

BLEADON PARISH COUNCIL

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Clerk to the Parish Council
Tony Jay

Bleadon Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting – 10th April 2017

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Bleadon Parish Council that was held in the Coronation Hall, Coronation Road, Bleadon on Monday 10th April 2017 at 8.00pm when the following business was transacted:

PRESENT Cllr Claire Gutsell (Chairman), Cllr ID Clarke (Vice Chairman), Cllr David Chinn, Cllr Peter Gibbon, Cllr Steve Hartree, Cllr Mary Sheppard, Cllr Kathy Strong.

Apologies were received from Cllr Morag Edwards.

The Clerk: Tony Jay

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE District Councillor Terry Porter and 9 members of the public

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed the District Councillor and members of the public. The Councillors and Clerk introduced themselves. During the introductions Cllrs Claire Gutsell, ID Clarke, Peter Gibbon and the Clerk all stated that they were leaving the Parish Council.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 11th April 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman as being a correct record

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The past year

The past year has been incredibly busy for the council and for many members of our community. In many ways it has been a defining year for our village:

We began to understand the extent of pressure on our village from developers.

We saw major planning applications on Bleadon Hill and other speculative applications that would have changed the nature of our village. The village united to fight all of these and particular thanks go to the Bleadon Hill Action Group which put in so much effort to successfully fight the 79 houses application. These sorts of applications will not stop, so we need to be on our guard and continue to work together to

keep our village special.

We got fed up with traffic problems.

Sadly, we had a fatal accident at the Bridge Road, A370 junction and this coincided with a debate about our main road junctions, the heavy lorries using our roads and the behaviour of drivers when driving through our village. As a result, North Somerset Council is creating a 'no waiting' zone at the Bridge Road junction and a residents' committee alongside members of the Parish Council is having regular meetings with Marshalls. With two long straight roads into the village, speeding drivers can cause a real hazard and I'm pleased to say that moves are afoot to set up a Community Speedwatch Group, with the WI leading the way. Of course, more houses mean more traffic, so there is a direct link between pressure from developers and the safety of our roads.

We sorted out the ownership of the Coronation Halls

Our Halls committee puts a huge amount of effort into maintaining and improving what must be our village's greatest built asset. Over the years, there has been a lot of debate about the ownership of the Halls and the relationship between the Council and the Committee. This year we got a definite answer from the Land Registry Office. This is important, as it means that everybody can get on with making sure the Halls get better and better – and I know that there are exciting plans going forward – to benefit our entire community.

The village was bequeathed a huge liability back in the 1980s

Our churchyard is classed as a 'closed churchyard' and when this order was made in the 1980s the Parish Council of the time chose to take responsibility for its upkeep. Most councils gladly passed control onto their county authorities and, with hindsight, this would have a prudent course of action for our village – as we found out this year! Because the Council (and by extension, the village) is responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard, damage to the walls and pre-emptive action to make all the walls good for the future has left us with a bill of tens of thousands of pounds. This is a shame, as it has eaten into the Council's reserves, making us less able to cope with any unforeseen expenses that may come along in the future.

A lot of the Council's voluntary and professional resources were taken up dealing with correspondence from a very small number of parishioners. This was a shame as there was an awful lot more that could have been done if we had been able to use this time for the good of the village.

Despite all the challenges we managed to move forward

Transparency

One of the things I was keen to do when I became chair was to make the Council more transparent. The transparency I wanted for our Council was not the sort of 'box ticking' exercise that shows that meaningless rules have been followed (although they have), but the sort that comes from allowing parishioners to speak at meetings, from getting more people along to our meetings, from regular publication of news and from encouraging people to raise and discuss issues. I hope that, to some extent, we have achieved that.

Spring cleaning

Together with Tony Jay – our clerk, recruited last year – the Councillors undertook a bit of a clean-up. Some of that involved going through files that had not been touched for a very long time. Amongst the more interesting finds were a civil defense plan from 1979, the original hall deeds and more. These papers are now in a dry and safe environment.

We also looked at out of date and duplicated services, money saving ideas and we reviewed a number of contracts. As a result, we have streamlined expenditure as documented in the Council minutes throughout the year.

And our village continued to thrive.

The village celebrated the Queen's 90th, we enjoyed a great Mayday Fair, two harvest suppers, the usual fantastic Bleadon Players plays and pantomimes, the up and coming pub pantomime and raffle that raised a stunning amount for our youth club – and we even had our first ever dog show.

