

Chairman's Annual Report for 2016-17
On the activities of Walford Parish Council
For The Annual Parish Meeting on 10th May 2017
At Walford Village Hall @ 7.30pm



APPOINTMENTS:

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

Finance Committee: Chairman: Shane Carlson. Other members: Frank Myers, Karen Chinn, Simeon Cole, Dave Berry, Heather Evans.

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 was appointed as leader of the Steering Group when Angus McIntosh stepped down, due to work commitments. Other Members: Frank Myers, Dave Berry, Luke Freeman, Shane Carlson. Another parishioner is also a member.

Kerne Bridge Canoe Launch Working Group: Simeon Cole, Eric Drummond, Luke Freeman, Frank Myers, Dave Berry, Shane Carlson, Murray Alston

Forest Green Working Group: Although the Steering Group was disbanded, maintenance continues at the site.

Walford Links Steering Group: Was disbanded; see further information below on Walford Links.

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 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.

Insurance Provision: Came and Company Parish Council Insurance.

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

New Ward Councillor: Paul Newman.

Changes within the Parish Council:

In March 2017 Shane Carlson stepped down as Finance Committee Chair and member of the Finance Committee and Karen Chinn was appointed Chair in his place. Angus McIntosh was appointed as a new member of the Finance Committee.

Council Meetings:

Following the decision of the Parish Council to hold meetings every 6 weeks, rather than once a month, there were 8 scheduled council meetings during the year, with no meeting held in August or December.

There was one additional unscheduled Parish Council meeting held to consider a planning application.

Representatives of the West Mercia Constabulary and our Localities Steward attended some of the meetings; Ward Cllr Paul Newman attended all the meetings.

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. A further Finance committee meeting was held in early January 2017 to finalise the budget for calculating the precept.

Training and Courses:

HALC (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils) provided regular information on training courses, which Parish Councillors attend as necessary.

THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING: (Held on 13th April 2016)

Presentations from:

Andrew Blake – Wye Valley AONB

Diane Pearson – West Midlands Ambulance Service

Community Response Trainer: Demonstration on using a defibrillator.

There was a Q&A session at the end of each presentation.

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, during which the following topics were raised and discussed:

SUMMARY OF PARISH COUNCIL BUSINESS CONDUCTED DURING THE YEAR

(A) National and County Business:

Consultations: All relevant consultations received via Herefordshire Council were responded to by the Parish Council.

Superfast Broadband: The Parish Council has continued to follow developments and can report the following: **Phase 2 of the Fastershire rollout of faster broadband across Herefordshire and Gloucestershire** will be based around four areas (area 1, 2, 3(A-E) and 4) and will comprise of premises that were not covered by Phase 1 or commercial rollout. It is anticipated that we will sign a contract for these areas by March 2017. It has recently been reported that a contract has been entered into with Gigaclear **Area 3 has been subdivided into five smaller areas: Area 3A:** Cheltenham and Gloucester. **Area 3B:** Hereford. **Area 3C:** South Herefordshire and Gloucestershire (west of the Severn). **Area 3D:** North Gloucestershire. **Area 3E:** South Gloucestershire. **Area 4:** North Herefordshire.

How Fastershire is doing:

96,516 Fast homes and businesses

702 Kilometres of fibre laid

99 exchange areas now live

407 cabinets now live

Each area will go through its own consultation and procurement process to secure a supplier to carry out the deployment.

Area 3(A-E) and 4: The procurement process to select a supplier to deliver area 3 and 4 launched on Monday 19 September.

(B) Parish Council Internal Business

1. Minor Road Maintenance Scheme (Lengthsman)

The scheme was managed by Cllr Simeon Cole. Mr Gerald Green of Hope Mansell, who has been our Lengthsman for many years, stepped down due to other work commitments and Terry Griffiths was appointed as our new Lengthsman. Terry also carries out Lengthsman work for several other Parishes and is a very experienced Lengthsman, who comes with glowing references from Ross Town and Whitchurch and Ganarew councils. 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 has cut grant funding for this scheme to only 25% of previous levels in 2017-18, with a view to withdrawing the grant 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. As part of the new contract for 2017-18 with Herefordshire Council, the Parish Council will have to put forward 60% towards Lengthsman maintenance, with the other 40% being provided by Herefordshire Council.

