



*Cheswick Green Parish Council*

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## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE STATUTORY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON 22<sup>ND</sup> MARCH 2017 – CLLR. BRIAN BOWN**

The last twelve months have been extremely busy for all Members of Cheswick Green Parish Council and in particular for our very experienced and good Clerk, Marie Zizzi. We could not have coped without the dedicated help from our Clerk who is only employed on a part time basis.

### **Members**

Resulting from the sudden, very tragic and sad death of Cllr. Chris Noble in August 2015 and the subsequent resignations by Cllr. Greg Allport at the end of January 2017 and Cllr. Mike Cooper at the end of March 2017, it was necessary to advertise and fill the vacancies. I am delighted that Cllr. Ian Bruce was co-opted in March 2016, Cllr. Mick Swain was co-opted in May 2016 and Cllr. Penny Philips was co-opted in June 2016. Consequently, the new Members have all been on a steep learning curve. This has been made even harder with the many very important issues that have had to be and are still being dealt with.

Last year our Clerk, Marie obtained the General Power of Competence – GPC – this gives the Parish Council the power to do anything that individuals may do, as long as they do not break other laws. It is a 'power of first resort'; this means that when searching for a power to act, the first question you ask is whether you can use the GPC. To find the answer, you ask whether an individual is normally permitted to act in the same way.

### **Planning**

Cheswick Green Parish Council is a Statutory Consultee for all planning applications within the Parish and therefore Solihull MBC is required to consult with the Parish Council. In previous years, the Parish Council has been able to influence some planning decisions made by Solihull MBC. Members feel that their concerns have not been properly taken into account in respect of Blythe Valley Park.

Cllr. Margaret Gosling was elected as Chair of the Planning Committee in May 2016. With the volume of work, I am not sure whether Margaret was expecting to be quite so busy when accepting to be Chair. The Planning Committee deals with planning issues and is working on the Parish Neighbourhood Plan. Margaret will give her report on all the work that has been done and the many issues that the Parish Council is attempting to deal with amongst which the major issues are Mount Dairy Farm, Solihull Local Plan Review and Blythe Valley Park development.

### **Recreation Matters**

The Parish Council owns various parcels of land that are used as public open spaces. These areas are maintained by a contractor working for the Parish Council. The specification for the renewal of the grounds maintenance work was sent out for competitive quotations in December 2016. Four quotations were received. The renewal of the contract takes effect in April 2017 and is for a three-year period.

The trees are inspected every three years and action is taking in accord with the arboriculturist's recommendations, the previous report was provided in 2013. The trees were inspected and report received in September 2016. Any necessary work and some additional work has been undertaken. Cllr. Penny Philips was elected as Chair of the Recreation Committee. Penny will provide a more detailed report.

### **Shop Frontages**

Attempts have been made over many years for the appearance of the forecourt to the shops and Village Surgery to be improved. In the past efforts have been made to tidy the area on an annual basis with the assistance of Solihull MBC and members of Cheswick Green Residents Association. In June 2015, the Parish Council came up with an idea where its grounds maintenance contractor could carry out litter picking twice a week and maintain the shrub beds.

The scheme was first discussed with the owners of the shops and their managing agent, who supported this arrangement. The scheme was for each of the shopkeepers and Village Surgery to reimburse the Parish Council with their proportion of the costs. The scheme came into effect at the beginning of April 2016. Vast improvement has been seen. This is for the benefit of the shopkeepers, all residents and visitors to the village.

Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, the Village Surgery withdrew from the scheme at the end of last October and now carry out the litter picking and sweeping of the car park in front of the Village Surgery.

Discussions are taking place for the renewal of the scheme, with reduced costs, to take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.

### **Defibrillator**

Soon after his election as a Borough Councillor and being one of our three Ward Councillors, Cllr. Alex Insley managed to obtain a free Defibrillator from a few being offered by West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust. This was on the basis that the Parish Council provided a cabinet in a suitable location. The Parish Council investigated the obtaining of a Defibrillator Cabinet. The Parish Council negotiated with the supplier for a cabinet that will, hopefully, be vandal proof. The cabinet with low wattage LED light above was installed on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017. The Defibrillator will be installed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2017 along with free training on how to use the defibrillator provided by the WM Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust.

### **Tesco Bags of Help**

At the beginning of 2016, the Parish Council submitted an application for funds from the Tesco Bags of Help scheme. The Parish Council reached the short list of three successful applicants. After local voting by the public, the Parish Council achieved second place with a grant of £10,000. Funding from the grant has been spent on refurbishing the recreational equipment on the Recreation Ground together with the installation of a new concrete table tennis table. The final element of redecoration has just been completed.

### **Village Hall Roof**

Early in September 2016, it became apparent that the roof to the original part of the Village Hall was in danger of imminent collapse. This was noticed by a member of the Cheswick Green Residents Association, who contacted a Structural Engineer known to him. The Structural Engineer arranged for a specialist roofing contractor to immediately attend and make the building safe.

The Parish Council then became involved because of the nature of the problem and likely expenditure. The Structural Engineer was appointed on behalf of the Parish Council. A specification was agreed and six competitive quotations sought with three quotations being received.

Cllr. Mick Swain offered to be the link contact and coordinator between the Parish Council, Structural Engineer and contractor.

The initial approach was to attempt to straighten the roof trusses that were leaning and about to collapse. Unfortunately, the trusses were too twisted and would not straighten. There were three alternatives to deal with the problem: -

- To replace all the roof trusses. This would incur the cost of erecting a 'tent' over the building. There was a possibility of rainwater damage to the interior of the 'large hall'. A 'tent' would cost in the region of £12,000 to £16,000 in addition to the costs of new roof trusses.
- To leave the roof trusses in place and to install two very large steel beams upon which new rafters could be fixed and supported.
- The other alternative was to demolish the 'large hall' with the loss of the facility.

The second option was chosen as being the most appropriate course of approach. The work was completed ahead of schedule. Weather conditions were favourable, with the result that there was not much rainwater ingress.

Even with the area appropriately fenced off and kept secure, vandals continued to cause damage.

Cllr. Mick Swain carried out extensive research to see if there was any grant funding available to assist with the costs of the roof repair. Unfortunately, there did not appear to be any grants for this situation.

The Parish Council was very fortunate with the expertise of the Structural Engineer and the efficiency and competence of the roofing contractor.

### **Conclusion**

The volume of work being undertaken by Members is having a detrimental effect upon their domestic lives. Fortunately, they are well supported by their spouses. I should like to thank all those people for all their kind and enthusiastic work and help. Without their help, the Parish would be much poorer in amenities, facilities and appearance.

Finally, on behalf of all Members I wish to express our sincere thanks to our Clerk, Marie Zizzi for loyally helping all of us. We could not have achieved what we have done without Marie's excellent assistance.