

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

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The Meeting was chaired by Cllr Robert Cholmondeley, Barnt Green Parish Council Chairman.

In attendance: 5 members of the public
District (and Parish) Councillor: C Hotham
Parish Councillors: J Nilsson, P Perry, S Whitehand, O Polton and M Roberts
Tracy Bodley, Executive Officer, Barnt Green Parish Council

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all present. With the sad passing of Prince Philip he stated that local councils have protocol in place, one being that the flag in Millennium Park will now be lowered to half-mast for the duration of the mourning period. As a mark of respect the Chairman called for a one-minute silence.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from parish councillor Jagger and Network Rail Representative – Richard Dugdale.

3. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held 25th April 2019

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Reports from local council representatives

a) Chairman's report

The Chairman gave a report circulated to those in attendance and provided at Appendix 1.

He highlighted that the parish council was still working through the entirety of the lockdown periods and that the circular footpath at Bittell Lane Playing Field had been a huge success and well used by everyone, as indeed was the Cofton footbridge over the railway.

b) Report from District Councillor for Barnt Green and Hopwood Ward

District Councillor Charles Hotham spoke on the following various subjects:

- i) It was reported that it had been a difficult year due to the pandemic with BDC officers working tirelessly to distribute grants from central Government for those eligible to receive funding.
- ii) There had been an upsurge of planning applications, the increased number causing delays in the decision-making process, which has also impacted enforcement issues.
- iii) There has been a replacement for the Head of Finance with the new appointee recently commencing their position.
- iv) The financial position has been impacted greatly with reduced income from car parks and Leisure Centre facilities being supported. The current year-end figures are showing a deficit of £1m. It is hoped that Government grants will cover this loss.
- v) The planning review continues at a reduced pace – the Government imposed housing number requirements which being approved at BDC committee level was later withdrawn with its replacement is being awaited.
- vi) Cala Gated Access issues – BDC planning are still in discussion to get the gate unlocked.

A question from a member of the public put to District Cllr Hotham regarding the Friends Meeting House and if a planning application had been received with a view to converting to the Doctor's Surgery.

Response: Cllr Hotham could not comment if planning permission would be granted as he was not on the planning committee, however it was understood that there were many obstacles to overcome prior to an application being submitted – namely that the site would need to be determined by the Quakers as suitable to be given to the doctors surgery, the surgery would need to decide if it was a suitable location for them to operate from and NHS England would also need to assess the site suitability for a GP practise.

A member of the public asked Cllr Hotham to expand on the Cala path discussion with Cllr Hotham responding that progress was being made which could not be discussed in a public meeting at this stage.

c) Report from County Councillor for Beacon Division

County Councillor Peter McDonald was not present.

d) Parish Council Finances

A summary (attached appendix 2) of the parish council's accounts for 2020/21 was presented.

5. Open Forum

5.1 Community Walks

It was hoped that they would resume in September, a proposed date of the third Saturday in September was reported by the Chairman with plans to be discussed at a future parish council meeting.

5.2 Christmas Lights Switch On/Other Events

It was hoped that with the easing of restrictions other events including the Christmas Switch On and Wassail Walk would also go ahead.

It was also mentioned that with the installation of the outdoor gym equipment, the contractor was looking to hold a demonstration event for general attendance and it was hoped to expand this to involve local traders etc.

5.3 Bridleway Work

The improvement of public rights of way is continuing assisted by 106s funding from the Longbridge development and Worcestershire County Council. £300,000 has also been set aside to improve rights of way throughout the county.

5.4 Empty Property Dereliction

It was asked if BGPC were pushing BDC to address the dilapidation of the property on Sandhills Lane and the Canal Cottage by Lower Bittell Reservoir.

Answer: BGPC has pressed BDC, and all avenues have been taken but with BGPC and BDC powerless to act, there was not much that could be done.

Cllr Hotham remarked that he would send an email in his capacity as District Councillor to the Canal and River Trust regarding the Canal Cottage property.

5.5 Thank you to the Chairman and EO

Cllr Hotham wished to express his thanks to the Chairman and EO for all their hard work during this difficult year and stated that Barnt Green was a thriving community which was confirmed with the opening of two shops shortly.

The meeting ended at 19:34hrs.

**BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL
YEARS ENDING MARCH 2020 & MARCH 2021
Chairman's Report**

With no annual public meeting in 2020, I'm going to cover the last 2 years. I did write a report 12 months ago which was posted on our website so there will be some duplication. The council has its full complement of 8 councillors. In 2019, Harrison Rone-Clarke stepped down. Olivia Polton was co-opted and more recently Mark Roberts was co-opted. With the office at 80 Hewell Road currently closed, the council's Executive Officer, Tracy Bodley, continues to serve the council working from home.

