

## **BIRDINGBURY ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING**

**7.30pm Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019 in The Birbury**

The Chair, Cllr Ian Tipton, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Present were Cllr Ian Tipton, Cllr David Preston, Cllr Gaynor Davy, Cllr Jackie Morton (acting on behalf of the Clerk to record the meeting), Cllr Diana Turner and twenty-two members of the public.

**Apologies** were received from Paula Whitfield, Aileen Withington, Dallal Stevens, Liz & Richard Davies, PCSO David Banks, Barbara Munro and Simon Davy.

**Minutes of the 2018 AVM** held on 24<sup>th</sup> April were agreed as a true and complete record.

**Matters arising from the minutes** – none.

**Chair's Report** from Cllr Ian Tipton:-

Regular reports from the Chair are made throughout the year in Birdsong and Cllr Tipton invited questions and comments at this meeting from both those and his brief recap of events here.

Cllr Tipton congratulated Cllrs Davy and Preston for delivering another very successful village bonfire and fireworks and appealed for more help to support them next year.

Cllr Tipton outlined work that has taken place to explore with the Club, Birbury and Parish Council how a combined village amenity might be created through restructuring. The sensitivity of this subject regarding the share ownership from the Club members has precluded the Club Committee from presenting and discussing options it has identified at public and/or formally minuted meetings. Cllr Tipton hopes that in the interests of the village there might be some more productive collaboration between the Birbury Management Committee, the Parish Council and the Club to identify a way which might satisfy all parties and allow the village at large to have its say.

The Recreation Field is an ongoing responsibility for the Parish Council in terms of maintenance and safety. Cllr Tipton thanked Cllr Preston for his considerable time and diligent work spent on fulfilling our responsibilities here.

In September the village saw our own Bill Cowley and Ron Trenchard, both veterans from D-Day, receive the French Legion of Honour. An impressive list of dignitaries and exceptionally large number of villagers attended organised by Simon Davy. The Birbury provided excellent refreshments.

Thanks were expressed to the small group of five villagers who turned out for the village Litter Pick on 6<sup>th</sup> April. As usual bottles, cans and food containers dominated the collection.

Cllr Morton was thanked for her hard work in the refurbishment of the redundant Telephone Box and provision of the new Defibrillator for the village.

An increase to the precept will again be sought to keep pace with inflation and allow the Parish Council to fulfil its upkeep and maintenance obligations to the village.

Cllr Tipton personally and on behalf of the village thanked retiring Councillors Turner and Morton for their hard work. Cllr Tipton will also be retiring but said he believed the Parish Council was in good hands with ongoing Cllrs Davy and Preston and incoming Cllrs Richard Cutts, Guy French and Chris Morton.

**Questions arising from Chair's report:-**

Dick Withington queried why informal talks couldn't be resumed between the Club, Birbury and Parish Council. Cllr Turner responded that only individuals can have informal discussions and these cannot commit the Parish Council. The Parish Council can only commit to something through a properly minuted public meeting.

**Clerks' Finance Report 2018-2019**

In the unforeseen absence of the Clerk, Cllr Morton read the detail of her submitted report. The precept has increased for 2018-2019 by £573.84 which is slightly more than the increase in previous years. The main expenses were Clerk's salary and expenses, grass cutting, and insurance. There was a balance of £634.00 actual over budget. Additional funds are held by the Parish Council ring-fenced for the Defibrillator and Village Bonfire.

**Village Matters** – none.

**Reports from village organisations.**

**Allotment Society:-** Vic Shayler reported that there were sixteen residents and nine from outside the village who hold the 25 available plots. The harvest last year was poor due to unusual weather, and as a result the Produce Show was not held. One holder reported having to buy potatoes for the first time in twenty years! The Society has alerted the Parish Council to concerns over the condition of the shed.

**Angling Club:-** Jackie Westcott reported that whilst few in numbers whatever the weather anglers still enjoy the monthly matches, and that the weekly Wednesday evening summer matches will soon resume. New members would be welcomed.