Our groups and societies went from strength to strength as well.

The annual village plant up resulted in a vibrant range of flowers around the village and we even saw the WI's 'baskets' go viral on the Internet!

The future

As you'll see in the latest edition of Bleadon News, which comes out this week, there are many changes in store for our Council. I'm standing down from the Council in May to concentrate on my family and my business – although I will continue to edit Bleadon News. Councillors I.D. Clarke and Peter Gibbon have decided to stand down at the same time and our clerk, Tony Jay, has decided to pursue new opportunities. We also need to find a new Ranger to replace Ian Findlay.

Some may see this as a challenge for our village, and in some ways it is. But it is also a huge opportunity. It's a chance for new people to help guide our village, with fresh thinking and new ideas. It's also a real opportunity for some of our young people to play a part in developing Bleadon in the 21st century. Being a Councillor isn't always easy, but it's hugely rewarding and I've thoroughly enjoyed my time as Chair. I'd urge anybody with an interest in our village to consider joining the council.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank my fellow Councillors for the time, effort and energy they have put into their duties over the past year. In particular I would like to thank Peter Gibbon for taking over the Pension requirements of the Council, David Chinn for emptying the bins, putting up posters and organising the Community Payback scheme and more. Lastly ID Clarke who has been there throughout for me, we've sworn, laughed and astonishingly I had replies to me emails sent out at 5 am. I'd like to thank our clerk, Tony Jay, for his commitment and guidance, which often has gone over and above the call of duty. I'd like to thank our former Ranger, Ian Findlay for keeping our village spick and span. Most of all, I'd like to thank our parishioners for making Bleadon a great place to live and work.

CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk presented his report as follows:

2016-17 has been a very challenging year for the Parish Council's finances. The ongoing problems in the Churchyard have caused a severe dent to the Parish Council's reserves. In 2016/17 the repairs cost £17,479. A further bill, which may be of a similar amount, is expected when the currently ongoing work is completed.

At the start of the financial year the Parish Council's financial assets stood at a total of £82,439.86. At the end of the year the figure was £72,231.27. Therefore the Parish Council had an operating loss of £10,208.59 in 2016/17. The figure for 2017/18 could be broadly similar, due to the latest work in the Churchyard which will be paid for in 2017/18.

The precept demand has risen from £38,000 in 2016/17 to £39,140 in 2017/18, an increase of 3%. When inflation is taken into account in reality this is no increase at all.

The Parish Council faces very challenging financial times ahead. The cost of grass cutting in the village will be increasing substantially in the future. Also, regrettably the Village Ranger resigned during the year, and it is proving difficult to find a replacement. The only interested party so far has asked for wages twice as high as the previous ranger.

Bleadon Parish Council provides services which most small Parish Councils do not i.e. public toilets, a Village Ranger, heavily subsidised allotments and the maintenance of a churchyard. I have often heard it said that the Bleadon Parish Council precept is high. The reason for this is because the Parish Council chooses to provide these services.

If the precept demand is not to rise substantially in future years then these services may be under threat.

I have included unaudited figures, taken from the Parish Council's accounting package.

No questions were asked.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Cllr David Chinn presented his report as follows:

Your Parish Council Planning Committee has met regularly to discuss planning matters affecting the Parish. Members review all applications and where there is a need they carry out site visits.

During the year there has been an increasing demand for Councillor's time. Major developments at Bleadon Hill (Bleadon) and Wentwood Drive (WsM) have been opposed, resulting in an appeal and hearing respectively. The Bleadon Hill appeal was not upheld so the development was not granted permission. Many local applications have been supported by the committee with a small number receiving objections.

Sadly there have been some retrospective applications to deal with, where development has taken place without applications being made. The Committee advises that North Somerset Planning Department website be consulted before building is undertaken.

The Committee has also reported breaches to the District enforcement team. The Country is facing huge demands for new housing. Planning Departments are under immense pressure to cope with developers and speculators challenging decisions and developing green field sites. A Government white paper is being prepared for consultation relating to changes in planning law.

District and Local Councils have to face major changes which will make development easier. Local plans have become near worthless and their modern replacements have very little weight for objections to be considered. All applications can be viewed on the North Somerset Website. Support comments and objections can be made also.

CORONATION HALL

Cllr Steve Hartree presented his report as follows:

The Committee met on a regular basis over the past year; the Chair, Len Chamberlain, was unable to chair a number of meetings due to ill health and the Vice-Chair, Les Masters, chaired a number of meetings.