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 regularly attends Parish Council meetings, 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 Enhanced Lengthsman Scheme for 2017-18.

HGV Signs: Further signs to re-direct HGVs have been authorised by the Parish Council and will be installed at the top of Howle Hill, at the junction with Church Lane, in the near future.

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 enthusiastic parishioners have been really helpful in keeping their local paths useable, & 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: Moving forward in to next year's budget, unlike the Lengthsman Scheme, Herefordshire Council will maintain 100% of grant funding for this scheme in, 2017-18 and 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 has, fortunately, been no call for their input in the last year.

(C) PARISH PROJECTS:

(1) Bishopswood Public WCs: The Parish Council kept the public WCs at Bishopswood open during the last year, with a minimal maintenance schedule, kindly provided by EC Drummond and Sons; a deep clean was carried out in March 2016, in order to get the facilities ready for the new season. However, it became clear that a much more regular cleaning regime was necessary to keep the WCs in a condition that was safe for public use and because the Parish Council did not have the budget for this significant financial outlay, the decision was taken to close the WCs until a solution could be reached. It is hoped, that following the appointment of Riversea Holdings as preferred partners in the management of the canoe launch site, that it will not be long before these important facilities are re-opened for the public.

(2) The Neighbourhood Plan: Once the Herefordshire Council Core Strategy had been formally adopted, work on the Neighbourhood Plan started again. 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 this year will be 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; it is hoped that public attendance will reflect the interest that local residents have in this important plan for Walford Parish. **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. If you wish to help or have any queries, please contact the Steering Group: Neighbourhoodplan@walford-pc.org.uk.

(3) The proposals for a linked cycle way from Kerne Bridge to Walford were discussed in council and the following decision was reached: 'In light of ongoing and active projects being undertaken by Walford Parish Council and in consideration of the significant amount of input necessary to pursue and realise the aims of Walford Links, The Parish Council decided that it does not currently have the background resources / support required to bring this project to a conclusion. It is therefore proposed that the Walford Links project should be postponed for the time being.'

(4) The Kerne Bridge Canoe Launch: In 2014, 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 started to engage in work 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 has been approved by the Parish Council and appointed: Riversea Holdings will invest in the facilities and work with the Parish Council in order to achieve the most satisfactory outcome and share in the success of the venture. This management regime will include investment in improving the site, a revised and safer traffic flow regime, possible upkeep of the toilets (subject to negotiation of satisfactory arrangements), extended provision of refreshments for visitors and above all a management approach which is aimed at benefitting all users. These enhancements will be paid for by way of a charge per canoe launched or landed at the site and by pay and display parking arrangements.

(5) The Community Support Scheme: We are very pleased to report significant progress:

Your Council pursued the possibility of establishing The Community Support Scheme (previously known as The Village Warden Scheme' for a number of years and following considerable effort on the part of our Chairman and Councillors Dave Berry and Sophie Hurley, matched grant funding was secured from Herefordshire Council's Wellbeing Innovation Fund and has been in place since April 2017, to support the scheme. This funding ended on 31st March 2017, but efforts are being made to source further funding for 2017-18. Until this funding has been secured, and in light of the clear success of the project in supporting the vulnerable within our community, the Parish Council voted to increase the precept in 2017-18, in order to keep this vitally important scheme going. Regular coffee mornings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at St Michael and All Angels Church Walford, to which volunteers and clients are welcome.

'Prevention is better than cure A stitch in time saves nine Care closer to home' These are all expressions with which we are familiar, but how often do we think about them in relation to our friends and neighbours around us? There is plenty of evidence that early intervention can alleviate many of the problems which face us all from time to time, but so often in our busy lives we walk on by and don't recognise the early signs of people in need. The bereaved relative suddenly facing loneliness, the family deprived of their Mum who has had to go into hospital, the normally able person who, for some reason, cannot get into town to shop, the simple task which is proving difficult for someone. There are many different reasons where a simple helping hand or even just thoughtful intervention can make a difference. So at Walford Parish Council, with fantastic grant support from the Wellbeing Innovation Fund, we have been running The Walford Community Support Scheme. Staffed by a paid coordinator and delivered by a team of volunteers, we are now in a position to receive requests for help. Anybody who lives in the Parish who feels in need or is aware of someone in need can make an approach and seek help from us. Explanatory leaflets are available in public places and there are cards to keep in your wallet so that if you live away from this area you will know who to call if, after perhaps a telephone call, you are uneasy about the wellbeing of your loved one who lives here. We have a good team of volunteers but can never have too many, so, if you are motivated to help us, please make contact and join the list. The duties will not be onerous but just one stitch, put in by you, may save the eight which may have had to follow. Not only will you have provided help to those in need but you will also feel the sense of personal reward which goes with it. And, of course, you will feel safer in the knowledge that if ever you are in need there will be a powerful help network around you.

