

# The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

## Minutes of the Virtual Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 at 6.30pm

### Present:

**Dickens Heath Parish Councillors;** Trevor Eames, Maureen Holloway (Chair), Diane Potter, Nargis Rashid, Alan Scholes, Mike Small, Doreen Wright.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Councillor; Richard Holt

Solihull MBC Community Champions; Martyn Sargeant

8 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

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### 1. Apologies for Absence

None.

### 2. Martyn Sargeant of SMBC Community Champions – Update on Covid-19 in Solihull and Community Champions

Martyn introduced himself – he is actually the SMBC Head of Libraries and Art, but in the last year has focussed on community engagement during the pandemic. His presentation looked at the numbers of cases of Covid-19 over the past year across the West Midlands, and then at the Blythe area in particular.

- Of all the Solihull wards, Blythe has had the 5<sup>th</sup> highest number of cases with 936 cases since March 2020.
- Cases in Blythe have been 53% women and 47% men.
- The average age of those affected in Blythe is 40 (43 for Solihull overall).

Martyn then spoke about community engagement. Top down communication is not enough, there is message fatigue, everyone has had enough. There is a lack of trust in the Government, and a lack of reach – communication is needed right across communities. Solihull Community Champions was developed to tap into communication channels already in place within communities, and to provide feedback to SMBC from local people. There are around 180 Community Champions now in Solihull – with 18 in Blythe and 5 in Dickens Heath itself. Weekly Zoom briefings have been held since September, with around 40 to 50 attendees. Briefings have included Covid-19 updates plus other related topics such as vaccinations and mental health. Weekly emails are sent out with key messages to share. Solihull Community Champions has been looked at as a case study by the Cabinet Office.

Solihull Community Champions has worked because it has been able to build relationships, tried to be as open as possible, and because of the collective desire to move on and out of this current situation.

Solihull Community Champions has built something really positive over the last 12 months, necessitated by Covid, but it would be good to build on this for the future benefit of communities across Solihull.

Martyn then invited questions:

A resident thanked him for the very clear presentation, and asked if it was possible to have a copy of it. Martyn to forward it to the Clerk.

A resident asked a question about a family member who is in a care home some distance away, and when he thought they might be allowed to visit. Martyn replied that there is not too much substance to the Government guidelines as yet, but he is hopeful that as of April 12<sup>th</sup> it would be reasonable to travel for such a reason.

Another resident said that he was interested in the Community Champions and asked how he might hear more about it. Martyn replied that information is available on the SMBC website, and it is also pushed out in various different ways by the champions.

A question was asked about the return of schools, and how this was going as it appears to be going well so far. Martyn replied that it does - the testing seems to be going smoothly, with 10 positive cases reported in primary schools, and none so far in secondary schools.

Chair Maureen Holloway thanked Martyn for his much appreciated input to the meeting.

### **3. Minutes of the Previous Annual Parish Meeting held on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2019**

These were approved as a true and accurate record.

### **4. Report from the Parish Council Chair – Maureen Holloway**

Chair Maureen Holloway summarised some of the issues and achievements of the last year, which included:

- In a year that has been life changing for everyone, the PC has learnt to conduct parish council meetings using Zoom.
- During the first lockdown, the Clerk and Cathy of the Library set up a Covid-19 Facebook page to support residents and a Whatsapp group for volunteers to support Dalton's Pharmacy.
- The Parish Council taking ownership of the Village Green and play area, and working towards the procurement of a replacement playground following a soon to be arranged consultation with the school children.
- Arranging for the planting of trees, provided by SMBC, on the Village Green to replace several diseased and dead horse chestnut trees. Plus the planting of a flowering cherry 'Tree of Hope' donated by SMBC in commemoration of community spirit during the pandemic.
- The lovely hanging baskets, extended to the new developments, which were spectacular once again. Unfortunately In Bloom was cancelled, so the opportunity to build on 2019's silver gilt award had to wait.
- The installation of a new and safer electrical supply for the lights on the Village Green Christmas tree. These were sadly deliberately cut on 4 occasions, and this vandalism led to Woods Farm stepping in to donate a more robust set of lights.
- The setting up of a Library Review Working Group to discuss SMBC's proposed pilot to reduce the Library opening hours – now on hold.
- Responses to the Solihull Local Plan Review.
- A precept frozen for 2021/2, and still lower than it was 6 years ago.

Councillor Holloway thanked the whole of the team that make up the Parish Council for all of their hard work which is much appreciated, and thanked Dickens Heath residents for their input and involvement. The full report can be seen on the Parish Council website, and a summary in the Dickens Heath Directory for April.