In 2019, the Parish Council took over the ownership of the car park on the corner of Butterwick Close and Fiery Hill Road. Signage has since been erected to make it clear that it is a commuter car park offering free parking.

The switch to LED streetlights (south east of the railway line) was completed.

In conjunction with West Mercia Police, the anti-crime initiative, Smartwater, was rolled out and signage erected at key entry points to Barnt Green.

Funds made available from the Butterwick Close housing development, normally referred to as Section 106 monies, were used to extend and tarmac the footpath around the playing field behind the Baptist Church. Outdoor gym equipment is to be installed during this year at the bottom end of the field.

Footpaths have been well walked during lockdown, not least the playing field and the reopened footpath over the railway with the new footbridge at Cofton which was opened in September 2019.

There has been limited, but significant, progress with getting lifts installed at the station, which is a legal requirement from 2015. The Department for Transport has approved the funding for detailed design which it has then to approve.

Disappointingly, West Midlands Rail has not conveyed any indication of improvements to the station in relation to, inter alia, a train information screen on platform 1. However, one unannounced improvement has been the installation of dropped kerbs by the telephone exchange on Station Approach.

Much work on the pollinator site on the corner of Green Bank and Hewell Road was undertaken before lockdown. Signage and fencing was installed.

It's been tricky to sustain the flowers around the village with the staff of our suppliers on furlough. However, hanging baskets will be provided this year for the shops that are prepared to water them.

It seems a long time since the council organised a treasure hunt in 2019. Once lockdown eases, it is intended to resume the council organised walks and other events like the Christmas lights switch on.

The precept (the portion of council tax paid by residents to the parish council) increased by 1% for the coming year, having fallen by 0.20% in the previous year and being held at the same level the year before that.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has worked and supported the parish council over the past couple of years, both volunteers and those paid.

Robert Cholmondeley
6 April 2021

Summary of Draft Financial Accounts for 2020/2021

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL				
Financial Report of 2020/2021: Receipt and Payments				
Annual Parish Financial Report				
RECEIPTS	2019/20	summary totals	2020/21	summary totals
Precept received in current year	63,480.00		64,000.00	
Interest	550.94		273.97	
Lengthsman Refund	1,888.10		1,537.50	
Miscellaneous	29,877.20		10,220.00	
Grants Received	-		3,000.00	
Hires	680.00		170.00	
Total Receipts		96,476.24		79,201.47
PAYMENTS				
ADMINISTRATION :				
Staff Costs	20,765.14		22,057.10	
Chairman's Allowance	383.46		-	
Office Running costs	7,315.08		7,264.77	
Training and Publications	1,069.99		60.00	
Meeting Rooms and Refreshments	120.00		-	
Subscriptions	1,330.13		1,853.34	
Insurance	821.94		1,157.53	
Auditor Fees	542.40		247.40	
Legal Fees	-		1,336.67	
Election Costs	82.72		-	
Grants and Donations	200.00		500.00	
General Administration Costs	1,702.51	34,333.37	850.18	35,326.99
COMMUNICATION Newsletters	219.00		820.00	
COMMUNICATION Website	120.00	339.00	-	820.00
MILLENNIUM PARK Mowing	836.00		1,202.00	
MILLENNIUM PARK Maintenance	517.00		1,130.18	
Park Safety Inspections	68.50	1,421.50	68.50	2,400.68
PLAYING FIELD Mowing	2,642.51		2,556.51	
PLAYING FIELD Maintenance	2,259.16		1,214.41	
PLAYING FIELD Safety Inspections	68.50	4,970.17	68.50	3,839.42
ENVIRONMENT Hanging baskets	560.00		-	
ENVIRONMENT Planters	916.01		466.67	
ENVIRONMENT Maintenance	7,190.90		2,094.75	
ENVIRONMENT Outdoor Parish Caretaker			5,400.00	
ENVIRONMENT Pollinator Site			686.48	
ENVIRONMENT Commuter Car Park			402.00	
ENVIRONMENT Covid-19		8,666.91	1,263.00	10,312.90
FOOTPATH LIGHTS Maintenance	3,338.25		195.00	
FOOTPATH LIGHTS Electricity	3,038.43		2,911.08	
LIGHTING Christmas lights	9,589.58	15,966.26	7,259.40	10,365.48
HIGHWAYS Lengthsman charges	-		600.00	
HIGHWAYS Miscellaneous	-		-	600.00
MISCELLANEOUS Events	2,518.71	2,518.71	14.95	14.95
N'hood Plan/ capital projects 2016/17	15,021.45		4,627.02	
FIXED ASSETS		15,021.45		4,627.02
Net Total Payments		83,237.37		68,307.44

