



Chairman's Annual Report for 2017-18
On the activities of Walford Parish Council
For The Annual Parish Meeting on 4th April 2018
At Walford Village Hall @ 6.00pm

APPOINTMENTS:

Frank Myers was appointed as Chairman and Shane Carlson as Vice-Chairman.

Finance Committee: Chair: Karen Chinn. Dave Berry, Simeon Cole, Heather Evans, Frank Myers, Angus McIntosh.

Members to Working / Steering Groups:

Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group: Members of the Public were encouraged to join the Steering Group and the Chairman emphasised the importance of supporting the plan. Parish resident Will Warburg is leader of the Steering Group. **Members:** Frank Myers, Dave Berry, Luke Freeman, Shane Carlson. Another parishioner is also a member.

Kerne Bridge Canoe Launch Working Group: Murray Alston, Simeon Cole, Frank Myers, Eric Drummond, Dave Berry.

Lengthsman Co-ordinator: Simeon Cole.

Rights of Way Officer: Heather Evans.

Resilience Co-ordination: Dave Berry Resilience Co-ordinator with Simon Kinder as support.

HALC Representative: Simeon Cole.

Community Support Steering Group: Sophie Hurley, Frank Myers, Karen Chinn and Dave Berry.

Walford Village Hall Representative: Dave Berry

AONB Representative: Bridget Vine.

POLICE Representative: Karen Chinn.

Internal Auditor: Jayne Dunstan of Wye Accountancy.

Review of Standing Orders, Insurance Policies and Annual Subscriptions:

Standing Orders: Existing Standing Orders were approved, at the meeting on 28/02/18 a small amendment was made to Standing Orders, relating to the time at which the APM is held.

Insurance Provision: Came and Company Parish Council Insurance.

Subscriptions: The current subscriptions to HALC and the SLCC will be maintained.

Ward Councillor: Paul Newman.

Changes within the Parish Council:

In October 2017, Cllr Martyn Jenkins disqualified himself, due to non-attendance for a period of 6 months and an election was requested by parishioners, at which Guy Smith was elected as a Parish Councillor. In January 2018 Cllr Shane Carlson resigned for personal reasons and an election was not requested, therefore the PC can co-opt a new Cllr at the meeting on 4th April.

In February 2018, Cllr Luke Freeman disqualified himself, due to non-attendance and the Electoral Services Office has been advised of the vacancy.

Council Meetings:

There were 8 scheduled council meetings during the year, and two additional unscheduled Parish Council meetings, one held to consider a planning application and another to consider the Management Agreement for the canoe launch site.

Representatives of the West Mercia Constabulary and our Localities Steward attended some of the meetings; Ward Cllr Paul Newman attended all the meetings, with the exception of one, when he was on leave.

Committee Meetings:

Scheduled Finance Committee meetings took place, with a budget meeting held in November to consider recommendations to be made to Full Council for the precept request.

Training and Courses:

HALC (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils) provided regular information on training courses and the Clerk attended relevant events, including a Data Protection Course.

THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING: (Held on 10/05/2017)

An introduction was given by Will Warburg – NDP Steering Group leader: Will explained that The NDP is a project to enable us to take more control over development; it is different from the Neighbourhood Plan, which is about all the general ideas that the Parish Council has for the local area.

Presentation from Cllr Shane Carlson on the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Annual Reports:

Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report.

Ward Councillor Annual Report.

OPEN FORUM: Following this presentation, there was an open forum for questions from those present, the details of which are included in the minutes.

SUMMARY OF PARISH COUNCIL BUSINESS CONDUCTED DURING THE YEAR

(A) National and County Business:

Consultations: All relevant consultations received via Herefordshire Council were either responded to by the Parish Council, or all councillors were encouraged to respond as individuals.

Superfast Broadband: Area 3C (South Herefordshire): Fastershire has awarded a contract to Gigaclear, to deliver the phase 2 rollout to the areas not upgraded to faster broadband in phase 1.

