

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

80 Hewell Road, Birmingham, B45 8NF

0121 447 9893

exec@barntgreen.org.uk
www.barntgreen.org.uk



Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 24 April 2023 at 7pm held at the Friends Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR

The Meeting was chaired by Cllr Robert Cholmondeley, Barnt Green Parish Council Chairman.

In attendance: 1 member of the public
County Councillor: A Kriss
District (and Parish) Councillor: C Hotham
Parish Councillors: O Polton, S Whitehand
Eleanor Choudry, Executive Officer, Barnt Green Parish Council

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all present.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Parish Councillors P Perry and M Roberts.

3. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held 25th April 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Reports from local council representatives

a) Chairman's report

The Chairman gave a report circulated to those in attendance and provided at Appendix 1. Cllr Cholmondeley highlighted aspects of his report.

b) Report from District Councillor for Barnt Green and Hopwood Ward – Councillor Hotham gave a report circulated to those in attendance and provided at Appendix 2. Cllr Hotham highlighted aspects of his report.

c) Report from County Councillor for Beacon Division

The National Tutoring Programme subsidises tutoring to help pupils catch up on missed learning due to the pandemic. Worcestershire received £2.6 million; all the funding was spent. There are not enough bus and train services for local people and therefore there will be an extension of demand response travel to increase transport availability in Barnt Green and Rubery. The bus service 144A is changing to a National Express service so people will be able to travel to the QE hospital and Bromsgrove with all-day travel costing no more than £4. Highways have agreed to carry out works on the footway in Hewell Lane. Cllr Kriss has used £5k of his budget to help fund dropped kerbs at the Longlands, by the post box on Blackwell Road and also on Fiery Hill Road to allow disabled access to the station. Kendal End Road has an area where the pavement narrows due to overgrowth, this will be sided out. A request has been made for a full road safety audit of the whole area. Highways considered two areas for a pedestrian crossing, Bittell Road and Groveley Lane. Groveley Lane are to get a pedestrian crossing installed, it is hoped Bittell Road will be reconsidered in future. There has not been any accidents along Bittell Road by the narrow bridge, therefore additional signage will not be displayed. Statistics gained from accident analysis has to warrant any extra signage. Cherry Hill Road was closed for the widening of the carriageway due to the overgrowth, but work remains unfinished. There are now 2494 police officers in West Mercia

Police and a new community crime fighting team to tackle incidents identified by residents. A survey showed 84% of residents have confidence in West Mercia Police. There have been 700 recent arrests. Rubery has 2 electric bikes available to PCSO's. Cllr Kriss is hoping to get off road motor bikes to help stop illegal motor bikes and quad bikes. The vandalism and anti-social behaviour caused requires a robust response.

d) Parish Council Finances

A summary (attached appendix 3) of the parish council's accounts for 2022/23 was presented. Cllr Cholmondeley said that the PC had benefitted from the rise in interest rates and the ongoing hire of the meeting room had produced an increase in income. The PC has been successful in obtaining a couple of grants this year and will continue to pursue grant income. Unexpected costs include additional tree works. The PC is also considering the future of the children's play equipment in Bittell Road playing fields. Savings have been made with the streetlamps moving to LED's. The PC has purchased the Christmas lights and therefore ended the lease contract so savings will be realised in future years. Consideration is being given to quotes received for the replacement of the wetpour surface in the children's play area in Millennium Park. The wetpour has had previous minor repairs carried out but the repairs are costly and not long lasting, therefore it has been decided to remove and replace all the wetpour surface. The parish council has reserves with £30k being ring-fenced for the resurfacing of the commuter car park when required.

5. Open Forum

5.1 A resident asked what benefits a Unitary Authority would bring. Cllr Hotham explained that it would be one council that was responsible for all municipal duties and gave examples of Hereford Council and Yorkshire Council. Cllr Hotham suggested a north and south base would be most beneficial for Worcestershire with one base in Malvern and one base in Bromsgrove and the parish council taking on more responsibilities . It is estimated annual savings of £30 million could be made if there was one unitary authority. Many savings could be made with half of the cost of buildings, upkeep and less councillors all contributing. Cllr Kriss said that the parish council would be able to get things done quicker instead of having to wait for a response from councils. If there were a north and south divide Highways would be able to use other contractors. Currently only Ringway is used for works and they are very expensive. The Unitary authority would take on the role of District with other responsibilities devolved to parish level. Cllr Hotham requested that the District Council carry out a feasibility study to realise the benefits that would materialise for residents, but BDC refused.

