

LOWER PENN PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

4 APRIL 2019

PRESENT:

Councillors R Reade – Chairman
J Lewis
V Merrick
R Waltho
Mrs K Williams
County Cllr Mrs V Wilson
Sgt. J Dorrington – Staffs Police

Minute No		Action
1/19	APOLOGIES Received from Cllr Brown and Cllr Ms A Williams	
2/19	MATTERS ARISING None recorded	
3/19	REPORTS	
Community Safety 2018/19	<p>Cllr Mrs Williams gave her Report as follows:</p> <p>The Speedwatch Team have been out during 2018 on numerous occasions and varying locations within our area. Due to my current personal situation, Mr Keith Dunton has taken over the organisation of the Team and I would like to thank him on behalf of myself and the Parish Council for this. Based on this, Keith has been unable to provide the information I would normally report on in respect of total number of cars and speeding cars, but these can be advised at a later date.</p> <p>We have had 3 new team members join, who are now fully trained and operational.</p> <p>Keith has also been instrumental in organising Speedwatch signs and I am advised that these have now been erected in Langley Road, Penstone Lane, Orton Lane and Radford Lane. Keith has organised the funding for the signs and again I would like to say a big thank you to him.</p> <p>CSW is becoming very prominent in all areas, thanks to the excellent work of Michelle Shaker, the Community Engagement Co-ordinator. She arranged a CSW Engagement Meeting on 2 February 2019 at the Police HQ in Stafford which was attended by 2 of our members, Keith Dunton and Sue Callear. The guest speaker was the Chief Constable, Gareth Morgan. The turnout was reported to be excellent, and the next meeting scheduled for February 2020, again with a guest speaker, will be advised in due course. During the meeting, networking with other Speedwatch Groups was encouraged and some of the following issues were discussed:</p> <p>2017 – Great Britain had 1793 road fatalities – this equates to 5 deaths per day.</p>	

Within the South Staffordshire areas, we have 11 CSW groups, with the potential for another 3. Warning letters being sent out have increased as follows:

2017 – 1st letters - 5720

2018 – 1st letters - 8191

2017 – 2nd letters - 189

2018 – 2nd letters - 482

2017 – Home visits - 13

2018 – Home visits - 54

These increases are due to the increase of hours at the roadside by our volunteers:

2017 - 749 hours

2018 - 934 hours

Number of active volunteers:

2017 - 251

2018 - 327

We are also now allowed to report any driver using a mobile phone and warning letters are sent out for this.

So, from this you can see that Speedwatch is now a very prominent feature for speeding within our villages and many thanks go to all our volunteers – long may this continue!

Police Report

Cllr Merrick said that he is in regular contact with officers, both locally and at Police HQ, and reports on any current issues affecting our Parish. He said that ideally more PC's 'on the ground' would be a positive advantage and that he hoped to see a more regular attendance from PCSO's at Parish Council Meetings, work and shift patterns permitting. However, he was pleased to say that regular monthly crime reports are received and circulated. He thanked Staffordshire Police for their involvement with the issue of HGV's travelling through restricted locations and the Speedwatch Team for their continued hard work in resolving the ongoing speeding problems. He also said that the monitoring of the canal system and Railway Walk has improved this year due to the presence of more bailiffs. He then introduced Sgt. J Dorrington to the Meeting.

Sgt. Dorrington introduced himself as being one of three Sergeants covering the South Staffordshire area and apologised for the lack of police presence at Parish Council Meetings over the past few months.

He gave details of crime figures for last year and this year and said that although there had been an overall decrease of 3.4% in crimes reported, there had been an increase in vehicle crime in South Staffordshire.

Lower Penn (1) – decrease of 28% on previous year (65 less reported crimes)

Lower Penn (2) – decrease of 14% (18 less reported crimes)

He said that six specials are deployed one day a week to cover and focus on Himley, Wombourne, Springhill and local public houses.

Antisocial Behaviour – a decrease of 18% in South Staffordshire but a 2% increase in Lower Penn (1) (66 reported against 65 previous year).

Sgt Dorrington also gave information on the increase in car thefts and gave advice on how to avoid this happening.

He said that the Police had received a number of complaints from the Nursery site owners and residents forcefully disputed these claims and said that they have always acted fairly and followed approved procedures and correct legal channels. Residents asked if more police presence could be available around this particular

site to monitor the situation.

Planning Report

No Report available.

Victory Hall Report

The Chairman presented his report as follows:

The Hall is an integral part of the village and the financial support from the Parish Council is paramount in ensuring its financial viability and we look forward to the Council's continued support. The Hall is also reliant on the regular bookings from the Drama and Art Groups and other bookings for social and party events remain buoyant.

A copy of the accounts for the year ending December 2018 will be made available for the Parish Council.

The most significant change that has occurred during the past year is the establishment of the Lower Penn Parish Council as Trustees of the Hall, the rationale and details of which have been minuted by the Parish Council. The daily running of the Hall still remains the responsibility of the Management Committee, who recently held a meeting to discuss the options for the future of the Hall, including:

1. Demolish and rebuild – this was dismissed as financially unacceptable
2. Reroofing and major structural improvements – concerns that any major works on the structure could have disastrous consequences
3. Patch and Repair – this was agreed

A priority list of maintenance was drawn up with the first work being to ensure that the building is weather-proof which includes the front entrance, the roof and guttering - some of this work has already been started.

Regular reports will be made to the Parish Council at its monthly meetings as Trustees of the Hall.

Financial Report

Cllr Richard Waltho presented his report as follows:

The Finance Committee presented the draft Budget for approval, with a Precept of £12,000. It was proposed that the Precept budget be formally approved and that all financial transactions will follow audit procedures.

Environment Report

No report available.

Highways Report

Cllr Lewis presented his report as follows:

Throughout the past year I have continued to monitor, document and report on the state of the village highways – some issues have been resolved and others are ongoing.

- **Gullies & Gutters:** these remain an ongoing issue and we continue to experience flooding caused by a build up of debris and collapsed verges. This has now been recognised by the Highways Department and is under review. The main areas of flood concern are the junction of Langley Road/Dimmingsdale Road, Greyhound Lane, Market Lane/Langley Road and Orton Lane. The verge and drainage ditch in Penstone Lane, despite being cleaned out, is still under pressure
- **General Highway Conditions:** due to a mild winter in comparison to 2017/18, we have not experienced a major increase in road damage. However, this has been off-set by the continued presence of HGV/traffic volume. Pot holes and kerb subsidence are reported regularly but due to financial restraints and limited funds, are being patched/repared on a priority basis within the County. In November a section of Langley Road was closed for re-surfacing with kerb

stones being replaced and to date is wearing well.

- **HGV's:** HGV movement within the weight restricted area of the village is increasing due to home deliveries, construction work and traffic diversions. This is compounded by the indiscriminate use of satellite navigation systems proven by incidents whereby an HGV used Trescott Ford as a short cut to the Bridgnorth Road and articulated lorries with 40 ft trailers attempting to negotiate Greyhound Lane.
- **Traffic Volume:** the village has seen an increase in traffic volume, particularly at the Springhill/Market Lane crossroads, which is having a detrimental impact on the highway, the environment and in turn, creating safety issues for drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and the equine community. This is confirmed by the increase in accidents at Greyhound Lane/Springhill Lane and Dene Rad/Orton Lane. In an attempt to assist motorists at the junction of Penstone Lane and Orton Lane, the Parish Council requested the chevron signing to be re-positioned further down the road but unfortunately this request was refused.
- **Fly Tipping:** fly tipping, litter and indiscriminate use of the lanes to deposit rubbish has continued to blight our village, but we have seen a decrease in the illegal dumping of tyres but an increase in discarded cannabis detritus. The main areas of fly tipping concern are Greyhound Lane railway embankment, Blackpit Lane, Furnace Grange Road and Langley Road layby. All incidents are reported via the South Staffordshire web site and we are fortunate that the Street Scene Team collect on a daily basis and specialist companies remove any gas bottles and asbestos due to health and safety issues. Unfortunately, we are unable to assist when offences take place on private land but residents are encouraged to take preventative measures wherever possible.
- Finally, the health and safety of our parishioners is of prime importance and I would like to thank the Clerk, the Police, Severn Trent and the District and County Councils for their support.

District Council Report

District Councillor Reade presented his Report:

South Staffordshire District Council continues to address the challenges of a further reduction in Government grants, whilst maintaining the high standards of the services. A recent resident survey showed:

1. South Staffordshire is a good place to live – 91% agreed
2. Satisfied with the way the Council runs things – 69% agreed
3. Perceived value for money – 73% strongly or tend to agree

The reduction of the revenue grant from the government and the business rates retention percentage still remains unclear and the effects of a fairer distribution scheme which will support poorer councils that have a greater demand for social services remain uncertain. This could well mean a reduction for well managed councils such as South Staffordshire District Council.

My Account registrations are exceeding expectations particularly as information on planning applications in our area is included within this service.

Fly tipping prosecutions have been successful and the use of covert cameras have assisted in this, although there are strict procedures to be followed before permission is granted by the Magistrates Courts.

Dog fouling remains a problem and the Council's approach is to make dog owners aware of penalty fines by providing bins and signage to this effect.

He also said that the District Council has worked closely with the County Council to provide a 7.5 weight limit restriction along Langley Road to Merry Hill island.

County Council Report

I come to the end of my fifth 4-year term as District Council for Wombourne North and Lower Penn and now await the election results on 3 May 2019.

County Cllr Mrs V Wilson presented her Report:

Over the last 12 months I have been updating you all, advising of the scale of the financial challenge the County Council has faced, and our plans to achieve a balanced budget in 2019/20.

At the County Council Budget Meeting in February, proposals were approved to close the £35m shortfall in our budget next year, made possible by a combination of early and decisive action, a tight grip on our finances and effective lobbying of Government. We are now on track to deliver a balanced budget for 2019/20 and have a robust medium term financial strategy for the next 5 years, and we still have the third lowest county council tax in England.

Before Christmas we received our funding settlement from the Government and there was some positive news in the shape of a business rates pilot and one-off funding from Government for both social care and roads, which will help ease immediate pressures, but we have made it clear that a long-term national solution for funding care must be urgently addressed and we will continue to work with our MPs to press the Government on this.

We also need to keep up the pace of our transformation, finding new ways to achieve results by working with local councils and with communities, embracing digital technology and data, and keeping a tight grip on our costs. The additional funding coming our way will help in the short term only. It does not provide a long-term answer to how we care for a growing ageing population, or how with less money and fewer staff, we make things happen in our communities in the future. We recognise the impact this may have on our parish council organisations and on local communities, but we are completely committed to open and honest dialogue as we make the necessary changes.

It was good to hear about a new 10-year plan unveiled for the NHS but if we want to deliver a long-term sustainable health service then how we fund social care as a nation must go hand in hand with this. In Staffordshire, as in other parts of the country, we have seen our care bill soar by more than £100m in the last decade, and together with partners we continue to press the Government for a long-term solution.

The rising cost of adult social care is one of the issues increasing the pressure on the County Council's finances – and communities will still need to play their part in plugging gaps in some local services. To support a growing ageing population, increasingly we will all have to do more and pay a little more to continue to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. There are 1,137 Looked After Children in the County Council's care.

As Conservatives, we believe in personal responsibility, that people should keep most of their hard-earned pay and that government, whether local or national, should support those who really need our help. While the County Council can no longer do or fund everything we would like to, we remain focused on supporting communities to find their own local alternative and affordable options to help themselves, their families, their friends and their neighbours.

Regardless of the permutations of the UK's exit from the EU, our top priority will remain Staffordshire's economy. Creating the right conditions for the economy to grow and create more, better paid jobs. Our role as the County Council is to plan and prepare for the long term and ensure this county has the right sites, roads and transport, services, skills and ambitions for business to flourish and offer our residents the jobs and opportunities to prosper.

Staffordshire County Council is set to launch the 'one-off, time-limited' Community Investment Fund (CIF) as part of revised budget proposals. But we must remember one thing and that is:

“Those who can make the biggest difference to creating stronger, healthier, independent and more rewarding communities are the people who do a little more for themselves, their families and their friends and this is reflected in these new proposals”

The latest unemployment claimant figures for January show our Conservative number one priority of having a productive Staffordshire economy continues to work. Staffordshire’s unemployment claimant count rate is 1.4% and remains the lowest out of the 14 strategic authorities in the West Midlands and well below the national rate of 2.4%. Staffordshire starts 2019 with near full employment. There is a total of 7,535 claimants in Staffordshire.

The cost to arrest the steady managed decline of Staffordshire’s network is in the region of an ongoing extra £15m per annum, one off, ring-fenced to activities that directly replace or enhance the life of existing highways assets. It will be distributed between a number of maintenance operations that have significant outstanding work programmes such as life-adding structural repairs prioritised through the Council’s Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan, pothole repairs – to reduce the current work stack, and to support the preventative maintenance programme and gully emptying.

In addition, funding has been devolved to each County Councillor’s division for locally identified priorities that are not currently being delivered through the HIAMP. This funding is £20k per division and I have discussed our local priorities for this funding with my Highways Officer, with the aim to identify work activities by April 2019. The funding is to be spent during 2019/20 and identified works are being planned and co-ordinated to achieve the greatest value for money. I am already working hard with each of my 7 parish councils to maximise the stretch that this small amount will allow me – match funding will be required, and I really hope to be able to enhance the beautiful rural roads here in my division.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the last 12 months in my role as County Councillor, and look forward to the next year and working closely with you all.

Chairman’s Report

The Chairman presented his Report:

As we approach the end of the 4 years as councillors, I reflect on some of the main issues that appear in our minutes. These are where our role as councillors can help in ensuring that our village is a clean and safe place to live and work. We report incidents of fly tipping and general litter to the District Council and we report to the County Council on matters relating to highways, such as potholes and gully maintenance. Speeding is always an issue and our thanks go to the Community Speedwatch Team for all their efforts.

We receive regular reports from Staffordshire Police giving details of crime in our area and a recent police forum was held here in the Victory Hall. One reason for the rise in crime is the theft of expensive cars. The key-less cars can be stolen by the purchase of fairly cheap equipment that can read the code of keys left close to house doors and then be driven off. The police are giving advice on how to avoid this happening.

The mowing of Castlecroft Playing Field, the Village Green and verges at the cross roads is all done by our own contractor and the standard of work has been very satisfactory, along with the savings that have been made.

I hope that residents will come to understand the role that the Parish Council has in planning matters and that we are a consultee only and do not make planning decisions.

The last 6 months have been very difficult for the Council and its meetings and we

hope that we can all learn from the past.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the Parish Council's thanks and appreciation to Harry Brown for all the work and dedication over the last 70 years that he has given to this parish. Harry is now 94 and is not enjoying good health, but we wish him well in his retirement from council involvement.

My thanks to councillors for their support and participation and to Jan Footman for her role as Clerk, over the last 12 months.

4/19

Any Other Business

There was none

Signed:.....**Chairman**

Date:

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