(B) Parish Council Internal Business

1. Minor Road Maintenance Scheme (Lengthsman)

The scheme is managed by Cllr Simeon Cole. Terry Griffiths has been carrying out work as our Lengthsman; with his team. Regular maintenance was carried out on bus shelters, road signs, footways, gutters and gullies on the B4234. As members of the 'Winter Maintenance Self Help Scheme', 10 tons of salt and grit provided by Herefordshire Council are stored at several locations throughout the Parish, in order to provide access to supplies in different areas. Walford and Bishopswood Village Halls are the most easily accessible to the public. Many thanks to all of those who have stored and distributed these supplies on behalf of the Parish Council.

Grant Funding: Herefordshire Council cut grant funding for this scheme to only 25% of previous levels in 2017-18 and the grant will be withdrawn entirely in 2018-19. The Parish Council decided to use some of its financial reserves, in order to maintain this important service within Walford Parish in 2017-18.

2. Other Highway Matters

Road Defects: Our Localities Steward Kevin Williams has been the interface between Balfour Beatty and the Parish and this new system has proved successful. Kevin attends Parish Council meeting when he is able to, in order to answer questions and keep the Council up to date. On-going work on pot holes and other Highways defects has been addressed by means of the Clerk making regular reports to, and our Lengthsman co-ordinator keeping in regular contact with the Localities Steward. The Parish Council has agreed to sign up for the Lengthsman Scheme for 2018-19.

HGV Signs: Further signs authorised by the Parish Council to re-direct HGVs have been installed at the top of Howle Hill, at the junction with Church Lane, and a contribution was made by Howle Hill Nursery.

3. Parish Paths Partnership Maintenance Scheme (Rights of Way)

The scheme is managed by Cllr Heather Evans, the Rights of Way Officer. In the last twelve months we have done path clearance work without being prompted and have had very few complaints. Our Rights of Way officer has again noticed, with gratitude, that there has been an increase in enthusiastic parishioners and landowners keeping their local paths useable and hedges generally cut back. The Parish Council will need even more feedback to ensure they spend wisely. Under the expanded Lengthsman Scheme, Parish Paths partnership (P3) funding (for Rights of Way) will continue to be available for eligible parishes for works on public rights of way paths but will be managed within the Lengthsman scheme processes.

Grant Funding: Unlike the Lengthsman Scheme, Herefordshire Council will maintain 100% of grant funding for this scheme in 2018-19 with a view to withdrawing the grant entirely in 2019-20. As part of the

new contract with Herefordshire Council, the Parish Council will have to contribute 15% towards maintenance of Rights of Way, with the other 85% being provided as a grant by Herefordshire Council.

4. Resilience Co-Ordination: Our Parish Resilience (Emergency) Co-ordinator is Councillor Dave Berry, with support from parishioner Simon Kinder. There have been calls their input in the last year, to respond to the snow and ice in bad weather over the winter months.

(C) PARISH PROJECTS:

(1) Bishopswood Public WCs: During the season, Riversea Holdings Ltd, who are managing the site on behalf of the Parish Council, has been voluntarily looking after the public toilets, which were closed due to budget cuts at Herefordshire Council. Riversea has been keeping reduced facilities open and clean for public us, on a voluntary basis. It is hoped that these facilities will be fully operational again in the future, but this will require significant resources. Discussions continue with Herefordshire Council.

(2) The Neighbourhood Plan: Steering Group members have been holding meetings, to progress the project to the next phase and a considerable amount of work has been put into creating a draft plan. The Annual Parish meeting in April 2017 was specifically earmarked to update councillors and parish residents on the progress so far and to hold an open Q&A session to discuss the NDP. Late in 2017 there was a call for sites, which resulted in 16 potential sites being identified for development. Grant funding available to Parish Councils to support the creation of a NDP have been accessed and independent consultants brought in to assist. Parishioners who are interested in getting involved in this important project are encouraged to contact the PC if they wish to become involved and work with the Steering Group.

