

**Minutes of Bishop's Itchington Annual Village Meeting
28 April 2025 at 7.30pm**

Present:

Cllr Chris Kettle (Chairman), Cllr Adam Dugmore, Cllr Orlaith Horsman, Cllr Alistair Lamont, Cllr Simon Tagg-Wilkinson, Cllr Jane Thomas, Cllr Norman Thomas, Cllr Steve Tressler

In attendance:

Karen Stevens (Parish Clerk)
10 Members of the public
Cllr Natalie Gist
Cllr Nigel Rock

Councillor Kettle (Chairman) thanked everyone for attending and those who had provided reports for inclusion in the paperwork for the meeting.

He advised that this is Karen's last official meeting as Clerk to Bishop's Itchington Parish Council as she relocating to Northumberland. We did thank Karen at our last Parish Council meeting, but I would, particularly in front of you as representatives of the village, to record our thanks to Karen for her contribution.

1. Apologies:

Pam Reason

2. Minutes of the Annual Village Meeting 29 April 2024:

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Annual Village meeting held on 29 April 2024 as a true and complete record of that meeting. (Proposed Cllr Tagg-Wilkinson, seconded Bill Landon)

3. Bishop's Itchington Parish Council Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2025:

The chairman advised that he is not going to go through each of the reports in detail as they are in the paperwork for those who wish to read them but if there are questions, please feel free to ask them.

Each member of the parish council has taken on an area of responsibility as portfolio holder.

Biodiversity and Climate Change: Cllr Simon Tagg-Wilkinson has been the portfolio holder for Biodiversity and Climate Change but sadly, due to other commitments has decided to resign as a parish councillor.

We do take our biodiversity and climate change responsibilities seriously; obviously our opportunity is limited in a village like this, but it is important that the decisions we do make do consider what the implications are from a biodiversity perspective and where we can influence we will do so. Cllr Kettle thanked Cllr Tagg-Wilkinson for his expert input as his contribution has been great.

Cemetery and Churchyard: as many of you are aware there have been some major challenges at the cemetery over the past 12 months. Lessons have been learnt. As the portfolio holder, Cllr Alistair Lamont has said that we need to move forward, and this is what we are doing. There is limited space in the cemetery and additional land needs to be acquired. We are aware that over the last two winters there has been flooding issues at the cemetery, and we are looking at ways to try to alleviate this.

David Pink commented regarding the Churchyard and the excellent job on laying the hedge – it is hoped that the other half of the hedge (Manor Road) can be laid this winter.

Play Area/Hardcourts/Playing Field: Cllr Norman Thomas holds the portfolio role and he was significantly responsible for the refurbishment of the play area. Cllr Kettle thanked Cllr N Thomas for what he has done.

Cllr Thomas advised that the play area although it is now two years old, continues to be well used by those in the village as well as visitors from other villages. There is an issue with graffiti being sprayed on to the equipment and whilst this does not detract from the functionality of it, it does make it look grim. The path has eroded, and we will have to address this issue. Cllr Thomas would like to get a steel youth shelter installed next to the football pitch to try and get the older children/youths out of the play area at night. We are also looking at the relacing the fence between the playground and Ivy Villa.

The hard courts are extremely well used, and they were resurfaced recently.

The senior football team is down to one team at the moment, but they are hoping to set up a second team. Stockton Youth Football Club are asking to use our pitch on a regular basis. Many of the members of the club are from Bishop's Itchington.

The cricket club has been reinstated, and it is being well supported. They are looking at getting a new artificial wicket installed as the old one is very old and not fit for purpose.

A new working group has been set up to look at replacing the current pavilion.

As you are aware, Judith Chrisitan-Carter recently passed away and the parish council has ordered a bench in her memory, and this will be installed next to the other memorial bench by the path that leads down to the hardcourts.

Human Resources: The portfolio holder, Cllr Orlaith Horsman advised that everything is in the report published in the paperwork. She thanked the Clerk for everything she has done for the parish council/village. There is currently a recruitment drive taking place to fill the Clerk/RFO vacancy. There are also three vacancies for parish councillors if anyone would like to join the parish council – if interested, please contact the parish office.

Planning: Cllr Adam Dugmore is the portfolio holder and Cllr Kettle advised that he very grateful for his diligence – the parish council sees a lot of planning applications some of which are significant issues. Currently Cllr Dugmore and he are dealing with issues relating to the solar farm at Old Town and he was very grateful for Adam attending a recent meeting with Highways Officers senior officers from Stratford District Council. Cllr Dugmore gave the following verbal report to the meeting:

“Over the past year, we’ve seen a variety of planning applications. All of these are discussed and a response agreed in a full council meeting or, if the timescales do not allow this, the clerk submits a response on the council’s behalf, after consulting with members.

