

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at the Friends Meeting House, Sandhills Road on Monday 22 April 2024 at 7pm

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

In attendance: 47 member of the public
Parish Councillors: C Hotham, P Perry, L Williams, O Pardo Roques, S Whitehand and M Roberts
Eleanor Choudry, Executive Officer, Barnt Green Parish Council
Simon Clifford, Senior Sponsor, and Jennifer Slater, Sponsor, Network Rail

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all present.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from County Councillor A Kriss.

3. Presentation by Network Rail regarding Barnt Green station lifts - Simon Clifford, Senior Sponsor, and Jennifer Slater, Sponsor.

Cllr Cholmondeley gave a brief history of the lift project. When the new footbridge was installed in 2015 with more steps than the old bridge, disabled access to the station was necessary to comply with the Equality Act 2010. At the year end and in the next few years, the installation of lifts did not happen. During the tenure of Chris Grayling as Minister for Transport between 2016 and 2018, major cuts were made to electrification schemes and existing projects had to resubmit budgets to continue. The revised budget for the Bromsgrove electrification did not include lift installation at Barnt Green to keep costs as low as possible. Over the next few years, lifts were put on a formal procedural basis by Network Rail and an application was made under the Access for All Scheme, but it was known that it was likely to fail, which it did. Another route could then be pursued. The project and its funding was approved by the Department for Transport in early 2023. Last year, Network Rail said that installation would commence in August 2023.

Simon Clifford said that they had been working through the different designs and the construction drawings would be complete in July 2024. It is a fully funded and committed scheme which will commence in winter 2024 which is between November 2024 and February 2025 funding period. The start date cannot yet be confirmed. The designs are progressing well. The buried services under the track are causing a delay but we are very close to completion. The drawings and presentation can be emailed to the parish council.

Residents and councillors asked questions the answers of which were:

The install work will take 9-12 months with work being carried out through the night so that train services are not disrupted.

The design of the lifts will be finalised in July 2024.

The project is fully funded based on estimates but has not yet been out for tender.

The tender process will be from August to September 2024.

By the end of September the contract will begin so Network Rail will be on target to be onsite before Christmas 2024.

The department wants the lifts installed as soon as possible.

The undertrack crossing has caused a challenge.

The funding allocation has been ringfenced.
The install did not go ahead as stated last August 2023 as the project was underdeveloped.
Network Rail are currently in funding period 7, it has been confirmed that if the timeframe slips the commitment is still there to deliver the project.
Part of Station Approach may be closed for the container.
Network Rail have a contract with Stannah for the maintenance of the lifts.
If the lift was broken Network Rail should be notified of the failure and a phone number for the Station Team contact will be available on the platform.
A bicycle will fit inside the lifts as they can fit 16 people.
There will be either a temporary footbridge or separate access in Hewell Lane.
There will be a new electricity supply installed by Western Power. They will communicate with the PC to minimise disruption to the businesses etc.
A water tap will be installed on the platform to maintain planters.
An expected useful life of a lift would be 25 years usage.
The main risk to the project is affordability.

A resident commented that there is no publicity for planning in advance of travel regarding disability access. There is not a dropped kerb on Fiery Hill Road. There are no timetables on the platform or a screen or ticket machine on Platform 1. When the QR code is scanned it only takes you to the website, not directly to live departures. There is no access to the middle platform. People get the train into Redditch and back out to Birmingham so they can access Platform 3. A resident asked why they have to pay to travel to Redditch so they can return to the correct platform. All train stations are not compliant with the Disability Rights Access whereby a taxi is made available to take to a nearby accessible station. Residents agreed that not everyone uses the App.

Simon asked the parish council to send a list of deficiencies at the station to him.

Cllr Hotham detailed the history of the failures to deliver the lifts and how frustrating the situation is.

Simon confirmed that Network Rail have increased public engagement and are available to attend a future meeting to give an update. He will send Cllr Cholmondeley a project timeline.

Residents gave a round of applause for Cllr Cholmondeley and Cllr Hotham for their perseverance in pursuing the installation of the lifts.

4. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held 24th April 2023

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

5. Reports from local council representatives

a) Chairman's report

Copies of the Chairmans report were available 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 – Copies of the Cllr Hothams report were available to those in attendance and provided at Appendix 2. Cllr Hotham highlighted aspects of his report

c) Report from County Councillor for Beacon Division – Cllr Kriss had sent his apologies. Copies of Cllr Kriss's report were made available to those in attendance and provided at Appendix 3.

d) Parish Council Finances

A summary (attached appendix 4) of the parish council's accounts for 2023/24 was made available to those in attendance..

