**BERKSWICH PARISH**

**CHAIRMAN’S ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2024**

**Budget**

The Council’s finances remain sound with an adequate but diminishing balance held in allocated reserves. A review of the budget showed that recent small increases in the precept had made no allowance for boosting the reserves or renewal of assets. With inflation the Council’s ability to address major items of expenditure in the future was at risk of being compromised. It was agreed to increase the precept by 50% in the 2024-25 financial year and annually by the rate of inflation thereafter to help rebuild the balance in reserve.

**Boundary Commission**

The Parish Council made very strong representations against proposals by the Boundary Commission to merge Walton on the Hill with the Stafford South East County Council constituency and keep Milford in a revised Trent Valley constituency. It made no sense for a relatively small parish to relate to two County councillors. It is expected the Commission’s findings will be published in the next few weeks.

**Planning**

The Council has been consulted on 14 planning applications in the year. Most were modest proposals for small domestic extensions or alterations to which no objections were raised. The Council reiterated its strong objection in principle to the resubmitted outline application for affordable housing off Oldcroft Road considering it little different to the scheme refused planning permission by the Borough Council in 2023. The Council has also objected to the County Council’s application to erect 6 houses on vacant land at the foot of The Rise principally on the grounds of highway safety near the school entrance and proximity to the junction with Lichfield Road. Both applications remain undetermined.

**Parking on The Rise**

Complaints have been received regularly from nearby residents about air pollution, traffic congestion and danger caused by parents and bus parking on The Rise when Walton High School pupils leave in the afternoon. Although the Parish Council understand and sympathise with the complainants, have spoken to the bus company and the school and initiated a poster campaign asking drivers to switch off their engines while stationary further action is not a matter within our legal jurisdiction and sadly the problem continues.

**Walton Garage**

A number of complaints were received about graffiti on the garage buildings disfiguring the local environment and the dangers of large delivery transporters off-loading vehicles during peak traffic hours. The new owners of the site have responded constructively to an approach by the Parish Council to say they fully understand local concerns and are taking steps to increase security at the site and manage delivery arrangements.

**Walton Coppice**

The Council was fortunate to receive a grant of £9700 from the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme for works in Walton Coppice to enhance nature conservation and biodiversity. This was the second phase of a project initiated in 2023 (for which an earlier FiPL grant had been received) and included the clearance of weaker and poorly sited existing trees; the planting of a new hedge around the annexe and planting of 600 new trees away from neighbouring houses throughout the woodland. Considerable assistance was gratefully received from Burton Conservation Volunteers, the local scout group and some local residents in this work: it is intended to establish regular working parties of volunteers to carry this project forward.

**Hollybush Coppice**

Discussions have been held with Berkswich Primary School about resuming use of Hollybush Coppice for educational purposes (this had fallen into disuse during the pandemic). An application for Farming in Protected Landscapes grant to improve biodiversity and nature conservation in the Coppice has just been submitted.

**Highways matters**

The Parish Council objected unsuccessfully to a proposed weight limit along Brocton Road in Milford considering a) that the need had not been demonstrated and b) that it would displace any heavy goods vehicles affected on to other busy roads in the parish. In principle the Council supported the imposition of a 30mph speed limit on Brocton Road but had concerns about the illogicality of its proposed extent. Happily these issues appear to have been resolved sensibly.

Local residents drew attention to large vehicles travelling down Holdiford Road, Milford and damaging the historic bridges over the canal and river. The Parish Council has requested the County Council impose a weight restriction on the road. After an initial rejection the Parish Council is continuing to press on the matter.

**Relations with outside bodies**

The Council has continued to participate in meetings of the Trent Valley Collaboration Group of parish councils, a useful forum for sharing concerns of mutual interest and engaging with third parties such as Staffordshire Police or County Highways.

Our nominee continues to sit on the Walton (Berkswich) Village Hall Management Committee providing a helpful source of liaison.

The Council had a stand at the Berkswich Parish fete which provided a beneficial opportunity to showcase its work and meet with members of the public.

Three issues of the Newsletter were published on-line in accordance with the Council’s decision to economise on printing and distribution costs.

**Members**

The present Council was newly elected 12 months ago. As Chairman I would like to express my thanks to all members for their contribution and support throughout the year with particular thanks to members of the Environment Group for their role in helping secure and implement the grant for Walton Coppice.

And finally a very big thank you to our clerk who has worked tirelessly and efficiently behind the scenes to ensure we are a well presented and financially stable organisation.

Alan Taylor

Chairman

7 May 2024