

Chairman's Report 2021-22

This report covers the period of May 2021 to May 2022. The Parish Council was able to return to face to face meetings whilst adhering to government guidelines for the prevention of transmission of Covid – 19. It is worth noting that the pandemic has had an impact on the ability of both the Parish and District Councils to get things done. Government guidance is now “back to usual business” although the backlog that has accrued will take time to address.

Appointments & Resignations

- August 2021 Cllr. Maureen Freeman date resigned as Parish Councillor
- September 2021 Janine Arm, Parish Clerk resigned after many years service to the Parish Council
- November 2021 Cllr. Mandy Cook was elected as Parish Councillor
- November 2021 Chris Gracey was appointed Clerk to the Parish

Business As Usual

Parish Councillors have continued to respond to complaints and concerns from residents on a range of issues from noise pollution and business operating conditions to bin collections at the Lakeside development which has been a particular issue, after repeated calls to the developer this was reported to the CCDC environmental officer. The development was scheduled to be handed over to the district council in April 2022 however this has been delayed for at least a couple of months for reasons which will be explained in the main Parish meeting tonight.

Grants & Proposals Awarded

- May 2021 - £15,000 CCTV & Park Renovation
- July 2021 - £1,750 Automated external defibrillator for Bethel Church
- September 2021 - Wooden planters for the school
- November 2021 - £150 Christmas event at Bethel Church
- January 2022 - £5,000 x 2 history boards for the History Society

Main Concerns

The two main concerns for the Parish are the condition of the Park and the HGV traffic through the village. A new issue has been the arrival of a large number of Afghan asylum seekers to be temporarily accommodated in Bridgtown at the Holiday Inn.

Parks & Open Spaces

Much of the volunteer work planned for planting and repainting was paused due the incidents of vandalism which was reported both to the Police and to the Community Safety Hub. Measures were taken by the Police to deter the vandalism and this seems to have worked to a degree as there have been no further reports to the Police in some months. Sadly vandalism is an issue not just for our Park but has been reported at almost all other Parks across the district sometimes involving large numbers of young people. The district council have now trimmed the bushes and shrubs and will repair the flower bed wall a second time although the cost this time will need to be met by the Parish. Sue Heath is ready to lead the planting and will need volunteers to support her. The play slide which volunteers attempted to paint late last year has now been inspected by the district council inspector re the wooden panels and reported that it is safe and just needs to be treated before painting. The Parish council is waiting for a quote for refresh of the wall murals as part of the refurbishment budget.

HGV & Traffic Problems

This has been a difficult & frustrating issue for the Parish, despite weight restriction signs HGVs continue to use Bridgtown as a shortcut to other destinations, causing near misses and damage to parked cars and to street furniture. It is accepted that a few HGVs will need access to make their deliveries. It is also unhelpful that Sat Nav devices fail to alert drivers of the restrictions. It was hoped that ‘unsuitable for HGVs’ signs could be provided by the County Council. However they have refused to support our request as they believe the weight restriction signs on all roads entering the village should be sufficient. Since the ‘unsuitable for HGVs’ signs have no legal standing, they cannot be enforced. The Parish Council will need to decide whether to purchase them from the CIL monies. In the meantime the chair has written to the Cannock Police Commander, Chief Inspector Victoria Downing to ask what support the police can give around enforcing the weight restriction signs which

are lawful. Robust enforcement would prevent or at least reduce the number driving through illegally. This will be discussed further in the main Parish meeting.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

The Parish Council continues to grow & develop relationships with key institutions in Bridgtown.

- **Bridgtown & District History Society**

There is a strong connection with the Society & the Parish Council has been pleased to fund history boards & plaques along the heritage trail. The Chair along with Cllrs. Eccleston & Kruskonjic are also members of the Society and attend their meetings and presentations. The Society have just elected a new co-chair following the sudden death of the much loved David Williams and past headmaster of Bridgtown Primary School. The Parish agreed a proposal put forward by Derrick Middleton to fund a plaque to be mounted on the school wall. It was not supported by the school who felt it would set a precedent for all other headmasters of the school.

The Parish Chair and the Chair of the District Council Cllr. Doug Smith were honoured to speak at the erection of the Ma Pardoe blue plaque ceremony. The Chair and other members also attended the unveiling of the Wooton family History Board.

- **Bethel Church**

The Parish continues to work with the church through Jan Burns and has funded a small grant for the traditional Christmas Event with practical support from Cllr. Eccleston and the local resident who played Santa. The Parish also funded an Automated External Defibrillator which has taken some time for the parts to arrive. It is now complete and will be fixed to the exterior of the church as soon as possible. The free life saving training sessions can then be organised.

- **Bridgtown Primary School**

The Chair has previously approached the school to ask what support the school needed, having heard that the school was short of computers for the children who do not have access to one at home. However Cannock Soroptimists were already donating those so Parish support was not needed. The Parish did fund 4 large wooden planters for the children to understand the benefits of growing their own plants. This is led by Sue Heath. Further information will be made available in the main Parish meeting.

- **Army Reserve Centre**

The Parish is keen to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with RMP Provost Coy 116. The Chair approached the Unit and Captain John Bailey has delivered a presentation on their role in peace & war time to the Parish Council. He led the RMP detachment parade at the remembrance Sunday being the first time they had done this. Last night the Parish Council were hosted by the Unit given a tour and listened to serving members about their roles and commitment to the Unit.

Welcome Back Fund(WBF) & Queens Jubilee

The Parish was successful in obtaining a £5,000 grant from WBF which is a European Fund initiative. The criteria was very restrictive. However 3 items were agreed by Parish Council and approved by fund managers. This included, An event co-ordinator to organise the Artisan Market at the Bridgtown's Social Club, self watering Planters and two large boxes of street party items for the Queen's Jubilee. Further benefits were made to those Parish Councils who had obtained the grant which had been reserved for the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. This includes cup cakes, chocolate lollies, commemorative coins and a huge sliced cake. This was followed by a Beacon to be lit on the day of the celebrations June 3rd for 2-3 hours to signify the event of her Majesty's coronation anniversary. Further update in the main Parish Meeting.

Asylum Seekers in Bridgtown

In November the Parish Council were informed that a number of Afghan asylum seekers were to be accommodated at the Holiday Inn under a contract agreed between the Home Office and Serco. As a result of the concern raised by Parish Councillors, the Chair arranged a meeting on 18th November with Senior Police Officers, District Council Officers and the Cabinet member for community safety. Councillors have been sent the confidential notes of the meeting. At the meeting Cllrs. Eccleston & Cook volunteered to act as the local contact for residents. The Chair has provided an update prior to or at each Parish Council Meeting. This is development which the Chair will provide in the main parish meeting.

Next Year Projects to be working towards

1. Continue to progress the refurbishment of the Memorial Gardens & Play Park now that it is 'Back to usual Business' and the threat of vandalism in the park has reduced.
2. Continue to identify appropriate funding projects from CIL monies that benefit residents.
3. Improve use of Parish website and parish profile.

Val Jones
Chairman of Bridgtown Parish Council
11th May 2022