VISION AND OBJECTIVES: To uphold an active, vibrant, thriving and caring parish where an excellent quality of life is available to all, where people are respected and valued and where there are homes, businesses and facilities to meet the needs of a sustainable rural community. In furthering this Plan, Walford Parish Council will work with interested parties and stakeholders to ensure wherever possible that any work or development activity within the parish will:

- Protect the general, natural and historic environment, habitats and open spaces and, in particular, the parish's primary asset of being within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – thus continuing its strive towards being an area free of chemical, airborne, noise or light pollution.
- Support sufficient, sensitive, balanced and proportionate housing to meet the needs of local people, which is of sustainable mixed types, in keeping with our local character, suitably located and built in manageable numbers and density; thereby ensuring a consistency of design that respects, enhances and retains the rural character of our parish.
- Maintain, support and sustain the limited local facilities including; village halls, school, public houses, sport and leisure spaces.
- Provide opportunities for informal outdoor recreation and tourism by enhancing its outstanding natural environment and green infrastructure assets for the benefit of local residents and visitors from further afield.
- Safeguard and promote the development of environmentally focused agriculture as a business and ensures that the quality and quantity of agricultural land provision is given due weight, when development is considered, in order to preserve the distinctive rural landscape of Walford parish.
- Underpin local businesses and employment suitable and appropriate for a rural area within an AONB.
- Co-ordinate with the relevant external parties to continue the active rollout of high-quality super-fast broadband network services and mobile telephone coverage for those parishioners and local businesses wishing to use it.
- Maintain roads, footpaths, right of ways, cycle-ways, pavements, and other parts of the parish infrastructure in order to meet the needs of the community and ensure that they remain safe and in good condition.
- Control the future development of our parish; in particular, ensuring that the boundaries are fully respected and any future amendments will have been made with due care, consideration and consultation.
- Welcome new residents to our Parish so that people feel safe and where community involvement and spirit is actively encouraged.

If you wish to help or have any queries, please contact the Steering Group: Neighbourhoodplan@walford-pc.org.uk.

(3) The Kerne Bridge Canoe Launch: In 2010, Herefordshire Council offered the site to The Parish Council, by means of a Community Asset Transfer; the launch facilities are rated as some of the best on the River Wye. After a long process of negotiation, the site was finally transferred to the ownership of the Parish Council in May 2016.

The Parish Council has been working to enhance these facilities and the way they are managed and operate in order to provide the best possible visitor experience. Following a formal process of selection, a preferred development partner was approved by the Parish Council and appointed: Riversea Holdings Ltd are investing in the facilities and working with the Parish Council in order to achieve the most satisfactory outcome and share in the success of the venture. For some time, Riversea Holdings Ltd were operating under Agreed Heads of Terms, but the PC is pleased to announce that at the meeting on 28th February 2018 a formal Management Agreement was signed by the PC and now that this is in place, Riversea has taken over all aspects relating to the management of the site on behalf of the Parish Council. The site improvements include a revised and safer traffic flow regime, and subject to the appropriate permissions, extended provision of refreshments for visitors, an information point and above all a management approach which is aimed at benefitting all users and improving general safety for all users

These enhancements are being funded by way of a charge for any boat launched or landed at the site and by pay and display parking arrangements. The first year has been a success in terms of the management on site, thanks mainly to Charlie Baker, whose skills in supervising the site, communicating with and assisting users have been highly praised by many visitors.

Understandably, with a new venture of this kind, the first year has had its teething problems and concerns have been expressed by some local residents, worried about future plans for the site; the PC has tried to allay these concerns, by explaining that the basic plan, originally tabled and consulted upon in 2011, remains as outlined above and any future initiatives will be openly discussed by the Parish Council and where appropriate, stakeholders consulted with, before any action is taken.

As the next season gets underway, we anticipate a smoother ride for all and look forward to working in a spirit of co-operation with canoe launch companies and members of the public, including fishermen, who use the site.

(4) The Community Support Scheme: We are very pleased to report further progress:

Your Council pursued the possibility of establishing The Walford Community Support Scheme for a number of years and following considerable effort on the part of the Steering Group, the scheme got up and running with a match funded grant from Herefordshire Council's Wellbeing Innovation fund. However, that funding ceased at the end of March 2017, but thanks to our Chairman, Councillors Dave Berry, Sophie Hurley and in particular the efforts of Cllr Chinn, further grant funding and donations have provided further funding for 2018-19.