Most are straightforward extensions or changes of use, plus some seeking permission to cut back or remove trees which are subject to tree preservation orders. It's been a fairly steady year with little reaching too far out of the ordinary, however there were a few applications that sparked interest from residents.

Regarding the regeneration of three Orbit sites around the village, though the Gaydon Road site was approved last March, the other two sites – one in St Michael's Close and the other on Starbold Road – have been withdrawn. As the three were part of a co-ordinated plan to ensure existing residents had somewhere to move to, we're not sure what this means for the whole project.

One of the more controversial applications was a battery storage facility on Hambridge Road, which would have industrialised an area which has been identified in our Neighbourhood Development Plan for protection. The planning officer used the NDP policy, among others from the Core Strategy to support her decision to refuse.

There have also been a couple of applications to vary existing planning permissions which have prompted some discussion between planning and highways officers and, while we're not happy with the information we're being provided, we're chasing for answers.

The parish council has a voice in the planning process and one that we are prepared to use. Where we make representation and that representation conflicts with the officer's recommendation, we get to speak to the committee and reflect the community's position. This, as we saw very recently, can influence the committee's decision. In some cases, steering them away from thoughtlessly following policy and instead finding ways to interpret them in a way that delivers common sense.

We can never afford to take our foot off the gas, though. Many of you are aware of the South Warwickshire Local Plan and the quite vague proposals for new settlements in our part of the district. We can take some comfort from the data which does seem to suggest that the sites which would have a direct impact on this area are among the least favourable, but we continue to watch for new news.

Beyond the SWLP, and perhaps prompted by its preparation, we should prepare ourselves for another rash of applications. Among others, we already know that Richborough Estates is looking at another 80 houses on Gaydon Road, next to the Chapple-Hyam Avenue estate, while Barratt David Wilson homes has made an Environmental Impact Screening Request for up to 275 houses (yes, you did hear that right. Two hundred and seventy-five) between Hambridge Road and Ladbroke Road, filling the space from Old Road to the Itchen.

Remember the power to grant or refuse these rests with Stratford District Council but we'll of course be doing what we can with these to ensure that, if developments are to happen here, they remain appropriate to the village, are of high quality and contribute to a sustainable future".

Finance: - Cllr Chris Kettle is the portfolio holder. The budget process starts each year in November /December as we must submit what the parish precept will be by the mid-January deadline. This poses a challenge as we have three/four months left of the financial year before we have to set what the budget is going to be for the next year and we are required to be prudent in that we should not be committing to spend more money than we are getting in unless we have sufficient revenue reserves to cover the shortfall. We forecast carefully what the expenditure is going to be in January, February and March. When we did the budget last year for the period just ended, we did estimate we would break even and despite the additional costs we had for the cemetery, we have spent less than we thought so have about £17,000 to carry forward. That money is not lost but is included in our reserves for the benefit of future expenditure. What we have done over some years is we have some long term projects in the village such as the tennis court that does not require much annual maintenance but does require significant expenditure approximately once every ten years when we have to resurface the courts (approximately £20,000) so rather than take a hit in one year of £20,000 what we build up is a fund each year so that when this happens we have money in the budget so we do not have to call on residents to pay a significant increase in council tax in that year. Therefore, when we have a surplus that is what we do with it to cover major expenses in the future i.e. new playground equipment, extra land for the cemetery etc.

Moving forward, we have set a budget of £112,500 which equates to £93.58 per annum for a band D house compared with £92.55 last year (an increase of 1.1% per household).

Police Liaison: Cllrs Orlaith Horsman and Norman Thomas take on the role of liaison between the parish and Southam SMT station. Cllr Horsman advised that everything is in her report. We are all conscious of escalating reports within the community of anti-social behaviour, car theft and home burglaries and therefore she and Cllrs Norman Thomas, Natalie Gist and Nigel Rock met with the local police team on 1 April. Listened to their plans for a presence in the local community in that they will be stationing mobile vehicles for certain periods of time allowing the community to come along and speak to them. They are very conscious of the car thefts. In terms of anti-social behaviour that we described that have been reported they were aware of but less aware of the things we see on Facebook. Incidents need to be reported formally as they do not look at Facebook. The main thing that came from the meeting was a process for the community to report all kinds of issues (see appendix 1 attached) including what to report and what to include in the report. Without this level of reporting, they will not get additional resources needed to tackle the issues that affecting the community. What we want to gain is a better working relationship with the police to help tackle crime in the village.