The prime business of the Committee was concerned with the improvement works to the hall - these were completed in 2016 and, in August 2016, there was an event for all parishioners to launch the improved hall. A number of issues concerning the building following completion of the works were addressed by the contractor to the satisfaction of the Committee.

The support of Bleadon Parish Council in regard to financing the improvement works was much appreciated by the Committee, as was the supply of paving slabs for the exterior of the hall by Marshalls.

The original millennium mural in the entrance to the hall was a casualty of the works, but, due to the skill of Scott Morris, a photographic record of the mural was produced and can now be seen in the new entrance hall.

The Committee received advice from the Charity Commission in relation to working procedures, and was advised by the Parish Council that a search on Land Registry records confirmed that the hall is owned by Bleadon Parish Council. A Trust Deed of 1938 transferred management of the hall to a Management Committee.

Hire charges operative from 2017 were discussed and agreed, replacement fire doors have been installed and there was an adjustment made to car parking spaces. The Community Payback squad worked to clear some overgrown areas around the hall and are willing to undertake similar work in the future.

The Management Committee propose to appoint a hall caretaker and, subject to finance being obtained, plan to refurbish the hall kitchen.

The Management Committee finances are in good order despite the substantial costs involved in the hall improvements.

Tribute must be paid to the excellent and most efficient work of Kevin Barrett (Secretary) and Ian Gibson (Treasurer) and to the enthusiasm of the members of the Hall Management Committee.

The Parish Council is represented on the Management Committee by Councillor Mrs I D Clarke and Councillor Steven Hartree.

ALLOTMENTS

Cllr Mary Sheppard presented her report as follows:

The allotments are all occupied at present, but some need a little TLC. With the warmer weather approaching I hope this will happen. At the end of September there will be one, maybe two available plots. If anyone is thinking of taking on a whole or half plot then their name will be added to the waiting list.

HIGHWAYS

Cllr Mary Sheppard presented her report as follows:

This past year has been a frustrating one with the fatality on the A370 junction with Bridge Road and secondly speeding through the village. The Parish Council have not been privy to the inquest result from the fatal accident. North Somerset Council has some details.

Marshalls has agreed to work with the Parish Council and residents to try to resolve the problems near their depot. North Somerset Council has said that the 60mph speed limit is satisfactory on the stretch of the A370 near to the Bridge Road junction and that driver error is often the cause of accidents. They intend to install double yellow lines on both sides of Bridge Road for approximately 150 yards northwards from the A370 junction, alleviating the parking of vehicles at the junction in order to aid the flow of traffic.

The traffic lights promised by North Somerset Council are likely not to materialise unless a s106 agreement from the development of the water park and the car boot sale field is finalised so drivers are asked to respect other road users and keep to the speed limit.

OPEN SPACES

Cllr ID Clarke presented her report as follows:

I am usually able to begin my report by saying that I am pleased to say that it has been another good year for our Village and its Open Spaces, however this year it might seem that we have not quite come up to our usual standard.

Although it may seem that we 'could have done better' in light of the sheer volume of work and changes that we have been faced with throughout this year and the fact that we have been without a Village Ranger for several months we have in fact I feel done remarkably well.

Having said this I will dispose of the negative issues first – you may guess what two of them are, but this year we have a third issue.

First issue: 'Dog Mess' – What more can be said - for at least the past eleven years when writing this report both Penny Robinson and myself have pleaded for cooperation in 'picking up' and using the designated or any of the litter bin which are strategically placed around the village. We are somewhat at a loss as to what more we can do unless the offenders are caught in the act, when perhaps 'naming and shaming' would prove an effective deterrent. Can we also ask that areas of grass or little garden plots between the pavement and residents front fences are respected by not allowing our dogs to relieve themselves or leave their deposits on them. If you know of or see an irresponsible owner please inform our Parish Clerk – be assured confidentiality will be respected.

Second issue: 'Litter around the village' – As mentioned in previous years I do not think 'we' are litter throwers but that rubbish is both blown out of our bins or dropped by the collectors. To help overcome this please may we ask that bins are not placed out for collection before the night prior to collection – and if rubbish is scattered by the animals or dropped by the collectors at the 'multi collection points' please can it be picked up – both would be a great help and a benefit to all. The viewing points and the lay-bys in Roman Road are frequently strewn with general litter and takeaway food packaging. This is particularly difficult to understand as presumably the people have driven there as they appreciate the outstanding views – so again we ask why spoil it? .

