birlingham Website Group

A report was read, as follows:

“On 1 April 2014, the Parish Council handed control of the Birlingham village website, birlingham.org, to an independent Birlingham Website Group. The Website Group has taken responsibility for the day-to-day running of the website, its design and content, and for the village email, Birlingham News. It was agreed that any profits from advertising would be passed to the Jubilee Committee, to be used for the benefit of the village.

Now that advertising is imminent, the Website Group decided that it would be financially and practically beneficial for the group to be merged with the Jubilee Committee and this took place on 1 April 2015.

The two original conditions of the formation of the Website Group have been passed on to the Jubilee Committee:

- The Parish Council will retain ownership of the domain name, birlingham.org.
- The Parish Council will always have its own pages, accessible directly from the Home page, and will be wholly responsible for their design, content and maintenance.

The website has continued to expand over the last twelve months and is currently undergoing changes to prepare for commercial advertisements. These should begin to appear on the website over the next few weeks.

Over the last twelve months there have been 3900 'first-time' visitors, compared to 1800 in 2013/14 and 1300 in 2012/13. (The number of different visitors is likely to be a fraction of that recorded but still a very significant number.) Since the website started in 2012 over 30,000 pages have been viewed during 11,500 visits.

Meanwhile, a further 29 editions of Birlingham News have been distributed over the last year, covering 140 events, issues, planning applications and other items of news.

Over the last few weeks the Website Group has been delivering hard copies of the emails to those houses in the village that do not currently subscribe, with the result that the take-up of the email is now just over 70%. The subscription rates vary greatly between different areas of the village, as follows:

Lower End	73%
Village centre	85%
Upper End	55%
Eckington Road & beyond	42%

This suggests that the challenge for the Parish Council, Jubilee Committee and other organisations is to engage those in the outlying areas, particularly Eckington Road, who often feel they are ignored by the rest of the village”.

8) Democratic Opening (Open Questions)
None.

Closure – with nothing further to discuss the meeting closed at 7.25pm. **The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting in May will be posted when arranged.**

Signed: Steve Morris, Elected as Chairman

Date: