

**Minutes of Bishop's Itchington Annual Village Meeting
25 April 2022 at 7.30pm**

Present:

Cllr Dugmore (Chairman) Cllr Christian-Carter Cllr Kettle Cllr Tressler

In attendance:

Karen Stevens (Parish Clerk)

6 Members of the public

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Dugmore who welcomed everyone, particularly residents and those who had not attended one of these meetings previously. He advised that it was a parish meeting for the electorate facilitated by the Parish Council Chairman and Clerk to the Council. Cllr Dugmore opened the meeting and advised that this meeting is for members of the public/residents to share what has been going on, what events have been happening, what the various clubs, groups and societies have been up to. There will be a short summary of where we are from the Parish Council point of view, updates from the District Councillor, and a question-and-answer session followed by an informal 'get together'.

1. Apologies:

Cllr Gates, Cllr Thomas, Donnamarie Davenport, Carolyn Went, Martin Green

2. Minutes of the Annual Village Meeting 26 April 2021

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Annual Village meeting held on 26 April 2021 as a true and complete record of that meeting. (Proposed Cllr Tressler, seconded Cllr Christian-Carter, three in favour, none against, remainder abstentions as they were not at the previous year's meeting).

4. Bishop's Itchington Parish Council Annual Report Year Ended 31 March 2021

Councillor Dugmore (Chairman): Cllr Dugmore advised that it has been an interesting 12 months. Three councillors have resigned during the year, the first being Cllr Dawn Mann who set up and ran the Covid Helpline. The parish council would like to recognise all the hard work she had undertaken in setting the Covid Careline up including her vast organisational skills and the rapport she built with residents in the village. The parish council thanked her for the work she undertook with and on behalf of the parish council and in particular with that Covid Helpline as she had done a superb job.

Unfortunately, Cllr Sharon Bougoussa resigned in July 2021. Cllr Sharon Bougoussa had had quite a part to play in the Covid Helpline being the first point of contact and she was our last representative from the Bishop's Hill estate. Again, a big thankyou to Sharon for the work she undertook as part of the parish council.

A Neighbourhood Development Plan has been in progress for several years, but we are finally getting there as the Regulation 16 Notices have been published, so it will be up for inspection shortly. An inspector has been nominated and eventually there will be a yes/no referendum held in the village. Over the years, many people have put a lot of effort into progressing this but special thanks to Cllrs Steve Tressler, Norman Thomas and Judith Christian-Carter for their inputs to get this 'over the line'. It is a protective document for the future of the village and if passed at referendum, will be a statutory planning document.

The Playground Working Group has come together and has become a lot stronger with additional support. It is busy keeping the play area safe and serviceable whilst planning for the replacement of equipment. Some equipment has had to be removed recently as the wooden play equipment has deteriorated over time as it is nearly 20 years old. There is a project underway to replace the equipment with a modern steel set up – the first piece of equipment to be installed will be a replacement arial runway that is on order. This is being paid for from parish council budgets and it is intended that the replacement play area will be paid for by grants, not the parish council precept. Thank you to Cllrs Norman Thomas, John Gates, and Judith Christian-Carter for their input to this project and for progressing it forward. There are several members of the public helping with this project and they are very much appreciated for the time and energy they have committed to this.

Our County and District Councillor, Cllr Chris Kettle has given on-going support throughout the year including issues with street lighting and road maintenance/highway. This support has been appreciated.

Planning: we have had a few 'interesting' applications this year and many will be aware of the proposed solar farm that is currently refused although it is suspected that they will be bring something new/amended forward. Thank you to Cllr Steve Tressler for attending planning committee and speaking on behalf of the parish council. Also, thank you to Cllr Judith Christian-Carter for her ongoing planning inputs, interpretation of policy and advice.

We started the year with a councillor stepping down and unfortunately ended the year with a councillor stepping down. Cllr Michael Mann decided to leave the parish council in March, and we should reflect on the drive that he put in to keep the pavilion project moving, notwithstanding the issues we had at the end but there was a level of enthusiasm that he brought to it and a group of supporting residents that he kept motivated and engaged throughout. We must recognise the work he did do, and it is unfortunate that he chose to step down after the decision in February.

