

**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT 7.30 PM ON THURSDAY 19 APRIL 2018
AT ROWINGTON VILLAGE HALL**

Present

Councillor I Henderson, Vice-Chairman (in the Chair)
Councillor D Lane
Councillor Mrs J Coles
Councillor M North
Councillor Mrs D Weir
Parish Clerk – Nicola Overall

Councillor S Gallagher
8 members of the public

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor Ian Henderson welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked those present for taking the time out to attend the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Warwick District Councillor – Councillor P Whiting and County Councillor J Cooke.

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 27 May 2017

It was proposed by Councillor D Weir and seconded by Councillor J Coles that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 27 April 2017 having been previously circulated, be signed as a true record.

3. Councillor J Cooke - Warwickshire County Council (read by the Clerk)

Lapworth & West Kenilworth Annual Report 2018

Election results May 2017

Following the election in which the County Council was reduced from 62 to 57 seats the state of the parties was Conservative 36, Labour 10, Liberal Democrat 7, Green 2, Independents 2.

Kenilworth Children's Centre

During the 2016-17 budget prior to my election, it was decided that the Children's Centres budget would be vastly reduced. This led to a number of proposals for some centres to close. Some residents from Lapworth & Kenilworth currently use the services of the centre at St. John's School in Kenilworth. This was one of the centres earmarked for closure. However, following a long campaign by residents WCC relented and agreed to keep it open until at least August 2019. The Centre in Bertie Road has now closed.

Talks between The County Council & St John's School to keep the Centre open beyond 2019 are proceeding well. The Governors of the school are confirming proposals in May that if accepted would see the school managing the Children's Centre from August 2019 onwards. However, a note of caution, there is still some way to go before a satisfactory outcome can be assured.

Wharf Lane Lapworth

Following complaints during the summer the matter of Speeding on Wharf Lane Lapworth has been considered. Following speed surveys, consultations with officers and my visiting the site, I have agreed with John Horner to jointly finance the speed limit of 40mph. The scheme is currently being advertised and following the consultation period should proceed. I have also financed three further minor road improvements across the Division.

Potholes

The County Council has been given an extra £1.5 million to help towards repairing potholes in the County. I suspect a small fraction of what is required.

A46 Resurfacing

This is ongoing but doesn't come a moment too soon. The uneven surface and huge number of potholes between Kenilworth and Stanks Island at Warwick to my mind make this a road where you really do have to play "dodge the pothole."

New National Planning Policy Framework Announced

The Government is consulting on its recently announced new version of the NPPF. The reason I am adding it to this report is that it gives increasing powers to those Councils with Neighbourhood Plans. As I read it, up to two years from the Neighbourhood Plan being accepted at referendum Councils can effectively veto housing developments within their NP area. However, we will have to wait and see what happens to this proposal after the consultation ends. More info can be found at: - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-revised-national-planning-policy-framework>

County Fire Services

Discussions are taking place between West Midlands and Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Services about future joint working arrangements. Discussions are at an early stage, but Warwickshire is the smallest fire service in the country and there is potential for an improved service. We will have to see if talks prove fruitful.

2018/19 Council Tax & Spending

WCC's One Organisational Plan from 2017-2020 underpins how WCC will continue to transform to meet the changing needs of our communities. We are doing so while having to make an extra £67 million in savings by 2020.

We have streamlined our priorities and are focusing on helping people remain safe, healthy and independent. This includes concentrating resources on those that are most in need, people in receipt of social care and our young people, particularly those in care. This activity needs to be underpinned by a strong economy, our second priority.

In 2018-19 WCC's share of council tax will rise by 4.99%. This comprises a basic 2.99% rise as well as an extra 2% increase that the government allows us to levy to help us fund social care. So, for a Band D property, the annual Council Tax bill is now £1,363.68, an increase of £1.25 per week on 2017/2018's bill.

