

Chairman's Report Annual Parish Meeting 2011

During the past 12 months the Parish Council has further established itself as a professional organisation and has worked strategically with other key organisations for the benefit of our parish.

Jan Wright, our Village Agent has been working hard with our community groups to help them develop and obtain funding. She has worked tirelessly to improve transport for our area with the South Staffordshire Rural Transport Partnership. We now have a trial Saturday bus service to Telford. I urge you to take advantage of this new service. The trial ends in March 2012 and it really is a case of use it or lose it. During 2011, Jan will be helping us to work with the community to progress our Parish Plan.

The Parish Council continues to work closely with Staffordshire Police. PC Smith and PCSO Price have worked extremely hard to keep the level of anti-social behaviour in our parish low.

The low level of crime means that PC Smith and PCSO Price have increased their crime prevention and community improvement work and many residents have benefited from their home security scheme and Wii sessions.

The Wheaton Aston Play Strategy Working Group, led by Kath Doyle, secured over £50,000 of Playbuilder funding for some fantastic play equipment at Marston Road Playing Field. The new equipment and skate park were opened by our MP Jeremy Lefroy in February and are already being well used. Although they were unsuccessful in their grant application from Sanctuary Housing funding for a BMX track, they have not been disheartened. They are looking to see if it's possible for our local young people to create a BMX track themselves out of earth. Kath Doyle, Phil Elson, Ted Noblett and the rest of the working group have put in a lot of effort to improve facilities for our young people and I would like to thank them on behalf of the parish council for their hard work.

I sincerely hope that the new equipment is better respected than the skate park was last year and I ask parents to instil in their children a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the equipment that they asked for. Last year, the Parish Council spent nearly £500 repairing damage to the skate park. That £500 could have funded an extra play scheme trip, paid for an extra litter picker for a year or paid for 5 SUSSED sessions at the village hall. It is disappointing that two benches have been ripped out of the ground and so this year the Parish Council is having to pay to have them put back in the ground.

The Christmas lights switch on event was even bigger and better than last year. There were more stalls and more entertainment on stage. Nick Collins, our MC for the evening did a great job of ensuring that the entertainment went smoothly. I would like to thank the Christmas Lights Working Group and the Parish Council Manager for their hard work to make the lights a success. Around £2000 was again raised at the event for local community groups and the Parish Council Manager and working group are already striving to make this year's event even better.

The Parish Council carries out maintenance of many areas in the parish including cemeteries, churchyards, playing fields and play areas. Much of it is carried out by Bloomin' Gardens & Landscapes Ltd and I am pleased to report that the Parish Council has received so many positive comments about the grounds maintenance during their first year. The Council also pays for regular litter picking at the Marston Road field and Primrose Bank play area. Last summer the hanging baskets and tubs in Wheaton Aston were very attractive and I would like to thank Mr. Cadman for his work on the summer planting. We have recently enjoyed the daffodils that he planted and we look forward to seeing the flowers that we have asked him to plant in Wheaton Aston and Lapley again this coming summer.

We are also grateful to Mr. Cox who continues to care for and restore the black and white fingerposts in the parish.

Mr. Bissell, our Village Orderly has made a big impact in the parish. He sees to all the little jobs that make a big difference to the appearance of the parish. He repairs benches, collects litter, repairs play equipment, fixes gates, cuts back overgrown hedges, removes graffiti, repaints and repairs notice boards, delivers News & Views, inspects the equipment at Marston Rd, installs and refills dog bag dispensers and much much more.

As well as our new Village Orderly, the parish has again benefited from the numerous volunteers who have helped to prune, tidy, litter pick and plant bulbs and summer seeds throughout the parish and I would like thank all of them for giving up their time for the benefit of the parish. I would particularly like to thank Mr. Darrant who not only looks after several streets in Wheaton Aston but also religiously carries out weekly safety inspections of the play equipment at Primrose Bank play area. The Parish Council are greatly indebted to him.

We are also indebted to Mr. Brian Littleford who has worked very hard to improve the planted area of the village car park. On behalf of the Parish Council thank you both very much for your time, effort and commitment.

I remind everyone that the car park on Hawthorne Road is available for the benefit of anyone using the village facilities whether it be the Post Office, Village Hall, Spar, Church, Doctors' Surgery or Beauty Salon. Please use it and keep the kerbs and pavements free of vehicles wherever possible.

The volunteer programme is working well but continues to need new volunteers. If you can spend just 30 minutes a week to pick up a few pieces of litter, sweep up some leaves and report anything that needs fixing to our clerk it would be a great help. The Parish Council will provide gloves, bin bags, litter pickers, hi-visibility vests and sharps boxes in case you should come across any sharp objects or broken glass.

All three villages were entered into the Best Kept Village Competition and last year Lapley was awarded first place and both Stretton and Wheaton Aston were highly commended. One essential feature of the Best Kept Village Competition is the children's posters and I would like to thank St Mary's First School and Vernon Lodge School for producing posters, many of which are displayed around the villages. Local gardens also play a large part and again these were judged in each village and a presentation evening held in September at the village hall. At that evening, I took the opportunity to invite and thank all those (paid and unpaid) who have helped the Parish Council to improve the appearance of all three villages over the past 12 months.

It is disappointing that despite all of the additional money that is being spent on maintenance and the time and effort that residents are volunteering, we still experience a high level of litter dropping and dog fouling. Both are anti-social, dangerous to public health, cost the tax payer money and will not be tolerated. Dog poop bins and litter bins are provided at numerous locations around the parish, free dog poop bags are available in Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston. There is no need to drop litter or not pick up after your dog and I urge everyone to report offenders to South Staffordshire Council. If the amount of dog fouling does not reduce, South Staffordshire Council will bring in undercover patrols to catch the offenders and they will prosecute them.