Finally, thanks must be given to our Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer, Karen Stevens who keeps the parish council on the 'straight and narrow' and is the face of the council in the office. A lot of work goes on in the background that Councillors and residents do not see, and thanks must be given for this as the work is very much appreciated.

We go into 2022 with four council seats to fill. If we are going to represent the village properly, we need to fill those seats with a broad representative mix of areas, of backgrounds, people who have just joined the village, people who have been here for years, people of all different backgrounds, different skills, different knowledges to reflect the community we have in Bishop's Itchington. It is not as difficult as it sounds, and it would be really good to have new thoughts, new ideas and new faces and if it is not you but you know someone else who would be good get them to contact the Clerk or myself or any of the councillors to chat about what being a councillor entails.

Cemetery and Churchyard:

The published report outlines what has happened in the cemetery and Cllr Christian-Carter is happy to answer any questions. The old water tank has finally been removed and the process of replacing it has begun. The Young brothers are being asked to put some slabs down for the new tank to sit on so all being well it will be up and running in time for the hot weather.

Planning:

No additional information to add to the published report.

The question of Nemo Racing was raised, and Cllr Judith Christian-Carter advised that this is ongoing and presently there is no more information regarding this.

Another question was raised as to whether there is any 'inklings' that there will be any future housing developments approaching the village. Cllr Chrisitan-Carter

advised that whilst the Core Strategy/Local Plan that we have got continues. As things stand, Stratford District Council (SDC) is committed to providing 14,800 new homes between 2011 and 2031. More importantly is that each village has got its own allocation depending on its designation. As a Category 1 Local Service Village, it was specified that we had to have 112 new builds. We are actually 180% over that and this does not include the quarry as it was within what was then the built-up area boundary. The Bishop's Hill site, because it was a redeveloped brownfield site, it was classed as a windfall site and therefore, as such, does not count towards the allocation. In the last site allocations plan, SDC divided up all of the villages into various tiers. This was about reserve sites and so would be a site they would put forward if needed. There are several categories and Bishop's Itchington was put into Tier 7 and this is villages that have 'significantly over delivered' therefore they would have to go through all six tiers before they started to release sites in Bishop's Itchington (7 is the bottom tier). This comes back to the importance of the Neighbourhood Development Plan because, when you get to look at it you will see that there is a policy about no further development outside the built-up area boundary and very strict restrictions for anything within the built-up boundary. Given all this and assuming we stick with the Core Strategy until 2031, the chances of any major developments in the village are extremely low. Surveying has been carried out on land off Hambridge Road and when asked, the surveyor said that the landowner had requested a survey. Another person was told that Follet's were trying to sell the land behind them and that they were the surveyors of the possible purchasers. Cllr Dugmore advised that any landowner can submit a planning application on their land, similarly they can order a survey on their land. We are aware of landowners looking at options but unless they pass the test of the planning policy as evaluated by SDC, it will not go ahead. Sites only get developed due to two things – landowners want to sell the sites and people want to buy them. A further question was asked as to whether you need planning permission for notice boards as we have all these new people in four new estates around the village, but nobody is part of the 'old' community. If planning permission is not required, can we put notice boards up so at least some information can be shared. Cllr Dugmore advised that it was being investigated. The ones you currently see are on parish council land, so are straight forward to install. If you look at the Persimmon estate or Furrowfields estate for example, all the land is owned by management companies and therefore we would require the landowner's permission to erect noticeboards. It has been considered but has not got to a point of being executed. The question of planning enforcement was raised regarding Bishop's Hill as the plans included a hard path beside the nature reserve straight into the village. The only path at the moment is through the nature reserve and not all of it is stoned and therefore people end up driving into the village rather than using the path particularly if the weather is inclement. Can we not get the planning enforcement officer to push the path through. Cllr Dugmore advised that he recalls the requirement for a path but does not recall how it was to be surfaced. Cllr Christian-Carter advised that the path that has been installed was the path that got planning permission. There is a need to create a safe exit onto Works Lane from the path and some barriers will need to be installed. The current houses that are being built create the bottom of the estate and this is where the path will enter the estate therefore the path is not complete. There are approximately 285 houses in the estate, but the parish council is not informed of how many are occupied. There are between 1,200 and 1,300 houses within Bishop's Itchington. It was agreed that the Parish Council will look at the plans that were approved and compare it to what is there and if there is an issue, it will be raised. The issue of a new the new doctors' surgery from funding from Folletts was raised and the chairman advised that their obligation on this expired two years ago whilst the CCG was still working out if they were going to do it. Their decision was to

support a significantly larger cluster down at GLH rather than smaller satellite sites like this one. Therefore, even if Folletts had spent £2,000,000 and had built it for us, no one was prepared to run it. The planning application was put forward and the parish council supported it as we thought it was a good thing, the village was behind it, the developer was prepared to do it and were going to equip it and let it run for 20 years without cost, but no one was prepared to run it.