**The Birbury:-** Jackie Westcott reported that Pauline Meade had retired as elected village representative and been replaced by Alice Munro. Leslie Turner has retired from the Committee and as Treasurer after nine years' service, for which grateful thanks, and Alice Munro has taken over the role of Treasurer. Investigations identified a fault with the water heater affecting the electricity. This has been replaced. Some new lighter weight chairs had been purchased (some with arms to assist the elderly). Donations were received from The Country Show Committee towards upkeep and improvements and Rugby Cement's Benevolent Fund towards Bill Cowley's presentation event, with the balance remaining with the Birbury accounts. Events organised or supported by the Birbury Management Committee include the Egg Roll, Bill Cowley's presentation, the Tractor Run, a fundraising Bazaar, Tea (and sherry) at Christmas and a St. George's day Country Lunch.

The Birbury Management Committee is also custodians of the Birdingbury Distribution fund which this year has paid for repairs to the Playing Field goalposts and donated towards the cost of the coach for the children's pantomime trip.

Queries from the meeting regarding finances were responded to by Guy French (auditor).

The Birbury holds about £5,200 of its own monies (boosted this year by donations) with £500 allocated to Village Crockery and £373 Youth Club. The Distribution Fund stands at approximately £5,000. Room hiring income had reduced by half. John Starley queried if the village required the crockery fund. Several attendees confirmed the usefulness of having crockery available and thanked Rhondda and Chris Barney for their work, and it was agreed that via Birdsong its existence and availability would be highlighted.

**Birdingbury Club:-** Chair, Tony Flint reported that the Club continues to make improvements and respond to members' feedback, for example the introduction of better beverages (particularly wine and gin), more varied entertainment (one large and one small event per month) whilst continuing with its regular events. The Club continues to work closely with the Church and wider community for mutual benefit. Whilst the Club is increasingly susceptible to price increases, raises in wages and increasing utility costs, its steady improvement of recent years has continued and it now holds a very small reserve.

The Club committee has worked hard to continue to seek a structure that might fulfil the wishes of the village to provide a combined and improved facility with the Birbury. Currently it is a not for profit organisation operating as a registered society under the cooperative community benefit societies act 2014 and regulated by the Financial Conduct Association. It is a distinct legal entity, with limited liability, that is owned by and trading mutually with its members and is governed by an elected (and entirely voluntary) management committee who are wholly responsible to the members as owners of the entire property and business.

Following informal discussion with the parish council and a minuted meeting with both the Birbury and the Parish Council which set out the parameters and protection each group required, the Club was tasked with looking into how this could be done.

Investigations by the club suggest that we have a unique scenario in Birdingbury in trying to bring together an existing pub/bar and an existing village hall/community room, rather than being a community that is trying to save or reopen one or the other; however following legal advice and much work, the Club have developed a proposal that it believes would satisfy all parties (although it fully accepts this would require compromises for all parties).

The Club sought to reopen informal discussions to explore this proposal with the Parish Council and Birbury to seek their support, at least in principle, before formally putting it to its members (as it is required to do) and then formally making the proposal to the Parish Council as leaseholder. However, the Parish Council declined to discuss further on an informal basis, and suggested that the Birbury Management Committee believes it ultimately is the body who can decide any changes to structure.

The Club therefore suggested that the Parish Council seek legal advice on its decision-making position and that of the Birbury, however this suggestion was also declined.

A request to the Club from the Birbury Management Committee for permission to look into developing the Birbury's own kitchen/toilet facilities was declined as it was felt that this was not in the spirit of cooperative working.

Whilst the Club's offer of informal talks remains 'on the table', given the seeming impasse in the process, the Club will now have to continue with its plans to redevelop the Club independently of the Birbury/Parish Council but very much in line with its original proposals of refurbishment, upgrades, reworking of the garden areas, the extension of the rear of the club to provide a function room/village hall with kitchens, and other general improvements.

The Club recognises that its relationship with both the community and the membership remains the key to its success, and it would undoubtedly be better to work jointly on this, but equally it does now need to get on with the improvements.

Comments:- Chris Barney said that there was concern that the Club members could decide to sell the site and with any combined facility this could result in a loss of asset to the village. Cllr Turner explained that the Parish Council is unable legally to give any informal views. Richard Cutts responded to a request by confirming that the current Club membership comprised 60% villagers and 40% from outside the village. Chris Barney suggested that the Club better promotes to villagers how to join to boost its resident numbers. Cllr Tipton and others hoped that talks could continue to find a way forward.

