



Cofton Hackett Parish Council

Newsletter Summer 2020

Dear Resident

I hope you are all managing to stay well and keep active during these difficult times. As we were not able to hold the usual Annual Parish Assembly this year, this issue of Cofton News is more of an annual report on what the Parish Council has been up to during the previous twelve months and includes information on finance, planning and community activities.

Also we were advised by the Government not to hold the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council when we would normally elect a Chairman and appoint Councillors to specific areas of responsibility. I have agreed to continue as Chairman for another year or until such time as we can hold an Annual Meeting, and all Councillors have agreed to carry on in their current posts.

From my perspective there have been two major achievements in our Parish during the last year. These were the opening of our new Cofton Village Hall and the overwhelming "Yes" vote in favour of our Neighbourhood Development Plan which we produced in conjunction with Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council.

The support and usage of the new Village Hall has been quite outstanding and has, I feel, helped to bring together the new development and the existing parts of Cofton Hackett to the mutual benefit of everyone in the Parish. It is a pity that Covid-19 forced the temporary closure of both of our village halls, but I am sure they will reopen with renewed vigour once we can return to some sort of normality. Thanks to everyone - hirers and attendees alike - for their support of our halls.

Thanks also to all of you who voted in the referendum on the Neighbourhood Development Plan last December. The turnout was over 70 per cent, with 87 per cent voting in favour of accepting the plan. This has now been accepted by Bromsgrove District Council and gives us a stronger say in the future development of our Parish.

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MP and Councillors' contacts:

MP Sajid Javid – sajid.javid.mp@parliament.uk

County Councillor Peter McDonald – pmcdonald2@worcestershire.gov.uk

District Councillor Richard Deeming – r.deeming@bromsgrove.gov.uk

Parish Councillors: Jennie Webb, Joan Fay, Claire Fryer, Mike Pattison, John Slack, Richard Deeming, Greg Cook

Chairman: Roger Westbury

Clerk: Andrew Billau clerk@coftonhackettpc.org
Tel: 07496 979153

Parish Councillors' contact details can be obtained via coftonhackettpc.org or from the Clerk

Parish Council meetings are (generally) on the third Monday of every month (excluding August) at 7.30pm at Cofton Village Hall and are open to the public.



Cofton Hackett Parish Council

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I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for their hard work over the last twelve months, and also our clerk Andrew Billau for his support and guidance to the Council over the year. We still have a vacancy for a Councillor so if you would like to play a part in shaping the future of your Parish, please get in touch with Andrew or myself. We will be happy to let you know what is involved in being a Parish Councillor and how you can contribute to what promises to be a vibrant and exciting time for Cofton Hackett.

The Parish Council continues to meet virtually on a monthly basis using the Zoom videoconferencing facility. If you would like to join us at any of our meetings or have an issue you would like to raise, please contact Andrew for details of how to join our calls.

My best wishes to you all - stay safe and healthy.

Roger Westbury
Chairman



COVID-19 Cofton Hackett Support Group

2020 has certainly been an interesting year so far. One positive outcome of the Covid-19 situation we find ourselves in has been the community response. Over a week before lockdown an idea was born out of concern for residents who may be affected by physical distancing, shielding and isolation. Within 4 days the volunteer core team had set up a mobile phone helpline, community WhatsApp group and organised leafleting of over 1000 homes in the parish of Cofton Hackett. No mean feat; so a very big thank you to all the volunteers who stepped out to hand deliver these.

Since then the volunteer core team have undertaken weekly shopping for a handful of residents, coordinated prescription collections for a number of shielding residents and sorted out a few other requests.

The community WhatsApp group has taken off with residents helping each other out with various requirements such as locating shopping items (flour, yeast, sugar, baby milk, disinfectant wipes and hand gel are regular requests!), collecting prescriptions, alerting when supermarket delivery slots came available, recommending delivery of groceries and organising local businesses to visit the village to sell essential items.

It has been heartening to see how the community has responded positively to help others in this unique situation. This crisis is far from over, but we can be reassured that the village residents have a generous and an enormous heart for their neighbours. Whatever we face in the months to come will be made that bit easier knowing there is support around if we need it.

If anyone is still in need of help or support please message the helpline - 07735 760662 and we will do our best to help - for free:)



Finance and General Purposes Annual Review

Since the last Parish Assembly in May 2019, the Parish Council (PC) has completed the acquisition and the subsequent leasing of the New Village Hall and this year's budget round was formally agreed in January. The review of the PC's assets is still underway, but much progress has been made.

In the financial year ending 31st March 2020, the total income was significantly less than we expected to receive. This shortfall was due to the non-arrival of the £47,200 from Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) s-106 grant that had previously been agreed with St Modwen as a consequence of the planning agreement for the development of the East Works site. This budget item has been carried forward into this year's budget and we are hoping to receive this money from BDC once St Modwen have forwarded the agreed amount. This grant has been earmarked for improvement of open spaces with the Parish. In the last financial year, the PC also made a significant grant of £12,500 to the Cofton Village Hall CIO to contribute to the setting up costs for the new hall. A small grant was also made to Cofton Hackett Village Hall to assist in grounds maintenance.