Neighbourhood Development Plan:

It was agreed that this had been covered earlier but the importance of the document was reiterated.

Playground Working Group:

The replacement ariel runway has been ordered and it is hoped it will be installed in mid to late June.

To obtain grants, we have to show that we have done satisfactory, rigorous, valid public consultation so Tom Cooper has been into the primary school and worked with the children to get their ideas. There are various survey monkey questionnaires live on social media and young people at Southam School. Once this is all complete, we will have met the consultation element (with the target audience) for grant applications. Regarding the funding of the scheme, the Pavilion Project was going to be partially funded by a contribution from the developer of Furrowfields (Section 106 funding). Initially it was an agreement that it would fund playground equipment but the playground at the time (2016) was in good repair with no deterioration. There was the project looking at how to resolve the pavilion issue therefore we engaged with Bovis Homes (now Vistry) and their solicitors via SDC to complete and sign a Deed of Variation to allow us to use the S106 monies for the pavilion project instead. The pavilion project will not proceed so one of the options we are looking at, following resolution at a recent committee meeting, is to engage with the appropriate legal representatives to change that back. If it works, we will have up to £134,000 available to use to fund the playground. One option is to transfer the whole amount to the playground, one is simply to open the perimeters so it can be used for either or both. BISA has raised approximately £6,000 and this is in an account until it is decided as to how the pavilion will be replaced.

The suggestion that a shelter be incorporated into the plans for older young people/dog walkers was made – this suggestion had already been passed onto the working group.

A member of the public raised the issue of the playground on the Bishop's Hill estate as there is a space but no actual play equipment. The site is not owned by the parish council; therefore, it is the developer's responsibility. As part of the planning approval, there is to be a recreational area included and this is marked on the map a LEAP – local equipped area for play. They also said the path from Bishop's Hill to the village is good if you are walking but if you are with children using a bicycle, scooter, roller skates etc, it is not user friendly.

A new resident of Bishop's Hill raised the question as to where the parish council boundaries were. It was explained that the Bishop's Hill development down the road that takes you to the B4451 – the north of the road is the northern boundary of the parish and goes all the way down to almost the M40 junction (just before Knightcote Bottoms Lane). It then spreads out to the east taking in a number of isolated farm properties. Bishop's Hill and Bishop's Itchington are the only significant conurbations within the parish. Originally, the parish boundary ran through the middle of the Bishop's Hill development which would have placed part of the estate in Bishop's Itching parish and part in Harbury parish but following agreement with Harbury, the boundary was reconfigured so that the whole development was brought within Bishop's Itchington as it was recognised that most residents would use facilities in the village.

The issue of schooling was raised regarding not being able to get to get primary places at Bishop's Itchington school. Unfortunately, this is outside the scope and influence of the parish council and would need to be brought up with the County Council.

Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP):

It was agreed that this had been covered sufficiently earlier but the importance of the document was reiterated.

Pavilion Project:

To summarise where we got to on this:

