



NEWSLETTER REFLECTIONS

Spring 2015

No. 86



Firstly due to government legislation this issue is required to be "BLAND". This restriction is in place to prevent any possible "Electioneering".

You will see from our Neighbourhood Plan Consultant's report overleaf that the Plan is now with the Borough Council for initial screening. This part of the procedure should be completed shortly. It has been a long and frustrating process but, at last, we can now see the finishing line. When it is finally adopted and the settlement boundaries accepted your Parish Council will be in a position to demonstrate your wishes with regard to any future development in our Parish.

As you know, the Parish Council has, on your behalf, been fighting against major developments in the villages but with both hands tied behind its back. It is regrettable that the council could not have done more to prevent these unnecessary developments. In some cases the developers are keen to work with the council, through which, we have secured the promise of a new medical centre and sufficient land for field sports catering for all age groups and our local schools.

In the replies to our consultation with the community you expressed concern about young people being unable to source suitable accommodation which would enable them to remain in the village. Similarly the elderly found a lack of housing suitable for their needs. The current Borough housing policy is an inflexible, points based system, which allocates housing to anyone in the country who has the necessary points and wishes to live in the Parish. This excludes local people who are connected to the village but do not have the necessary qualifying points.

As detailed in the Neighbourhood Plan the Parish Council is in negotiation with the owners of the Zion Chapel and, if successful, will begin to manage three issues that concern members of the community. Firstly, intensive development on the site will be prevented if it is secured. The intention, in conjunction with a housing association, is to build some small bungalows, as retirement or starter homes, and to convert the Chapel into two starter flats with all the properties being for LOCAL PEOPLE.

The contractor installing the sports equipment at the Jubilee Playing Field has, unfortunately, been taken ill. This has led to a delay in constructing the final element of

the development, the BMX track. It is clear, however, that it has not prevented your sons and daughters from enjoying the Skate-park and Multi Use Games Area. Please ensure that your children wear protective helmets and pads when using the equipment and that you and they have read and understood the Conditions of Use notice. Please note that the equipment is not supervised by members or employees of the Council.

In addition to the sports facilities, plans have been submitted to the Planning Authority for the construction of a Community and Business Conference Centre to be constructed as an extension to the end of the building standing in the JPF car park.

Despite the additional legal costs, reports to support our objections to developments, and the development of the JPF site the Parish Council's portion of the Council Tax has not been increased.

In conclusion, thanks should go to all the voluntary organisations in the Parish who devote their time to providing aid and assistance to so many people in the villages and help to maintain a pleasant village environment for us all to enjoy.



The new facilities on the JPF have been officially opened by our local MP, Mr Jeremy Lefroy on Saturday 21st March. It is good to reflect that the majority of the village have contributed to this development through a decision by the Queen's Jubilee Celebration Committee to make a donation to the new equipment.

A new footpath will be installed along the edge of the site in early April whilst the installation of the BMX track will begin in early May.

Colwich NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The number of houses that could be built in the Parish on the land put forward to Stafford Borough Council for development by Colwich and The Haywoods landowners was shocking. Even when the planning officers threw out some of the less desirable sites the numbers were still massive. Back then, in 2009, there was little we could do about it other than protest. Thankfully, in 2011, the Localism Act came into force and gave us the opportunity to plan our own future. An opportunity that Colwich Parish Council seized upon.

The Localism Act brought in Neighbourhood Plans. These are statutory development plans for local neighbourhoods. They are powerful documents but we can't put anything we like into our Neighbourhood Plan. It has to be about the use of land, it has to fit with government policy, European law and Stafford Borough Council's Local Plan.

When we sent out our big questionnaire to everyone seeking information for the Colwich Neighbourhood Plan you told us about what houses you wanted and where you wanted them. Not only that but you told us about the things you valued such as the historic buildings, the canals, rivers and green spaces. You told us about the problems with traffic and with the location of the current doctors and with other services. You told us also about the need for more recreational facilities, parking and transport. From this we developed a vision of what the Parish would look like in 2031 and what planning policies we needed in the Colwich Neighbourhood Plan to bring that about.

HOUSES

As a country we need to double the supply of housing so it is understandable that the Localism Act won't allow Neighbourhood Plans to stop development but development needs to be on our terms. We have guidance from Stafford Borough that suggests that about 260 are required in the Parish. The numbers are due to three factors; an ageing population, family breakup and immigration.