5.2 Thank you to everyone involved with the Parish Council.

Cllr Cholmondeley wished to express his thanks to everyone who supports and is involved with the Parish Council whether they are paid or volunteers.

The meeting ended at 19:50hrs.

Signed Chairman..... Date.....

Chairman

**BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL
YEAR ENDING MARCH 2022
Chairman’s Report**

The council had been one under its complement of 8 councillors during the year. Joe Nilsson left the parish and ceased to be a councillor and we welcomed James Baldwin to the council. A number of events were co-ordinated by the parish council during the year. On Sunday 5 June 2022, an event was held at the Bittell Road Playing Field to celebrate the Queen’s platinum jubilee. Despite inclement weather, which eased during the day and the cancellation of some stallholders at the last minute, the event was successful, not least because the bouncy slide and assault course were free for children.

Live music from Brass Beatz generated a party atmosphere in Millennium Park on Saturday 2 July. The Christmas lights switch on was held on Saturday 3 December, with entertainment from a brass band and a children’s choir.

Unfortunately, the community walk scheduled for mid-September was cancelled as it fell in the period just after the death of Queen Elizabeth II. However, a formal event proclaiming Charles III as King was held in Millennium Park.

Two pear trees, one a Worcestershire Black Pear, have been planted at the foot of the railway embankment on the pollinator site in Hewell Road. The flowers laid in memory of the Queen were laid there. The grass has begun to take over from the wildflower concept to counter which some yellow rattle seed has been planted.

Three apple trees have been planted on the left, just after the entrance, to the Bittell Road Playing Field. Some drainage work, funded by the Barnt Green Medical Trust, has improved the area around the children’s play equipment. During the winter, there were still some muddy patches and a pool of water when wet. A further assessment of the options and costs is to be undertaken. The play equipment is 15 years old which is its normal life expectancy.

The Parish Council co-ordinated a Warm Spaces initiative during January and February hosted by the Baptist Church, the Friends Meeting House and St Andrews. Though cases of hardship from the rise in fuel prices were not evidenced, the volunteers generated a community spirit and meetings continue under different nomenclature.

After a long campaign, notification has been received from Network Rail and Sajid Javid MP that the funding for lifts at the railway station has been secured. Work should commence in August 2023.

Network Rail informed the council last June of an intention to place double yellow lines on Station Approach. Following responses from the council asking a number of questions about the impact on the village centre, the work has not proceeded.

After the installation of electric fencing, the council applied for village green status for the field and footpath leading from Blackwell Road to the footbridge over the M42 (path BG507). Unfortunately, this application was not successful and the village has lost its field where recreational sledging took place on snowy days.

The precept (the portion of council tax paid by residents to the parish council) increased by 3.4% for the coming year. A tight budget was agreed notwithstanding double-digit inflation.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has worked for and supported the parish council over the past year.

Robert Cholmondeley

Annual report 2022 to 2023 from Bromsgrove District Councillor Hotham.

Dear Barnt Green Parish Council,
Please accept the following annual report:

Following the sad death of Queen Elizabeth 11 on the 8th September 2022 the Council entered a period of mourning and sent a letter of condolence to King Charles 111.

It has been a difficult 12 months for Bromsgrove District Council (BDC). The year started with the resignation of the Head of Finance followed 3 months later by the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer leaving his post. An able replacement was recruited on a temporary basis and the full extent of the difficulties surrounding the introduction of a new accounting IT system were laid bare for all to see. It emerged that BDC had agreed to be the Guinea Pig for the new software and this had not gone well. The net result was the council had little control over the finances and the external Auditors eventually issued a section 24 notice for failure to deliver the accounts on time, effectively putting the financial side of the council in special measures. Work is now underway to resolve the situation and progress is being made. A corporate peer challenge by the Local Government Association is underway to try to learn the lessons of this failure.

The large levelling up grant received by BDC from the government is to be spent on redeveloping the Market Hall site in the town centre and has also been used to purchase the old fire station and library buildings in Windsor Street. Doubts have been raised by the Independent Councillors as to the value for money achieved by this purchase.

The planning department has suffered from significant staff shortages which has resulted in delays to planning determinations, this is a country wide problem due to a national shortage of planning officers. However, planning enforcement has been recently outsourced to Worcestershire Regulatory Services; this has had a positive impact and enforcement has become far more proactive.

The review of the district wide strategic plan has continued apace and was on track to be released for public consultation late last year. However, this was unexpectedly delayed and is now not to be made public until after the next set of local elections in May 2023. This is of significant concern.