- quite a lot of background work was undertaken to decide what kind of things the building should support,
- what kind of building would be necessary to support those facilities,
- Went through the process of engaging an architect.
- Put forward a good design,
- Went to tender and five competitive tenders were received,
- Three of the tendering companies were interviewed,
- All were reviewed against a comparison, so they were all fairly assessed,
- The price of the building was quoted at just over 1.1 million pounds,
- We had been working with a fund-raising specialist and talked about some of the sources of funding – we had the Section 106 monies of £134,000, we were hoping to get £75,000 from HS2 but in the grand scheme that was only going to be just over £200,000. By the time the payment costs were factored in, we were looking at nearer 1.3 million pounds and then interest on top,
- It became interesting when a public meeting was proposed about this. We delivered the initial leaflets and that caused quite a ripple particularly on the local Facebook groups,
- We had the public meeting – residents at the meeting very quickly made their feelings known. Some were very positive, and some brought really good ideas as to how it could be developed further, some were very much against the idea, and it is good to have these polarised views. Some appeared to be happy to contribute to something that would make the village better whilst others, understandably, were quite concerned about the effect on their personal finances as we were talking about something that would increase the precept by 50% over the next 20 to 30 years. That 50% in real terms is about £50 or around a pound per week but as we know some peoples' finances are genuinely so tight that this could tip them over the edge. Some brought with them perfectly valid and reasonable criticisms of the project and brought alternative ideas, and some sadly just came to disrupt the meeting,
- As we got to the point of conducting a survey there were various elements that were compressed in time and this was discussed in a meeting and frankly, things were rushed,
- Last minute changes meant that the survey got delayed going out,
- When the survey went out, the company doing the deliveries missed certain chunks of the village as they were not aware of Bishop's Hill and Furrowfields therefore councillors delivered these and Cllr Dugmore delivered to as many outlying farms as he could,
- The results of this, we had got two weeks into a consultation and not everyone had received a form or the information leaflet that went with it, so this was not good enough,
- With the deadline less than two weeks away and we were in a bit of a funny time with the clerk taking much deserved holiday, Cllr Dugmore called an extraordinary meeting and at that he asked four questions:

- Whether we thought that survey was still valid given that people had not received the information on time and had not had enough time to review it. The parish council agreed that no, it should not be considered valid because of those good reasons,
- We also went through the things that went wrong in that survey and we committed on top of that to look at examples of good practice that other councils use. We know that some councils have a consultation tool kit that they use so we committed to put one of these in place before we do anything of this scale again,
- The big question that Cllr Dugmore had suspected several people had had on their minds for some time but were not sure about bringing up was whether we actually wanted to continue with that project at that cost with that funding pot. The councillors at that meeting agreed that it was not the right thing to do in the current economic climate and therefore the pavilion project would not continue,
- It was agreed that the parish council were just too close to the project,
- We have learnt a lot from it: we have got a design; we know our way through the design process and have learnt about the sort of things contractors can do for us. Therefore, if that gets picked up at any time in the future, we are already three quarters of the way down the line of how it gets done, we know what to do. The pavilion project is shelved from the point of view as to how it was going to be funded and the cost it would have been. If a means of funding it came out of the blue tomorrow, then we could get the plan off the shelf and carry on,
- The plan was based upon the intended use, with the building supporting sports activities and community activities. The people who came forward when we asked them were part of the group that came up with the design. The whole village was asked their opinion on the design,
- The pavilion is now in a holding pattern. One of the things that came out of the meeting and the survey was that we need something to replace it. Therefore, we need a solution but not that solution, particularly in the terms of funding,
- Sport England were well behind this project, and they suddenly pulled the rug on funding it. Sport England said this is how it must be done and a lot of their recommendations were taken on board, but Sport England decided that in the aftermath of Covid, they would not fund new builds but would provide funding to existing buildings to put into place covid defences for example extra ventilation,
- The point was raised that even if the parish council was taking a step back and were expecting a dedicated group of people/working committee to take this forward, there were still things that the parish council could do, particularly the creation of a car park so that visitors to the village have somewhere to park (the Pavilion Project included a car park for 27 vehicles),
- In the report pack there is a summary of the key questions that came back in. The two important questions on the survey were about establishing the need and 53% of the responses said there needs to be a flexible community space for recreational facilities and community events, 36% said no, we do not need this. The key statistic is that 71% would not be happy with paying for it through the precept, only 27% said they were okay with it and 2% of respondents said they do not know,
- We specifically dismissed the survey as a mandate for applying for a loan,
- Normally, with postal surveys, 4% is seen as a good response rate, but in this case, 332 surveys were returned which equates to approximately a quarter of the village,

- It is felt that the council made the right call even though there were pro-pavilion people who raised concerns that the parish council had made the decision before the survey results were known but the decision was vindicated by the survey results.

5. Parish Council Financial Reports for the years ended 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2021

Details of the council's accounts for the last year were included in the printed booklet provided but due to issues with the IT system a couple of figures will need to be updated and re-issued.