**Birdingbury History Group:-** Chris Barney read a report on behalf of Aileen Withington which outlined the last year's activities of this group. Stretton-on-Dunsmore History Society have visited to learn more about the history of significant buildings in Birdingbury. Members were able to visit the relatives of a former Birdingbury Camp POW (at Oelsnitz, Vogtland and in East Kreutzberg, Berlin), and attend the unveiling of a plaque in Ardleigh to the crew of the Halifax bomber which crashed there in 1943. Some of the History Group's material was included in the exhibition to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WW1 Armistice in St Leonards Church. Two members have been very patiently transcribing the Civil War Loss Accounts for Grandborough and Leamington Hastings. The Group continues to have contact with former residents and their relatives from as near as Dunchurch and far as Australia. It has been an interesting and rewarding year and new members would be most welcome.

**Birdsong:-** Lesley Fleming reported that the bi-monthly 20-24 page Birdsong, which remains free of commercial advertising to protect its independence, has now reached edition 91. It includes Church News and Views which remains a separate but

co-published part of the magazine edited by Rachael Glanville, and it is distributed across the parish.

Steers of Rugby continue to provide an excellent service at a highly competitive cost, although this has risen slightly in line with inflation. An issue of 24 pages costs around £100 to print 160 copies. In addition, the PCC finances the Church News and Views section on a pro-rata basis. Birdsong funds have remained healthy.

Birdsong has received generous donations from many individuals and Lesley thanked those kind and generous people who had supported the publication over the last year. Funding has also been received from the Village Distribution Fund in the past and Lesley hopes this might be able to continue.

Thanks go to everyone who writes articles, sends photos and provides information about events and activities. Thanks also to the proof reader (Leslie Turner) and the distribution team. Please keep up the good work so that everyone knows what's been going on, and what they can look forward to in the months ahead.

Thanks too to Dallal who continues to do a great job posting each edition onto the Village Website which means that Birdsong is available to be read, downloaded and printed free by a worldwide audience and appreciated by non-residents who have connections, past and present, with the village.

**Defibrillator:-** Jackie Morton reported that the defibrillator was installed in December following successful grant of £5,424 from lottery monies, 52 villagers had attending training and every property in the parish had received a leaflet and fridge magnet with the access code. There had already been occasion for it to be fetched for an emergency although it hadn't yet been used. Thanks go to Steve Edgar and Mark Thomas for undertaking the role of responsible "guardians" making sure on a weekly basis that the equipment is available and in good order.

**Good Neighbours:-** No report – remove from agenda for next year.

**Ladies Circle:-** Jenny Hawes reported that Ladies Circle continues to meet on the second Tuesday of the month, usually in the Birbury, from September to June. There is an informal range of activities chosen by members including talks from visiting speakers (national and local), craft sessions, visits to local gardens, musical recitals and shared meals either in the village or nearby. Non-members are welcome to advertised events for £3 admission.

**Leamington Hastings Academy:-** Paula Whitfield's report as Chair of Governors was read by Tony Flint (also a Governor). Because of its small class sizes and nurturing nature of the school it attracts children from both in and out of the catchment area. Mrs Suzanne Marson was appointed new Head of School in September with it for the previous two years having been under the joint management of the Exec Head of Dunchurch Schools and Head of Dunchurch Infants School and Nursery. A new early years teach Mrs Liz Wooldridge also started in September. In May 2018 a visit from Ofsted judge the school as good. Paula is now a governor of the joint federated

governing body for the two Dunchurch schools which is reviewing its admission arrangements including the movement of children from Leamington Hastings school to the Junior School.

**Neighbourhood Watch:-** Jackie Morton reported that we have a new PCSO, David Banks, who sends his apologies to the meeting. Thanks were recorded to Helena Steadman (Seal) who had served our community well for many years. David Banks plans to hold some property marking events in the village and has already twice been stationary outside the Club in a high visibility visit and met several villagers. Over the last year there have been a few incidents:- a lost/found cat, gypsy visitation, concern over drugs dealing near the recreation field, a suspicious "litter picker", brazen daylight theft of a motorbike, anti-social behaviour with the despicable egging of two houses, and then one night several cars broken into and items taken. The contacts list was updated to comply with Data Protection Regulations, and it has been suggested that perhaps WhatsApp or Facebook might be appropriate platforms. Jackie would like somebody to take over the Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordination role and perhaps they could consider advancing the service. Jackie was thanked for all she has done with Neighbourhood Watch.

Dick Withington asked if there was specific advice regarding car key crime. Jackie said she believed that keys in a tin (to block radio signals) was suggested, but not to hide the tin so intruders needed to confront residents. Use of the old fashioned crook locks has also been suggested.

