

THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2014

Planning:

The most contentious planning issue arose early in 2014 and that related to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). SHLAA indicated that there were three parcels of land surrounding Little Wenlock being made available for 163 houses and also that Harworth Estates (UK Coal) had made a large area of land for over 2000 homes available in the vicinity of New Works. If all the land around Little Wenlock was built on then the size of the village would more than double. Harworth Estates have already drawn up a concept plan entitled "Land west of Lawley" for its land with the proposed starting date of 2016.

The Parish Council will carefully monitor any proposed building developments around both the communities and will keep everyone up to date on any formal proposals. The Parish Plan 2012-2022, drawn up in consultation with the community, clearly states the key principles which the Parish Council will adhere to when any formal planning applications are made.

Parish Councillors have attended a number of meetings relating to the latest national and local planning initiatives.

Huntington Lane Surface Mine:

Members of the Parish Council have continued to sit on the liaison and community fund committees. During the last 12 months funding has been given to St. Lawrence Church for toilet and kitchen facilities, new street lighting at New Works and Coalmoor Road footpath. The Community Fund has now been spent and no further applications for funding can be made.

Regrettably the work of the community fund committee was marred by the failed attempt of five individuals who tried to discredit its work and subsequently by T&W Borough Council who took five months to release the money for the grants.

Although at the planning stage the surface mine was vigorously opposed by the Parish Council it would be fair to say that UK Coal have been good neighbours and that the parish and surrounding communities have benefitted greatly from the Community Fund. Regrettably it now seems that the northern end of the site will probably be built on.

UK Coal ceased mining operations in the summer of 2013 and restoration work commenced. However the wet autumn meant that it was too wet to do some of the work and this will commence again in spring 2014. It is highly probable that the oversight of the restoration work will be undertaken by the parish council alongside T&W.

There is local opposition to the proposed car park on New Works Lane by New Works residents and the Parish Council will do all that it legally can to get this aspect of the restoration plan reviewed.

Candles Landfill Site:

Veolia will finish importing material onto the site this year and restoration work will then commence.

In January 2014 Veolia made a planning application for a temporary bulking facility on the site in relation to recyclable materials. LWPC did not object to this application but made 12 recommendations for specific conditions to be applied to the planning consent and T&W applied many of them. One was that the present Candles Site liaison committee continues to meet to monitor the on site operations.

Projects:

The arrival of superfast broadband in October 2013 was welcomed by everyone and its launch was widely publicised. A road closure was required to bring the fibre cable to the cabinet and T&W Highway Officers were most helpful in getting the legalities sorted out as quickly as possible so the project would not be delayed.

The Parish Council was presented with the Jan Snell Award by the Shropshire Association of Local Councils for its work alongside BT Openreach in bringing superfast broadband to Little Wenlock.

The project to replace all the lights at New Works and add a new light is well underway and should be completed by summer 2014.

The Parish Council is presently working on a plan to upgrade the footpaths at Swan Farm Pool and hope that will be completed in the next 12 months subject to obtaining funding.

In the October Community Newsletter a request was made for any project ideas from the community but none were received.

Little Wenlock War Memorial:

In spring 2013, in consultation with the Parochial Church Council, the Parish Council agreed to accept responsibility for the upkeep and care of the War Memorial. Thanks to the Hog Roast, the generosity of the community and a grant from The War Memorial Trust the War Memorial is being cleaned, repaired and the lettering re-cut. It is also hoped that there will be sufficient funds to create a "Memorial Book" to be placed in the church with the biographies of the fallen, a history of the War Memorial and the names of those who subscribed to the restoration.

Highways:

"Highways" is a permanent agenda item. The Parish Council is still vigorously pursuing a 40 mph speed limit on the rural roads and attempting to have some of the rural road designated as "Quiet Lanes" to make them safer for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

The state of the highways in the vicinity of the Forest Glen is a disgrace and the road junction at the foot of The Wrekin dangerous and in urgent need of re-alignment. The Parish Council has tried to persuade T&W to do something about this but so far with no success.

Following a period of consultation T&W has agreed to place yellow no-parking lines at the Forest Glen but these cannot be installed until the roads are improved and T&W will not employ a traffic warden to enforce any of the no-parking restrictions within the borough.

