

WHITBOURNE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting Held on Wednesday 5th May 2021 at 7.00pm

Present:

Note: Attendance was by remote video conferencing as necessitated by the Covid-19 lockdown.

Present: R James (Chair); J. Bromley (JB); G. Cupper (GC); T Hunt (TH); P. Wood (PDW); S. Knowles (SK); M. Clark (MC); C. Wier (CW); P Davis (PD)

In Attendance: Cllr N Shaw; K Phillips (Clerk). Three members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

All Councillors were present.

2. Report from the Chairman of the Parish Council

See attached report given by Cllr James

3. Public Discussion of any matters relating to Whitbourne

The following items were raised:

- Although the final payment for the village hall loan was imminent and therefore the potential to reduce the precept for next year, it was suggested that the precept remained the same to allow the Parish Council to undertake further projects for the benefit of parishioners.
- There had been quite a number of ordinary and extraordinary Parish Council meetings. Thanks were expressed to Councillors for the work they had undertaken throughout the year and the manner in which the business was conducted.

Meeting Closed at 19:15

Signed Cllr James (Chairman)

5th May 2021

WHITBOURNE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Annual Report from the Chairman of Whitbourne Parish Council.

Twenty years ago Whitbourne parish council had a very difficult decision to make, having been approached by the committee trying to raise the funds to build a new village hall. The committee had managed through fund raising and other grants to get 90% of the money needed to demolish the old hall and build a new one at the same location. So they asked the PC if they could make up the shortfall, otherwise the whole venture would fail, and the grants would be lost. The PC had insufficient funds in reserve to cover the amount so the only way to find the money was to take out a loan. The PC realised that any loan would have to be paid back by many PCs in the future. So after a long debate it was decided to take out a loan that would be paid back over twenty years at a fixed rate interest, with the repayments factored into the annual precept. We have now come to the end of this twenty year period and will make the final payment this month. I think I am the only parish councillor still serving that was on the PC that took out the original loan, but I am sure I am not alone in thinking that it was the correct decision. We now have an excellent village hall that is fully paid for and should serve the parish for many years to come. We will also be able to decide at our November PC meeting whether we wish to reduce our precept or to use this sum to finance other projects for the benefit of the parish. I would value any feedback on this subject from residents because it is their money not the PCs.

We have had many meetings during the last year, all of which have been via zoom . There are advantages and disadvantages with this form of meeting, the main advantage is that it is far more comfortable sat at home than venturing out on a cold wet winters evening to a cold village hall, but also there has been a much larger attendance by members of the public when all they have to do is log on. Although the delay between vision and sound that sometimes occurs can be a little disconcerting and it is difficult at times to stress the importance of a point when all anyone can see is your face it has proved to be quite successful. However from the 6th of May the government has ruled that online meetings must stop and face to face meetings only will be allowed. I think there will probably be challenges to this ruling and I can see that ways will be found to hold some virtual meetings in the future.

Most of the 106 money acquired from the Ardley Meadows housing developers has now largely been spent, with the pavement from Ardley Meadows having been extended to the community shop, the new bus shelter erected and a bike rack having been installed for users of the village hall and playing fields. The PC is intending to use the small amount remaining to pay for white lines to be painted on both sides of the road from the shop to the old school which is a length of road that is used by a lot of pedestrians but does not have a footpath. The PC was delighted that an initiative led by Nigel Shaw and Bringsty Manorial Court have recently recycled the old bus shelter and repositioned it on Bringsty Common for the use of school children and other bus users.

I am sorry to report that there has been no progress with the eyesore that was previously the Wheatsheaf Inn, but because this building is in private ownership the PC has very little power to force any progress. It is hoped that in the next twelve months someone will come forward willing to run it again as a commercial venture or the owner puts in an application for a more creditable plan.

The PC has spent a lot of time in the last twelve months dealing with planning applications. Although the PCs role when commenting on applications is only advisory it

WHITBOURNE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

always tries to mirror the views of the majority of residents and often uses the Neighbourhood Development Plan to guide its decisions.

We have to review the NDP every year to see if it is still fit for purpose, and when we looked at it last year it was decided that a working group would be set up under the leadership of the vice chairman Jackie Bromley and would be made up of several parish councillors and others with local knowledge or specialist skills. The remit of this group is to see if the present NDP needs to be updated due to changes in the governments housing policy.

Although the Village Hall and the Playing Fields have both been closed to the public for most of the last year their committees have still had plenty to do. The Village Hall has now had CCTV and internet access installed, the Playing Fields committee are in the process of removing the old matting and thoroughly cleaning the play equipment and also applying for grants to replace the broken swings.

The PC clerk works very closely with the county's road maintenance contractors and we are usually able to get any potholes throughout the parish roads filled promptly, as long as they satisfy the criteria. Unfortunately the road at the junction of the A44 at the Wheatsheaf that we have had many complaints about does not come into that category because the potholes are very shallow and it is classed as a low speed area. The PC agreed to support an application by Bringsty Manorial Court for a study of the speed of traffic crossing the common on the A44 but asked for the study to continue past the junction at the Wheatsheaf as far as the county border. The PC was asked by Herefordshire Council if it would like to delay the cutting of the verges in the parish to encourage more wild flowers to bloom and seed, but felt that it was too dangerous with the number of people now walking on our narrow lanes who need to take refuge on the verges from passing vehicles. My thanks must go to the volunteers that are regularly picking up the litter from our verges and public areas, they have made a huge difference but it is a great pity they need to do it at all.

The Whitbourne Parish Council website has recently been revamped which makes it easier for you to access information on agendas, minutes and the contact details for all the parish councillors and the ward councillor.

I have recently been remembering that it was also twenty years ago that this parish was one of the worse hit by the Foot and Mouth outbreak in the country. At that time in 2001 there were no farm animals left in the fields and the smell and haze of the smoke lingered throughout the centre of the village for weeks. What a contrast this spring has been with just about every field full of ewes and their lambs or cows and young calves. It just goes to show that things will recover and often recover better, and I believe it will be the same after this Covid emergency recedes. Hopefully it will encourage more people to help to preserve and improve what we have in this parish by volunteering to join one of the following groups that are trying to do that. Playing Fields committee, Village Hall committee, Bringsty Manorial Court, Community Shop Whitbourne Church and Litter Action Whitbourne, please join one if you feel you can help. Apologies to any groups I have missed.

Ron James Chairman Whitbourne Parish Council