

# Berkswell Parish Council – Parish Assembly 19 May 2016

## **Minutes of the Berkswell Parish Assembly, held in the Reading Room, Berkswell on 19 May 2016 at 8.00pm**

1. **Attendance** – A total of 56 (including the Chairman (Andrew Burrow) and Clerk) were in attendance.
2. **Apologies** - Kay Howles, Ken Allsop, Caroline Spelman
3. **Chairman's Report** – The chairman highlighted the key actions impacting the community that the Parish Council had undertaken during the year 2015/16
  - a. Aircraft Noise – noise survey in Riddings Hill
  - b. Speeding in Balsall Common – nothing had been done directly to address speeding, however, Cllr Cambage is working on possible traffic calming measures on Meeting House Lane & Sunny Side Lane
  - c. Solar farms – The Parish Council had objected to 2 proposed solar farm developments both of which had been rejected by the Planning Authority
  - d. Traffic calming in Berkswell – The Parish Council had agreed to pursue a traffic calming project in Berkswell village. The Council had agreed to provide £5k towards the cost of the project
  - e. Station waiting room – The problem of access to the north bound waiting room had been resolved, thanks to Cllr Bell
  - f. Petitioning re HS2 – Petitions had been submitted to both the House of Commons and House of Lords, with little impact to date. The HoL petition is expected to be heard in June 2016.
  - g. Grants Policy – The Parish Council had developed a Grants policy (available on the Parish Council website) which will be applied to all future grant applications
4. **Approval of Minutes of Parish Assembly of 26 March 2015** – Subject to minor changes the Chairman (Andrew Burrow) signed the minutes as a true record.
5. **Discussion of issues of interest raised by Electors attending the Assembly.**

### **Parish Council Current Position and Priorities**

**Councillors** - The chairman introduced the Parish Councillors by name; Dinah Edwards (co-opted on 18 June 2015), Alison Cambage, Richard Lloyd, Richard Drake (Co-opted on 15 October 2015), Don Hitchcock, Andrew Burrow (Chairman), Kay Howles (absent).

**Parish Council Finance** – Cllr Burrow reported that the 2016/17 precept was 6.5% less than the previous year, the current year's budget was c.£61,000, and the Precept was set at £49,000. The Council had £99,000 in the bank at the end of 2015/16. The Council had agreed a Reserves Policy which recognised that it is good practice to have a buffer of around 1 years budget with the balance being earmarked for key matters such as HS2, Traffic Calming, Solihull Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Development Plan

**New Parish Clerk** – Cllr Burrow introduced the new Parish Clerk, Richard Wilson, who was appointed in June 2015.

**Parish Council Internal audit** – Cllr Burrow commented that the 2015/16 internal audit report was very positive. The accounts were verified and the Council was complemented on its openness.

**Parish Council Value for Money** – Cllr Burrow reported that the Council make every effort to keep administrative costs down, Cllrs support the clerk and use volunteers on projects where possible. The Council had recently negotiated a new grass mowing contract and all key procedures have been updated.

**On-going Issues Facing the Parish Council** – Cllr Burrow summarised the key issues currently facing the Council, as follows:

- Stability of IT – the clerk is working on the stability and development of IT equipment and applications including the Council’s email account and website
- Land & Assets – It has come to light that no Parish Council land has been Registered. Cllr Edwards and the Clerk are working on the systematic registration of land and assets.
- Churchyard Mowing – the current arrangement is that the Council share the cost of mowing the churchyard with the Church. The Council and Church are looking to tender for a new a new contract to commence in 2017/18
- Museum Closure – the Museum committee have given formal notice to the Parish Council that the museum is to close. Under the museum constitution, the committee will make best efforts to disposed of exhibits (including the return of loaned items). All remaining exhibits after 30 June 2016 will become the responsibility of the Parish Council. The Council has agreed a procedure for the disposal of all remaining exhibits after that date.
- Risk assessments – the Council will embark on risk assessments for all Council land and assets (including trees).
- The Spinney – a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to clear under brush, prune trees and shrubs, and replaced fences and gates in the spinney. Work will be on-going as required.
- The Pound – the area has been significantly improved and will be maintained to this standard going forward.
- Spinney car park – the area. Has been cleared and will be maintained going forward.
- Balsall Common – the Council has given financial support to the Berkswell Society re planting projects
- Grants: Grants had been made to Heart of England School, Balsall & Berkswell Hornets Football Club, the Balsall & Berkswell Jubilee project, and the 53<sup>rd</sup> Coventry Scout hut redevelopment.
- NDP – Cllr Burrow reported that the process had been very slow, and had been overtaken by the Solihull plan review. The following are under consideration as part of the NDP process:
  - Car parking in Balsall Common - a survey has been conducted.
  - Speed limits in BC centre – not yet been addressed by NDP process.
  - Footpath between Balsall Common and Berkswell village
  - Levy on new housebuilders – this could result in money to the Parish Council which could be spent on infrastructure projects.
  - Berkswell Parish Council is keen to protect the green belt.
  - A Balsall Common by-pass is back on the SMBC agenda with houses behind Meeting House Lane.