As a parish council we have talked about should we call a village meeting with the local team, and the feasibility of CCTV points across the community with people using their own footage – how we can get a coordinated response to tackling what is perceived to be an escalation of crime thereby making people feel safer in the local community.

The message to the community is if you see crime/experience crime, report it to the police. They will not see a report on Facebook.

4. Reports from Village Organisations

Cllr Thomas advised that reports from the various Village Organisations can be found in the paperwork for the meeting. He then went on to highlight some of the main things that have happened in the various organisations:

Men's Shed: The sheds bee Apiary has been doing well producing honey.

BIFC: This year is the hundredth anniversary of the club.

Bishop's Itchington Sports Association (BISA): Been was established about 20 years ago and runs the sports facilities in the village. Various activities take place at the Memorial Hall and playing field. They also established the working group to look at replacing the current pavilion.

WI: BIWI have reached their Centenary this year and had a party to celebrate. Moira thanked the parish council and particularly Karen for supporting the WI Garden Group who look after all the all the planters in the village.

Friends of Bishops Itchington Primary School (FOBIPS): There have been several changes in the makeup of their committee and Donnamarie Davenport who has been the chair for several years stood down this year with Elizabeth Scott taking over the role. The group continue to organise lots of very successful events to support the school.

St Michaels Church: There is a thriving congregation. Heather Boyd advised there are several services, and everyone is welcome to attend. It is very child friendly, and they do have a fantastic congregation. It is a large congregation for a rural church and there is a lot going on. One of the things that does go out through the church which touches people in the village and the surrounding areas is the food bank (see information in the supporting papers). They are the smallest foodbank in the Fosse

Foodbank Group, but they are getting increasing demand year on year and have had to increase the amount of food they hold within the foodbank as they are getting so many people requesting help. It is very sad, but they are glad to be there to help people in their time of need and they are expecting the situation to get worse. They do undertake deliveries for people who are not able to collect. They are open on Thursdays between 2pm and 3pm for people to collect their food parcels. They did some goody bags at Christmas, and they are going to try and do it again in the summer so parents of children at school who are eligible for free school meals can request one. Volunteers are always welcome. The number of donations remain static so, in reality, they are declining.

Friends of the Yellow Land and BING (Bishops Itchington Nature Group):

Thanks to Pam Reason and the team who do really good work in maintaining the Yellow Land and the orchard. They meet every week and are always looking for new members to join the group

Community Centre: There has been a change in management. They now have a new enquiry email enquiriesBICC@gmail.com. and there is a dedicated person responding to the enquiries.

5. Reports from County & District Councillors:

Warwickshire County Council (WCC):

As County Councillor, Cllr Chris Kettle represents 11 villages in the Feldon Division that covers 53 miles and has over 9,000 adult residents.

WCC spends, this year, a budget of £420 million. The vast majority of this is spent on Adult Social Care, £250 million is forecast to be spent this year alone. This equates to £500 per adult in the district being spent on Adult Social Care. The Children and Families budget is £115 million and is the junior version of Adult Social Care and includes fostering, support for children but does not include any expenditure towards Special Educational Needs. Therefore £365 million out of £420 million is not spent on the services that most of the resident's use. The balance must cover Fire and Rescue Services, Highways, Environment, Waste Planning, Waste Disposal, Economic Planning, Health and other aspects of health care which are not part of Adult Social Care.

The biggest area of complaints he receives apart from individual concerns where he supports individual families, is about potholes, road signs, road markings and flooding.

He has a delegated budget to spend over the whole of Feldon District. He has spent a lot of it in Bishop's Itchington this year re-tarmac the pavement between the school and Ladbroke Road (approximately £20,000).

The funds available for the road network across the district are limited. WCC has set up a new pothole team for rural areas and unclassified road as they were conscious that most pothole complaints are on 'A' roads, urban areas where there is a much heavier level of traffic which meant rural areas were missing out. The team's target is that any dangerous pothole is dealt with. If possible, on the same day with all potholes where there is a risk of some form being repaired within 30 days. Often the repairs are temporary on the basis we need to sort the problem out then come back later to do a permanent repair.

