

Chairman's Address

Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting of Bickenhill and Marston Green Parish Council and thank you all for attending. This is not the AGM of the Parish Council, that will be held later. This is a meeting for me, as Chairman, to be able to comment on the various undertakings and activities of the last 12 months and the anticipated plans for the future.

First of all, I want to say that, while I was extremely honoured to be asked to take the role of the Parish Council Chairman in September last year, and it will be my signature at the end of this report, each and every one of the Councillors is as important as the other and I am speaking for the Parish Council as a whole. We are a team and I like to think we are a good one. We may not always agree but we are always considerate and respectful of each other and able to air our differences amicably, which is perhaps why we have not trended on social media like a particular Parish Council I could name. Up until May 2021 while we were all experiencing the unprecedented effects of Coronavirus, which changed the lives of the whole community, it was necessary for Parish Council meetings to be held remotely and this was achieved successfully, I believe, without any undue difficulties arising, thanks to everyone concerned. As a result of a High Court Judgement made in May 2021, which addressed the issue of public participation in meetings, our Parish Council meetings have been held face-to-face. This has made it easier for members of the public to attend and I would like to take the opportunity to thank them for the various issues they have raised with the Parish Council. I hope and trust we have been successful in dealing with their queries.

At the end of the last Parish Council year two of our Parish Councillors resigned and I would like to take the opportunity of thanking Peter Tennant and John Fox for their involvement and valued input during their time with the Parish Council.

Since then Councillors Carole Pearce, Mark Noblet, Sue Rogers and more recently Claire Kelly have been co-opted, all of whom are proving to be great assets to the Parish Council.

Community Infrastructure Levy

Community Infrastructure Levy is a planning charge which came into force in April 2020 and is used to help deliver infrastructure and support the development of an area. This has meant that since May last year the Parish Council has been able to provide support in respect of a number of local projects, e.g.

1. Marston Green Infant Academy and Marston Green Junior School
Both schools are being supported with the purchase and installation of various items of playground equipment.
2. St Leonards Church
St Leonards Church has been supported with a contribution towards a new replacement heating boiler.
3. Marston Green Bowling Club
Marston Green Bowling Club has a new lean-to structure.
4. Marston Green Scouts
The Scouts have received a contribution towards the cost of a new kitchen.

Other Community Infrastructure Levy applications are currently being reviewed.

Projects carried out by the Parish Council

A number of additional projects have received attention this year including the following:

1. The fencing bordering the driveway to the Burial Ground and the Millennium Wood car park has been replaced.
2. Improvements have been made at the Burial Ground, including work on the Ashes plots and the removal of tree stumps.
3. The paths on the Allotments have been replaced and further work is to be carried out shortly.
4. The extremely tall Lombardy Poplar trees between the Allotments and the gardens on Elmdon Lane have been lopped as they were considered to have been in a dangerous state.

Covid Relief Money

Covid Relief Money awarded by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council was used to support the various sports teams using the Recreation Ground facilities, all of which had been impacted by the periods of lockdown. The residue was awarded to the Around Again Charity, an organisation that helps those in food poverty and whose aim is to tackle this through the provision of food and other items and by providing help to alleviate other sources of hardship.

Mist Netting at Millennium Wood

Representatives of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds have carried out mist netting at Millennium Wood on two occasions when they have netted and placed rings on a variety of birds visiting the wood.

Defibrillator at the Recreation Ground

Arrangements have been made to install a defibrillator at the Parish Office.

Improvement to Broadband Speed

A lot of work and consideration has been placed on attempting to improve the speed of broadband in Bickenhill and this is rapidly reaching its fruition stage.

All of this is merely a taste of the Parish Council's achievements during the last 12 months and is in addition to the numerous projects carried out regularly on an annual basis, including:

- The Parish Council's Remembrance Day Service at the Memorial Garden in Marston Green, when we work in conjunction with St. Leonards Church, the Baptist Free Church and the Scouts and Guides.
- The provision of Christmas Trees in both Marston Green and Bickenhill (although the Parish Council was unable to display a Christmas Tree at Bickenhill last Christmas due to the ongoing roadworks).
- The Christmas Lights in Marston Green.
- The upkeep and maintenance of Millennium Wood, the Memorial Garden, the Chapel Garden, the Recreation Ground and the Burial Ground, and for this we owe thanks to Nikki and Tony, our groundsmen, both of whom continue to carry out such sterling work and take such pride in keeping these areas looking pristine.

Planning

On the planning side, the Parish Council review and consider planning applications submitted in respect of Marston Green and Bickenhill, including those for development. (Broadly speaking development includes any building operation, other than the maintenance and internal alteration of an existing building, and any material change in the use of any buildings or land). The Parish Council's observations are submitted to the planning department of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, which authority does have an obligation to take regard of our comments.

In this respect the Parish Council worked hard last year, together with a number of local residents and Ward Councillors in a determined effort to ensure the rejection of one particular application for an extension to the car park which sides onto Black Firs Lane and which would have meant the loss of green space and amenity land. The application was declined by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and the applicant appealed against the decision but I am pleased that this decision was upheld at the appeal stage.

External Committees

In addition to the various internal Parish Council Committees, the Parish Council is also represented on the Parish Hall of Marston Green Trust and the Marston Green Village Charity Trust, with three trustees on the Parish Hall Trust and two on the Village Charity Trust. The Parish Council is also represented at meetings of HS2 and Birmingham Airport.

Looking to the forthcoming year and beyond the Parish Council is, as we speak, producing a five-year plan of our needs and aspirations, including work on all the trees that the Parish Council is responsible for and for which a full survey has recently been carried out. The plan will be made as visible as possible with the intention of ensuring that specific measurable time-bound goals are adhered to. So, watch this space!

None of the above would be possible without a Parish Clerk or Proper Officer and in Julie we are lucky to have someone who not only carries out her duties thoroughly and diligently, she is always helpful and supportive. I think I can speak on behalf of everyone when I say we are so lucky to have her.

Parish Councils are great survivors of government institutions. They were the only Councils not abolished by the Local Government Act in 1972 and have existed for over 120 years. I hope they continue to prosper as an example of the benefits of our government system of local decision making. Marston Green and Bickenhill Parish Council pledges to respect its residents and, while we must acknowledge the need for new homes and infrastructure, we will always endeavour to retain green spaces and try and maintain the villages of Marston Green and Bickenhill as ideal places to live by working to protect our environment.

CLlr Clive Hill
Chairman
Bickenhill & Marston Green Parish Council