4. Councillors Mrs S Gallagher & Peter Whiting - Warwick District Council

Summary

The priority of the Conservative group that controls Warwick District Council has been to continue to provide high quality services, improving them where possible, despite the continued downward pressure on the financial support provided from central government to local government in general, and district councils in particular. As is hopefully apparent from what follows, we are working hard to achieve this on a number of major projects.

Finance and the RUCIS scheme

Despite this financial pressure, the Council recently approved the new rates of council tax for the 2018/19 financial year with only a £5 annual increase on the WDC share of a band D property. If our Parish Precepts are included, Warwick District is in the bottom quartile of all English district councils for its council tax charges.

As finance portfolio holder, Peter has worked hard to ensure that the RUCIS scheme remains available despite the need to economise where possible. This scheme provides funds for a wide variety of local capital projects, and many organisations within Arden ward have benefited from it. We encourage you to continue to publicise this scheme.

Leisure

When she was Leisure portfolio holder, Sue began the process of outsourcing the management of our leisure centres. The new operator is now in place, and we are also approaching the end of a major capital investment programme in Leamington and Warwick; work is beginning to determine what investment is required in Kenilworth. The benefits of these changes are already apparent in terms of increased usage, and the outsourced contract will see a service that cost local taxpayers several hundred thousand pounds each year transformed into one that will deliver annual income of over a million pounds.

HQ Relocation

Warwick District Council currently occupies two buildings - it uses the Town Hall for public meetings, while officers are based in Riverside House, originally designed to house the Leamington Building Society. The use of two buildings is inevitably inefficient, while Riverside House is significantly too big for the council and would require a multi-million investment to bring it back to an acceptable standard.

The Council has therefore made the decision to relocate to new offices that will be built on the site of the current Covent Garden car park. This will see the Riverside House site developed for housing, to fund the building of the new council offices. The multi-storey car park at Covent Garden will be replaced and enlarged, and the spending power of council employees will be moved much closer to the centre of the town.

Europa Way

Work is underway that will see this site to the south of Warwick transformed to include housing, commercial buildings, and a new community sports stadium. This latter element would provide a new home for Leamington Football Club, and in turn free up their current Harbury Lane site. This is a complex scheme that involves the close co-operation of many parties, with Warwick District Council co-ordinating.

Fly Tipping

The Council has for some time had in place arrangements with its waste management contractors to provide a rapid response to clean up reported incidents of fly tipping, and this appears to work well. In order to dissuade persistent fly tippers, in late 2017 the Council formed a partnership with Rugby Borough Council to increase enforcement action. Considerable investigative work is required to bring successful fly tipping prosecutions, and RBC has a team with a proven track record in this area. Residents should continue to report any issues but should not search for or disturb potential evidence themselves.

Gypsy and Traveller Sites

Work continues to identify one or more suitable sites. The new portfolio holder for this area has launched an appeal to Parish Councils to encourage co-operation on the subject, but the topic remains extremely politically challenging. This is despite the fact that bringing one or more sites into operation would greatly reduce or eliminate the problems of illegal encampments that have affected Warwick District and its neighbours over the recent past. The one site under active consideration is the Harbury Lane site currently occupied by Leamington Town Football Club. Assuming the development of a new sports stadium at Europa Way progresses as planned, then this site would become available and is considered suitable. However, this will take several years, and work continues to identify other possible sites.

5. Vice-Chairman's Report – Cllr I Henderson

Introduction

We have had a busy and challenging year. We've welcomed 3 new Councillors (Jane Coles from Lowsonford and David Lane and myself from Pinley). We've also benefited greatly from the continuing service of Diane Weir and Michael North. John Gaffey stood down as our Chairman and as a Councillor a few weeks ago, having served for almost 5 years. He also was a valuable source of local knowledge. We also said goodbye to Nicky Clarke after an amazing 17 years of service to the Parish in a variety of roles and also to Graeme Coombs who was with us for just over 3 years. A very sincere thanks to all who have been prepared to serve as Parish Councillors.