## 5. Blythe Borough Councillors invited to Speak

Borough Councillor Richard Holt commended everyone for all the work at grass roots level and the work to maintain and improve the area. He particularly commended the Parish Council for taking on the Village Green, as it is so central to the community. He also gave an update on his role at SMBC, he is now Chair of the Planning Committee, and what that involves.

## 6. Issues of Particular Local Importance

### Litter, Fly Tipping and Pot Holes

A resident commented that litter and fly tipping has got worse, including a lot of tyres, and doesn't seem to get cleared as quickly as it used to. Also the road surfaces seem to be getting worse and worse, and the resident asked if they are inspected. Borough Councillor Holt replied that litter and fly tipping is a perennial problem, tips can only be accessed by booking, and SMBC response times have been affected by Covid. Any fly tipping can be referred to either SMBC or one of the Borough Councillors. In terms of roads, Councillor Holt replied that there is generally an annual inspection of the highway. Road maintenance has been taking place in the past year, damage to roads needs to be repaired. It is disappointing to see roads in disrepair, but generally Solihull MBC do a good job. Parish Councillor Di Potter added that in terms of litter – Simon, our litter picker, does a really good job and there are also various residents who litter pick as volunteers. But the emptying of the bins each week does result in a lot of litter. Councillor Trevor Eames said that in general the refuse service has been maintained well over the past year.

### Class Use of Commercial Units

A resident of Waterside commented that there have been amendments to the Class Use Regulations which could affect a lot of apartment owners. A unit at Waterside has been converted into a boxing gym. Councillor Trevor Eames replied that the Government has relaxed the conversion of uses of commercial units – often to residential – but such changes would have to go to Solihull MBC as the planning authority. It's useful to make Borough Councillor Richard Holt aware. He added that it would be worth contacting SMBC Planning in case there has been a breach of planning rules. SMBC rely on members of the public to let them know if work is not in accordance with planning rules. The resident replied that the changes came into effect in September 2020 – all are now Class E – and there doesn't seem to be anything that can be done in this case. Apartment owners could have a quiet retail unit below them, and now planning permission isn't needed to convert it to a more noisy one. Noise can have a detrimental effect on residents, Councillor Holt added that a noise complaint can be pursued if it is affecting their quality of life. Councillor Holt thanked the resident for highlighting this change in planning policy.

### Main St/Waterside

A resident asked about Main St and Waterside – whether they are privately owned and all maintenance has to be undertaken by Centrick/Dickens Heath Management Co. He said that when he had a walk down at Waterside, he was surprised to see the water feature with broken steps, lots of algae, and litter in it. He added that on Main St several of the concrete balls have been knocked out and left to one side and several bollards have been completely knocked over. Centrick say that they will be looking at this. Councillor Maureen Holloway replied that concerns about Main St and Waterside are raised at most Parish Council meetings. It is all privately owned, and SMBC and the Parish Council have no responsibility for these areas. Some residents are paying huge service charges to Dickens Heath Management Co. and Councillor Holloway added that she has sympathy both with members of the public and also with residents paying these service charges. Councillor Trevor Eames added that the PC is aware of the problem, there is a big backlog of repairs required in apartment blocks and to the water feature, and Centrick are doing a review to look at where economies can be made. The Parish Council have acquired the Village Green, and so the cost of replacing the playground will now fall to the PC – which will help a bit. The resident of Waterside added that Centrick are working through a serious backlog of issues, and they do seem to be better than former managing agent Savills.

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Signature.....

Date.....

Flail Cutting of Trees and Shrubs

A resident commented that he felt that the cutting back of trees and shrubs by industrial flailing, carried out by SMBC, was causing serious damage to them.

Damage to the Village Green

A resident commented that in the past groups such as the boot campers have overused the Village Green and caused damage to it. He hopes that the Parish Council will not allow this to happen again. Councillor Maureen Holloway replied that the Parish Council has discussed putting in place a policy for use of the Village Green. There are already signs up to advise that the Village Green can't be used for commercial purposes without the permission of the Parish Council, and each application will be considered on its merits. So this will hopefully allow the Parish Council to control over use of the Village Green. During lockdown, the Village Green was allowed to be used for keep fit/exercise activities even though they were commercial as it was exceptional circumstances. The resident said that he just wants some balance, and for excessive use and damage to the Green to be stopped.

Councillor Mike Small added his thanks to all the attendees for coming along to the Annual Parish Meeting and asked them to let other residents know that they are all welcome at Parish Council meetings – the rest of the Parish Councillors also extended their thanks.

Meeting ended 8.05pm