

Barlaston Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report 2014/15

At the end of April Councillor John Russell retired from the Parish Council after nearly forty continuous years of service. In addition to his work on the Parish Council, particularly in planning matters, Councillor Russell had also served the ward as Borough Councillor and had served a term as Staffordshire County Councillor. He was a member of the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association and involved with the Campaign to Protect Rural England. He is a passionate believer in the retention of the North Staffordshire Green Belt and has taken up and progressed many environmental causes. His contribution to Parish Council meetings and his knowledge of the history of planning developments in the village will be greatly missed.

During the year Councillor Sara Fearn, one of the councillors for Barlaston East resigned. Councillor Fearn's chairmanship of the Cemetery Committee will be particularly remembered for the improvements in the site maintenance that she initiated and for the restoration of the churchyard to a place of peace and tranquillity once again.

The Barlaston Women's' Institute celebrated its centenary at an event held in the Village Hall in August, 2014. This event was very well attended by members across the County and an opportunity was taken on the occasion to present the current Chairman, Mrs Irene Moran, with the Diamond Jubilee Award. The Women's Institute plays an important role in village life. The Parish Council was also very pleased to give its support to the initiative of the Barlaston Herons to secure funding for the procurement and installation of cardiac defibrillators in key places around the Village.

Significant progress has been made in developing the Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan and it is hoped that a consultation document that will form the basis of a referendum can be published in late 2015. The Parish Clerk has worked closely with Stafford Borough Council Planners, Clerks from neighbouring key service villages and planning consultants in ensuring that the key principles of the National Planning Policy Framework have been followed. The Clerk has also organised a series

of workshops to examine in more detail some of the themes that emerged from the earlier questionnaire that was sent to each household. It is believed that a consensus is emerging regarding the future shape and development of the Village but it is also felt that any Plan is likely to be challenged by developers. The importance of an approved Neighbourhood Plan to a village such as Barlaston cannot be understated.

During 2014/5 the Parish Council Planning Committee considered more than 30 planning applications and where appropriate made comments to the Borough Council Planning department

A major matter of concern to the Parish Council is the likely impact of the closure of Meaford Road on the rest of the village, particularly on Tittensor Road. The closure is likely to take place in May 2015 and the County Council Highways Engineers have committed to work with the Parish Council in monitoring traffic flow. The Parish Council has continued to regularly bring up highway issues particularly in respect of drainage and potholes and it is disappointing to report the relative lack of progress that has been made. An area of particular concern is the Orchard Place crossroads. The reasons for lack of progress are thought to be lack of resource following government cutbacks in public expenditure and other locations have greater priority.

In the year there have been major improvements to the streetscene. The planters that have been placed strategically in conjunction with new benches have been well appreciated and the areas around the Village Green, the Canal and the Railway car park have all been enhanced. The bus shelter on Station Road has been replaced and has received much favourable comment. The Parish Council continues to appreciate the work of both the formal and informal litter pickers but it is a matter of concern that despite all the exhortation through notices large amounts of rubbish continues to be dumped around the village. The Parish Council was delighted that its nominee (Mr Joe Poultney of Tittensor Road) for the prestigious Stafford Borough wide 'Pride in Your Patch ' competition was successful in winning the top individual award.

The Parish Council as Trustee of the Village Hall Charitable Trust agreed to an expenditure of more than £20K on the renovation of the

kitchen. This work is much needed and when completed will make the Hall much more attractive to hirers. The Village Hall continues to be very well used.

The 'Heron' continues to be very well received and the work of the Editor, Ms Viv Dunne, is great appreciated. The Parish Clerk routinely submits Council information in the monthly Parish Magazine.

Grants have been awarded under Section 137 of the Local Government Act (as amended) as follows:-

Barlaston Cricket Club (fireworks)	£200.00
Barlaston Village Show (Frozen/Marquee)	£680.00
Barlaston Good Neighbours Scheme (Display Board)	£ 90.00
British Legion	£250.00
C.P.R.E.	£ 25.00
Friends of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archives (Barlaston Tithe Map)	£ 80.00
Wedgwood Cricket Club (junior kit)	£200.00

In conclusion I would like to recognise the strong support that Neil Hemmings, the Parish Clerk, has given to me and the rest of the Council over the past year. He makes sure that he is fully aware of any issues that are emerging and deals with the agencies involved.

I would like to thank the Parish Councillors for their work in representing their ward members and I hope that the new Council that will start work in May 2015 will be effective.

Gareth Jones

April 2015