On a personal note, I find being a Parish Councillor quite fascinating and I'm learning a lot. We are looking for additional Councillors, so if you can spare a few hours a month, please get in touch with us, or Nicola. It's a great way to find out more about the area and putting something back into the community.

As announced at the last Annual Parish Meeting, our Parish Clerk – Nicola Everall, joined us almost exactly a year ago – so happy work anniversary Nicola.

Nicola brings a wealth of experience to the Parish Council as she is also Parish Clerk at Bearley, Snitterfield and Wolverton and recently has taken on the role of bookings secretary for Rowington Parish Hall.

The Parish Council has met 12 times in the last year, including unplanned meetings in September and January to deal with some urgent planning issues. We publish meeting agendas and minutes on our website <http://rowingtonpc.org.uk/> and all meetings are open to the public – except for confidential sessions dealing with e.g. HR issues..

Rather than repeat information that is already on our website, I just want to highlight a few matters from the past year:

We have considered 42 planning applications during the year. That's an increase of 40% compared with the previous year. This increase hopefully reflects an improved economic position within the community, but also is as a result of the publication of the Local Plan by Warwick District Council. This provides greater certainty about planning applications meeting certain criteria and has introduced targets for new housing. Greenfield land is still largely protected, but applications for the development in village in-fill sites are probably easier.

Applications of particular note during the year include:

Rear extension to Fleur de Lys public house

Rear extension and internal remodelling of the Durham Ox

A very substantial build for Riding for the Disabled at Lowlands Farm

We supported all of these applications

Another application considered by the Parish Council was the proposed build of 38 houses at the old nursery site at Kingswood. We spent a lot of time debating this application as we were acutely aware of strong feelings both for and against within the community. We also met with the developers to make sure that we understood exactly what was proposed.

Whilst we were prepared to support many aspects of the proposal, overall, we felt that it was too large a development and of an inappropriate design for a rural community. Accordingly, the Parish Council made a formal objection to the proposal and the application was subsequently considered by the full Planning Committee of Warwick District Council, where it was approved.

Not all of you will agree with the decision that we made. I assure you however, that we tried very hard to do what we believed was in the best interests of residents within the Parish. With the benefit of hindsight, we probably underestimated the importance that WDC attach to achieving new housing builds, as described in the Local Plan.

Still on planning matters, but in my view the undoubted highlight of the year, was the publication of the Parish Design Statement. Many people collaborated on this project, but a constant throughout was Michael North. Amazingly, Michael is still with us and continues to provide wise advice to the Parish Council that reflects his vast knowledge and experience. Other key players were Ernest Petrie, Nicky Clarke, Robert Browett and John Gaffey. Without their hard work this fantastic document would never have seen the light of day.

The Planning Design Statement is a community document prepared from responses from over 100 households within the Parish. It describes in some detail the collective views of residents as to the design principles for future developments. The Parish Council will carefully consider all planning applications against this benchmark document.

Although a Parish Design Statement is not a mandatory planning document it can and is being used to provide guidance for the design of proposed new developments. Its utility will last for many years and will hopefully prevent the worst excesses of the planning system.

I don't want to give the impression that planning matters represent the only activity of the Parish Council. Other regular features include:

The playing field continues to be inspected on a weekly basis as part of our public liability insurance obligation. This task is shared between Councillors and our external inspector David Connolly. Planned maintenance is regularly undertaken, and reactive works are carried out when required. New signs have been installed and fencing repaired. We are currently replacing some of the worn out play equipment.

The Parish Council often acts as a focal point for the reporting of local issues which are then re-directed to those at the District or County Councils. Typical issues are: potholes, damaged verges, blocked gullies and damaged signage. We do not control the budgets for these repairs, so cannot influence response times unfortunately. We also take an overview of footpaths and bridleways throughout the Parish.