Third issue: Complaints have been received in regard to garden trees and shrubs overhanging the pavements – they are a hazard and a nuisance particularly after a downpour as the rain causes them to bow over to an even lower height – please help by keeping your garden in your garden.

Sadly we received Ian Findlay our Village Ranger's resignation. We are very grateful to Ian for all the work he carried out around the village. The role of the Ranger is to maintain the shrub and plant areas as well as the general area around the Village Hall, Youth Club and Play Park also the tidiness around the village and the outlying areas – the lay-bys and pathways, Purn Quarry, Accommodation and Roman Roads as well as Hillcote. We are presently advertising the post and hopefully it will be filled shortly as areas around the village are certainly not looking so spick and span without the attention of a Ranger.

We have recently approached the 'Community Payback Scheme' to help and support the work of the Village Ranger. Their first visit was made a few weeks ago when they started work on areas around the Coronation Halls. The Churchyard is another area that has been identified for their future attention.

The village tubs although only planted up in spring still managed to provide us with an attractive display throughout the seasons. We have also benefited from the displays that have been planted or have just appeared on the verges and in the hedgerows and again we are privileged to have so many well-tended gardens with their seasonal changes around the village. We have again taken up NSC's kind offer of free plants for our Spring-plant up – so keep a look out for the date

We have recently removed three parking spaces in the car park hopefully making it easier to enter, exit and manoeuvre. Over the years many residents have suggested introducing a one-way system in the car park – this might be a consideration for the future. Another suggestion that has been made by quite a few is for a skittle alley to be located perhaps behind one of the buildings this would be most welcomed by local league and WI league skittlers and indeed when Bournville's St Andrew's church challenge us at St P&P.

We have replaced the saddle stones stolen from Well Green with sink troughs. They serve a dual purpose – not only do they look attractive they also protect the green from vehicles attempting to park on or drive over it.

We rely on many people to help in keeping our village looking good and in good repair, our grateful thanks to:

The volunteers who help at 'plant up' times and to the residents who kindly take it upon themselves to plant up and tend their own containers.

To Mark Howe and his team who continue to maintain the various grassy areas and verges around the village and churchyard as well as undertaking various other jobs that need attention.

To Faye Thomas for keeping the public lavatories in clean and good working order – a testament to her work is that although well used we have never received a complaint

To those who when coming across litter pick it up.

And finally to those who take the time to report / share their concern/s, suggestions and compliments with us. Your endeavours and contributions are noticed and most valued. Thank you.

CHURCHYARD

Cllr ID Clarke presented her report as follows:

Throughout the year the usual general remedial work has been carried out around the churchyard – the cutting back of the undergrowth and the general trimming and tidying. This year we were pleased to

receive help from members of the congregation of St Peter and St Paul who met on several occasions to attack overgrown areas in the churchyard. Hopefully in the future we will also be receiving help from the Community Payback Team in our ongoing battle with the general tidiness of the churchyard.

We continue to receive an annual amount of monies from The Commonwealth War Graves Commission towards the upkeep of our military graves. Later this year a sign for the graves supplied by the Commission is to be installed. We feel very privileged to have responsibility for this task.

As many of you are aware our churchyard is classed a 'closed churchyard' so the responsibility for its maintenance has been transferred to the Parish Council. This of course comes with accompanying cost implications. In the past few years we have had to undertake expensive repairs to sections of the old stonewalls and earlier this year another four areas of wall were identified as in need of repair – it was by far the most extensive that the parish Council have had to undertake and naturally the most expensive. As many of you will remember disaster then struck in that a large area of wall not identified as in need of repair just collapsed – so not needing repair but rebuilding. So while the initial repair work was being carried out we had to start liaising again with the Diocese and builders for specifications and quotes.

So, where are we at present? The initial repairs have been completed and we are pleased to say that all the comments we have received about the quality of work and the friendliness of the workman can only be described as glowing. The work on the collapsed area is presently underway.

The cost of maintaining the churchyard has been a worry to the Parish Council but understandably never more so than this year. To avoid having to significantly increase the precept we have chosen to dip into reserves, however this cannot continue as we have a responsibility to maintain reasonable reserves plus not all residents agree with the Parish Council having this financial responsibility. With this in mind we recently approached North Somerset District Council to ask them whether they would take over the responsibility for the churchyard. After several months of chasing them we were pleased to be advised that they would be willing to do so. However, our relief was very short lived as we were then advised that this was not to be. This change of mind had a distressing knock on effect in related areas. We have submitted a complaint in regard to this change of decision to NSC's Chief Executive and we are presently awaiting a response.