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS SUMMARY 2020/2021						
RECEIPTS	2019/2020	2020/2021	PAYMENTS	2019/2020	2020/2021	Variance
Precept received in current year	63,480.00	64,000.00	Administration	34,333.37	35,326.99	2.81
Interest	550.94	273.97	Communication	339.00	820.00	58.66
Lengthsman Refund	1,888.10	1,537.50	Millennium Park	1,421.50	2,400.68	40.79
Miscellaneous	29,877.20	10,220.00	Playing Field	4,970.17	3,839.42	-29.45
Grants Received	0	3,000.00	Lighting	15,966.26	10,365.48	-54.03
Hires (room / playing field)	680.00	170.00	Environment	8,666.91	10,312.90	15.96
			Highways	-	600.00	100.00
			Events	2,518.71	14.95	-16747.56
			Capital projects	15,021.45	4,627.02	-224.65
Total Receipts	96,476.24	79,201.47	Total payments	83,237.37	68,307.44	-21.86

VAT Refund	8,837.86	5,955.33	VAT PAID	8,708.47	4,829.19
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Annual Receipts	105,314.10	85,156.80	Annual Payments	91,945.84	73,136.63
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Notes to the report of 2020/2021 Receipts and Payments account:

1. These draft accounts are presented on a Receipts and Payments basis and have yet to be externally audited.
2. The impact of the precept for 2020/21 upon the Parish Council Taxpayer was £62.47 per Band D Annual Council Tax payment.
3. Other income variances:
 - a) Due to the pandemic, interest rates have decreased, and the amount of interest raised via deposit and savings account has declined.
 - b) The Lengthsman scheme continues via Worcestershire County Council who will refund up to £1888 each year. The council is still awaiting final payments against the February and March invoices.
 - c) VAT refund fluctuates from year to year with the Parish Council claiming VAT on non-business activities. The amount reclaimed depends on what purchases (predominantly Capital Expenditure) are made during the year. It would be fair to state that the parish council should not depend on VAT reclaimed each year to support the future budget and class it as income to reduce the precept.
 - d) Miscellaneous income for during 2020/21, consisted of a wayleave from Cadent Gas and a business relief government grant due to the pandemic.
 - e) A grant from Bromsgrove District Council New Homes Bonus relates
 - f) Hire income for use of the playing field has been impacted detrimentally as 2 credit notes have been issued for non-use during the lockdown periods of the pandemic.
4. Expenditure variances:
 - a) Administration: the variance shows an increase of 2.81%, although the office is currently closed to members of the public, it still has expenses to cover including, electricity, broadband connection, for example.
 - b) Communication: The Parish Council issues two Bulletins during the year, which are delivered free to residents of the parish. The invoice relating to the Spring 2020 edition

was sent out in April 2020, thus recording 3 editions on the 20/21 accounts – Spring 2020, Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021.

- c) Millennium Park and Playing Field: The increase in costs for 2020/21 relate the installation of a new boundary fence, the previous boundary being overgrown shrubbery had suffered damage in stormy weather resulting in its removal.
 - d) Environment: This has remained static. The Outdoor Parish Caretaker expenditure and the Pollinator site are now recorded using a separate cost code to allow for improved budget making decisions.
 - e) Footpath and Christmas lighting: Due to the installation of LED bulbs to all the parish council owned streetlamps, the monthly retainer for inspection and maintenance has ceased. The Christmas Lighting contract was renewed for a further 3-year hire period, separated into two contracts for lighting hire and installation/removal.
 - f) Highways: the Lengthsman scheme continues to be appreciated by the parish council and residents, and as this is a delegated service via Worcestershire County Council there is almost nil net cost to the parish council
 - g) Events: During 2020/21 the parish council has been unable to host any events due to the pandemic. Expenditure of £14.95 relates to the purchase of the trophy for the best dressed Christmas shop window competition.
 - h) Capital projects / Exceptional items: There have been no capital expenditure projects during this period.
 - i) Fixed Assets: A new shed located in Millennium Park has been purchased during this financial period.
 - j) VAT: the amount of VAT paid has reduced to fewer capital projects to the previous years. There are special arrangements for parish councils to reclaim the VAT on all purchases that are described as for non-business purposes.
5. The full version of the parish council's accounts may be inspected during the audit period, as yet the date for this is unknown. To view the accounts please contact the office. A summary of the unaudited accounts will also be available on the parish council's website during that period: www.barntgreen.org.uk

~End of report~
Tracy Bodley
Responsible Financial Officer
05/04/2021