6. Open Forum

A resident asked about the Artrix arts venue in Bromsgrove. Cllr Hotham said the building had closed prior to Covid so wasn't eligible for any grants. It was used as an NHS vaccination centre so was able to build up funds. RAAC concrete was found in The Core Theatre in Solihull so they moved into the Artrix until February 2024. BDC have committed to spending £20k to maintain the building. It has to be running to apply for art grants and have a secure future. It only has 350 seats and 30 of those have a restricted view. Bigger acts need at least 500 seats so it is too small.

A resident asked for speed bumps along Hewell Road as she was concerned about pedestrian safety. There used to be bumps but they were removed due to complaints about the noise. 4 x 4's can drive over them without any effect. A resident will contact WCC Cllr Kriss regarding parking on the pavements and speeding traffic. Cllr Cholmondeley explained that it is not illegal outside of London to park on the pavement. The vehicle has to cause an obstruction and be witnessed by the police to be prosecuted.

Cllr Hotham said that BDC had released a county wide road sweeping timetable and the roads will be swept every 3 months in Barnt Green.

Complaints were raised about the planters and weeds. As the PC has changed supplier it is hoped that the planters will be improved this year. People can log on to WCC <https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/council-services/travel-and-highways/report-road-or-path-issue> to report blocked drains, potholes etc.

A request was made for a school crossing patrol (lollipop man/woman).

Some people are not disposing of their dog poo bags in the waste bins in Bittell Road playing fields but leaving them along the path. Cllr Roberts confirmed that for collection the distance of the bins from the access gate is measured and the bins cannot be placed further down the field.

A resident asked whether anything could be done about the house that has been empty for over 10 years on Sandhills Lane. Cllr Hotham said that properties that have been empty for over 10 years have to pay 3 times the council tax. There is no known legal route that can be taken unless the property becomes unsafe and a danger to the public.

7. 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 20:48hrs.

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

**BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2024
Chairman's Report**

The council has had its full complement of 8 councillors during the year.

With declining numbers on the usual Community Walk in September, it was decided to end the 2023 walk in Millennium Park with a performance from Brass Beatz and move the date to June. It was moderately successful. The Council made the Bittell Road Playing Field available to Social Eats who held an event there in September. A similar Social Eats event is scheduled for 2024. The Christmas Light Switch On was again well attended. It was not, though, without some last minutes hitches. The Council again organised a Wassail Walk between Christmas and New Year which attracted about 60 people.

Biodiversity is a hot topic in local government with Worcestershire County Council drawing up a Local Nature Recovery Strategy with which we have engaged, initially through the completion of surveys and identifying appropriate sites. The initiative we took last year appears to have been successful as the 5 fruit trees we planted have survived the winter and are bearing blossom. We are grateful that some residents have volunteered to work on improving the pollinator site on the corner of Greenbank in an attempt to reduce the ratio of weeds to flowering pollinator plants. Though not attributable to the Parish Council, it is worth noting that the National Trust is at an early stage of work on a project called the 8 Hills Regional Park extending from Clent to Weatheroak. It aims to improve access to the countryside and improve wildlife corridors. It is stated that the proposals are not about preventing urban development but about providing a robust plan for nature, recreation, active travel and sustainable farming. The Lickey Hills and the Bittell Reservoirs are within the scope.

Some further drainage work has been undertaken around the childrens' play equipment in Bittell Road Playing Field. Despite this, half the site remains boggy whilst the other half drains. It has been decided that the equipment needs to be re-sited, closer to the Adult Gym equipment where there is better drainage. The original equipment is at the end of its expected life span, being 15 years old, so quotations are being sought for new items.

Repairs have been made to the Wetpour Surface housing the childrens' swings etc. in Millenium Park. Unfortunately, the new surface was laid in wet weather and bobbles appeared. The contractors are to make repairs in the coming weeks now the weather should be drier.

Last year, I stated that work should commence on lifts at the railway station in August 2023 after the Department for Transport agreed to their installation and its funding. You'll have noted that this did not happen. However, Network Rail have kindly accepted our invitation to give an update at today's Annual Public Meeting.