A new district wide centres strategy has been developed and this will hopefully help and support Barnt Green village. There will be the involvement of the Parish Council through the District Councillors.

The council’s development of 60 homes on the old council house site at Burcot Lane is nearing completion. It is disappointing and inexplicable that the 37 market rental properties the council intend to retain are forecast to

generate only a total net annual return of £10,000. This has been questioned by the Independent group and whilst the figures have been confirmed no explanation has as yet been provided.

The popular community grants scheme based on the back of the new homes bonus payment from central government has again been axed despite strong opposition and lobbying from Independent Councillors.

The Artrix remains closed and without the reinstatement of the funding once provided by BDC, it is uncertain as to when it might reopen.

Youth provision has been significantly improved in Bromsgrove town centre and this has had a positive impact on the level of anti-social behaviour and minor crime. It is hoped that funding can be found to roll this programme out to other centres across the district.

Despite promise after promise at cabinet level to deliver usable local bus services nothing has been forthcoming, we await the long heralded countywide bus review with trepidation. The lack of public transport in the outer areas of the district is a disgrace.

Finally, the financial situation at BDC and across the other Worcestershire district councils and the County council is terrible. We feel it is now time for a rethink on local government and the introduction of a unitary authority at the same time as increasing the role of Parish Councils.

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Appendix 3 – Parish Council Finances Summary of Draft Financial Accounts for 2022/2023

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL				
Financial Report of 2022/2023: Receipt and Payments				
Annual Parish Financial Report				
RECEIPTS	2021/22	summary totals	2022/23	summary totals
Precept received in current year	65,000.00		68,000.00	
Interest	30.56		1,031.85	
Lengthsman Refund	1,775.60		2,423.60	
Miscellaneous	1,000.00		7,574.46	
Hires	395.00		840.00	
Total Receipts		68,201.16		79,869.91
PAYMENTS				
ADMINISTRATION :				
Staff Costs				
Chairman's Allowance	-		-	
Office Running costs	9,649.64		9,445.98	
Training and Publications	30.00		275.00	
Meeting Rooms and Refreshments	250.00		50.00	
Subscriptions	1,518.25		1,626.68	
Insurance	1,247.36		1,307.22	
Auditor Fees	520.00		552.40	
Legal Fees	-		-	
Election Costs	-		-	
Grants and Donations	500.00		550.00	
General Administration Costs	1,592.66	34,339.95	1,540.64	38,023.23
COMMUNICATION Newsletters	270.00		620.00	
COMMUNICATION Website	120.00	390.00	120.00	740.00
MILLENNIUM PARK Mowing	872.00		845.00	
MILLENNIUM PARK Maintenance	630.00		1,575.95	
Park Safety Inspections	68.50	1,570.50	250.00	2,670.95
PLAYING FIELD Mowing	2,099.45		2,779.23	
PLAYING FIELD Maintenance	1,346.88		1,370.00	
PLAYING FIELD Safety Inspections	68.50	3,514.83	98.00	4,247.23
ENVIRONMENT Hanging baskets	400.00		510.00	
ENVIRONMENT Planters	850.00		850.00	
ENVIRONMENT Maintenance	799.05		2,376.70	
ENVIRONMENT Outdoor Parish Caretaker	5,400.00		6,388.00	
ENVIRONMENT Pollinator Site	110.00		-	
ENVIRONMENT Commuter Car Park	-		-	
ENVIRONMENT Covid-19	-	7,559.05	-	10,124.70
FOOTPATH LIGHTS Maintenance	-		380.00	
FOOTPATH LIGHTS Electricity	2,916.13		3,301.35	
LIGHTING Christmas lights	7,074.66	9,990.79	8,800.57	12,481.92
HIGHWAYS Lengthsman charges	2,370.00		2,020.50	
HIGHWAYS Miscellaneous	-	2,370.00	-	2,020.50
MISCELLANEOUS Events	970.20	970.20	2,354.51	2,354.51
N'hood Plan/ capital projects	1,139.01		7,483.50	
FIXED ASSETS		1,139.01		7,483.50
Net Total Payments		61,844.33		80,146.54