We continue to support our two local churches – St Luke's in Lawsonford and St Laurence in Rowington, the village halls in Rowington and Lawsonford and the Parish Records, with annual donations. We have also funded repairs to the parish signs and the adopted red telephone boxes.

We also undertake weekly inspections of the two defibrillators located in the Rowington and Lawsonford Village Halls. This is part of the requirements of the insurance cover that goes with the equipment. We also replace the pads and batteries on a regular basis.

The Parish Council's website, www.rowingtonpc.org.uk is an important source of information and we encourage everyone to visit the site regularly. We are only slowly getting to grips with social media but have been encouraged by the response to our recent request to be provided with email details, which will further improve the way we communicate with residents. A number of Councillors use the Nextdoor Rowington App and find that useful for communicating urgent or local information. Approximately 34% of households within the Parish are signed up to use the app. Nextdoor.com is the place to go.

District Councillor Sue Gallagher recently organised a public meeting to discuss Policing and Crime issues which was attended by approximately 90 residents from Rowington and Lapworth.

We heard from the Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner and also our local MP, the Attorney General, Jeremy Wright, who lives in the Parish. Burglaries continue to be of concern to many residents and we monitor these closely. I am currently attending a 10 week programme called "Warwickshire Police Academy" aimed at improving links between the Police and the community.

One of the benefits of this is access to Police resources to answer outstanding questions, so if you've an unresolved issue please let me know. I've already raised the issue of failure to visit the scene of a burglary, as reported by a number of residents.

In closing, I want to look briefly to the future. Engagement with the community is one of our priorities and we will continue to look for better ways to do this. We want to support, as best we can, the exciting developments at Lowsonford Village Hall that are aimed at breathing new life into that community. We will continue to support community activities and we be organising training on how to use the defibrillators we have installed. We expect to receive additional funds at some point that can be used for infrastructure projects, so please let us know your ideas for the possible projects.

6. Reports from Organisations

Lowsonford Village Hall – Maurice Daw

A public meeting was called by the Trustees of Lowsonford Village Hall in early December 2017. The current Trustees were unwilling to carry on, and with the Hall needing some major upgrade, it was proposed to close the Hall.

Villagers at the meeting all spoke with conviction that the Hall should stay open.

A working group of 6 villagers spent the next 6 weeks reviewing the options. They conducted a village survey to all 77 houses, investigated how other local Halls were run and found out about options for grants/funding for the upgrade.

At a Trustee meeting in January the findings were presented. 2 Trustees resigned, with the Chair intending to resign after a handover period. 3 new Trustees were elected and a new Chairman. Robyn Jackson, Jane Coles, our Parish Councillor and myself, Maurice Daw, as chair.

We are now meeting monthly. We have a detailed plan to refurbish the Hall and have set about the emergency works needed. These include the roof, drains, electrics and trees. We plan to run some fundraising events, e.g. a pig roast on 24th June, and to approach charities and other sources to help with funding. Any support from the Parish Council would be most welcome.

Royal British Legion – John Hale

Last year we reported that the Branch was undergoing some changes and I am pleased to say that these have all now been completed. Although the Women's Section has closed many of its members have joined the main branch. We are now nearly forty strong, having welcomed some newcomers to the district and are benefitting from their interest in our various activities. During the past year we have held two luncheons at the Navigation pub, both well attended and apart from the enjoyment of the meal, providing the opportunity for us all to get to know each other better.

With Remembrance as one of our main areas of activity we attended the Remembrance Sunday service at St. Mary's, Lapworth in November and wreaths were laid on the War memorial there and also at the Rowington memorial. Last year's Poppy Appeal was organised by Mrs Carol Regan and received wonderful support from the community. This was to be Carol's last involvement with the local Poppy Appeal, but I am very pleased to say that Mrs Sarah Marsden will be taking on the role in future. It is important to remember how much the Legion depends on the annual Poppy Appeal to provide funds for its work with needy Ex-Service men and women and their families.