I would like to thank Mr. David Wright and his team at Staffordshire County Highways. Their Neighbourhood Team's work has been extremely visible. The Clarence system works well and Highways respond quickly to any reported problems. I urge all residents to call or email Clarence to report all highways problems as the system is very effective. We appreciate the

pressures that Highways are under to repair the roads following the severe weather that we experienced last winter however we will continue to push for necessary work and repairs for our parish. Speed of traffic continues to be a problem in our parish. Safety improvements have taken place on the A5 and police speed checks have taken place within our villages. The Parish Council is also working to have Leeke Way improved as the verge has been severely damaged by parked cars and passing vehicles.

The Parish Council continues to financially support the voluntary car scheme. It is well used in our parish but the scheme is desperate for drivers from the Wheaton Aston area so if anyone is able to offer a journey or two a week please contact the coordinator in Brewood.

Our Summer Holiday Play Scheme provided five outings and some SUSSED sessions in the village hall. Louise Barton has always worked hard to plan the trips and ensure that they run smoothly and I am sure that I speak on behalf of the Parish Council and local parents and children when I say that we are extremely appreciative of her work. Unfortunately this year, as the Parish Council has kept the precept at the same level as last year, it has had to make cuts and the play scheme will not be offering trips this year. There will be 10 SUSSED sessions though at the Village Hall, so there will still be activities on offer for our local children. Last year the sessions were offered free of charge but as so many parents booked places for their children and then didn't send them, the Parish Council has no option but to charge a small fee for each session this year.

The Council continues to support many local organisations including Junior Youth Club and Wheaton Aston Carnival.

Many organisations outside the village are also supported including South Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Action, Brewood and District Voluntary Car Scheme, Citizens Advice Bureau, and the Samaritans. All of these organisations benefit our community and we are grateful for the support they give our residents.

The Parish Council is working hard to improve its communication with residents. Minutes and agendas are available in the Post Office as well as on the village website. News & Views is distributed to every household by hand or by post and is available on the village website. Summaries of parish council meetings are written by Mrs. Wildman and sent to both the Stafford Newsletter and The Grapevine and the Parish Council Manager continues to increase awareness of Parish Council news and improve the profile of the parish.

Debra Bate continues in her role as the Parish Council's Proper Officer. The role has developed tremendously over the past few years and last year the Parish Council re-evaluated the post. The title has been changed from Clerk to Parish Council Manager to reflect the level of knowledge and responsibility needed for the job.

County Councillor Rex Roberts continues to send regular reports to us about many County Council issues. We also work closely with the District Council on matters of interest in the parish and are routinely consulted on planning applications.

All Parish Council meetings are open to the public and the monthly meeting starts with a short public session for questions. These sessions have recently been well attended and it is good to see people taking an interest in the work of the Council. Parish Councillors not only attend these monthly meetings, working group meetings and training sessions but also represent the Council on other groups in the parish and represent the parish at meetings across the county. The role of a parish councillor is a voluntary one and none of our councillors claim any allowance or expenses so I would like to take the opportunity to thank them on your behalf.

Our finances are in order and well managed, and both the External Auditor and the Audit Commission have accepted the accounts for the year 2009/10. For 2010/11 our precept

remains at £61494 equivalent to £5 a month for a D band household. The Parish Council Manager works hard to get the best possible price for everything that the Parish Council purchases whilst trying to ensure continued quality of service. Although inflation remains low there are several costs that have increased that the Parish Council has had to bear which means that the Parish Council had to make some difficult decisions and has cut some services such as the summer holiday play scheme.

Your Parish Council:

- Offers summer holiday play sessions
- Provides the junior youth club one night a week
- Provides a free car park in Wheaton Aston
- Maintains and insures play equipment at Primrose Bank and Marston Road Field and inspects both areas once a week to make sure that they are safe for our young people.
- Litter picks the three villages
- Cuts and strims grass and weeds the churchyards and cemetery at the churchyards in Lapley and Wheaton Aston and pays for similar work to be carried out at the church in Stretton.
- Maintains three notice boards
- Provides grants to local organisations
- Plants spring bulbs around the parish
- Runs a volunteer scheme
- Cuts grass and maintains hedges, fences, goal posts, youth shelter and footpaths at Marston Road Field
- Provides hanging baskets and tubs in Wheaton Aston and plants summer flowers and bulbs in the troughs around the war memorial at Lapley
- Provides Christmas lights in Wheaton Aston and now Lapley
- Organises the Christmas lights switch on event
- Provides free dog poop bags from dispensers and local shops and pressurises South Staffordshire Council to enforce dog fouling legislation.
- Enters all three villages into the Best Kept Village competition
- Comments on Planning Applications and Tree Works requests in an attempt to preserve the heritage of our area
- Is consulted on government consultations that affect services in our village
- Produces a quarterly newsletter to keep you informed of our work
- Represents local residents to ensure that our parishioners' needs are taken into account by organisations such as the police, transport services, district council and county council

All for £5 per month per household I hope that you feel that you get good value for your money.

I have enjoyed being your Parish Council Chairman over the past three years and hope that I have served you well. Next month the existing council stands down and a new council will be elected. More and more responsibility is being passed down to parish councils and the next few years promise to be an exciting time of change. I wish the new council well and hope that you will serve the parish fairly and effectively.

Mrs. Barbara J. Cox