- Berkswell Parish Council has proposed a potential new settlement in the North of the Parish
- Berkswell Parish Council is attempting to get a joint position with Balsall Parish Council. This is proving to be quite difficult.

**Open Forum (comments recorded in the order they were raised)**

A resident questioned whether the construction of HS2 would impact on any proposed housing development – would people want to buy with such disruption?

Cllr David Bell provided the following perspective from a SMBC standpoint:

- a CPO had been considered by SMBC regarding the Partco Building in Balsall Common. However, the site owners have said they will develop the site themselves.
- The SMBC Local Plan is aiming to provide between 6,000 to 8,000 additional houses in rural areas. In Cllr Bell's view there needs to be improvements to infrastructure before housing is approved. The by-pass would be a quick way to give access for new housing

A resident commented that land behind Barratt's lane was subject to a Planning enquiry. SMBC had previously objected to proposals to build on this land stating that there needed to be a gap between Solihull and Coventry.

Cllr Lloyd commented that it took many years to get the by-pass off the map but it has come back very quickly. Apparently HS2 are now proposing a dual carriageway from Stoneleigh through to the A45. In the event that HS2 doesn't happen the route will still be available for a dual carriageway.

A resident confirmed there was talk of connecting the A46 (Kenilworth) with the A45 (Cornets End) and asked "How do we get to the bottom of what is actually being worked on"? Cllr Bell has made enquiries and not got very far.

Cllr Bell commented that there is a housing quota from Central Government to local authorities. The reality is that if SMBC doesn't make plans for meeting the quota quickly, then there is a risk that the government will impose plans.

Cllr Hitchcock commented that there have been 9 routes proposed for a by-pass over the years (mainly on the western side of Balsall Common). None were planned to go through Berkswell but now roads and rail might go through Berkswell Parish.

Archie Taylor (Burton Green) commented he was aware of a plan for a road from the A46 to the A45 to by-pass Warwick University but he had been unable to obtain clarification of the plans. He commented that the Greenbelt is not being respected as need to build houses is taking precedence.

Cllr Burrow asked for a show of hands in favour of a by-pass around Balsall Common. There was a clear majority in favour of not building a by-pass

Cllr Burrow asked for a show of hands in favour of building houses behind Meeting House Lane. There was a clear majority in favour of not building any houses in this location.

Cllr Burrow asked for a show of hands in favour of a new settlement on reclaimed land in the North of Parish. There were 29 in favour and 7 against.

It was reported that developers had recently (3 years ago) bought the land behind Station Road and bordering Meeting House Lane with the intention to build houses.

A resident commented on the need to take action with SMBC who are apparently just doing what the government is telling them. He asked, "Is this a fight worth fighting?" And stated that the community should be challenging SMBC on matters such as HS2, Airport & Housing.

Cllr Lloyd commented that the Parish Council or members of the community could ask for a poll on local matters any time we want. A Parish Assembly can be convened at any time, but would need proper notice and an agenda.

Also the NDP will result in a referendum.

A resident expressed concern that Balsall and Berkswell Parish Councils need to agree on a common NDP but that the SMBC plan will supersede anything in the NDP. He asked, "How can the two PCs be made to work together?" (heads of terms approach perhaps).

Cllr Bell reported that 400+ sites have been included in the Solihull local plan. He advised that Parish Councils must make positive suggestions to SMBC as well as challenging other proposals.

A resident suggested "Why not develop the greenbelt for recreation not for housing?".

Cllr Hitchcock commented that Berkswell Parish Council are members of the Marsh Lane Reserve and that residents should be encouraged to take advantage of it. Cllr Hitchcock expressed concerns that this area may die because of over development.

A resident commented that the community should put forward positive suggestions in a balanced way.