**St Leonard's Church:-** Dick Withington said that we continue to be blessed with The Reverend Alison Massey's ministry and have had the benefit recently of the Revd Gail Phillip, although she is moving on to Exhall. Karen Armbrister was elected Church Warden at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in April but will not be seeking re-election next year. Peter Law and Mel Palmer have left the PCC having given many years of good service. New members of the PCC would be welcomed. Investigation needs to take place into some mortar which has fallen from the pediment before our next inspection in 2020. A bench in memory of Doreen Johns will soon be put up in the churchyard. Nearly £4,000 was raised from the Promises for Auction evening for the Global Care charity. The partnership with this charity is in its final year and Andrew Armbrister and Dick Withington will be visiting the Bekaa Valley in November. The Church Fete will be at the Club/Birbury on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July from 3.00. Thanks go to all who give so freely of their money, time and talents to support the work of the church.

**Recreation Field:-** David Preston reported that the annual inspection throws up lot of things we should or could do to improve the recreation field. There is a constant watching brief for maintenance and health and safety issues. The possibility of

replacing the slide was mentioned – however the idea of an improved slide, possibly with enclosed steps at the top was not welcomed.

**Swop Shop:-** Jenny Hawes reported that swop shop continues to meet on a Saturday in the Birbury at 10.30 for about an hour, with people taking turns to host. They enjoy some lovely cakes and biscuits. There is no charge for coffee, but a voluntary annual donation which has resulted in £65 being given to the Birbury this year. Swops range from books/magazines in the winter to plants and produce in the warmer weather. All are welcome.

**Village Website:-** Dallal Stevens submitted a report read on her behalf. The website still delivers a useful service providing information on all village related matters, Parish Council documents, agenda and minutes, local information, copies of Birdsong, Church news and views, a village calendar of events, some history, and an archive of village photos. There are also links to local sites and information. An issue that the village needs to address is of the website's need to comply with GDPR with regards to the use of photos and pictures of villagers. The Parish Council is asked to decide how the website should proceed before it can post any photographs. The site particularly gives pleasure for villagers and their friends and families far and wide.

Lesley Fleming thanked Dallal for her most efficient and effective work on the website particularly with regards posting Birdsong.

**Birdingbury Wheelers:-** John Starley reported that the first outing of Wheelers will be tomorrow (1<sup>st</sup> May) and will continue on Wednesday evenings. Chris DeNahlik is putting together a "Hare and Tortoise" principle to accommodate all abilities – more to come on this soon. The evenings are very social.

**Village Fireworks:-** David Preston reported another successful event with very favourable feedback from the 386 people attending on the fireworks, food, general atmosphere and organisation, plus exceptional value for money (being £5 for food and fireworks). Thanks go to the small group of volunteers who organise and run the event, and particularly some new younger helpers. Income was £1,317 and after some non-recurring capital expenses there was a surplus of £22. This plus the balance brought forward of £659 should be sufficient just to cover the costs of a complete washout next year.

The event is aimed particularly at families with young children so should be affordable and at a suitable time. It is not intended as a profit making event, and is priced at £5 whilst others in the area are typically £7.50. Pricing will be reviewed before the next event. Volunteers would be very much welcomed to help with the event.

**Any other business:-**

Margaret Burnett expressed her disappointment at the service we seem to be getting from the planning department at Rugby Borough Council in that they do not seem to be paying any attention to the comments made by the Parish Council or residents with regards to planning applications. We do not have the infrastructure in terms of roads, sewerage, water etc. to support further significant developments. Cllr Tipton assured that members of the Parish Council had visited the planning department at RBC to make those points but likewise it doesn't seem to have had much affect. It seems that RBC planners reference any similar scenarios that might have had successful appeals made and make decisions based on those outcomes to avoid appeals against them. It also appears that landowners are being approached by companies putting forward schemes. Until RBC gets its planning policy approved they are not scrutinising applications closely. Cllr Turner confirmed that the National Planning Framework allows for conversion of stables and other agricultural buildings as a principle.

Jackie Westcott commented that there still seems to be somebody using the open bin at the bus stop for dog waste rather than the dog bin.

Chris Morton commented that he is disappointed to see RBC wasting money with the many low bridge signs that have appeared.

Lesley Fleming asked for the minutes of the AVM to be published on the website in draft form so that they could be read and digested before the meeting. This was agreed.

**The meeting closed at 21.15 hrs.**