

## **Bickenhill & Marston Green Parish Council - Chairman's Report 2019**

A question often asked is what is the function of the Parish Council?

Parish Councils play an essential part within the structure of local democracy, they have a vital role in acting on behalf of the communities they represent. They are in a position to give views, on behalf of the community, on planning applications and other proposals that affect the parish. The Parish Council undertakes projects and is involved with schemes that benefit local residents, it works in partnership with other bodies to achieve benefits for the parish. It is also in a position to alert relevant authorities to problems that may arise, or report or request work that needs to be undertaken. Although The Parish Council powers can be limited, it still has a very important role in the local community. It is the local link to the borough council, it is the starting point for residents to get answers or advice on local or personal issues that are within the remit of the Parish Council. Let me now give a more in depth look at your Parish Council.

- The Bickenhill and Marston Green Parish Council employ a clerk, a financial officer and two grounds men, the following is a short breakdown of their duties
- The Clerk to the Council is the Proper Officer of the Council and as such has a statutory duty to carry out and lead all the functions of a council's activities legally in particular to serve or issue all the notifications as required by law
- The Clerk is responsible for ensuring that the instructions of the Council are carried out. The Clerk is accountable to the Council for the effective management of all its resources and will report to them as and when required. The Clerk is expected to advise the Council on, and assist in the formation of, overall policies to be followed in respect of the council's activities, and in particular, to produce all the information required for making effective decisions and to implement constructively all decisions
- The Responsible Financial Officer is accountable for all financial records of the Council and the proper administration of its finances, in line with the Governance & Accountability procedures
- Our two Groundsmen are responsible for all formal gardens, The Pleck, The Chapel Garden and the Garden of Memory. They also take care of Millennium Wood, as well as maintaining our Burial Ground to a high standard and I can say high standard due to the number of compliments we receive. Their duties also include work in the Recreation Ground, again it a high standard. The planters on Station Rd and troughs on all access roads into Marston Green, in essence they are responsible for the face of Marston Green, as viewed by our residents and visitors, and again this is a testimony to the number of compliments we receive for the work that they do
- Bickenhill and Marston Green Parish Council as of the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2019 have nine elected Councillors. Councillors are also members of committees that cover various aspects of council business I.e. Planning, Finance and Recreation, these committees discuss and recommend issues that then come to full council for ratification
- Our planning committee regularly meet to discuss future planning applications received from SMBC, if necessary we will speak at the full planning meeting at the council house to lodge our objections and raise any concerns raised by our residents

- The Finance Committee monitor expenditure and budgets and carry out audit checks in lines with our responsibility and accountability
- The Recreation Committee cover new projects, community projects such as the memorial Sunday activity, the Christmas lights, and the overall running of the Parish
- We have a Councillor who represents the Parish Council on all of the airport committees. His role is to report back to the council on all of the current activities at the airport.
- We have a Councillor who attends the HS2 meetings and regularly reports on the current situation and progress
- We have three parish counsellors who together with three representatives from St Leonard's church make up the six trustees that are responsible for the running and maintaining of the Parish Hall

As I said earlier a Parish Council has limited powers, but does have a duty to its residents and that is the key to a good Parish Council. It is important to say Bickenhill and Marston Green Parish Council is a non-political organisation. Currently the council is served by Councillors who have one thing in common, that being to put something back into the community where they live. It is important to note that this is a voluntary position and they do not get paid for the time they spend on Council business. At the beginning of this report I said The Parish Council is the starting point to get answers to things that affect the local community. Contacting our Clerk by telephone, email or letter is the right place to start for any enquiries or guidance.

I have been a Parish Councillor now 15 years and served as Chairman for the last ten years. A lot has happened in those last ten years. Your Parish has grown from a small Parish to a middle to large Parish, overall we have doubled in dwellings and tripled in residents. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight just a few of the things that have happened in this time.

- One of the most important changes was the decision the Council made to change the name of the Parish from Bickenhill Parish to Bickenhill & Marston Green Parish. Historically Bickenhill was one of the oldest Parishes in the country, we felt it was most important that we retain the history that we have in the name Bickenhill, but at the same time we needed to feature Marston Green where 95% of the residents of the parish live. We were able to achieve that with our new logo that incorporates both villages. A final point on that, is that the design and artwork was paid for by donation.
- After an experience of travellers occupying the Millennium Wood. It has been necessary for the Parish Council to invest in securing all our vulnerable areas within the Parish to deter this kind of occurrence happening again.
- We now have a proper Parish office and facilities to hold committee meetings
- We have improved our working relationship with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- We have purchased Christmas lights that are featured on the main roads through Marston Green at the festive season

- When the Borough Council made the decision to remove the planters from the front of the Station Road shops, the Parish Council decided to take over the responsibility of maintaining and caring for the planters. In 2018 we replaced the old planters for new ones, council felt that it is an important feature in Marston Green
- The parish purchased stands for hanging baskets on the main thoroughfares of Marston Green, we sponsor our local gardening club to plant up the baskets and our ground staff feed and water them. Parish Council created a new garden on the site of the former Chapel on Station Road
- In the village of Bickenhill we annually pay for the upkeep and maintenance of the churchyard within St Peters Church. Last year the parish council agreed to contribute towards the repair of the church clock, which is an important feature of the village and we were impressed by the fund raising of the residents who contributed to the clock's repair. We maintain a children's playground in the village
- We annually purchase a large Christmas tree at the entrance to the village.

That is just a few of the things that have happened in that period of time, let me assure you there are many-many more but I just wanted to give you a feel for what the Parish Council does within the community.

Our clerk for the last 12 years Carole Cox has been an Integral part of our development, Carole decided to stand down from her position as Clerk, I would like to take this opportunity of publicly thanking her for 12 wonderful years of service that she has given to this parish. I am pleased to say that Carole isn't leaving us completely and will continue her association with the Parish Council in the capacity of the officer responsible for our finance.

We welcome our new clerk Franciska Giles. Franciska is a resident of Marston Green, she has two young children attending our local schools. I am sure Franciska will play a big part in our future development and we wish her every success.

Looking ahead now. As a Parish Council we have to face many issues, greenbelt is under threat from new developments, we have major parking issues within the village of Marston Green. The Parish Council will always try to protect our green belt. Parking issues and proposals to implement new restrictions have been viewed and council has responded to the Borough Council with their comments. Six years ago we looked at the viability of adopting a Neighbourhood Plan, at that time it was felt that costs involved were far in excess of the value to our Parish so after consultation with our residents we decided not pursue the matter. With any future or possible development opportunities we may well reconsider a neighborhood plan to ensure we get the maximum allowance available for re-investing in community projects. This issue will be decided by Parish Council if there is a change to Solihull MBC Local Development Plan which impacts any future developments within our parish.

There has been speculation regarding The Community Infrastructure Levy, which is money that will be available to the Parish Council from the developers via SMBC, we understand these funds are for use on community projects. At this moment in time we (the Parish Council) have not yet been officially

notified of the amount of money we will receive from the Chelmsley Lane development, however we are aware that it will be paid probably in instalments. When we have been notified officially of the exact figure and the conditions on how the money can be spent, we will make our recommendations on the possible projects.

I hope I have been able to give an insight into the function of a parish council. On a personal note it has been an honour to serve the Council as Chairman for the last ten years, I am proud of the things we have achieved. However, I now feel the time is right for me to stand down as chairman and will do as soon as soon as we have the right person to take the position.

Frank Bunce  
Chairman  
Bickenhill and Marston Green Parish Council