

# BREWOOD & COVEN PARISH

With Bishop's Wood  
& Coven Heath



**Annual Report 2020-21**

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## **Brewood and Coven Parish Council – Annual Report for the Year 2020-21**

Welcome to the 2020-21 Annual Report of the Parish Council. The following reports were given at the Annual Parish Meeting which was held on 8<sup>th</sup> April this year:

### **Chairman's Report – Parish Councillor Mary Sambrook**

This year has been a steep learning curve for all of us due to the restrictions of Covid-19. As appointed Chair during this period I have helped facilitate the use of Zoom for our Parish meetings which resumed during the summer of 2020. I assisted in the training of a number of Councillors enabling all to be able to attend Council meetings. Two Extraordinary Meetings were called in 2020. The first being in March 2020 when I was acting Chair after the sad loss of our former chairman Richard Dakin. This meeting was to enable us as a council to run effectively until we were able to facilitate remote meetings. My thanks go to the Clerk, Assistant Clerk and members of staff for their continued support and working throughout this difficult time. Due to the government allowing the opening up of play areas during the summer, the second meeting was called to enable us to quickly get our parks open. My thanks go to Parish Councillor Peter Knight and other Councillors who carried out risk assessments of all our sites enabling us to make the decision at that meeting to open the parks without which this would not be possible. Rather unconventionally you will all remember this meeting was chaired from my camper van remotely by the sea in sunny Cornwall. During the autumn the realisation that our annual Civic Sunday would not be possible gave us as a Council the opportunity to give funds into the Christmas Hamper Project led by Councillor Wendy Sutton. My thanks go to Wendy for all her help. This was very successful and provided much needed support to members of our Parish. Digital poverty was an area highlighted greatly in the media for school children unable, as a result, to carry out home learning. As a Council it was decided that we should purchase 16 laptops in total which were distributed around the schools which serve our children living in our Parish. I spent some time sourcing these and then distributing them around the area. Due to Covid there have been no public events to attend. However I have attended a number of meetings via Zoom and Microsoft Teams for working parties and other community groups. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic many of you will be aware that I have been supporting members of our parish with shopping, chemist runs and various other duties as so many have also done. It has been a great pleasure watching how well our community has worked together assisting each other through such difficult times and I am glad I was able to be a part of this volunteer group. Finally I would like to thank all Councillors for their support throughout the year and bearing with me while I got to grips with hosting our virtual meetings. My special thanks must go to Maggie our Clerk who has been a fantastic support throughout, along with all members of staff. There is nothing more to say than fingers crossed 2021/2022 will be a better year for us all and thank you.

### **Finance Report – Presented by Parish Councillor Chris Smythe**

This Finance Report relates to income and expenditure for the financial year 2020-21 only. As there was no Annual Parish Meeting in April 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic any income and expenditure from that year has not been reported, however, the minutes of the meeting are posted on the Parish Council's website.

The Council's budgeted expenditure for the financial year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 was £304,696. Members resolved to set a precept demand of £165,861. In support of the 2020/2021 anticipated income was £10,933 net of VAT refunds and excluding the precept. The actual income was £11,048. The majority of this income was derived from rental charges received from the Royal British Legion and provision of facilities such as allotments hire of Coven changing rooms and The Poor's Land (grazing land). The Council's football facilities at Coven were hired by two adult teams for the season: Tettenhall FC, Essington Working Men's Club. Due to Covid-19 restrictions many matches were cancelled and have been rescheduled to take place after April as a result the income from Coven changing rooms hire was less

than anticipated. However, the Parish Council did receive £1,200 from Brewood and District Voluntary Car Scheme which was unexpected, this is used to subsidise the Car Scheme Co-ordinator's salary.

The actual expenditure incurred was £152,498 net of VAT and in summary comprised of:

- Staff salaries, including all on-costs, came to £86,339. Members do not receive any remuneration for the work they undertake as Parish Councillors other than £25 telephone expenses once a year.
- A further £12,213 was spent on administration, associated overheads, subscriptions, Audit fees and training. Lease agreements at Coven playing field and Coven Heath allotments came to £1809.
- There was no expenditure in respect of Parish Council Newsletters as no physical deliveries took place. Instead the Parish Council published an online roundup of news in February 2021.
- Maintenance of the Council's playing fields, amenity areas and open spaces were £24,735.
- Upkeep, running and maintenance of the Parish Council offices totalled £12,213.
- Grants totalling £25,291 were made to the three village hall committees in the parish, a variety of community groups and also for this year Christmas hampers for those residents affected financially by Covid-19. The Parish Council also bought and distributed 16 laptop to local children to help those families affected by 'digital poverty'. It was decided that this year there was no need to grant any funding towards Brewood Christmas lights as the committee had sufficient funds available. Bishop's Wood, Coven and Coven Heath Christmas lights received their usual grants, amounting to £2,791.

The capital amount held, excluding six months running costs of £60,000 is £67,700 plus 50,000 capital the sale of the bellmouth in Engleton Lane, Brewood in 2020; which can only be used for capital expenditure. The Parish Council is also holding ear-marked reserves for a variety of reasons; these include provision for future election charges, a contribution towards double yellow lines in Coven and Brewood, entrance markers in Bishop's Wood (using Roseclaim grant reserves), resurfacing Coven tennis courts, refurbishing the Parish Council chamber and office building, asbestos checks on all Parish Council buildings and tree works required parish-wide following an extensive tree survey.

### **Planning Report – Parish Councillor Richard Taylor:**

We are pleased to be consulted and to make comment on planning applications – both commercial and residential. This year we considered 92 applications, three from gypsy and travelling show people and 26 commercial or industrial. Although the majority were returned with no adverse comment, in the main, those that we were concerned about were in concordance with the final decision by the planning authority, South Staffordshire Council. We are grateful to be informed of and occasionally make comment on tree works both within the Conservation Area and on those with Tree Preservation Orders. We were disappointed with the decision of the Secretary of State to allow the WMI - a case was well-reasoned and people-power was rejected. A proposed site in Lawn Lane for commercial change was rejected – local knowledge and objections were very important. The new road for RFO Featherstone will be detrimental to the residents of Coven Heath – we objected and await the decision. We await the decision of the development behind Grain Ridge in Sandy Lane, Brewood – we had numerous reservations. Again we await the decision on the Play Barn in Kiddemore Green Road. We were disappointed at the withdrawal of the Rural Exemption proposal in Bishop's Wood, for much-needed low-cost housing for local people. We continue to be concerned over the potential creep of industrialisation into the Green Belt in the Parish area. We thank our Assistant Clerk for her help in collating and giving our response to the relevant authority.

### **The Bront Annual Report – Parish Cllr Glen. Sibley:**

Throughout the year there has been very little litter to be found and no evidence of dog fouling, thanks to responsible dog walkers and local litter picking volunteers. There were a number of flood warnings for the river Penk, notably last winter when we saw a record water level at Jackson's Bridge of 2.5 metres with local fields flooded, many local roads under water, and The Bront looking like a lake over most of its area.

### Late Spring 2020

Despite a very wet winter with record levels of flooding the paths had recovered well and had dried out and were all easily passable. There were no fallen trees that could be a danger to visitors. Wild flowers were blooming and there were buds and leaves on the trees. Birds were flying around, singing and starting to build nests. There was an abundance of lesser celandine covering the areas where Himalayan balsam once grew. The mown areas showed signs of recent cutting. The river Penk and Watershead Brook had receded to a low level and were flowing slowly through the site. A few signs of new Himalayan balsam shoots were evident and this was reported to the grounds maintenance team for attention.

### Summer 2020

Paths had become very wet due to heavy rain and there was some standing water. The handyman/gardener had kept on top of maintenance of The Bront since the Friends of The Bront disbanded and has trimmed the area by the Poplars Farm Way entrance and path. The path through the trees had been widened by cutting back the overgrown bushes on either side. The culvert at Poplars Farm Way Entrance had a build-up of silt creating a small bank where wild flowers (possibly yellow yarrow) were growing. The contractor and I did an inspection of the Himalayan Balsam growth and this was treated and is dying off. I visited the training archaeological dig site when it was being carried out. Protective sheets were used to reduce damage to the grass and when they had finished and cleaned up it was difficult to see where they had worked apart from minor discolouration of the surrounding grass. I reported that there was large areas of Himalayan balsam growing either side of the bridge in Lawn Lane by Star Park and Brookside Park. I believe a letter was sent to the site owners and noticed later that Brookside Park had cut it all down on their side of the bridge. This was very important as the seeds from this area are carried by Watershead Brook directly into The Bront. Removing the plant at this location protects both The Bront and Brewood from further threats from the seeds being carried downstream by the river Penk into The Bront and into Brewood. During the early Covid-19 lockdown there was a problem with rubbish bins not being emptied causing litter to appear. This got onto Facebook and the bins were emptied. The litter problem was dealt with our volunteer litter pickers for The Bront, two local residents.

### Autumn 2020

Several trees had low hanging branches on the path from Riverside Way. This was due to the weight of water and was dealt with by the gardener/handyman who cut back the outer part of the branches, allowing them to spring up out of the way. He had also cleared the Poplars Farm Way entrance again. Parish Cllr Richard Taylor reported that Himalayan balsam was about two metres high and in flower and was growing on the lower bank of the river Penk but only visible from the opposite bank on Brewood Park Farm land. The grounds maintenance team was informed of this and attended a site meeting arranged by Parish Cllr Taylor. The river Penk had risen and fallen again due to on and off heavy rain. The weir beside the Poplars Farm Way entrance path had had the bank reinforced with concrete. A flood warning was issued on Coven Matters on Facebook and on the Parish Council Facebook page.

### Winter 2020

I discovered that trees backing on to Willow Close had been missed from the recent tree survey. A meeting was arranged between myself and the surveyor to look into this and he was unaware that the trees along the path from Poplars Farm Way entrance were part of the survey this was reported to the office and the completion of the survey followed.

### Spring 2021

Spring bulbs were showing new growth and there were catkins on some trees. All paths were muddy and there was some standing water, wellington boots were required! The site was covered with snowdrops and birds were singing and flying around. The bench seat on the mown green near the picnic table had a number of slats loose both on the seat and the backrest, one of the frames was bent and twisted causing all of the slats to be out of alignment and the gardener/handyman had successfully repaired these.

## **Playing Field Reports:**

### **Brewood – Parish Cllr J. Jeffries**

Since the last Annual Report, the Parish Council has continued to take pride in and maintain Jubilee Park. Five incidents of exceptionally heavy rain during the period from October 2019 to October 2020 (including Storm Dennis) resulted in waterlogged surfaces as well as wet equipment. This curtailed the use of both adult exercise equipment and all facilities for young people prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In line with Government instructions, the Jubilee Park was closed to the public by resolution of the Council, and a working party be appointed to carry out risk assessments, which included considering the impact on the caretakers. Thanks must go to Parish Councillor Peter Knight CBE for his thorough inspections and risk assessments. Access to the tennis courts was facilitated by members of the Tennis Club once play was allowed again in May 2020, and the public was welcomed back to the park in August, subject to Covid-19 restrictions. Any adult exercise equipment which was face-to-face was kept locked. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the playing field is being well used, whilst the exercise equipment is still taped off following government advice. South Staffordshire Council has also provided clear signposting regarding social distancing and hygiene. Improvements have included new hand holds to the zip wire, an up-to-date noticeboard by the skateboard equipment and repainted picnic benches. Birds have been deterred from perching above swings by the use of cable ties, and whilst this has been effective it was time-consuming and did not last long. A plastic more permanent solution has recently been approved by the Parish Council, and this should help to keep swings clean. As usual, our thanks must go to the caretaker, Elaine Glead and to Martin Smith the handyman/gardener who both help to maintain a quality service. These thanks are especially due during the roller-coaster restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, with which they have coped admirably.

### **Coven – Shaun Boyce (caretaker)**

It has been my privilege to have been appointed caretaker in January 2019. The playing field is used very regularly and is such a valuable space for families from the village and further afield. The playing field is home to two football teams: Essington and Tettenhall. Games have been a bit hit and miss this last 12 months for obvious Covid-19 reasons. In the early days of me taking over there were bouts of anti-social behaviour but by engaging with older children this died out and since then there have been less than a handful of incidents. There are several older pieces of equipment on the park that need overhauling which are regularly reported on the inspection reports. For a proportion of 2020, the playing field and park were closed to all visitors due to Covid-19. When the playing field was finally opened it was used all day every day right up until nightfall. I try and keep the playing field open as late as possible just for somewhere for the young people to feel safe and secure and away from walking the streets, hanging around at the shops etc. It is always closed before it is fully dark. The tennis court nets are extensively used. Also, there are a couple of basketball players that travel all the way from Telford to utilise the court at least once or twice a week, subject to Covid-19 restrictions. When the previous caretaker for football decided not to undertake the Sunday football duties any more, I took this over and have a great relationship with the team contacts. I ensure the pitch is lined in a timely manner and the changing rooms are kept clean, tidy, and warm for when they arrive on the Sunday morning with piping hot water for showering after matches. I also engage with teams of junior players that use the playing field on an informal basis. One thing that is regularly reported via social media is the presence of dogs on the park. The Parish Council website was recently updated to reflect that dogs are not permitted in playing fields in the Parish; most people are genuinely apologetic.

### **Bishop's Wood – Parish Cllr Rachel Glover**

Bishop's Wood Play Park has been greatly used over the last year despite being closed for a number of months. When I have visited, even in the snow, there have been a number of children along with parents enjoying the facilities. It is an asset which is much loved by the community. New gates this year were installed which I have been informed made opening and closing the playing field a lot easier. Unfortunately we have not yet been able to install the goal posts due to the flooding issues but hope to look at this during the summer. The tree at the bottom of the playing field where Martin, our caretaker, had planted a number of bushes has not been a problem this year to my knowledge, however the bushes

are now badly trodden and another option may need to be looked at during the coming year. My thanks goes to Rachael Dunbar our caretaker who has opened and closed the playing field for us during the year and kept an eye on things down there.

## **Allotments Reports – Parish Cllr David Short**

### **Ball Lane, Coven Heath**

The allotments have remained open during the entire pandemic. The last formal inspection was undertaken on 22 June 2020. There were three plots reported as vacant with some uncertainty about two others. I am not aware that those numbers have changed. On 28 March 2021 I did a walk around with Alan Lawrence, the caretaker and treasurer of the Coven Heath Allotments Association. All the vacant plots and several others were very overgrown. I was informed that one of the plot holders has a rotavator and would be willing to help make them suitable for new tenants. Most of the active tenants appear to have made a big effort to keep their plots well cultivated during the Covid-19 lockdown period and those less active have at least attempted to protect their areas from frost and overgrowth. I have noticed some increased activity over recent weeks. Although I was unable to speak with the bee hive owner, I understand they are still healthy and some tenants have enjoyed a few jars of honey. There is concern that at least one tenant has left an incinerator burning after leaving and the gates being closed. Leaving a fire unattended is dangerous, creates a smoke hazard and a breach of the Allotment Rules. The chicken coop which was erected on plot 37 is empty but the plot holder has confirmed it is still in use. Parish Cllr R. Taylor recently carried out an inspection and identified four plots as in need of a reminder letter to make a start or to give up their tenancy. The Clerk has reported a tree with a dangerously damaged branch to the tree surgeon.

### **Chambley Green, Coven**

The last formal inspection was on 22 June 2020. At that time there were no issues and just one vacancy which had been let and was due to be taken on. There were no condition grades stated in the report so it can be assumed that all plots were well tended at that time. I have not been to the site but an inspection by the Allotments Working Party is being arranged.

### **Clerk's Report- Maggie Birtles**

There was no Annual Parish Meeting held in April 2020 as the lock down came into force on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and all meetings were cancelled for the foreseeable future. The last physical meeting of the full Parish Council was held on 12<sup>th</sup> March. An extraordinary meeting was held on 19<sup>th</sup> March to enable the Parish Council to continue to function during the pandemic. There were no formal meetings until June when the Council was able to meet again virtually. Since the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting many things have happened, the most significant for the Council was the sad news that the then Chairman, Parish Councillor Richard Dakin, passed away on January 29<sup>th</sup> 2020. Vice Chairman Mary Sambrook stepped-in to chair meetings from then on and was elected as Chairman proper on 25<sup>th</sup> June at our first meeting of the Council's year. The casual vacancy for Parish Councillor for Coven ward left by Richard Dakin was contested and an election called which was then postponed until 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021. We should therefore welcome our new councillor at our 13<sup>th</sup> May meeting. Going back to 2019 for a moment, the Parish Council began negotiations with Lovell Homes to sell a small parcel of land giving access to the field in Engleton Lane, Brewood which eventually became the Somerford Park development site and thus facilitated the provision of some much needed affordable housing in Brewood. Coven also had a new housing estate built off School Lane called Saredon Gardens, and it was hoped that Bishop's Wood would also benefit from affordable housing at a rural exception site but sadly this has stalled, hopefully just for the time being. In January 2020 the Parish Council received the resignation of the Assistant Clerk, Gemma Jones who took a two year career break and went off to America with her family. We were joined in February by Kathryn Kliszat on a two year temporary contract. Unfortunately lockdown from 23<sup>rd</sup> March meant that Kathryn was unable to get to grips with her new role immediately but she has now settled in very well and is enjoying working for the Parish Council. After over eight years as Janitor at Sandy Lane toilets, Matt Orgill left the Parish Council in early 2021. He was replaced by Shaun Boyce who was already working as the caretaker at Coven playing field. Parish Cllr P. Knight kept the toilets spic and

span and in good working order during the intervening period. The first lockdown meant that playing fields, changing rooms and toilets had to close for a while but the allotments and the office were accessible for the whole time. Everything eventually opened up again once we got the go ahead from the government and after a series of risk assessments had been carried out. The Chairman, Mary Sambrook spent many hours setting up computers and devices for members and staff and we all very quickly learnt how to 'Zoom'. Despite the disruption of the pandemic we managed to complete a number of projects. The mobile SID between six sites was finally installed, a tree survey of all Parish Council owned sites was completed, a new website and associated email addresses were up and running for the deadline in September, double yellow lines were laid in Poplars Farm Way, Coven, a replacement gate at Bishop's Wood playing field was installed, a new weir on the river Penk in The Bront was completed, the purchase and distribution of 16 laptops for local children came about using unspent funds. Parish Cllrs Mary Sambrook and Wendy Sutton put together and organised the distribution of Christmas hampers for some residents and the electrics in several parish council buildings were overhauled. More details of these projects will be contained in the finance report.

The most significant issue to affect residents in the Parish was the West Midlands Interchange at Four Ashes and despite ferocious opposition, it was finally given the go ahead in 2020. We wait to see how this will impact on the Parish in the years to come.

Parish Councillors attendance figures at the 17 scheduled meetings since 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020:

	No.	%
M Alden-Court	15	88.2
J Bradshaw	17	100
R Glover	12	70.5
DM Holmes	12	70.5
J Jeffries	15	88.2
P Knight CBE	17	100
A Pupino	17	100

	No	%
M Sambrook	16	94
D Short	17	100
G Sibley	17	100
C Smythe	13	76.4
W Sutton	11	64.7
R Taylor	16	94
M Webb MBE	16	94

### **Brewood and District Car Scheme Report – Mrs S. Phillips**

Last time I prepared a report on the Car Scheme I began: This year has been quite eventful for the car scheme. This past year has been very *uneventful*. Due to Covid-19 we made our last journeys in March 2020. Since then I have constantly been checking the government guidance on GOV.UK in the hope of getting us up and running again. According to the guidance it has not been feasible to restart the scheme safely. I have kept in touch with the drivers by email and contacted some of our customers, who I know look upon the scheme as more than just transport, in an effort to keep their spirits up. Being a Samaritan at the Birmingham branch for years I am aware of the increased calls we receive and the reduction in volunteers, due to their need to self-isolate on occasion. This has meant there have been lots of shifts that weren't sufficiently manned. So I have been doing extra shifts at Birmingham, Stafford and Wolverhampton branches. Hopefully, when everyone has had their second vaccination, the world will be a safer place. We will get the scheme back up and running as soon as we possibly can. I am currently coming into the office to do the accounts and close up Year 20/21 and prepare for Year 21/22. For the future I have been thinking of extending our services beyond just medical appointments, but will have to discuss this with the trustees and drivers and I will endeavour to have a recruitment drive to get more drivers. The need for useful transport in this area is lacking and yet so important, I am sure our scheme can be of help.

<b>INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT</b>			
<b>YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>INCOME</b>	£	£	£
General Admin	1,697	3,966	2,912
Rent/lease agreements	1,899	1,950	1,969
Provision of facilities	3,775	4,649	3,806
Grants inc Roseclaim	6,840	2,369	3,171
Reimbursements	0	0	0
Bank interest	664	770	230
Precept	139,996	160,054	165,861
VAT refunded	0	0	0
Capital	0	50,000	0
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>154,871</b>	<b>223,758</b>	<b>177,950</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	£		
Staffing	92,133	89,665	85,719
Admin/overheads	11,414	12,304	16,592
Incidental expenses	3,972	2,238	0
Cllr and employee training	535	871	2,891
Leasing agreements	1,809	1,809	1,809
Subscriptions	1,030	1,149	1,050
debit card transactions	(18)	0	0
Coven playing field	4,941	4,129	4,477
Brewood playing field	2,183	2,075	3,553
Sandy Lane WCs	1,286	1,055	2,858
Other maintenance	7,059	6,800	10,751
Projects	500	435	8,390
Village hall grants	7,505	12,220	8,640
Christmas lights grants	5,256	5,300	2,791
Misc grants	22,188	8,142	19,237
Capital items	575	6,866	0
Loan repayments	9,027	0	0
s137 payments	150	0	150
VAT	0	0	0
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>171,546</b>	<b>155,058</b>	<b>168,908</b>
	£		
<b>(EXCESS) EXPENDITURE OVER INCOME</b>	<b>(16,675)</b>	<b>68,700</b>	<b>9,041</b>
<b>BALANCE SHEET AT 31 MARCH</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>COUNCIL FUNDS</b>	£	£	£
At start of year	149,875	133,200	201,900
VAT difference	0	0	0
Movement in year	(16,675)	68,700	9,041
<b>FUNDS AT END OF YEAR</b>	<b>133,200</b>	<b>201,900</b>	<b>210,941</b>
<b>REPRESENTED BY NET ASSETS</b>	£		
<b>Current assets</b>			
Prepayments	2,313	693	748
Sundry debtors	465	665	1,016
VAT refund due	1,577	1,199	2,592
Cash in hand	140,317	201,256	216,347
	144,672	203,812	220,704
<b>less:</b>			
<b>Current liabilities</b>			
Receipts in advance	1,087	25	0
Creditors	10,385	1,887	9,762
<b>NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR</b>	<b>133,200</b>	<b>201,900</b>	<b>210,942</b>