Relating to a number of incidents on the highways, we have arranged for a roadside digital speed display to be installed on Fiery Hill Road. White gates have been installed on Blackwell Road on the approach to Barnt Green which helps motorists become aware that they are entering a built-up area and should slow down. Since we installed a flood level sign under the railway bridge in Hewell Road, I am not aware that any vehicles have drowned out during, or after, sudden heavy rainfall. The precept (the portion of council tax paid by residents to the parish council) increased by 6.3% for the coming year. Last year the increase was 3.4% so I think we have managed our costs well during a couple of years of double-digit inflation.

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

Robert Cholmondeley

Cllr Hotham

Annual Report: Barnt Green Parish Council April 2024.
District Councillor Charlie Hotham.

I report on all of the progress made on local issues at every Parish Council meeting and details can be found on the Barnt Green Parish website.

In terms of the bigger picture at the District Council, you will recall that at the May 2023 election no overall majority was obtained by any single political party or grouping. This was the first time in many years that this had occurred. For the council to function it was decided that a new way of working was to be introduced. Rather than the cabinet form of governance a hybrid scheme would be adopted. This would involve the introduction of cabinet advisory groups who would then interact with the cabinet on major policy decisions. A far more inclusive way of governance than in the past. It has taken 12 months to update the council constitution and put in place the structures for this to happen; it is now due to go live in May. In the intervening period cabinet governance has continued with the Independents and Conservatives forming a partnership cabinet. I have been fortunate enough to be appointed cabinet member for finance and enabling.

Aside from the cabinet the council has four main committees.

Overview and Scrutiny: This holds the cabinet and Officers to account challenging decisions, monitoring performance and data quality.

Audit, Standards and Governance: Their main role is to ensure good stewardship of council resources, consider risk management and maintain standards.

Planning Committee: They decide on planning applications.

Licensing Committee: This committee sets licensing policy across the district including alcohol, taxis, gambling etc. The committee also act in a semi judicial capacity in granting and possibly removing licenses.

The full council meetings, cabinet and all committee meeting are open to the public to attend.

Council and planning committee are live streamed on YouTube.

The council is currently in a stable financial position with a balanced budget forecast for the next 3 years without the use of reserves. The council is receipt of large government grant to upgrade Bromsgrove town centre, with a redevelopment of the old market hall site and also the old fire station.

Each wards councillors now has a small fund with which to help local good causes. Please contact me if you think I might be able to help.

The council is currently reviewing the district wide strategic development plan. The call for sites resulted in over 400 sites being submitted. The council officers have been considering these sites and intend to consult later in the summer on a potential plan up to 2040.

Charlie Hotham.

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Worcestershire County Councillor - Annual Report

It has been a rather challenging year for Worcestershire County Council (WCC) especially in terms of our building.

The top floor of the County Hall was confirmed as having RAAC, and as such is the only public building in Worcestershire to be affected. However, the Council and the partners have adapted, and all our functions have continued albeit on the ground floor and basement. Thankfully no school or hospital had to close as a result of the governments implementation of the HSE advice.

This financial year, unfortunately has seen an overspend in areas of Adult Social Care, Home to School Transport and Special Education Needs provision. This had to be addressed through an increase in the council tax and also through central government help. As this looks like it is going to be the year on year overspend, we are implementing measures to mitigate this for the long term.

WCC are increasing their efforts on promoting the benefits of foster care across the County, and we would like to see this being taken up across Worcestershire to help young children in their progression to adulthood. I have heard first hand from both Foster carers and their children of the overwhelming benefit it is in comparison to those children who end up in residential care, outreach provision or even moved out of County.

Subsidies to our bus services, as well as increasing access to the successful, “on demand,” bus service have been looked at in response to the needs of residents. This will continue, as proper, accessible public services are a major focus for our Cabinet Member Responsible.

Worcestershire is in the top quartile for the quality of roads, according to the Department for Transport, and have secured an additional grant of £6m for roads and £4m for pavements, on top of our usual spend. You only have to drive across the border to Birmingham, to see the difference in quality of the road surfaces. The condition of our roads and potholes are one of the main complaints from Worcestershire residents.

Worcestershire has seen exceptional rainfall in the last few months, and therefore our lengthsmen and WCC workers have had a lot of difficulty keeping up with the constant maintenance during this time. Hopefully, during the summer, this will also be fully addressed.