We extend thanks the following benefactors:

E F Bulmer Benevolent Fund
Eveson Charitable Trust
Herefordshire Community Foundation
Walford Residents' Association
Walford Relief in Need Charity
Walford Timber
Howle Hill Nursery
Cobrey Farms
Poseidon Group Ltd

The scheme has been an unqualified success and goes from strength to strength under the supervision of our Co-ordinator Sarah Hayes and the dedication and hard work of the Steering Group members. Sarah, has in the last year been a huge enhancement to the project, demonstrating exemplary dedication and commitment. Activities are being organised to get lonely and vulnerable parishioners out into the community, such as cinema trips, lunches and flower arranging demonstrations; in addition, regular coffee mornings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at St Michael and All Angels Church Walford, to which volunteers, clients and parishioners are welcome.

See below the latest report from Sarah Hayes, our co-ordinator:

'Since our last meeting we've provided 45 volunteer hours of assistance across our community, consisting of 12 shopping trips, 15 social visits & 5 trips to appointments. It's important to understand that the majority of the help we offer is not just about assisting with transport.'

For example, the majority of the shopping trips we do are actually accompanying the person who requires the shopping, who are unable to get around the supermarket without assistance. This enables the people we're helping to carry on with their independence for longer, plus means they have the added bonus of having company & social interaction whilst they're shopping. Similarly, there are instances of transport to appointments – 5 this past 6 weeks – but these too provide an opportunity to interact with people who very often are lonely and isolated. Often including a cup of tea with the service user afterwards & half an hour's chat. Loneliness & isolation is a huge problem for many people living alone, particularly in rural areas.

We've created our program of events & activities for the year – or WOW (short for What's on Walford) & printed out flyers to be distributed across the community. Please do look out for those. The events & activities are open to all. And we're able to assist with the cost of these events & activities due to some very generous donations we've received from people living in our community.

We had a lovely first trip to the cinema in Monmouth at end of January to see Darkest Hour. Next activity is flower arranging & gardening advice at end of March.

I am in touch with the people at Ross Action Bus who are looking forward to working with us on the trips we already have planned throughout the year & other trips outside of that program to help build the network of people we're assisting in the Parish.

I will be organising Dementia Awareness sessions in Walford Village Hall as there has proved to be enough interest. I am working on getting some dates together & will be publishing those on our Facebook page & the Parish Council Website.

Finally – the scheme only continues to be a success with the help of everyone in our Parish. Please do let me know – in the strictest of confidence – if you are concerned about anyone. We're in the process of knocking on doors & leafletting at the moment so it's a great time to talk to me about anyone you're worried about. Chances are I'll be knocking on their door anyway to make sure they're aware of what we do. Similarly, if you're aware of anyone who would like to volunteer. No limit as to how much time is expected – that is totally dictated by the volunteer.'

(5) Land at Forest Green: In 2015-16 the maintenance of this piece of land was discussed and a proposal for continued maintenance was agreed, which has involved volunteer effort by Councillors and parish residents. Thanks to those who have contributed. In late 2017, a dead oak tree, which was giving cause for concern was felled using volunteer effort, which resulted in queries from parishioners living locally. The matter was included on the agenda, considered by the PC and a meeting was held on site to discuss the issues raised and the PC acknowledged that the matter could have been handled better, but it has learned from the process.

After consideration, it was agreed to explore a proposal to take cuttings from a rare black poplar tree, growing locally and to plant these cuttings when appropriate as the site is very boggy and black poplar trees grow well in such environments. In addition, there was a request by a member of the public to plant a hedgerow across the front of the site but, after consideration, the majority of councillors decided not to do this as they wished to retain the site as open space, with areas left as a habitat for wildlife.

