

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004**

This is the first formal Annual Report published by the Parish Council. It aims to give details of its activities during the past year, set out its objectives for the forthcoming year and set out information which the Parish Council is required to publish.

## **Chairman's Overview**

This Annual Report sets out what the Council has achieved during the past year. There have been some notable successes including the new street lights in the village centre and the development of closer working partnerships with the principal authorities with increasing success. However, there have been some frustrating aspects too, not least the County Council's continual delay in installing bollards along Hewell Road.

During the past Council year, the Council, Councillors and Clerk have thoroughly overhauled the Council's systems and practices in order to adopt a more business-like approach to our working practices, guided by the criteria required to obtain Quality Parish Status; all its practices and financial management now comply with the latest and ever-increasing regulations and requirements and are reviewed at least annually. This has been a great change to us all but we are slowly getting used to it!

Elaine Buckett, Chairman of the Parish Council

## **STATUTORY FUNCTIONS**

### **Street Lighting**

The Parish Council is a street lighting authority for and is responsible for maintaining most of the street lights in the parish. The 17 new lighting columns installed in the village centre last year have been a great improvement to the street scene. This year, the Parish Council is beginning a programme of replacing the old concrete lighting columns with steel ones which is expected to take 2 to 3 years to complete.

### **Christmas Lights**

The Christmas lights are in need of a major overhaul and the Parish Council is taking expert advice on how to provide Christmas lights in the future which are attractive and safe. The Christmas Tree will have a permanent location near the Millennium Arch with its own electricity supply.

### **Park, Hewell Road and Playing Field, Bittell Road**

Both these amenities are managed by the Parish Council and are well-used and are of great benefit to the community. Both are inspected annually by RoSPA and the Parish Council is under a duty to ensure that they are safe. From October 2004 the Disability Discrimination Act will apply to play areas. The Parish Council has decided that a review of the facilities in the Park on Hewell Road is required in light of this and has commissioned a survey from RoSPA for recommendations as to what should be done. The Parish Council has set aside a capital sum of £6,200 to carrying out improvements to these areas including those arising from RoSPA inspections and the DDA review. It is hoped that these will be completed by the end of the summer.

### **Environment**

The Parish Council currently maintains the railway embankment on Hewell Road with the assistance of volunteers, the embankment on Hewell Lane adjoining the Longlands, the area around the substation in Orchard Croft and some of the verges on Hewell Road, as well as the Park on Hewell Road and the Playing Field on Bittell Road. It also carries out bulb planting. This coming year the Parish Council intends to improve the areas around the railway bridges and the area around the telephone box at the bottom of Station Approach, and to work in partnership with Central Trains and Network Rail to persuade them to improve the Station and surrounding areas.

The Parish Council has also been liaising with the District Council to secure new litter bins in the village centre, which should be installed very shortly, and is in discussion with the District Council to ensure that litter in the village centre is collected promptly and properly.

## **PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT CONTROL AND CONSERVATION AREAS**

### **Development Control**

The Parish Council, as a statutory consultee, comments on each application for planning permission relating to properties in the parish. In August 2003 the District Council decided to put in place a moratorium on almost all applications to build new houses and this is likely to continue until August 2005.

### **ADR – Kendal End Road Site**

The village campaigned successfully to persuade the District Council not to include the green belt area on Kendal End Road as an ADR, in effect, an area for future development. However, a challenge has been made against that decision of the District Council and this will be heard in the High Court this year; the Parish Council is working with the District Council to see how we can help to fight this High Court action; the outcome of the case will determine whether action needs to be taken by residents and the Parish Council to ensure that this site remains Green Belt.

### **Conservation Areas**

A Conservation Area currently exists in the Fiery Hill Road/ Cherry Hill Road/Twatling Road area. The Parish Council aims to press the District Council into considering an additional Conservation Area for the village, probably in the Sandhills Lane/Sandhills Road/Hewell Road triangle.

## **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER AUTHORITIES**

### **Highways**

The Parish Council continues to monitor the state of the roads, signs and gullies and reports regularly to the County Council's Highways Partnership Unit. Later this year, the Parish Council intends to join up to a County Council scheme whereby the County will provide funding to enable the Parish Council to engage a contractor (called a Lengthsman) to carry out minor highway works which are not currently being done. This is an important and exciting opportunity for the Parish Council, and with luck a Lengthsman will start work this summer.