In terms of broadband connectivity, you may be aware that there is a Corporate Plan for shaping Worcestershire’s future priorities for investment in digital infrastructure and to provide gigabyte capable broadband. We do however, need to work together as Parishes, Councils, private sector, and local communities to engage in this critical conversation. Mobile phone masts can be controversial, but our future digital connectivity is vital. So the first step, is discussing local potential locations with providers so a favourable balance can be agreed.

Vaccinations rank second only to clean water, as the most effective public intervention to prevent disease. Worcestershire has one of the highest uptakes of MMR vaccinations in the West Midlands, with over 90% of children being vaccinated with 2 doses by the time they are 5 years old. However, we still have a little way to go for “herd immunity”, which is said to occur at 95%. WCC are offering any one who has not taken up their vaccinations the opportunity to through their doctors, local pharmacies and mobile centres. We have to be aware that only across the border, in Birmingham, there are reported cases of measles.

In terms of Covid 19 vaccination take-up, across all the eligible cohorts, Hereford and Worcester and indeed Worcestershire have the highest rate of vaccination take up, when compared to both the Midlands and the national averages. The flu vaccination uptake is also higher than the Midlands average.

Locally, I have been utilising my divisional funds for the benefit of Barnt Green, but I am still pushing for a crossing in Bittel Road and will continue to do so. I have spent a good deal of time

interacting with both the Civil enforcement Officers(CEO) in Bromsgrove to highlight the issues here, and with your local residents to try to educate those that insist on stopping on the pavement or disabled area. It is not as easy as just issuing a ticket as the CEO's have to allow 5 minutes of observation prior to issuing a ticket when someone is in breach of the traffic regulatory order.

I really do think that, should Barnt Green manage to get a fully trained Street Watch team of at least 6 volunteers, the issue of parking and speeding would be minimised.

As always, please feel free to get in touch to discuss any of the above updates in more detail or indeed about any other issues.

Kind regards

Adrian
Cllr Adrian Kriss
County Councillor for Beacon
akriss@worcestershire.gov.uk
Bromsgrove Conservatives
01527 304042
07973 989991

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Appendix 4 – Summary of Draft Financial Accounts for 2023/2024

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL				
Financial Report of 2023/2024: Receipt and Payments				
Annual Parish Financial Report				
RECEIPTS	2022/23	summary totals	2023/24	summary totals
Precept received in current year	68,000.00		109,750.00	
Interest	1,031.85		3,029.80	
Lengthsman Refund	2,423.60		1,960.97	
Miscellaneous	7,574.46		3,369.47	
Hires	840.00		3,378.75	
Total Receipts		79,869.91		121,488.99
PAYMENTS				
ADMINISTRATION :				
Staff Costs	22,675.31		24,198.38	
Chairman's Allowance	-		-	
Office Running costs	9,445.98		8,812.31	
Training and Publications	275.00		30.00	
Meeting Rooms and Refreshments	50.00		40.25	
Subscriptions	1,626.68		1,794.08	
Insurance	1,307.22		1,372.71	
Auditor Fees	552.40		587.40	
Legal Fees	-		-	
Election Costs	-		179.20	
Grants and Donations	550.00		1,250.00	
General Administration Costs	1,540.64	38,023.23	2,365.97	40,630.30
COMMUNICATION Newsletters	620.00		650.00	
COMMUNICATION Website	120.00	740.00	180.00	830.00
MILLENNIUM PARK Mowing	845.00		900.00	
MILLENNIUM PARK Maintenance	1,575.95		2,669.52	
Park Safety Inspections	250.00	2,670.95	211.10	3,780.62
PLAYING FIELD Mowing	2,779.23		2,284.10	
PLAYING FIELD Maintenance	1,370.00		636.82	
PLAYING FIELD Safety Inspections	98.00	4,247.23	211.10	3,132.02
ENVIRONMENT Hanging baskets	510.00		524.65	
ENVIRONMENT Planters	850.00		708.33	
ENVIRONMENT Maintenance	2,376.70		2,687.55	
ENVIRONMENT Outdoor Parish Caretaker	6,388.00		6,873.96	
ENVIRONMENT Pollinator Site	-		47.00	
ENVIRONMENT Commuter Car Park	-		-	
ENVIRONMENT Covid-19	-	10,124.70	-	10,841.49
FOOTPATH LIGHTS Maintenance	380.00		1,588.75	
FOOTPATH LIGHTS Electricity	3,301.35		2,421.67	
LIGHTING Christmas lights	8,800.57	12,481.92	4,260.00	8,270.42
HIGHWAYS Lengthsman charges	2,020.50		2,232.81	
HIGHWAYS Miscellaneous	-	2,020.50	948.30	3,181.11
MISCELLANEOUS Events	2,354.51	2,354.51	1,374.58	1,374.58
N'hood Plan/ capital projects	7,483.50		14,559.04	
FIXED ASSETS		7,483.50	750.00	15,309.04
Net Total Payments		80,146.54		87,349.58

