

## Brocton Parish Council - Chairman's Annual Report 2016.

Presented to the Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday 27 April 2016.

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Parish Council's work during the past year.

At the first meeting of the newly convened Council in May 2015 I was elected Chairman, Julie Perry re-elected Vice Chairman, we welcomed Elizabeth Learoyd as a new member to join Leslie Lee and Carole Green and at the June meeting appointed by co-option were Lynne Smith and Roy Middleton to complete the full Council of seven Councillors.

The new Council received a report of the previously held meeting with County Highways officials regarding Brocton crossroads. Despite all the arguments put forward by this Parish Council, the officials were adamant the criteria to reduce accident potential had been achieved and no further action was foreseen.

For the first half of 2015, the only benefit to Brocton residents from the closure of the Milford road for Severn Trent works was to provide a frequent bus service through the village. Despite concerted efforts to persuade the bus company, (supported by Cllrs. Frank Finlay and Len Bloomer and with intervention from Jeremy Lefroy MP), Arriva were unmoving in their decision that it would not be financially viable for them to retain a similar, if reduced, service and they would not comply. Added to the disappointment of this decision, the one bus a day we had previously had through the village was cancelled without prior notice and the 74 service along the Cannock Road was seriously reduced after 6.30pm. To try to support its' representations, the Parish Council held a village bus survey. This told us that, unfortunately, whilst there were some residents, mainly in the 65+ age group, who relied on a bus service through the village, the majority of residents did not use the service at all or did so very infrequently.

In January this year there looked to be a breakthrough when an alternative operator, Social Travel, offered one return journey per weekday through the village. Unfortunately this did not last long and the service soon had to be withdrawn as being financially unsustainable. At this stage the Parish Council has had to resign itself to the fact there is no possibility of a service being re-introduced in the foreseeable future. Brocton is not alone in this. In the last 12 months we have seen similar cancellations of bus services throughout the Borough as County Council subsidy continues to be cut back and passenger numbers continue to fall.

In June, the Council received the results of a recent Housing Needs Survey undertaken by Stafford and Rural Homes. This had identified a need for 11 housing units, an increase of 2 on the survey carried out some years earlier. Local housing issues that were identified included a desire for downsizing within the Parish which could not be catered for by social housing. Whilst the Parish Council confirmed it would offer conditional co-operation to the Housing Association scheme, any progress will depend on the availability of land which currently is not on offer.

On a sunny day in August we held the annual Picnic at the Park at the playing field. This was very well attended and as well as thanking Brocton Football Club Junior Coaches, Brocton Brownies and our local police officer, the Parish Council is grateful to Cllr Bloomer and a number of local residents who help with this event and make it possible.

A lot of time was spent on responding to the County Council Countryside Estate Review relating to the future management of sites throughout Staffordshire. We were principally concerned with the effect this would have on future management of Cannock Chase Country Park and the role of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership. Following a number of meetings with Cannock Chase AONB Partnership members, the Parish Council put forward the view that many of the outcomes the County Council were hoping to achieve as part of the review of management were already in place for this particular location. The outcome of the consultation is still awaited.

A memorial plaque listing those Brocton people who lost their lives in World War I was erected in All Saints' Church and dedicated in time for the Remembrance Day Service in November 2015. We record thanks to William Emery & Sons who very generously supplied, engraved and fitted the plaque for us and to Bob Mudway for bringing the project to conclusion.

General village "housekeeping" sometimes proves challenging as both Borough and County Council resources continue to shrink. Some of our grass verges are in a terrible condition and a previous commitment from the County Council to help once the road diversions were lifted was not upheld. Towards the end of last summer some improvement could be seen but this was shortlived due to the ravages of the exceedingly wet winter. We are grateful to Stafford Borough Council's Streetscene team who did respond to our request to clean up some of our pavements and sweep Walton Lane which improved things considerably. The visits from the Civic Amenity Lorry, jointly financed by Stafford Borough and the Parish Council is a much appreciated resource.