Keith Tindall (Chairman of NDP) commented that it was a difficult balancing act working on a joint NDP as the committee can't focus on one parish or the other. He acknowledged the good turnout in Berkswell at this meeting and that Balsall PC need to do the same. He emphasised that residents must make their feelings and views known by attending NDP Committee meetings, respond to surveys etc.

There was a general view from the assembly that they didn't know that the public can attend NDP committee meetings. Cllr Burrow clarified that the meeting dates were on the Parish Website.

Graham Lock commented that the Berkswell Society and Residents Association are including NDP meetings details in their newsletters. He re-emphasised that residents must start contributing to NDP process.

It was suggested that it would be worthwhile doing a complete survey of residents' attitudes to key issues. Cllr Burrow commented that SMBC won't disclose specific sites under consideration which makes it hard to consult.

Keith Tindall re-emphasised the challenge facing the NDP committee in that very few NDPs cross parishes and also the Solihull Plan process is delaying matters. He informed the Assembly that the committee had a Consultant advising on the NDP process but not on specific content.

Cllr Bell commented that he thinks SMBC will consult on options. He reminded the Assembly that Cllr Ian Courts has been a supporter of green belt in the past. Cllr Bell speculated that SMBC may say how many new houses should be built in Balsall Common and let the Parishes sort out where.

Cllr Burrow commented that there will be CIL money arising from new building which would be available for new infrastructure. Keith Tindall commented that CIL money wouldn't be sufficient for large scale projects such as new schools etc.

Cllr Burrow commented, "we can fight proposals or we can work out where our share will go". He asked which approach people would favour. Graham Lock asked what the mechanism is for measuring community support for any scheme? Cllr Burrow replied that the community would have to come up with a local policy and get SMBC to agree to a process.

A resident asked if the area would be dictated to provide a specified number of houses or bedrooms? Cllr Burrow stated that the SMBC Plan quotes the number of houses and that the NDP could look at the make-up (types) of those houses. Cllr Bell commented that 40% of new houses must be 'affordable'.

A resident asked what will new residents do in the area?

A resident commented on a map showing travelling times around the region.

A resident expressed amazement that Cllr Bell is excluded from details of things that matter so much to the area. Cllr Bell responded that he is not in the SMBC Cabinet and it is the Cabinet who makes the decisions. He stated that SMBC have a poor record for house building which is why the government is applying more pressure.

It was suggested that local papers might to run a campaign for the Balsall Common area? Cllr Burrow restated his view that the issue is about Berkswell should be influencing what happens rather than have something imposed. He also stated that it was a fallacy that local schools can't take more local pupils as a high proportion come from outside the area so the catchment area could be redrawn.

It was suggested that Berkswell is as much Coventry centric as it is Solihull centric and did SMBC recognise this? Cllr Burrow commented that Berkswell being aligned with Coventry might not work to Berkswell's favour.

The assembly agreed that the residents are brave enough to determine where the Basall Common allocation should be located. The genesis of this is being assembled by the NDP Committee.

Cllr Burrow asked for a show of hands on the following:

- Who would like Solihull to take the decision with Berkswell resident's input = no one was in favour
- Who would like NDP to take the decision = the majority of the Assembly was in favour

A resident commented that the prospect of so many new houses is dreadful and the residents are used to have the Meriden Gap which is precious. There are areas of great natural beauty and this should impact any decision regarding new housing developments.

Cllr Hitchcock commented that he didn't think the majority of residents know what we do have by way of natural assets. He questioned how do we live up to the changing face of society?

A resident suggested the need for a long handled litter pick to clear up around Barratt's lane. Cllr Burrow agreed to put this request on Parish Council Agenda

A resident (Barratts lane) commented that broadband is utterly dire as is mobile phone reception and asked what people felt about connectivity in this village? Cllr Bell agreed to look at this. Others suggested that Back lane and Berkswell village are problem areas.

A resident commented on speeding in Station Road, the lack of enforcement of parking on verges and that police officers are rarely seen in the village.

Others agreed that Parking on pavements is a problem in Balsall Common. Cllr Burrow commented that the Council could make this illegal and subject to a fine in the way Dickens Heath had. The consensus of the Assembly seemed to be that a total ban on parking on pavements is not workable and that people need to be sensible about the matter.

Cllr Lloyd commented that the Parish needs an opportunity to have a say over whether a West Midland Combined Authority is wanted.

The meeting closed 10:20pm