Special Educational Needs (SEND). He has been approached several times over the last two years with families who need support, particularly with education and this is where children have fallen out of the education system and there has been a blockage in the information flow between those schools and WCC. Children get left at home without being educated excluded from their first school and with nowhere to go. SEND is a hugely emotive area and all the SEND expenditure by law, must be funded by the government. WCC is not allowed to charge the council taxpayer for the money we spend on supporting SEND children. Last year WCC was given a budget in the region of £60 million to support SEND children in education. That was completely in the wrong sphere in terms of volume. We also have a legal obligation to support those people, and we overspent the budget in 2024/25 by £48 million. There is a strange quirk in that, normally if you overspend you must take it out of reserves, if you have no reserves, you must charge council tax. Because WCC are not allowed to spend any money on SEND we spend the money the government gives us but not any of our own. The overspend is kept in a special account and the government (current and previous) have said that one day they will come up with a plan to sort out the over expenditure. The cumulative overspend by the end of 2025/26 will be approximately £150 million which is a massive amount of money. WCC are not prepared to support our SEND children, we have a legal obligation to do so, but it is a major matter of concern as to not only how we will meet that shortfall, the government has committed that they are going to give a solution but that does mean money. WCC is not the only county in the country with the problem, every county has it. If we sort the £150 million out, we still must work out going forward how SEND expenditure is funded.

He gets a grant of £8,000 that he has spent across villages to support community schemes. There will be another grant this year to support village communities and a bidding process that takes place in July and if any money remains, there is a second bidding process in November. Usually, grants are in the region of £1,000. They are not there to fund a whole project but are a contribution to allow projects to get off the ground.

HS2 – he has the longest stretch of HS2 of any councillor in England. He and the Stratford District Councillors have struggled endlessly with proposed HS2 road closures and today have received a proposal to close the A423 because they want to widen the track from one side to the other. It takes hours of their time and have had countless meetings over the last 8 years. It is endless – the only thing they have learn is ragwort, a poisonous plant that will kill animals who eat it. It only grows on uncultivated/unmanaged ground and HS2 have hundreds of acres of ragwort which makes adjacent fields unusable. Two years ago, HS2 had no team and no recognition that they have a legal responsibility to remove ragwort. Each contractor now has a team and has said how they are going to treat ragwort this year.

Stratford District Council (SDC):

Cllrs Nigel Rock and Natalie Gist were introduced to the meeting.

Cllr Rock advised that their report had been circulated therefore would not go over it. It is good to notice the anniversaries of the football club and WI. SDC are celebrating their 50th anniversary by being abolished by the proposed merger of the district and the county councils - it is called English Devolution.

The Local Plan for SDC and WDC has been out for consultation and over six and a half thousand responses have been received so the councils are working their way through these as there is a very tight timescale to deliver the local plan. There is a great deal of concern for local residents here as there are a lot of new settlements proposed around this area.

Foodbanks – SDC has supported the foodbanks, and it should look at how this help can be increased.

Council Tax bills have been delivered and include lots of information particularly information on recycling. The recycling plant is based in Coventry and is owned by a consortium of local/district councils. Recommend that people download the app as it tells you about the right days for bins, what can be recycled and can also be used to report fly tipping.

He concluded by saying it had been a pleasure dealing with Karen and wished her the best of luck in Northumberland.

6. Questions and Answers:

- The question was asked as to what the timescales were regarding the local plan. Cllr Rock advised that by the end of December, a broad brush of the settlements has got to be dealt with but there is also a lot of other issues that need resolving as well i.e. where you put renewable sites, heritage assets, travellers' sites etc. It then goes to a government inspector to look at and they can ask numerous questions. All the steps taken/to be taken will be publicly announced.
- BISA: One of the trustees highlighted on the pavilion, everyone in the village agrees to wanting a new pavilion but in order to secure some funding, they do need feedback from village residents and there is a quick (takes two minutes) survey on Facebook and on leaflets around the village. The main issue the working group has is due to recent history many residents are concerned about the money aspect. The working group want it to be fully funded by the schemes that are going on around us i.e. HS2. There are several funds they can apply to which previously they did not have access to but they cannot present a business plan to the village and say this is what you have asked for and this is our vision until we get enough people to say we would like a pavilion. We cannot access funding until we have a certain percentage of people saying this is something we want. People in the surrounding areas are welcome to complete the survey
- Old Coop Building, Chapel Street – are there any more specific plans for the building? There has been nothing since the planning application to seek a change of use from retail to apartments

6. Close of Meeting:

Cllr N Thomas thanked residents for attending the meeting.

The meeting closed at 20:50

Signed..... Chairman

Date.....