The continuing cuts are leading to less visits from the Neighbourhood Highways Team who carry out small maintenance jobs on pavements and verges. We ask all residents and landowners to be proactive in ensuring that pavements and verges are attended to following any building work and hedgecuttings are swept up and removed. We have, however, completed a number of outstanding maintenance jobs following a village walkabout with our County Highways Liaison Officer and you may have noticed two new village boundary signs, one on the A34 coming from Stafford and one in Teddesley Road.

To have control of our own roadside grass cutting is a great advantage and our contractors continue to provide an excellent service both with roadside cutting and at the playing field.

Two recent litter picks have resulted in over 40 bags of rubbish being collected, mainly from along the A34. The most recent was held on 21 April as part of the Borough "Clean for the Queen" event when over 20 people turned up to help and approx. 45 people enjoyed tea and cake at the Village Hall in celebration of H.M. The Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The speed and increasing volume of traffic, particularly large vehicles, continues to be a major concern of people living in the village. Temporary speed indicator devices are provided from time to time but are only available for limited periods. The Parish Council obtained data recorded by the SID in Pool Lane between April and November 2015. For the time the SID was in place, 50% of vehicles (32,738), travelled at less than 30mph; 33% (21,646) at 30 – 35mph; 12.5% (8,186) between 35 - 40mph and the remaining 2,951 vehicles at 40 – over 65 mph.

Despite constant appeals, our own Speedwatch Group has faltered due to lack of volunteers. We have access to the police training that is required but without sufficient manpower to operate a regular patrol we are unable to move forward with this.

Fast broadband provision continues to be a frustrating topic. Half the village has this provision, half does not. We are told by the Superfast Staffordshire project manager that 26,000 premises in Staffordshire still await broadband upgrade, including these Brocton properties. A new round of funding has become available to provide for 3,000 additional premises but we are still waiting to see if Brocton postcodes are included in this. In any event it seems we have a long wait yet.

Communication between the Parish Council and the community it serves has always been a priority. We continue to produce the quarterly Paper Chase, written and produced by Cllr Lee and the Clerk. Cllr Lee also operates our website which is becoming an increasingly important part of our communication procedure. The Public Session at the beginning of each Parish Council meeting also offers an opportunity for exchange of views or to raise matters of concern.

We continue to have close liaison with County and Borough Council, Cannock Chase AONB Management Team, the Community Council for Staffordshire, responding to consultations, attending seminars and meetings and generally keeping in touch on a day to day basis.

Our Parish functions as well as it does due to the many people who give freely of their time and energy to help in many ways. The voluntary work that is undertaken by you goes mainly unobserved but brings huge benefit and financial saving to the Parish. I would like to say thank you to you all. That includes my fellow Parish Councillors, our Clerk, our Borough Councillor, Frank Finlay, and County Councillor, Len Bloomer, who attend many of our meetings and are a great support. John Sulway who keeps a close eye on our playing field, Alan Siddons, our internal auditor. Bob Mudway, our past Parish Council Chairman of 25 years who continues to help in lots of ways. Many congratulations to Bob who, very, very deservedly, received the British Empire Medal in the Queen's New Year Honours List in recognition of his services to the community of Brocton.

Over the next 12 months, Staffordshire County Council intends to begin the process to work with Parish Councils and others to devolve more power to local communities. These will be challenging times which will undoubtedly need a positive approach but could open up new opportunities. Whatever the outcome, your Parish Council will always endeavour to work for the best interests of the community it represents.

Finally, I have to report that, after 15 years of service to the Parish Council, our Clerk, Chris Hammond, has decided to retire with effect from 31 August 2016. Chris, helped on numerous occasions by her husband, Frank, has worked tirelessly for the benefit of the Parish. We thank them both and wish them well in the future.

*Robin Bates* Chairman