

# The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

## Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday March 17<sup>th</sup> 2015 at 7.00pm in the Parish Rooms, Waterside

### **Present:**

**Dickens Heath Parish Councillors;** Philip Brandum (Chairman), Robert Cudmore, Alyson Glenn, Richard Holt (from 8.35pm).

Solihull MBC; Councillor Linda Brown, Councillor Ken Hawkins.

Trading Standards Officer; Richard Staveley

19 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

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### **1. Apologies for Absence**

None.

### **2. Presentation by Solihull Trading Standards**

Richard Staveley of Solihull MBC Trading Standards gave an overview of some scams that are taking place in the Borough. One type is investment scams, which are particularly targeted at socially isolated people. Scams involve collecting a lot of personal information by phone before targeting the person with a very specific investment. People who answer 'scam' mail risk being placed on a 'suckers list'. Trading standards will offer support, for example they have call blocking devices. Richard then demonstrated a range of fake vodka bottles that had been on sale in the Borough. The Chairman thanked Richard for his very interesting presentation.

### **3. Introduction to being a Parish Councillor – Phil Brandum, Chairman**

Chairman Phil Brandum outlined a few personal thoughts on being a Parish Councillor. He has enjoyed it – talking to people, engaging with groups, bringing individual skills and independent judgement. The Parish Council could do more if it had more councillor time, and it will have 2 additional councillors as of the May 2015 elections.

The Parish Council is governed by statute and doesn't have much power, for example, when dealing with highways and the problem of car parking, or with the planners. But the role of the Parish Council is very much one of trying to influence those with power, for example at Solihull MBC. Building good relationships with officers at SMBC is important, along with knowing who to talk to and putting forward a good argument (plus shouting a bit louder if necessary).

The role of a parish councillor can also be very frustrating. With the collapse of Parkridge, the dream for Dickens Heath has not come to fruition – so what can be done about it now?

In terms of time commitment, individual parish councillors can do as much or as little as they are able to. The minimum requirement is to read the papers for, and attend, one meeting per month. But many parish councillors do a lot more, and those who are retired, for example, can get a lot more involved.

A leaflet which gives an overview of the role of a parish councillor, and who is eligible, is available on the parish council website.

### **4. Minutes of the Previous Year's Meeting held on May 27<sup>th</sup> 2014**

These were accepted as a true and accurate record, proposed by Councillor Brandum and seconded by Councillor Glenn.

## **5. Report from the Parish Council Chairman – Phil Brandum**

Chairman Phil Brandum summarised some of the highlights and issues of the last year, and welcomed the input of residents.

### Floral Decorations

The floral decorations were more extensive than in previous years, and included flower boxes on clock island – which were greatly appreciated by a lot of residents. The Parish Council are taking on the maintenance of the 2 islands either side of the clock island. There was some discussion about islands in general, that a couple are still under the control of Redrow. The edges of the islands are being knocked by vehicles – there was a suggestion that the corners of the islands could be painted red to make the unusual shape more visible.

### Village Green and Playground

The Parish Council feel that the Village Green and Playground should be owned by the community, and have approached the Receivers with regard to taking it over. The Parish Council will continue to negotiate, on the basis that the Village Green has no development value and cannot be built on but does incur maintenance costs. Residents agree, but have reservations over whether the Village Green is sufficiently protected from development. The maintenance costs of around £3,000 are met by service charge payers on Main St. It would be more equitable for this to be shared by all residents through the parish council precept, and could possibly be funded without raising the precept.

### Litter and Dog Mess

Litter and dog mess is an on-going problem. The Parish Council have put posters up and will be advertising in the April Dickens Heath Directory about the health dangers of dog mess, will contact SMBC about getting a fast clean up if dog mess is on adopted land, and intend to pursue any offenders who are identified.

### Further Developments

The Parish Council are disappointed that the new developments are going ahead sooner than planned. However there will be a section 106 contribution towards education provision (partly in Tidbury Green), a youth facility, maintenance of open services, bus services, the doctors surgery, biodiversity and some affordable housing (the Parish Council hope to see a local lettings policy put in place).

### Youth Provision

A youth facility has been discussed for a long time – with a location being the stumbling block. SMBC already have around £100,000 in section 106 monies for this. For some time the Parish Council have been discussing, in partnership with SMBC and DH Community Primary School, a proposal as part of a large community project in the school grounds. The school is an ideal location where young people can congregate in an open yet sheltered environment where they can be properly supervised, with low level supervision and some youth worker input. The planning application is expected to be submitted in the next few months. There should hopefully be up to £200,000 available in total. In principle it will be available in school holidays and outside school hours. A resident asked about the MUGA that had been included in the Bellway Homes plans for the Cleobury Lane site. At the time, the Parish Council had been split on whether this was a suitable location – there would be difficulties with supervising and managing a site at the edge of the village. The planners were not happy with including the MUGA, and the proposal was running in parallel with discussions about the school. When the planners asked whether the Parish Council was still in support of the MUGA on the Bellway Homes development, the Parish Council said no because they believed there would be a better outcome at the school. Residents commented that teenagers who would like to play football have nowhere to play in Dickens Heath, the Village Green is not suitable for older children and they need somewhere here.

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Signature.....

Date.....

Village Survey

The Chairman summed up by outlining the village survey that is currently being carried out – to gain a better understanding of residents’ priorities. This should enable the newly elected Parish Council to put together a work plan for the next term which reflects the population’s priorities. The survey is available on-line at survey monkey, and will be delivered on paper with April’s Dickens Heath Directory.

**6. Blythe Borough Councillors invited to Speak**

Councillor Ken Hawkins spoke about various issues which are currently of concern to residents. With regard to the completion of the Garden Squares II site, and associated works, a lot is being done behind the scenes. Tenders are due in by the following week. And with regard to the parking restrictions, the Blythe Borough Councillors plan to meet with the Parish Council to discuss areas which are still of concern. He also suggested that the Ward members should meet to discuss the on-going problem of dog mess.

Councillor Linda Brown spoke about her great concern that the library is at risk, she is trying to use the premises as much as possible. A paper on the future of the library includes a reference to an ‘exit strategy’, and Councillor Brown is fighting to get this term removed from the paper. It is a problem that the ownership of the library is not in public hands, one future possibility might be that the Parish Council could take over the building.

**7. Issues of Particular Local Importance**

Work on Old Dickens Heath Road

The planters behind the clock have been removed, but no bollards have yet been installed. Residents are very concerned that the gap will be wide enough for cars to get through. The Ward Councillors are planning to bring this up in their next meeting with SMBC officers. It was reiterated that SMBC is one of the safest local authorities in the country in terms of road accidents. Councillor Holt agreed that if the measures were not suitable to prevent cars getting through, then the planters should be put back. It was felt that Highways should communicate better with the Parish Council about when and why these amendments are being made to the highway.

Nature Reserve

The area through the kissing gate and around the pond needs tidying up, this land is the responsibility of Dickens Heath Management Co.

Neighbourhood Plan

A resident commented that there is going to be an overspill of housing from Birmingham in the future, and Solihull will get a proportion of this. Dickens Heath will be under further pressure to provide more housing, along with the accompanying additional pressure on car parking and infrastructure. It would therefore be a good idea to get a neighbourhood plan in place. The Chairman agreed, and said this should be a matter for the newly elected Parish Council.

Meeting ended 9pm