(6) 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. MF Freeman provided manpower and machinery to clear the worst of the overgrowth last year, leaving selected areas for the benefit of local wildlife and has kindly offered to assist again, when necessary.

(7) War Memorials: In 2016, the Parish Council was awarded a 75% grant for the cleaning and re-pointing of Bishopswood War Memorial and the work was carried out by IMI, to a very high standard. Both War Memorials Trust and many local residents have given very positive feedback on the work. A new limestone plaque is being made by Ursells of Ross, to bear a copy of the inscription from the front face of Walford War Memorial, which has become largely illegible. Listed Building consent is being applied for and the proposal has been approved by both War Memorials Trust and the Conservation Officer at Herefordshire Council.

(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: Since a handover in responsibility for administration of the official parish website, www.walfordpc.org.uk took place; 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 managed by Councillor Shane Carlson.

7. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

During the year the Parish Council returned observations to Hereford Council on 35 separate planning applications.

(E) 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 also receive important contributions via Herefordshire Council for maintenance of the rights of way and the Lengthsman Scheme.

Supporting specific Parish Projects arising out of the Parish Plan has also been a key aim of the Council; we have ensured we maintain adequate provision within our reserves to respond in a timely fashion to such initiatives, such as management of the canoe launch site at Kerne Bridge, the Community Support scheme, maintenance of War Memorials and the public WCs at Bishopswood. We also have to be mindful that a by-election could occur which may require funding.

As you are no doubt aware, local government budgets are currently under significant pressure again this year as further savings are required to be made versus the ongoing challenge of providing a broad range of services to our communities.

Against this backdrop, Walford Parish Council evaluated what services it currently provides, what monies (including grants) are and will be available this fiscal year and then, as a consequence, what services it wishes to continue and/or cease to provide going forward. In addition, the Walford Parish Council Finance Committee considered what reserves could be appropriately drawn upon to cushion any resulting impact to local residents.

We believe that, in common with resident opinion received and ongoing demand, Walford Parish Council should continue to provide (at the very least) the following core services to the same level as they have been this year – namely;

- All maintenance to footpaths, rights of way etc.
- All maintenance of culverts, ditches etc.
- The provision of the Community Support Programme

Unless locked into the 2017/18 budget as planned and scheduled funded activity – no other out-of-cycle expenditure would be included in our budget for this year in order to keep the precept impact to an absolute minimum. Anything new would have to wait until included within the next budget year 2018/19.

The net impact of this review meant that (after expected remaining reserves were taken into consideration) there was an approximate £9,000 short-fall that required to be covered. This therefore meant an increase to £40.40 per typical Band D household in 2017/18 as opposed to £26.74 in 2016/17. This increase was presented to full council by the Finance Committee and was (in addition to the entire FY17/18 budget) accepted unanimously.

As you appreciate, we face another challenging year ahead and need to ensure that we continue to provide positive value for money for all Walford residents by focusing our time, effort, attention and your money in the right areas.

HMRC: The Council has reported and made payments to HMRC for PAYE and NI, as required by legislation. Payroll and Pensions management has been handed over to an external service provider; Autela Group will now administer these aspects of Parish Council business, enabling The Clerk to focus on providing support for the Parish Council and community projects.

The Parish Clerk: I would like to extend our thanks to Catherine for another year of diligent stewardship as she works tirelessly to keep the Council on track. The work of Parish Councils is carefully regulated within a legal framework and Catherine has studiously pursued her training and development since joining us so that we receive top class advice. We also work closely with The Herefordshire Association of Local Councils and their Chief Executive Lynda Wilcox has offered valued support as we have embarked upon the ambitious plans described in this report. Our thanks go to her.



Frank Myers MBE - Chairman of the Parish Council 10/05/17