(6) War Memorials:

Bishopswood War Memorial: Has been added to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. See below from Historic England:

Bishopswood War Memorial, B4234, Kerne Bridge, Bishopswood, Herefordshire – Awarded Listed Building Status

List Entry Number: 1448763

'We have taken into account all the representations made, and completed our assessment of the memorial. I am pleased to inform you that having considered our recommendation, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has decided to add Bishopswood War Memorial to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The memorial is now listed at Grade II.'

There are also plans to plant a hedgerow, set back from the memorial, to create a backdrop and to frame the monument, subject to discussions with the landowner

Walford War Memorial: The installation of the plaque to the base of the memorial has not yet taken place, but process is being followed to gain Listed Building Consent for the work to be carried out.

(D) PARISH COMMUNICATION:

(a) Parish Newsletter: This continues to be a popular and informative device to communicate with parishioners about matters which affect their neighbourhood and contains information from the Village Halls, schools and other local groups of interest in the community. It is posted to all households in the Parish. Paid advertising is now included in the newsletter, to generate some funds which can be put towards printing and postage costs.

(b) Parish Website: The Clerk has been responsible for posting news as it becomes available together with the agenda and minutes of meetings and reports on planning applications.

The Parish Council continues to evaluate means of improving its communications with the public, including offering to keep parishioners who express an interest, up to date with developments, by e mail.

(c) Facebook: As part of our ongoing drive to improve communication with our parishioners, Walford Parish Council continues to administer the Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/WalfordParishCouncil>. This features council information and village events - whilst showcasing local businesses - coupled with providing news updates and alerts from in and around the parish. Additionally, it regularly features County announcements from Herefordshire County Council. The site is now being managed by Councillor Angus McIntosh and we thank him.

(E) PLANNING APPLICATIONS

During the year the Parish Council returned observations to Herefordshire Council on 47 separate planning applications.

(F) FINANCIAL MATTERS

Each year the Parish Council reviews its expenditure over the past year and sets a budget for the following year. Our principle income is derived from the precept; however we have also historically received important contributions via Herefordshire Council for maintenance of the rights of way and the Lengthsman Scheme. As you will no doubt be aware, this funding is in the process of being phased out. To give you an idea of how this impacts on our budget the funding has been/will be as follows:

- 2016/17: £6818
- 2017/18: £3187
- 2018/19: £2320 (RoW only)

The Parish Council is also committed to supporting specific projects that were indicated as important to the community via the Parish Plan; Kerne Bridge Canoe Launch, Walford Community Support Scheme and the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

We are also required to exercise a degree of caution with our accounts so that we can maintain a reserve fund of between three and 12 months' of expenditure which may be used for unexpected expenditure or emergencies. Our annual budgetary requirements are in the region of £50,000 and so our reserves should reflect this.

A significant unbudgeted item for financial year 2017-2018 came in the form of a mid-term election which came to £2,310, however thanks to prudent planning we are looking to end the year with a surplus.

Looking forward to the financial year 2018-2019, we have been fortunate enough to secure additional funding from external sources for the Walford Community Support Scheme which continues to provide much needed support to isolated members of our community. This has reduced the burden on the Parish Council to finance this project, and furthermore, income derived from the Canoe Launch should offset this further. It is worth mentioning that we start the new financial year in the absence of a permanent clerk and therefore we should expect this to impact the budget that was set prior to this circumstance being known.

HMRC: The Council has reported and made payments to HMRC for PAYE and NI, as required by legislation. Payroll and Pensions management has been handled for the last year, by external service provider Autela Group.

The Parish Clerk: Throughout the year Catherine has applied the utmost professionalism to her work as our Parish Clerk. From the day she first joined us, determined to become fully qualified, she has delivered on her ambitions and become a hugely valuable asset to the Parish. Several years ago, she completed her qualifications and has diligently pursued best practice ever since. As a result the Council was able to adopt the Power of Competence. We are greatly in her debt.

Sadly, she has now decided to leave us to pursue other things and she will be very hard to replace.

We wish her well and thank her sincerely for all she has done for the Parish.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Myers', with a stylized, cursive script.

Frank Myers MBE - Chairman of the Parish Council 28/03/18