

## **Berkswell Parish Council**

### Time to have your say

On Thursday May 8<sup>th</sup> in the Reading Room, the Parish Council hosts the Annual Parish Assembly. This is not a Council meeting but a meeting of residents of the Parish. Since 2012 we have held this meeting 'in the round' to help facilitate the exchange of ideas and views to provide direction for the Parish Council for the next 12 months. It's your annual meeting where you can help set the priorities for the Council. So do please come along and contribute or at least listen to the issues of most concern to fellow residents.

Last year we combined the evening with the AGM of the Berkswell Society, which proved a great success. Therefore we will repeat this format and are pleased to learn that the Berkswell Society have secured guest speakers from the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). Given the seemingly relentless threat to our little pocket of rural England the choice of presentation is highly relevant.

The AGM starts at 7-45 and after a short refreshment break will be followed by the Annual Parish Assembly, so do please come along for an enjoyable social evening.

The Parish Council meets again formally a week later on the 15<sup>th</sup> May in the Jubilee Centre, Balsall Common. At this meeting we review our processes and procedures, as well as electing members of committees and our chairman. As this is also an ordinary meeting of the council we'll have a full agenda. In May 2015, the Parish will need to elect a new Council which it does every 5 years and obviously coincides with the general election.

### Solar threat abated?

Having seen two proposals recently for large solar farms in the Parish, residents naturally have feared that this represents a significant new threat to our fragile community. An industrialisation of our landscape - just what we don't want or need. However there is some hope...

In early April the Government unveiled a new solar power roof strategy which contains proposals to turn the Government estate as well as factories, supermarkets and car parks into "solar hubs". In the statement Energy Minister Greg Barker *'stressed that the Coalition was keen to "move the emphasis for growth away from large solar farms and instead focus on opening up the solar market for the UK's estimated 250,000 hectares of south-facing commercial rooftops". Ministers said new solar installations will need to be appropriately sited, give proper weight to environmental considerations such as landscape, heritage and local amenity, and provide opportunities for communities to influence decisions that affect them. The Government has voiced concern that large-scale, ground-mounted solar deployment has been much stronger than anticipated. The boom in "solar farms" has had impacts on visual amenity, ministers acknowledged.'*

Given that we have the NEC, the Airport, Birmingham International Station and the prospect of the new HS2 station up the road from us, our hope is that SMBC see the potential for a "solar hub" away from working greenbelt farmland.

### HS2 petitioning timetable announced

From 28<sup>th</sup> April residents have just 3 weeks to submit your petitions to fight to lessen the worst impacts of HS2. By the time you read this article we will have hosted our own “how to petition” event in Balsall Common in cooperation with Balsall Parish Council and we will be well advanced with the Parish Council’s petitioning process. This initial phase is very much a matter of staking the ground over which we are prepared to fight, so much more work will need to be undertaken once our petitions are lodged. Once we enter the committee stage we will have to put our arguments and case to a panel of MP’s. No-one yet knows how long this will take – but it won’t be quick and will certainly not be simple. Rest assured though that your Council is resolved to fight for the best possible outcome for Berkswell Parish.

#### Clerk’s “open house”

Following the successful trial in March of “open house” session in the Village Stores’ Tea Room, our Clerk Sharon Butterworth, will continue to be available for residents to meet and raise issues with until the end of May. Sharon will work from the Tea Room on Mondays (apart from Bank Holidays) from 10-12 and from the Library in Balsall Common on Tuesdays at the same time.

#### Council vacancy

Following the resignation of Ken Meeson we have a further vacancy for a Councillor. If you are interested in working on volunteer basis on behalf of the community and helping to preserve and enhance what we all hold dear, please get in touch with Sharon for more information. I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Ken for his many years’ service on the Council (including chairmanship) and to wish him well for the future.

We hope to see you on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May for our Parish Assembly, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May for our Annual Council meeting. Please keep any eye on our notice boards for more details of both meetings.

Graham Lock  
Chairman