For this financial year, the PC had budgeted for a total income of just over £100,000 which includes the s-106 grant mentioned above and £3,500 of rental income from the Mission Hall. To date we have still not received the s-106 money and unfortunately the new tenants have yet to move into the Mission Hall due to Covid-19 restrictions. This year's precept (PC's share of the Council Tax) is £47,290 which is an increase of £6,610 from the previous year. The Parish has seen an increase in the Tax Base (number of band D equivalent households) from 1,008.1 in 2019/20 to 1,088.5 in 2020/21. We are anticipating spending just under £74,000 in this financial year and hoping to make a net contribution to our total reserves of approximately £26,000.

The new village hall (Cofton Village Hall) was completed and handed over to the PC in the summer of 2019. The legal sale agreement and transfer documentation were completed in August and September. The PC leases the new hall to the charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) Cofton Village Hall who manage the routine running of the hall. The PC has access to the new hall for public meetings, administrative meetings, storage space etc. The use of the new hall by the local community has been very positive and although this has been severely compromised by recent events, we are all positive that this will get back on track once the Covid-19 related restrictions are eased.

The tenants of the Mission Hall, owned by the PC, surrendered their lease and vacated the property in December 2019. This resulted in a loss of rental income and has also required the PC to invest in some minor refurbishment of the property prior to the new tenants taking occupation. The Covid-19 crisis has resulted in the new tenants not being able to sign the lease until they can realistically commence activities. We must accept that there is a significant degree of uncertainty regarding the timing of the receipt of rental income from the Mission Hall.

Cllr John Slack

PLANNING

The Parish Council has repeatedly lodged objections to proposals from St Modwen to construct a five storey block of flats in the final part of the Cofton Fields development. The Council feels that the flats would not be in keeping with the street view on Groveley Lane, nor appropriate to the village setting.

The Council considers all planning applications within the Parish and posts its comments and recommendations on the Planning Authority's portal.



Highways, Open Spaces & Environment Annual Report

Inevitably, since the lockdown, the work of those of us involved with open spaces has been necessarily more limited. However, over the last few months a number of projects have commenced.

In the autumn, the annual bulb planting took place, this time around Cofton Village Hall and there was a lovely display of daffodils around the village this year (check our website for some of the photographs). The planters were also refilled, although access to some of the planters has been restricted since the lockdown. Hopefully this might be resolved soon.

Discussions continue with St Modwen about opening a suitable access route to the 'trapped' allotment land behind The Grove. It is anticipated that an additional 9 allotments might be made available late next year once a secure route has been created. Our solicitors have been briefed and we are now waiting for legal documents to be provided by St Modwen. There is also a proposal to eventually change the name of this site. Once access has been gained it is hoped the release of Section 106 monies will also enable us to prune some of the trees on this site.

Just before the lockdown the council commissioned some minor tree surgery on the Myhill Allotments. There are also plans to replace the damaged gates to these allotments once the lockdown is over. Regular inspections of the Myhill Field play area continue and work has been identified to replace the older soft surfaces when Section 106 money becomes available. Just before the lockdown began in earnest ROSPA conducted its annual safety check on the Myhill Field play area. We are pleased to report that it was given a clean bill of health and that the 'low risk' issues identified were already in hand. Once the lockdown has ended the Parish Council will continue to secure quotes for the replacement of the old soft surfaces and replace the existing swing seats and chains.

There has also been a land asset review with Horton's Solicitors this year to update the Council records of land that we own and to ensure that proper and necessary maintenance of Parish Council land takes place. Sites include the land around Cofton Hackett Village Hall and the Mission Hall, land around the new Cofton Village Hall, the Myhill Field and Old Sewerage Works Allotments and the Myhill Field play area.

Councillor Fay has been active in encouraging Worcester County Council to trim some of the overgrown shrubbery on Ten Ashes Lane and remove logs from Lickey Coppice. The Council has also begun looking at commissioning some new Christmas lighting for the village, but this project has had to be postponed this year because of the lockdown and the necessary lead time companies require for such a project.

On the Cofton Fields Estate, councillors have been involved in facilitating a public meeting with Mainstay, the estate's management company, to discuss the fees charged to estate residents.

Earlier in the year councillors helped Steve Bach, our Parish Paths Warden, undertake some essential repairs to local footpaths.

The age of our streetlamps continues to present some issues. During the lockdown there have been a few reports of failed streetlamps. These are being dealt with by the Council, but as always, if you do notice a failed lamppost please do report it to the Parish Council clerk.

Unsightly and arguably unnecessary telegraph poles installed on Ashmead Rise have been reported to Worcestershire County Council and a complaint has been lodged with BT.



Cofton Village Hall Covid-19 – Update

The outbreak of the coronavirus forced the temporary closure of the Village Hall which has meant a loss of income for us and many of our hirers. We made a decision very early that we would give everyone full refunds as we knew we had some cash reserves and the government grant of £10,000 has replaced some of the lost income and allowed us to cover a large portion of our costs.

We are now in the process of planning the reopening of the site which will obviously be dictated by government guidelines but is expected to be from 6th July. This will mean that capacity will need to be reduced to allow users to observe the social distancing rules. Official guidance has not yet been issued on the numbers of people allowed to meet or whether any face coverings etc. are required but we will operate in-line with all guidelines and will expect all users and hirers to do so too.

During the closure, the hall and all equipment has been thoroughly cleaned in preparation for re-opening. On reopening, all users will be expected to use hand sanitiser on entry, cleaning will be carried out daily and we will be asking all users to clean down and sanitise areas used after their sessions. Hand dryers will be switched off and hand towels provided in toilets.

As soon as we know when groups and classes will return, we will share the details on our Facebook page.

Stay safe and well

Sam, Hall Manager

www.coftonvillagehall.org