New rumble strips were installed on the roads into Little Wenlock. T&W have agreed to place "road narrows" signs on Malthouse Bank on both sides of where it narrows at its junction with Huntington Lane and to renew the 30 mph signs on Wellington Road.

The Parish Council has provided a grit bin at the entrance to Crofter's View and has increased the number of roads to be gritted this winter.

T&W, at the Parish Council's expense, has sown two verges with poppies on Wellington Road as it approaches Little Wenlock.

Huntington Lane:

The Parish Council is seeking to have the road formally named. Letters have been sent out to all householders on "Huntington Lane" to seek their views and to Royal Mail to make sure that post codes would not be changed. T&W Officers have been most helpful in giving advice and support in this exercise.

Our Young People:

Younger members of our community have helped to improved the footpaths at Swan Farm, litter pick and tidy up the area around the bus shelter in Little Wenlock. The Parish Council is always willing to support our young people in any projects which they wish to undertake for awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Dog Fouling:

The Parish Council has tried to do all that it can to encourage dog owners to clear up after their dogs and the Clerk has a supply of free bags to give to dog owners for this purpose. Regrettably a few anti-social individuals cannot be bothered to clear up after their dogs and spoil the verges and footpaths for the rest of us.

New Works Planters:

Thank you to the volunteers who maintain the planters and for the donation of Christmas Trees by Meadowdale Garden Centre. The Parish Council will continue to fund the planting and upkeep of the planters.

Councillors:

Besides attending the monthly Parish Council meeting councillors give time to other activities such as supporting projects for young people, helping village hall activities, working behind the scenes on highway and street lighting projects, watching over Rights of Way. Councillors also attend Local Access Forum, Wrekin Forest Partnership, Rural Forum and Shropshire Association of Local Council meetings. There are also meetings with T&W Borough Council officers on matters such as Shaping Places (about planning) and Parish Environmental Teams (PETS). Within the parish councillors attend UK Coal and Candles Site liaison meetings and village hall meetings.

General Power of Competence:

In May 2013 the Parish Council met the very strict criteria to adopt the General Power of Competence.

"The Government's intention in providing eligible parish councils with the general power of competence is to better enable them to take on their enhanced role and allow them to do the things they have previously been unable to do under their existing powers"

The Government hopes that this new power will give local councils confidence in the legal capacity to act for their communities. The idea being that councils will use this power to work with others to provide cost-effective services and facilities in new ways to meet the needs of local communities.

The General Power of Competence, Localism Act 2011 Sec 1 (1) gives local authorities, including eligible local councils, "the power to do anything that individuals generally may do" as long as they do not break other laws. It is intended to be a power of first, not last, resort.

Communications:

The Community Newsletter is issued every two months if there is enough information to fill it. It is distributed by parish councillors and volunteers. It is also on the parish web site. Additional copies are available at the Huntsman Inn, St. Lawrence Church, the village hall and the Clerk. An annual information sheet is distributed at the start of each year. Please let the Clerk have any information you wish included by December each year.

Notices of parish council meetings and the agenda are placed on the notice boards at Little Wenlock and New Works; other important and useful information is also put on the notice boards.

The Clerk can be contacted by phone between Monday and Friday. The web site contains a great deal of useful information including recommendations for suppliers of services etc.

The Neighbourhood Watch and information service operated by the Clerk now has over 50 subscribers. This service keeps parishioners informed by email of any suspicious activities in the area, forewarns of road closures, severe weather warnings and general local information free of charge. The Clerk just needs your email address for you to participate.

Finance:

Whilst the accounts may have looked generously healthy this year much of the money was ring-fenced for projects such as broadband, rights of way, the War Memorial and New Works street lighting. Costs continue to rise and the parish council is not immune to this. However it has kept the increase in the Precept as small as possible for the 2014/15 financial year whilst still being able to provide a first class service.

The annual accounts are audited by a qualified local auditor, this is known as the internal audit. The accounts and the internal auditors report are sent to the government's auditor and this is known as the external auditor and this year cost £360. The external auditor's report states: "On the basis of our review, in our opinion the information in the annual return is in accordance with proper practices and no matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met."