Cllr Kettle explained that last year we had a difficult year. In the midst of it we had a change of Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) when Alison Biddle resigned and Karen Stevens, as clerk, also picked up the RFO role and as you see there is an awful lot that goes through the accounts every year with a total expenditure for 2020/21 of £138,000 of which some will have come out of reserves which we will need to transfer before the published audited accounts are produced. This is all the money we raise through the precept, and it is spent within the village – people are always concerned at how their council tax contributions are spent therefore it is important for people to know that the money we raise as a parish council is solely for the benefit of residents. Running a village of this size is not as simple as it might seem to many because there is an awful lot going on and we have a large amount of open space to maintain (cemetery, verges, playing field etc) and we have an inordinate large number of trees which need to be checked on a regular basis to make sure they are safe and if they are not, remedial action taken and again, this is not cheap. Play equipment also must be checked annually and replaced as necessary. We do have staff to pay: Clerk/RFO, Cemetery Manager and Playground Inspector. We do review expenditure every month and all items of expenditure do have to be approved by full council. We use electronic banking and there is full visibility of everything that is spent, If anyone has any questions relating to the accounts they should contact Cllr Kettle via email.

6. Reports from Village Organisations

BIFC:

The football club has had a mixed season. The covid times were very on and off affecting the leagues and getting going again was a bit tricky. During this season they have had to pull the first team who play on a Saturday out of the Banbury League particularly because of a distinct lack of commitment from the players. As BIFC get fined if they cancel games, at Christmas the decision was taken to pull out, The League decided that the reserves team could continue as the first team were in the premier league division and the reserves were in division three. Once the opportunity to play a settled side arose then they started to get some results. Most of the reserves are the younger village lads. The Sunday side has been more successful having won one cup competition and are in two other cup finals and will finish in the top four of their leagues. Thank you to the Greaves Club for the sponsorship they give (help towards insurance, first aid, fees). Sometimes they are lucky, and a local business will buy them a kit for them. They use the playing field and pavilion facilities and therefore thanked the parish council for this.

BISA:

The courts are used by a group of people who play tennis regularly, there is a five-a-side football group, walking netball and a netball team have just started training. The strength this year again has been the badminton group which is thanks to Linda Hassall, and she has been able to extend it from just Wednesday evenings. BISA has now got an email address – talktobisa@hotmail.com. BISA could do with a few more Trustees. The Chair of BISA thanked Pam Reason for all her hard work, keeping the minutes, sorting everyone out – thank you.

Friends of the Yellow Land and BING:

They split their time between the two sites. It is slightly unfortunately that much of the work that needs to be done on both sites is winter work although the orchard is slightly more summer based. They meet every other Sunday morning for a couple of hours at one of the sites. They have also been involved over the last couple of years on a few occasions in helping at the Hidden Green – for example digging out a new bed for planting/growing potatoes in. If you are at a loose end on a Sunday morning or know of anyone else that might be for a couple of hours you are more than welcome to come along – they start at 10.30am, have a coffee break at 11.30am and finish at 12.30pm so nothing onerous and the group is very friendly. The group also has a young lady working with them who is doing her Duke of Edinburgh award so it is a good set up for doing community volunteering part of the award – she has asked whether she can carry on coming to the group once she has completed the required element of her award.

WI:

Everything is in the report .

Badminton Club:

The club is going well. Following covid, people want to get exercising again. The Club benefits BISA and also benefits the Memorial Hall as apart from the short mat bowls, they are one of the Memorial Halls biggest income streams as they hire the hall for five hours per week now. The club runs for three hours on a Wednesday night (first hour children, second hour adults/teens and last hour adults) and 2 hours on a Tuesday (one hour in the evenings for adults and one hour in the morning for ladies (could do with more ladies attending)). Wednesday is very busy, and the focus is on children/young people of the village, so they get priority. Spaces are limited to 12 players per session as covid is still quite an issue. Due to the popularity, those who cannot get a session one week are prioritised the following week, so people get to play every two weeks. A new lady, Katie May has taken on the Tuesday night so it is under the BISA heading but she is leading it. All is going well.