AN AGEING POPULATION

The paragraph below is from our Neighbourhood Plan:

3.4.1 The 2011 Census shows the total population as 4528.



The age distribution has changed markedly between 2001 and 2011 with 25-29 year olds declining from 5% to 3.3% and 30-40 year olds from 21.4% to 17.5%. In this time the number of older people has grown from 5.9% to 10.5% for 60-64 year olds and from 7.7% to 13.6% for 65-74 year olds. In this time few of the Stafford Borough population groups have changed by more than 1%.

FAMILY BREAKUP

Sadly the number of divorces is high. Many couples do not marry so the extent of the breakup of family units isn't clear. When it happens, the breakups lead to demand for more accommodation.

Between 2001 and 2011 the number of houses in the Parish grew by 11 but the number of residents dropped by 56. This decline in the density of the population can be due to people living longer or living as smaller units because of family breakup.

IMMIGRATION

Stafford has been designated as a growth area and so people are attracted to the area to work. The Parish is also a beautiful place to live so the influx of older people retiring from the West Midlands and Stafford to live here can be expected to continue.

The above factors have led Stafford Borough Council to conclude that 1,200 houses should be built in 'Key Service Villages' in the Borough in the next 20 years. Great Haywood is designated as a 'Key Service Village' and so is Little Haywood/Colwich. Across the Parish our 'share' of the 1,200 houses is 259.

In common with many communities across the country the lack of both a Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan left the way clear for developers and permission has already been given for 168 houses to be built leaving 91 still to be provided. The Neighbourhood Plan will say where these will go.

DESIGN AND THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The Haywoods Society has refreshed its important Village Design Statement and the Borough Council has redone the Conservation Area Appraisals.

These documents support the Neighbourhood Plan in preserving what's good about the Parish and in making sure that future developments enhance the character of our communities.

GREEN SPACES

Many residents have told us about the pleasure they get from the canals, rivers, fields and woods that they walk through or which they see as they go about their business in the Parish. We are very lucky to have Staffordshire Wildlife Trust as a big employer in the area and a key partner in helping to enhance the environment that many residents treasure. This environment underpins all other considerations. See boxout for more on this subject.

TRANSPORT

Many aspects of transport do not come under the heading of 'land use' so are difficult to deal with in the Neighbourhood Plan. We can still work with developers to improve bus services, address parking issues and improve road layouts. The proposed road link between Main Road (opposite Roseacre Nursery) and Mill Lane is a case in point.

DOCTORS AND SERVICES

Working with developers we have planned for an enlarged surgery on the village side of the railway bridge in Mill Lane. This will have sufficient parking and also be accessible to the wider community via the new road referred to above.

Shops and small businesses are going outside of the villages and the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to reverse this so that you can leave the car at home and walk or cycle for work or shopping.

RECREATION FACILITIES

The improvements to the Jubilee Playing Fields are extensive but even more is planned. You told us about the need for local facilities for younger people, notably in Great Haywood and this is covered in the Neighbourhood Plan. If you call gardening 'recreation' then green fingered residents will have more recreation at new allotments delivered via the Neighbourhood Plan. Copies of the latest draft of the Neighbourhood Plan have been sent to local organisations for comments. Copies are available from the Parish Centre or via the web site.

Copies of the draft Neighbourhood Plan are available for inspection at the Parish Centre between 1pm and 2pm Monday - Friday or by appointment at other times.

Your comments on the above proposals would be most welcome and assist the Council in finalising the Plan before its submission for Independent Inspection.

Neighbourhood Plan Consultant

THE ENVIRONMENT

We all have a natural environment- we live in it! But do we know enough about it in order to protect it? Some of the best features of the natural environment in Colwich Parish are our hedgerows and ponds. There is also evidence of Medieval Strip-farming Systems immediately to the north and south of Anson Row. We have several Local Wildlife sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. However, knowing about these features is not the same as protecting them.

Colwich Parish Council is commissioning wildlife surveys to be carried out by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust over the spring and summer. A lot is already known about our natural environment but these latest surveys will provide up-to-date and specific information which can be used, either to fend off further housing development OR, where this is not possible, to oblige a developer to compensate for the loss of habitat by creating that same or even enhanced habitat elsewhere in the parish. Hopefully, in this way, the designation of Local Green Spaces and an all-important Green Infrastructure can be achieved which will allow as many residents as possible to enjoy as many local wild life features as possible. This will preserve the natural environment for both ourselves and future generations who live in Colwich Parish.