### **Village Centre Infrastructure**

In September 1998 the residents of the village identified a number of areas requiring capital investment to improve the village and adopted a scheme known as the Village Appraisal. The Parish Council has been working in partnership with the County Council and District Council to put the Village Appraisal into effect. The first stage of the Village Appraisal, namely the traffic calming in the village centre, was completed last year. The second stage, that is the protection of pedestrians along the south side of Hewell Road, is under consideration by the County Council and public consultation will take place. A bid for funding for the third stage, that is, relaying the broad pavement in front of the One Stop block of shops with the addition of planters and cycle racks has been made to the District Council.

### **Speed Reduction Measures**

The junction of Bittell Farm Road and Bittell Road was also identified in the Village Appraisal as requiring improvement and an application has been made to the County Council's Highways Partnership Unit for funding for alterations to this junction. However, in response to recent public pressure, the Parish Council is also working in partnership with Cofton Hackett Parish Council, West Mercia Constabulary and the County Council to consider whether measures to slow traffic on the B4120 (Bittell Road, Kendal End Road, Barnt Green Road) are required. The Parish Council, the District Council and the County Council have been working together with residents to consider measures to slow traffic on Aqueduct Lane; regrettably funding has not yet been identified. Other roads have been identified for possible traffic calming but it is unlikely these will be looked at this year.

### **Parking**

The long-awaited, new waiting restrictions are now in place; these are intended to increase the number of spaces for short term shoppers and service users. Disabled spaces are also now allocated. The Parish Council intends to review the new waiting restrictions in September and thereafter annually. The Parish Council's aim is to make maximum use of on-road parking spaces whilst balancing the needs of the residents and to utilise any available off-road parking, whilst robustly trying to find more off-road parking. The Parish Council is grateful to the Victoria Inn and to the Social Club for allowing their car parks to be used by shoppers, shop workers and patients, but they are *not* for all day parking by commuters; if these facilities are abused they will inevitably be lost.

### **Land at the British Telecom Exchange, Hewell Road**

It has been hoped that it will be possible to secure land for additional off-road parking for shoppers on this site and negotiations between the District Council and agents for the land owners are in progress, albeit very slowly. However, British Telecom has submitted an application for outline planning application to erect flats on part of this land and this application is currently being considered by the District Council's Planning Committee.

## PARISH MATTERS

### Quality Parish Status

In April the Parish Council decided to apply for Quality Parish Status. This is a kitemark awarded by the Government to parish councils which provide evidence that they operate not only within the legal framework applicable to local councils but to significantly higher standards. If the application is successful, it is likely to mean that the Parish Council will be entitled to operate local services currently provided for by principal authorities and will have access to additional funding.

### Parish Plan

The Parish Council was successful in its application for a grant for the preparation of a Parish Plan. This will enable us to survey your needs and aims for the village and to format an action plan to implement them. It is hoped this will be the blue print for the medium term planning for the village, not only by the Parish Council but also by the principal authorities and will be a benchmark against which the performance of those authorities can be measured.

### Village Design Statement

The Parish Council is funding the preparation of a Village Design Statement by a group of volunteer residents. Once completed, it will set out guidelines for future development in the village which it is hoped will be adopted by the District Council and then applied to every application for planning permission on properties in the parish. The Village Design Statement is in its final stages and it is hoped it will be published later this year. A copy will be distributed to every household.

### Communications

The Parish Council now produces three newsletters per year which are guaranteed to be delivered to each household in the parish by a group of volunteers. The February edition was significantly revamped to improve the layout, accommodate the amount of items reported and make it more user-friendly. If anyone would like a large print, Braille or Audio copy please inform us directly or via a friend. The website at [www.barntgreen.org.uk](http://www.barntgreen.org.uk) is now an integral part of our communication network, and is being updated.

### Volunteers

The Parish Council is again very grateful to the many volunteers who are always so willing to deliver information to your doors to get important information to you, sometimes at very short notice. Thank you to the volunteers who pick up litter and those who join working parties to tackle various needs around the parish.

### Complaints

No complaints have been received against the Parish Council, its members or officer.