Community Centre:

The parish council is grateful to the committee for the services they are providing including the post office and café. The interim Chair is Orlaith Horsman, Colin White is our contact for bookings and the report submitted with the paperwork for the meeting was written by Orlaith.

Men's Shed:

The Men's Shed is involved in making beehives at present. There was a talk from Warwick University and the University gave them a swarm, so the group are looking forward to having honey later in the year.

St Michael's Church:

There is a report in the pack Reverend Green, Unfortunately, Martin has covid and therefore is unable to attend.

Attendances:

There is a summary at the back of the pack of councillor attendances at parish council meetings.

Finances:

The final pages of the pack go into the council's financial report giving the councils current financial status. The Council's reserves appear high as this includes the Section 106 monies mentioned earlier as part of the miscellaneous sum of £143,908.46. The biggest expenses are the salaries of the staff (Clerk, Cemetery Manager and Playground Inspector) and the grounds maintenance (responsible for various hedgerows, verges, maintenance on behalf of the county council along the side of the highways, the playing field itself, and tree management plan that is a three-year rotational basis to keep the trees on our Land in a safe and healthy condition). General administration is broken down into several areas including burial ground expenses relating to the cemetery, parish office that we operate from, community grants fund (a small pot of money set aside for grants to local community groups – the Memorial Hall has received help in the past as well as the community centre), the pavilion playing field (cost involved in the running of the pavilion, the maintenance of the play area) and things like the Neighbourhood Plan whereby the parish council has had to engage a consultant (although this has been funded by a government grant). It should be noted that these are the draft figures. Before they go out to be audited the parish council will go through these figures because where we have identified a need to spend money but have not done so this year, because of timing or something else, we will set money aside in to a reserve for next year so although the cash in the bank will remain the same, but we will be setting out or possibly the other way round where we have spent money whereby we had previously set money aside we will take money out of that reserve and bring it into this year's income and expenditure so the numbers will change accordingly. The question of solicitor's fees was raised as the memorial Hall are unable to see anything appertaining to the registering of the building. They were advised that they were included within general administration and hence the budget was overspent. The solicitors have submitted all the paperwork but unfortunately it can take up to a year to get everything finalised at the Land Registry. The Memorial Hall advised that they are disappointed with the length of time this is taking as they cannot apply for charity status until this is completed. This is resolving land ownership for something that is unregistered prior to 1947 so it is complicated, and all government departments have a large backlog to catch up with post-covid. The parish council advised that the Memorial Hall will not lose the help of a fund raiser as it has committed to that.

7. Reports from County & District Councillors:

Cllr Chris Kettle introduced himself to the meeting and advised that he lives and farms between Bishop's Itchington and Gaydon. He explained that he is a former chairman of the parish council having served on the parish council for 24 years. He stood for election to District Council in 2014 and was successful. He ended up as Chair of the District Council in 2018/2019/2020. Following that, he was asked to stand for Cabinet at Stratford DC that is an executive role originally in the Council's Planning Department as portfolio holder and following a reorganisation in relation to the proposed merger with Warwick DC he then moved on to Community Safety that looks after two areas (Environmental Health and Community Safety per se which issues/liaison with the police as the district council has a legal duty to reduce crime and therefore manages CCTV operation across the District, look after the anti-social behaviour team, rural crime team and work very closely with the police in trying to minimise county lines (involves drug use, drug dealing, human trafficking, human slavery, and the young who are 'cuckooed' by the drug gangs to deliver drugs and the exploitation of young people is one of the nasty sides of this) and to minimise homicides across South Warwickshire by investigating as an independent party how domestic murders/homicide could have been prevented, have there been failures in x, y or z, whether it be mental health or other things, missed opportunities -work closely with the families and the reports that are published have the families and Home Office consent. Environmental Health goes from smells, rats, bonfires, licensing (taxi, drinks, gambling etc) which effects everyone in the community). He also sits on the Police and Crime Panel for the whole county and chair the budget group within that where they keep an eye on the Police and Crime Commissioner's review of the police budget (approximate £120 million). The proposed merger with West Mercia Police that did not go ahead, cost a considerable amount of money but was not the right way to move forward for Warwickshire Police. They mentor and monitor what is happening with the Crime Commissioner's Team. Also, following the death of County Councillor Bob Stevens, Cllr Kettle was asked to stand at the election to replace Bob and was successful so he became a County Councillor in May 2021. At County Council, he sits on Regulatory Committee (equivalent to the Planning Committee in Stratford), Adult Social Care which is the largest spending budget in Warwickshire County Council (WCC) approx. £165 million which is a sum that increases experientially year on year as more and more people fall into the category of needing social care and as we go into more challenging financial times that become even more challenging, Staff and Pensions and have ended up as a Trustee of the WCC Pension Fund (£2 billion) and looks at how this money is invested. There are professional managers of this and are very well advised by professional advisers all round. The contributors to the pension scheme include staff from WCC, SDC, parish clerks across the county and a number of other local authorities have their pension funds managed by Warwickshire. He then deals with the day to day Highways issues and flooding issues. Probably the busiest part of his work is District Council apart from his Cabinet roles which do take up quite a bit of time. With regards to representing residents within the villages, his biggest area of work is social housing/affordable housing tenants and seeing the number of people living in sub-standard living accommodation in what is a fairly wealthy part of the UK is really horrifying. A lot of our affordable homes are almost not really fit to live in. A lot of these people do not have the luxury of having surplus income to mend this, to put the heating on a little bit longer, to install their own double glazing whatever else it may be which most of us do as a matter of course – if there is a hole in the roof, we mend it, but when you go round some of these houses you see a lovely elderly couple in one of the villages and their living room floor and ceiling are completely black due to damp coming through from the