This year the Country will be commemorating the end of the First World War and in August two members of this Branch will be joining many thousands of others in a pilgrimage to Ypres (as Winston Churchill said "a more sacred place for the British race does not exist in the world"). This pilgrimage will mark the ninety years which have passed since the original 1928 pilgrimage, made by so many thousands of people to mark the 10th Anniversary of the start of the autumn offensive which led to the signing of the Armistice and the end of that terrible war.

Locally, we shall be holding a Pig Roast on Sunday 12th August 2018 to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal. One of our members, Tony Holdback, is kindly allowing us to use his garden in Preston Bagot and we are hoping to see over a hundred people joining us there. The event will be widely publicised throughout the coming months.

On 11th November the Remembrance Sunday service at St. Laurence, Rowington will be particularly poignant as this falls on the 100th anniversary of the ending of the First World War. We hope that there will be a large congregation on the day to honour those from the village who fell during the war.

May I just remind everyone that we would welcome new members. It is not necessary to have served in the Forces to be a member of the Legion but just to be an adult in sympathy with our aims and objectives. If you would like to know more, please contact me at the address below.

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Alms House Charity – Mike Wade

The Charity continues to operate 19 units of affordable rented accommodation, with single and double occupancy, in Beech Close and The Avenue. There have been no major events during the past year, with full and stable occupancy and no vacancies. Applicants for vacancies must have a strong local connection, and in the past demand has considerably exceeded supply. Unlike for many other Almshouses, there is no lower age limit, and the present community includes a wide range of ages.

The Charity's finances are sound, and the Trustees have for some time wished to explore the possibility of building additional affordable units, although present planning constraints would require this to be considered as an exceptional development. Recently it has become apparent that, under present circumstances, there may be a possibility in principle of obtaining exceptional planning consent if various conditions are satisfied. The Trustees are investigating one potentially attractive possibility, and initial discussions with WDC Planning Dept have indicated support in principle for a plan to build 6 additional units to meet an agreed local housing need.

The Trustees would like to have more detailed discussions with the Parish Council in the hope of obtaining political support for a future planning application and to consider the best future use of the land presently occupied by the Allotments.

Jane Ryland Charity – Stephen Williams (read by the Clerk)

During the course of the past 12 months the Charity has made grants to Rowington Cricket Club, Rowington Village Hall, the Rowington Old Folks Party Fund, St. Laurence Church, St. Luke's Church and Rowington Allotments Association to assist with various projects. In addition, many residents of the parish have been assisted with grants for essential home improvements, chiropody, travelling expenses, heating costs etc.

As usual, the Charity sent Christmas payments to those residents considered to be in need of some financial help.

We have made an effort to remind everyone of the existence of the Charity and to explain how we are able to assist, by placing adverts on notice boards. We hope that these will bring those in need of help to our attention.

Rowington Village Hall – Stephen Williams (read by the Clerk)

The financial situation at the village hall remains quite healthy. The revenue from lettings has been running at an encouraging level and the various social events put on by the committee have made a very useful contribution to funds. My thanks go to Ian Wilson for his excellent work on the hall financial affairs.

On the maintenance front, the major item was the refurbishment of the gents' cloakroom, completed earlier this year. The committee are very grateful to the Jane Ryland Charity which made a substantial grant towards the cost of this work. The wood-block hall floor was treated and polished at considerable expense and there were a number of other maintenance items of a more routine nature to be dealt with. Graham Bull has stood down from the management committee but will continue to oversee the maintenance of the carpark and other external areas. I am grateful to him for this valuable contribution to the operation of the hall.

The hall has been well used over the past year by regular hirers such as the Women's Institute, the Bridge Club, Inland Waterways, Brownie packs, caravanners and also private individuals and societies organising parties and other events. As usual, Anne Pitt has dealt with enquiries and bookings in a most efficient way. Again, my thanks go to her. Anne is handing over these duties to Nicola Everall with effect from 1st May.