## HOW TO CONTACT THE PARISH COUNCIL

Please feel free to contact any of your parish councillors or the Clerk, but please do try to do so at a reasonable time of day! Alternatively you may wish to use the "Contact the Council" facility at [www.barntgreen.org.uk](http://www.barntgreen.org.uk)

<b>Elaine Buckett (Chairman)</b>	<b>0121 445 1254</b>	<a href="mailto:chair@barntgreen.org.uk">chair@barntgreen.org.uk</a>
<b>Judith Jagger (Vice-Chairman)</b>	<b>0121 445 2437</b>	
<b>Peter Cliff</b>	<b>0121 445 6383</b>	
<b>Tom Gray</b>	<b>0121 445 4424</b>	
<b>Betty Lucas</b>	<b>0121 445 1370</b>	
<b>Sheila Parker</b>	<b>0121 445 1408</b>	
<b>Susan Whitehand</b>	<b>0121 445 3530</b>	

### **Each Parish Councillor has areas of responsibility as follows:**

Elaine Buckett:	Chairman, Finance, Highways, Village Appraisal, Village Design
Judith Jagger:	Vice-Chairman, Planning, Village Appraisal, Village Design, Floral Displays
Peter Cliff:	Highways, Newsletter, IT, Publicity
Tom Gray:	Finance, Playing Field, Park, Street Lighting, Christmas Lighting
Betty Lucas:	Planning, Environment, Special Events, Village Services
Sheila Parker:	Park, Playing Field, Street Lighting, Christmas Lighting
Susan Whitehand:	Planning, Conservation Area, School Governor

### **Parish Clerk**

**Mrs Deborah Warren, 57 Bittell Road, Barnt Green, Birmingham B45 8LX**

**0121 445 5433**

[clerk@barntgreen.org.uk](mailto:clerk@barntgreen.org.uk)

## FINANCE

### Members Allowances

Parish Councillors may now claim an allowance and travelling and subsistence expenses. The Council is required to publish details of amounts paid to councillors for the parish basic allowance and for the parish travelling and subsistence allowance. In the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 no payments have been made under these regulations.

### Financial Management

A summary of the accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 is set out below and these will be audited in accordance with the Local Government Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, first by an independent auditor and then by an external auditor appointed by the Audit Commission. The regulations have changed substantially in the last few years, which although has greatly added to the administrative burden on the Parish Council, has resulted in the Parish Council conducting its affairs in a more business-like manner. The precept, which is the Parish Council's addition to your Council Tax bill, has in 2004-5 increased by 21% increase on 2003-4. This increase was a very difficult decision to take but was unavoidable if current services are to be maintained. However, the Parish Council will thoroughly review those services and their delivery this year.

To enable electors the opportunity to comment on and shape the precept for 2005/6 the Parish Council intends to produce a draft budget in September which will be displayed on the notice board and circulated in the October Newsletter. Please read it and attend the Parish Council meeting on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> November at 7.00pm at which it will be discussed to air your views. The possibility of having a 'drop in centre' in the village in October is also being considered so that electors can comment on the budget and any other issues concerning the Parish Council.

### SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2004

<i>Previous Year</i>	<b>Receipts</b>	<i>Current Year</i>
21,050.00	Precept	22,300.00
5,473.00	Rebate from District Council	5,397.00
1,440.85	Interest received	971.51
57.50	Rent	57.50
200.00	Christmas lights contribution from traders	215.00
1,592.82	Golden Jubilee Festival	-
1,772.35	VAT refund	4,382.61
41.60	ADR campaign	-
0	Parish Plan grant	2,000.00
0	Refund of training course fee	54.00
0	Refund - feeder pillar installation	464.13
<b>£31,628.12</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>£35,841.75</b>
	<b>Payments</b>	
	<b>Administration</b>	
3,447.88	Staff costs inc NIC	4,768.24
455.93	Members allowances	216.08
356.94	Subscriptions	419.81
100.00	Website - setting up costs	600.00
611.17	Insurance premiums	702.93
1,793.55	Other	2,187.44
1,192.38	VAT	4,369.38
471.74	Loan repayments	471.74
<b>£8,429.59</b>		<b>£13,735.62</b>
	<b>Village Design Statement</b>	
0	Payment on account to VDS Group	£ 500.00
	<b>Environment</b>	
2,932.67	Maintenance of Park & Hewell Road	2,989.39
2,082.97	Maintenance of Playing Field, Bittell Road	1,519.26
293.00	Maintenance of open spaces	506.97
584.00	Hanging baskets	437.50
128.00	Purchase of new signs	0-
<b>£ 6,020.64</b>		<b>£ 5,453.12</b>
	<b>Street Lighting</b>	
2,405.92	Maintenance of street lights	3,354.90
0	Purchase of new street lights	17,095.75
730.00	Christmas lighting	1,784.20
<b>£3,135.92</b>		<b>£22,234.85</b>
	<b>Special Events</b>	
<b>£3,336.47</b>	Golden Jubilee Festival	-
<b>£20,922.62</b>		<b>£41,923.59</b>