roof and mould was growing through the paintwork. They had scrubbed it down and painted it in the summer but within six months there was so much damp in the house that you could not tell they had done anything. A question was raised about internet safety and the grooming of children – electronic crime generally does not start in Warwickshire as a lot of it starts overseas and broadband links. The resident advised that Northumberland police have a designated team who specifically cover internet crime and particularly internet grooming and other associated items regarding young children/people and she wanted to know if Warwickshire Police do anything similar. Cllr Kettle advised that the Chief Constable has full operational responsibility, the County Council promote what they wish to see as the key areas and they tend to be domestic abuse, county lines, street crime and rural crime particularly in South Warwickshire. Where police forces work together, particularly a big police force like West Midlands, they have far better facilities, so we work with them, and they are better at some of the forensic things so Warwickshire have a contract with West Midlands to use their forensic services. In the same way, if there are internet grooming issues, they will go into the merged service Warwickshire is buying in from elsewhere.

Merger of Warwick District Council (WDC) and Stratford District Council (SDC)

Merger of Warwick DC and Stratford DC – Work has been undertaken to merge the two councils to form one new South Warwickshire District Council. This has been worked on for the last two years and has taken up an inordinate amount of their time and therefore when it was announced last Friday that the merger was not going to happen, it was a huge disappointment and also a waste of a huge amount of cabinet and officer time. It had got to the stage where there were single heads of service covering Warwick and Stratford due to massive costs that needed to be saved in local government to allow us to remain viable. The logic was never wrong, having one environmental health team covering both areas, one community safety team, one planning team, one legal team would result in considerable savings. However, very early on Stratford started to carry out due diligence, whereby you investigate each side, you get an independent party to come in to say this what they are saying they look like is this true. There was a big push back from Warwick who did not see the need for any due diligence to be carried out whatsoever. Stratford DC were insistent, but they kept pushing back saying there was no need. Warwick DC then published its five-year plan and the Chief Executive of Stratford DC, having looked at their figures, realised that they had got borrowings, they had added £100 million in one year on top of the £300 million that they already had. To put this in context, Stratford DC has £11 million of borrowings, Warwick DC £400 million of borrowings and they did not tell Stratford DC even though the two councils were going to be partners and as soon as the councils merged, Stratford DC/residents would take on half of that liability. Therefore, Stratford DC got quite concerned and said due diligence or else. Due diligence was commissioned by Stratford and Warwick and Warwick and Stratford and that was due to report on 22 April 2022. At the same time, Warwick DC has its own social housing company called Dalton Homes, 100% owned as a company by Warwick DC. Around £100 million had been pumped into this company to build social housing and as part of a local government association review, they now reported that in view of the merger it would be well worth Stratford carrying out separate due diligence into this company. This was like a flashing beacon, so Stratford said to Warwick that we had to have this due diligence to which they agreed. This report was supposed to be issued before 22 April 2022 and the Minister who is to make the decision on the merger in mid-May. Warwickshire advised that they would not allow access until they had had their Board Meeting in late May/early June because we are going to have to get Stratford DC to sign a