Since being repaired last year the church clock has with Brian Robinson's care been reliably ticking along – this care could be better described as intense nursing with daily adjustments having to be made by its very own personal care assistant! His care and commitment is both valued and appreciated.

Our thanks to Mark Howe and his team who for many years has cut the grass areas and carried out the general maintenance – his efforts are appreciated by us all as we walk through the churchyard.

Our sincere thanks to all who when walking through the churchyard take the time and trouble to pick up the litter, remove dead flowers, stand up overturned pots and vases and other general tidying tasks. Thank you.

PLAY AREA

Cllr ID Clarke presented her report as follows:

The play area continues to be a well-used feature of our village. It is enjoyed by all ages from babies to grandparents. It is interesting to watch the changing patterns of usage throughout the time of day.

We are pleased to have such a popular and safe place for residents and visitors of all ages to meet, play and picnic.

To ensure safety the area is inspected annually by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and we immediately address any recommendations highlighted in their subsequent report. Our Village Ranger is required to carry out regular checks and produce reports of the play area and equipment. Since the resignation of our Ranger we have employed an outside firm to carry out these checks and produce reports. As a consequence of the latest report we are presently arranging for the spring rockers to be reinstalled at a 'less risk' level.

Health and safety guidance require us to have extensive areas of bark to break any falls from the equipment, unfortunately this means that we have lost a lot of the grassed areas. The downside to bark is that it is quite a costly commodity and begins to look scruffy quite quickly, it also needs regular sweeping as it tends to be easily trailed beyond the pit. We have discussed alternatives – rubber play

mats / tiles and although it would require a costly initial outlay it would most likely be cheaper in the long run. Perhaps something to be discussed again in the future when finances allow.

Our thanks to Ian Findlay the retired Village Ranger and to Mark Howe for keeping the area safe and well maintained during the year.

As many of you will remember a few years back moans and groans about the play area were continually voiced with very few positive comments reaching Councillors ears. I think it fair to say that the criticism was at times justified but we did listened and for several years now we have only received positive comments.

We hope you continue to enjoy the park and we would be pleased to receive your suggestions for further improvements.

OPEN FORUM

A discussion took place regarding waste and recycling collections. District Cllr Porter said that if there are examples of bins not being emptied, or being replaced in the wrong place then this should be immediately reported to North Somerset Council. All vehicles have 360 degree cameras which record everything the operatives do, so the report can be immediately investigated.

A question was asked 'What happened to the adopted Parish Plan as I have been told that you cannot find it?' The Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council cannot find a copy of the plan. It is not held electronically and all cupboards containing Parish Council documents had been searched. District Cllr Porter confirmed that he was given a four page pamphlet about the Parish Plan prior to the recent planning appeal, nothing more than that.

The Clerk confirmed once more that he could not find a copy of a Parish Plan, but stated that this plan is now out of date as the legislation has changed since it was produced, making Parish Plans obsolete. District Cllr Porter confirmed that no Parish Plan, including Bleadon's had been adopted by North Somerset Council as the Government changed their policies making Parish Plans redundant before they were adopted. Parish Plans were going to be included in the North Somerset Council planning policies, but that never happened, as they were never adopted.

District Cllr Porter said that the new initiative which took over from Parish Plans were Neighbourhood Plans. Only two have been adopted in the North Somerset area to date. Neighbourhood Plans cannot contradict anything which is in the core strategy. Therefore they cannot oppose housing development where it is recommended in the core strategy.

Once more District Cllr Porter said that Parish Plans cannot be introduced, or contribute in any way at planning hearings. He said that they have never been able to carry any weight, and there only use is to demonstrate the wishes of the Parishioners.

The Clerk was asked why it had not been made public that the Parish Plan could not be found. He replied that the only person who had ever enquired regarding the Plan was the person posing this question, who had been previously told that it could not be found. If the Plan is found then it will be made immediately available.

Cllr Hartree suggested that as it was clear that the Parish Plan would carry no weight at planning hearings then the Parish Council would not spend any more time discussing it. He reiterated what the Clerk had already said i.e. that no other Parishioner had raised a query about the Parish Plan, other than the questioner.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm