

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
THURSDAY 12TH MAY 2016
PARISH COUNCIL REPORT

1. You may remember that we had 2 elections last year! The first effort produced only 2 Parish Councillors; at the second attempt we managed to increase the number to 6 – still one short of the required number of 7. We were fortunate that one volunteer came forward to be co-opted to bring us up full strength, but since then we have two resignations so we have two vacancies to fill. We were grateful for the work done by Martin Bradford and Jimmy Morgan and were sorry to lose them. Anyone who wants to do their civic duty please speak to me later – surely there are some people who would like to see the Parish Council at full strength.
2. The Parish Council has continued to do all the nuts and bolts things that seem to produce a very full agenda for our regular monthly meetings, and there have been several extra meetings arranged to deal with specific issues. I will not take time to catalogue all these routine things – but rest assured that we have been fully occupied on your behalf. What I propose to do is to highlight some of the major issues which have demanded our attention.
3. First was the issue of the Village Hall Car Park. It has been apparent for some time that the car park was in a bad state, and once the costs of doing something about it became known it was clear that the Parish Council would have to get involved with the funding. We judged that it was also likely that the Village Hall may need financial assistance with other things which need renovation. I am happy to say that a contract has been let for the resurfacing of village hall car park, plus the overflow car park by the Recreation Ground; subject to the approval of a loan from Central Government the work should be completed in the next month or so. At this point I would like to thank Jeremy Howell Thomas and Simon Snape and the Village Hall Committee for their efforts in bringing things to this point. These things do of course have consequences – the loan will have to be paid back and we have provided for this from the increased Parish precept.
4. Next was the problem of reduced services from Central Government and Hereford. We attended a meeting on this issue arranged by Leominster Town Council, and it became clear that the main problem was the continuation of the 490 bus service. There was also talk of reduced funding for important services such as the Leominster Library. The Parish Council have decided to provide a contribution, along with other Parishes, to keep these things going for the Community. We have been successful in ensuring that the 490 bus service will continue as at present at least until this time next year. We are indebted to neighbouring Parishes and Leominster Town for joining with us, and our thanks are due particularly to Sebastian for his efforts in this regard.
5. We have also decided to do something about the appearance of the Village. The Telephone Box was offered to us, and rather than see the Post Office scrap it, we bought it. It cost £1 to buy, and a bit more than to refurbish, and we now have a little community library in there. We have also decided to arrange the planting of bulbs and wild flowers in strategic places in the Village. The War Memorial is very important to us, and we have applied for a grant to clean the stone work and repair a crack which has appeared in the structure. Last year we were grateful for the efforts of Penny and Jan who arranged to clean the area around the Memorial, put rosemary in the pots, and repaint the railings around the memorial. Also, we hope to smarten up the old water pump in Deakins Lane.

6. An issue which requires resolution in the near future is Community Assets. Last year we were asked to identify items which could be considered as “Community Assets”. This means that should these “assets” be under threat, the community would consider acquiring them. Other villages in Herefordshire have responded to this by listing things such as village shops and pubs. You may be aware that Brimfield recently had a referendum to decide whether the village should buy the Roebuck. We had originally proposed that our two pubs and village shop should be listed as “Community Assets”. This does not mean that we want to buy them now – but if there was a threat they might close we would consider buying them. However both pubs are unhappy with this. We would like your views on this.
7. The final item which I wish to comment on before I get the main theme for this evening is the precept. I have referred to new items which we have had to include in the budget, and as consequence we have had to increase the precept. The increase amounts to about £1.25 a month for the average Band D house, which doesn't sound a lot – but the percentage increase sounds big – 26%. Also, coming on top of a 28% increase last year, we are aware that the precept is much bigger than it was. I hope you will think that the extras which we are paying for – specifically the village hall car park, and the 490 bus service – are worth it. No doubt you will make your views known before we fix the precept for next year!
8. I will now turn to the big challenge for the future. A few years ago, the Government published its Localism Strategy. The centre piece of that, as far as we were concerned, was the formulation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan. The then Parish Council backed this idea, and worked long and hard to find people who were prepared to get involved in doing it. Eventually they managed to form a Committee, headed by David Small and a small group of volunteers. We joined with Richards Castle to prepare a joint NDP for the two Villages. Every household received a questionnaire soliciting views on the future for the Villages. The Draft Plan is now available for consultation with the two Villages, and everybody should by now have received a flyer on how to see the plan and provide comments on it. Those of you who have seen the Plan will be impressed by its size if nothing else, and we must thank David and his Committee, notably Mike Saunders and David English from Richards Castle, and John Alderman, Pauline Betteridge, Liz Moran and Don Pickard from Orleton for their efforts. Being the type of Village which we are, the main issue is housing. Hereford identified a need for an increase in the houses available within the County, and identified Orleton as a Village with a sustainable future – we have a shop, school, two pubs, a village hall, a doctor's surgery, and for the present a least a bus service. Hereford judged that we need to provide about 53 new houses over the 20 year period from 2011 to 2031. This includes the 14 affordable houses recently finished up Kitchen Hill Road, the two Border Oak houses on Postons Yard, and the recently – and in spite of Parish Council objections – approved Border Oak on Tunnel Lane. At the time when the Draft Plan was finalised we also had an outstanding application for 39 houses opposite the school. Many of you will have attended the Public Meeting last year organised in this room by the Parish Council. The Parish Council and a number of local residents objected to the application. However, the Hereford Planning Committee last week approved the application for these 39 houses. It was not all bad news – Hereford are promising a flood alleviation scheme upstream of the Village and Severn Trent say they have a solution to the sewage problem, and the Planning Committee were clear that the approval was conditional on these two things. You will have worked out that 53 minus 14 equals 39, so without the 3 Border Oak and other new builds arising from applications approved in the past but not acted on, plus other new applications for odd houses here and there, the approval for the houses opposite the school already exceeds the number of houses being asked for by Hereford.

9. The other number to bear in mind when considering future housing is the Housing Needs Survey included in the questionnaire on the NDP. Responses to this survey suggested that people in Orleton would like to see up to 80 new houses to cater for future needs. This should be regarded as a wish list rather than a hard requirement, but if we take this figure, after allowing for all the various pluses and minuses, we could be looking another 20 or so more houses than the 39 already approved.
10. We did not know about the approval for the 39 houses when the NDP was written. However the approval for the 39 houses is a fact which we must now live with. Let us hope that the promises made regarding sewage and general flooding are honoured. However we need your responses to the Draft NDP; specifically we need your comments in a number of areas
- a) The Plan identifies three areas beyond Halletts Well and on both sides of the road by the school as being suitable for the expansion of the village, but excludes other areas within village such as sites up Tunnel Lane and Kitchen Hill, Amiss Orchard, the Boot Car park etc., and any areas which are not joined on to the main core of the village. Is this right in your view?
- b) Now that the 39 houses have been approved, should we restrict development to this specific parcel of land and eliminate all others from the Plan. Hereford cannot say that we have not complied with their requirements. Alternatively, should we include space for the 20 or so more houses arising from the Houses Needs Survey? This would mean keeping one or both of the other areas of land identified as being suitable for development in the NDP – and we would be inviting development on them if we go for this option.
- c) The approval for the 39 houses was given against the background that Hereford is working on a flood protection scheme upstream of the village. They consider that this, together with other measures promised by Severn Trent, will also remove problem of sewage flooding in the Village. You may assume that the Parish Council will continue to oppose any development until these problems are solved. However, the developer of the land opposite the school has agreed to contribute £30000 to the flood protection scheme. You may wish to consider whether you wish to see further development if it can secure a financial contribution of Village infrastructure improvements. Again, we need your views.
11. I must stress that the Neighbourhood Development Plan is actually very important. When the Planning Committee were deciding to approve the 39 houses opposite the school they were told by the Planners that the NDP was not sufficiently well advanced for it to “carry weight”. In effect the Committee were invited to ignore the wishes of the community as expressed in the questionnaires and at the Public Meeting last year. Once the Plan is finished we will be on a much better footing to resist unpopular planning decisions – and your views on the draft plan are vital – so please read the plan and submit your comments on it. These comments must be made in writing – we want to hear your views this evening, but only comments that have been in writing will “carry weight”.
12. Finally, I want to pay tribute to the many people who put many hours of time, on a purely voluntary basis, to make the Village function. We have a Church and Chapel, youth groups, a Village Hall and Recreation Ground, regular Village Coffee mornings and more clubs and societies than I could name. I have thanked a few individuals for their efforts in this report, but I want to extend the Parish Council’s thanks to all those who give their time to making the Village what it is.