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS SUMMARY 2022/2023						
RECEIPTS	2021/2022	2022/2023	PAYMENTS	2021/2022	2022/2023	Variance %
Precept received in current year	65,000.00	68,000.00	Administration	34,339.95	38,023.23	9.69
Interest	30.56	1,031.85	Communication	390.00	740.00	47.30
Lengthsman Refund	1,775.60	2,423.60	Millennium Park	1,570.50	2,670.95	41.20
Miscellaneous	1,000.00	7,574.46	Playing Field	3,514.83	4,247.23	17.24
Hires (room / playing field)	395.00	840.00	Lighting	9,990.79	12,481.92	19.96
			Environment	7,559.05	10,124.70	25.34
			Highways	2,370.00	2,020.50	-17.30
			Events	970.20	2,354.51	58.79
			Capital projects	1,139.01	7,483.50	84.78
Total Receipts	68,201.16	79,869.91	Total payments	61,844.33	80,146.54	22.84
VAT Refund	2,929.28	7,132.86	VAT PAID	4,441.15	5,861.39	
Annual Receipts	71,130.44	87,002.77	Annual Payments	66,285.48	86,007.93	

Notes to the report of 2022/2023 Receipts and Payments account:

1. These draft accounts are presented on a Receipts and Payments basis and have yet to be externally audited.
2. The impact of the precept for 2022/23 upon the Parish Council Taxpayer was £66.18 per Band D Annual Council Tax payment.
3. Other income variances:
 - a) Interest rates have increased, and therefore the amount of interest raised via deposit and savings account has improved.
 - b) The Lengthsman scheme continues via Worcestershire County Council who will refund up to £2,171 each year. The council is still awaiting final payments against the March invoice.
 - c) VAT refund fluctuates from year to year with the Parish Council claiming VAT on non-business activities. The amount reclaimed depends on what purchases (predominantly Capital Expenditure) are made during the year. It would be fair to state that the parish council should not depend on VAT reclaimed each year to support the future budget and class it as income to reduce the precept.
 - d) Miscellaneous income for 2021/22, consists of rent from Engie for the electric car charging point in the community car park. In 2022/23 the increase is predominantly due to grants received from Barnt Green Medical Trust for drainage works and playground repairs and a Worcestershire County Council grant for the Platinum Jubilee event.
 - e) Hire income includes fees paid by Total Football for use of the playing field and has increased due to regular hire of the meeting room to Conexus Childrens Tuition
4. Expenditure variances:
 - a) Administration: Staffing costs appear to have increased, but this is due to the previous Executive Officer leaving in November and not being replaced until February.

- b) Communication: The Parish Council issues two Bulletins during the year, which are delivered free to residents of the parish. Only one edition was charged in 21/22. A website hosting fee of £120 is charged in 22/23.
 - c) Millennium Park and Playing Field: Costs were increased in 2022/23 mainly due to repairs carried out to the children's play equipment in Millennium Park. This was funded by Barnt Green Medical Trust. All invoices for the mowing of Bittell Road playing fields were processed within the year.
 - d) Environment: The Outdoor Parish Caretaker expenditure has increased due to an increment built into the contract. A number of repairs were also carried out after receiving recommendations following the safety inspections of equipment.
 - e) Footpath and Christmas lighting: Footpath lighting has increased due to soaring electricity costs. Fortunately due to government assistance, LED fittings and a change in the contract the increase has not been too significant. The Christmas Lighting contract was due for renewal but a one-off payment secured ownership of the lights so future savings will be made.
 - f) Highways: the Lengthsman scheme continues to be appreciated by the parish council and residents, and as this is a delegated service via Worcestershire County Council there is almost nil net cost to the parish council.
 - g) Events: During 2022/23 the parish council was able to host a number of events. These included the Platinum Jubilee Celebration, Brass Beatz in Millennium Park, Christmas lights switch on, Chairmans Christmas Buffet, the Wassail Walk and the best dressed Christmas window competition.
 - h) Capital projects / Exceptional items: A new storage shed has been installed in the playing field for use by Total Football and the parish caretaker. Drainage works were carried out in Bittell Road playing fields to try to reduce the muddy areas surrounding the children's play equipment. The work was funded by Barnt Green Medical Trust..
 - i) Fixed Assets: The new shed has been added to the fixed assets.
 - j) VAT: There are special arrangements for parish councils to reclaim the VAT on all purchases that are described as for non-business purposes. A VAT claim from 1.01.23 to 31.3.23 will be paid into financial year 2023/24.
5. The full version of the parish council's accounts may be inspected during the audit period, as yet the date for this is unknown. To view the accounts please contact the office. A summary of the unaudited accounts will also be available on the parish council's website during that period: www.barntgreen.org.uk

~End of report~
Eleanor Choudry
Responsible Financial Officer
19/04/2023

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