If you spot any unusual wildlife then please contact the Staffordshire Ecological Record website at: www.staffs-ecology.org.uk

BAG COLLECTION (CLOTHES RECYCLING)

As most people now use the recycling bins at the Jubilee and the Parish Centre it has been decided that the bag collection is no longer necessary.

Just to remind you that all the proceeds from the recycling scheme go to local projects such as the play activities for children on the Jubilee during the summer holidays. So please, support your local community and keep on donating your unwanted clothes, shoes and books by putting them in the recycling bins.

BEST KEPT VILLAGE

The Committee is again asking for your help. The next litter-picking date is 16th April @ 6:30pm. We also ask your help in picking up litter generally, and start thinking about your Hanging Baskets, and the flowers you are planting in your front gardens.



ELECTION 2015

The General Election, Borough Council Election and Parish Council Election will, for the first time, all take place on the same day following a recent change in the Law. The National Association of Local Councils has asked Parish Councils to encourage people to stand for and/or to vote at the Parish Council Elections.

What is a Parish Council?

The Council is the first rung of local government representing the concerns and aspirations of the local community. The majority of its funding comes through a charge on the council tax collected by Stafford Borough Council. The Council uses its funds to maintain the Jubilee Playing Fields, cut the grass verges, clean footpaths and gullies of leaves and to make small grants available to local groups. The Council is a consultee on all planning applications in the area.

Colwich has 14 Councillors (7 from Great Haywood and 7 from Little Haywood/Colwich). Once elected these Councillors represent the entire Parish.

JUBILEE PLAYING FIELDS – DOG FOULING

The Council is trying to clear up the dog mess problem blighting the playing field and elsewhere around the parish. If you see any mess at the Playing Fields please report it to the Clerk by completing one of the forms available on the website or by email, detailing when and where you have seen the mess.

Once the Council has documentary evidence of the problem we will work with Streetscene at Stafford Borough Council to discuss the best solution going forward.

Remember it is an offence not to clear up after your dog with a Fixed Penalty Notice of £75 or even a fine of up to £1,000.



What does a Parish Councillor do?

The duties of being a Councillor are many and varied with the day to day contact with local people as the most important. Yes, there are meetings, but these serve as an avenue for Councillors to bring matters to the attention of colleagues so as to agree a Council position.

Councillors sign an Acceptance of Office within the first few days of taking office and undertake to observe the Code of Conduct, including respecting the impartiality of the Clerk and other Officials. Councillors also complete a register of interests published on both the Borough Council and Parish Council's websites.

How do I become a Parish Councillor?

All 14 seats are to be contested. Nomination papers are available from the Borough Council and must be returned no later than 4pm on Thursday 9th April. You will need to satisfy certain criteria as will those who second your nomination. A 'Notice of Poll' will be published on 28th April for polling day on 7th May. The successful candidates take office on Monday 11th May.

What happens after I am elected?

During the week commencing 11th May, all successful candidates MUST attend the Parish Centre on St Mary's Road to complete

their Acceptance of Office. Failure to complete this declaration will automatically mean that the seat become vacant. The first meeting of the new Council will take place at 7:30pm on Friday 15th May. The first act of this Council will be to elect a Chairman.

Why should you vote?

Everything we come into contact with on a daily basis affects how we feel and what we do. Voting in the parish council election takes so little time, especially as you will be at the polling station for the General Election, but will have a daily impact on you for the next four years. If you leave voting to others your opinions and wishes will not be heard. Simply by voting for a candidate you feel will reflect your view sends a clear message of your opinion to the decision makers.

It is said 'people get the local council they deserve'. Do you know who in your community is standing for election and what they hope to achieve? The names of candidates will be published in the parish noticeboards as soon after 10th April as possible. Speak to them to help you decide who to vote for.

Councillors live side by side with you in your community; they are the most local level of government, being easily contacted and directly answerable to the community every time they walk out of their front doors. Your council tax funds the Council so be sure that you have voted for the right people to look after your community. If you do not vote, others will and their views may change your life.

Please ensure you have registered to Vote. If in doubt contact the Borough Council BEFORE 20th April.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

Skip: 18th April, 30th May and 20th June.



Chairman:

Cllr. Paul Gilbert

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