The social committee have put on several successful events, including two Simple Supper evenings and the Winter Ball. There have been large attendances at these events, which have attracted several of the newer residents of the village as well as the usual supporters. Shirley Lowe and her committee have put a lot of time and effort into these events and are to be congratulated on their success.

Ann Beresford and Adam Marsden have joined the committee recently and I am sure that they will make a very useful contribution to the successful running of the hall. Otherwise there have been no changes in the membership of the committee.

The hall has its own website - www.rowingtonvillagehall.co.uk and this is most useful in advertising the hall and the events to be organised. The hall also features on Facebook.

In conclusion I would like to thank all of the members of the Management Committee for their support and unfailing enthusiasm over the past year; the village is fortunate to have such a good team looking after the hall.

WI – Carol Regan (read by the Clerk)

I am pleased to say our WI in Rowington is not only thriving, but we have increased membership again this year. We have enjoyed some diverse meetings and intend to keep up the impetuous. This year we will be joining our Federation to celebrate our Centenary Celebrations.

Allotments Association – John Greenaway (read by the Clerk)

Our membership remained constant for 2017 with all members cultivating their plots and assisting in the maintenance of the allotment grounds. Anyone visiting the grounds could have no doubt how much the plots are used and what some important facility allotments are to the Rowington and surrounding community.

We continue to hold two working days each year, one in spring and one in autumn. This allows us to ensure the upkeep and continual improvement of the allotment grounds. Our autumn clear up day is always hard work putting the allotments to bed for the winter and I am glad to report a very good attendance again this year with everyone really working hard to get everything done on the day. The ditch was cleared of brambles and other undergrowth and it was dug out to the full length of our land. Both our hedges were cut back, and all debris collected to be dried out and burnt later. Bonfires are quite difficult for us as we don't have any waste ground to hold them on and we must be very careful when burning that we don't cause smoke to blow in the direction of the bungalows.

Our grass cutting program worked well with all the communal grass that we are responsible for being cut by our members each week. We have acquired a further second-hand petrol mower which has an electric start. This has been useful for those who find it hard to pull start our other mower. We continue to impress upon our members to keep their paths cut and tidy to ensure a pleasing aspect to the allotment plots.

Our Keder poly tunnel continues to be well used particularly over the growing season, in fact there is not enough space for everyone who wants it. Unfortunately, it proved to be too expensive to extend and so members have, in lots of cases, erected a small greenhouse on their plots.

The continued maintenance and improvement of the allotment grounds remains one of our chief goals. Without our constant attention the hedges ditches and communal areas would very soon become overgrown and unsightly. We are very aware that the allotment grounds are an extremely important part of our village life and are grateful for the continuing support of the Parish Council and the Ryland Charity in ensuring their growth and continuation.

Thanks to all our members who have gone out of their way to carry out necessary jobs throughout the year, special thanks to Freda who continues to maintain our wild flower garden and to Sue who keeps the muck heaps topped up each year bringing bags of horse manure most days in her own car.

Our current subscription of £20 a year for a half plot covers our ground rent but little else and so we are currently having a further collection from our members half way through the year. We decide the amount of this at our spring meeting based on our current bank balance. It may be that in future we will have to consider increasing our main subscription to ensure the viability of the association.

As already stated we are very keen to ensure that the allotments, that we have all worked so hard to improve over the last 10 years, continue to be well maintained and that they remain an important asset for Rowington and the surrounding area.

We will of course be encouraging all our members to ensure they have plenty of produce to enter in the annual village Flower and Vegetable Show in August.

For any further information or to be added to the waiting list please contact either John or Sue on 01564 784352.

7. Public Forum

Discussions took place regarding the District Council's granting of planning permission for two houses, which were currently being erected next to Rowington Club on Rowington Green. Several residents raised concern regarding the size and design of the houses.

Concern was raised regarding the future of allotment land as it was understood that the area could be used for the building of Alms Houses.

The formal meeting closed at 8.45 pm. and was followed by light refreshments

Signed.....Designation Date.....