nondisclosure agreement and they cannot do that until late May/early June at which point the Minister will have decided. Stratford said, sorry we cannot do that therefore why don't Warwick DC and Stratford DC write to the Minister asking him to delay the decision and Warwick DC said no. Stratford DC said they will write to the Minister anyway and the response was received that if you write to the Minister, the deal is off. The downside of this is that all the huge benefits that we would have had would be lost. The issues were that to deliver a plan that is balanced going forward, Stratford DC needs to save about £200 million expenditure per year which equates to quite significant cost reductions. Warwick must make £8 million reductions each year (40% of their total budget) which equates to massive savings. When they published their council tax bills this year almost every authority in the country put it up by 5% to cover inflation and other expenditure whilst Warwick decided not to put it up at all even though they have £8 million to save, interest rates were going up at that stage and they have £400 million of borrowing. Their decision not to raise council tax started to make Stratford DC very worried. So, all in all, looking at it Stratford DC took the view that it is not in Stratford DC residents interests, despite the money Stratford have spent on due diligence etc, if Milverton Homes was to go wrong, interest rates have gone up, building prices have increased 30% in the last 12 months, the business model they would put together for Milverton Homes would have been torn up so where would that leave the £200 million in borrowing – if it was to go wrong, we, collectively as residents would be responsible for that liability and therefore, residents of Stratford DC would potentially be paying £200 million pounds worth of interest and what would this do to our budget and services that we currently deliver. It was decided that it was a 'no brainer'. Had there been an open and frank discussion we could have worked through it but Warwick were not prepared to do that. At the same time, we learnt just over a week ago that the Finance Director of Milverton Homes has resigned and then last Friday the equivalent of the chief accountant at Warwick DC has also resigned. Putting this altogether, did we want to get 'into bed' with a partner who was potentially putting our council taxpayers at risk and the answer was no. Cllr Kettle advised that he is also professionally a Forensic Accountant and therefore has been doing a huge amount of work over the last six months helping officers. It is very disappointing for all involved, including colleagues looking after the Climate Change issues, waste contracts etc. The Waste Contract which has been negotiated by both councils together and is a legally binding contract, will continue and benefits will be seen, South Warwickshire Local Plan will continue to be developed together but at the end if the work there will be a plan for SDC and a plan for WDC, not a merged into one overall plan although there will be consistent policies across the whole as there is a duty to collaborate across adjoining authorities by default. Clarification was sort that there will be there will be two separate plans and therefore consistent different policies. It was confirmed that there will be two separate plans and policies will be very similar – two separate plans co-developed as neighbouring authorities. The original timelines for this have been changed and he was therefore asked how this sit verses the 2031 strategy that is currently in place. It will supersede the current core strategy, start much earlier, and be called the Local Plan so that we can differentiate between the old and new plan, and it will focus on the core strategy focused almost entirely on housing across the District and will look far wider at infrastructure and jobs as well as housing demand. One of the weaknesses of the current core strategy is that infrastructure was not addressed properly, and commercial development was not looked at. The old core strategy will not be lost as the evidence base will flow through so there is continuity between the two but, clearly, the core strategy needs refreshing as the core strategy in 2031 will be 20 years out of date and the new strategy will take us to 2040/2045

when it is published. As we move forward, there will be two planning authorities exactly as there is now. Some areas will have joint working i.e., Community Safety who already work together under the auspices of the South Warwickshire Community Safety partnership. All in all, it is very disappointing as there were huge synergies that could have been saved but at the end of the day residents will be pleased that £200 million risk is not being taken on.

8. Any other Issues, Questions, or Comments

Cllr Tressler advised, that as a member of the parish council it needs to be acknowledged that Adams diligent and very conscientious approach to how we dealt with last year. If it had not been for Adam, he did not think there would still be a parish council now and he needs to take serious credit for this, so, well done Adam and thank you for the excellent support you have given. Thanks was relayed from all the members of the parish council to the Chairman, Adam Dugmore.

9. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 21:54

Signed.....Chairman

Date.....