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS SUMMARY 2023/2024						
RECEIPTS	2022/2023	2023/2024	PAYMENTS	2022/2023	2023/2024	Variance %
Precept received in current year	68,000.00	109,750.00	Administration	38,023.23	40,630.30	6.42
Interest	1,031.85	3,029.80	Communication	740.00	830.00	10.84
Lengthsman Refund	2,423.60	1,960.97	Millennium Park	2,670.95	1,830.62	-45.90
Miscellaneous	7,574.46	3,369.47	Playing Field	4,247.23	5,082.02	16.43
Grants Received	-	-	Lighting	12,481.92	8,270.42	-50.92
Hires (room / playing field)	840.00	3,378.75	Environment	10,124.70	10,841.49	6.61
			Highways	2,020.50	3,181.11	36.48
			Events	2,354.51	1,374.58	-71.29
			Capital projects	7,483.50	15,309.04	51.12
Total Receipts	79,869.91	121,488.99	Total payments	80,146.54	87,349.58	8.25
VAT Refund	2,929.28	6,166.59	VAT PAID	4,441.15	6,853.99	
Annual Receipts	82,799.19	127,655.58	Annual Payments	84,587.69	94,203.57	

Notes to the report of 2023/2024 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 2023/24 upon the Parish Council Taxpayer was £66.44 per Band D Annual Council Tax payment. The first instalment of the precept for 2024/25 of £37,750 was paid by Bromsgrove District Council into the financial year 2023/24 in error which is why the precept figure shows as £109,750. The actual precept for 2023/24 was £72,000.
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 £2,280 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 2023/24, consists of two rent payments from Equan for the electric car charging point in the community car park. They paid an additional £1,000 rent for 2024/25 into 2023/24. £125 from Cadent Gas and £948 from Worcestershire County Council to reimburse the PC for the village entrance gates was also received. 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 hire of the meeting room to Conexus Childrens Tuition. The increase is due to the income received from the hire of the playing field to Social Eats for the street food and music festival event held in September.

4. Expenditure variances:

- a) Administration: Staffing costs have increased in line with the Local Government revised pay rates. Office energy savings of £440 have been made by switching suppliers. Uncontested May election costs were £180. Grants were paid to support Bromsgrove Citizens Advice, Barnt Green Friendship Group and Cocks Croft Wood Trust.
- b) Communication: The Parish Council issues two Bulletins during the year, which are delivered free to residents of the parish. The website hosting fee increased to £180 in 23/24.
- c) Millennium Park and Playing Field: Work was carried out on the trees in Millennium Park that were overhanging the Friends Meeting House. Two invoices for the mowing of Bittell Road playing fields are awaited. Tree works were carried out in Bittell Road playing fields in 22/23.
- d) Environment: A water level marker was installed where the road dips under the bridge on Hewell Road. A nominal amount was paid to the business that supplies the electricity to the defibrillator on Hewell Road. The Outdoor Parish Caretaker expenditure has increased due to an increment built into the contract. A repair to the basketball hoop and the shed in Bittell Road playing fields were carried out.
- e) Footpath and Christmas lighting: Footpath lighting maintenance costs have increased as the existing lanterns are obsolete and the replacements expensive. Fortunately due to a change of energy supplier electricity costs have reduced. The Christmas lighting contract was due for renewal in 22/23 but a one-off payment secured ownership of the lights, so a significant saving has been made this year.
- 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 2023/24 the parish council was able to host a number of events. These included 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: Further drainage works were carried out in Bittell Road playing fields to try to reduce the muddy areas surrounding the children's play equipment. To improve the surface and reduce frequent repair costs new wetpour has been installed in Millennium Park.
- i) Fixed Assets: The new defibrillator 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 1.12.23 to 31.3.24 will be paid into financial year 2024/25.

5. The full version of the parish council's accounts may be inspected during the audit period, between Monday 3rd June to Friday 12th July 2024. 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

10/04/2024

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