

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 14th April 2015

- 1 Chair: Mr George Glaze, Chair of Eckington Parish Council.
- 2 Present: 7 Parish Councillors and 3 electors.
- 3 Apologies: Apologies received from Cllr Cameron.
4. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 01 April 2014: Cllr Smith proposed, and was seconded by Cllr Williamson, that the minutes were a true record of the meeting. All present agreed, and they were duly signed by the Chair.
5. Parish Council Report: The Chair gave the following report:

A Parish Council is the first level of elected representation and is close to the community it serves. Eckington Parish Council consists of nine elected councillors, all volunteers, a Parish Clerk and a Parish Lengthsman.

The Parish Council has an overall responsibility for the well being of the local neighbourhood and this may be summarised as:-

Representing the local community;
Delivering services to meet local needs;
Striving to improve quality of life in the parish.

To meet this responsibility the Parish Council continues to have at least one representative on each of the main village committees and regularly sends Councillors to other appropriate local Government or Council meetings. Thus the Council is informed on both local and wider issues.

Following adoption of the Localism Act 2011, the reduction in both Central Government and County Council funding the work of the Parish Council has not only increased but become much more onerous.

Some of the work done over the last year includes the following.

The Council has considered and commented on 38 **planning applications**. The work of Cllr Bainbridge in preparing briefs, often including photographs has been invaluable when considering applications, some of which have been contentious. I will return to this issue later.

The Council is responsible for maintenance of the **Cemetery and Churchyard**. This routinely includes grass cutting, conducting an annual safety inspection of the gravestones and making good any damage. This year to visually enhance the cemetery overhanging trees along the northern boundary have been cut back, the ground levelled and reseeded.

Maintaining the **War Memorial** is also an important Council responsibility. We are indebted to Cllr Wilkes for his continual work in keeping the memorial to such a high standard throughout the year.

The **allotments**, located behind the Recreation ground are also managed by the Parish Council. Ten plots are available and all are rented. There is a current waiting list of two.

Footpaths are also an important leisure facility that the Parish Council values highly. They are regularly walked by the Footpath Officer to ensure they are well maintained. The Modification Orders for the footpaths at Hammock Lane and Piercing Lane

continue to follow due process. A site visit by the Inspector is planned for 16th April, following which it is hoped there will be a speedy conclusion to this saga.

The Parish Council continues to support the **Recreation Centre** with an annual grant to assist with running costs of this valuable community asset. The past year has also seen developments to the **Recreation Ground** funded by a Section 106 grant from the Hanford Drive development. These improvements include reorganisation of the play area with new equipment purchased and safety enhanced, an enlarged parking area with better access. Seating and tables have been added to the spinney adjacent to the railway line.

Another source of funding for community projects is **New Homes Bonus**. This is paid via Wychavon District Council from monies received from Central Government and is allocated to projects that will benefit the community. Unfortunately, with the approaching General Election the future of this income source is uncertain and there is a pause in processing applications. However during the last year the Parish Council has applied for and been awarded some £31 000 that will be used for the Village Hall renovation and to purchase new equipment for Eckington U5's.

Speeding traffic is a perennial problem in most rural villages and Eckington is no exception. The Parish Council continues to utilise the VASS sign as a reminder and has lobbied the Safer Roads Partnership to continue with speed enforcement. Unfortunately recorded average speeds have reduced to such an extent that SRP no longer consider enforcement appropriate. Your Parish Council is unhappy with this conclusion and is therefore investigating Community Speed Watch as a way to ensure continued speed monitoring. A request for volunteers has been issued and to-date 6 have come forward.

The reduced Highways maintenance schedule has inevitably led to some deterioration in roads and footways. The Council continues to press Highways both directly and via our County Councillor to address these issues.

The Council also supports the village entry into the **Parish Games**. Thanks go to Mr Colin Chapman for organising the event. Unfortunately we were not able to three peat our success this year but came second.

I promised to return to the question of contentious planning applications. In early summer 2014 the village faced a potential addition of 28 houses behind Roman Meadow and some 70 buildings behind Eckington Bank. This would have seen a 20% increase in village dwellings at a stroke. As a direct result of these applications the Parish Council was approached by a concerned group of villagers to develop a Neighbourhood Plan.

Community support was gained for this project at an open meeting in August. This led to the formation of a steering group (including four councillors) that enthusiastically set about what has developed in to an onerous task, despite professional guidance. Never the less under the chairmanship of Mr Ian Pickford and with assistance from WDC the plan is developing well. Much evidence has been gathered, household and housing surveys have been conducted. Results to-date have been published on the ENP website. A public meeting is planned for 16th May to share and discuss with the community the results obtained to date.

While much still remains to be done the Steering Committee still believe the plan can be delivered for approval before year end.

I would to take this opportunity to thank all Councillors for their time and commitment in dealing with Council matters, our clerk, Louise for her attention to detail and guiding the Council through difficult decisions. Also thanks to our lengthsman Phillip for keeping the village spick, span and safe.

Finally a reminder that your Parish Council is always pleased to hear from villagers so please come to a Council meeting or contact any of the councillors to discuss any pertinent matters.

6. Other Issues

A query was received by an elector present relating to the 6% increase in Parish Council Tax. It was explained that this was due to the fact that 2015 is an election year, and as such the Parish Council must prepare for the fact that it may have a contested election, and therefore payment in the region of £1,000 would be required by the District Council.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 7.15pm.