

Acton Bridge Parish Council Meeting minutes Annual General Meeting

Date & time	4 th May 2021 at 19:30	Location	Video conference
Attendees	R Holt (Chairman), T Brocklebank, C Ballantyne-Roberts, R Forbes, D Hall, D Charlton, G Hayward, Cllr C Fifiel CW&C, Cllr G Edwards CW&C, Cllr P Williams CW&C Mrs C Robinson (Clerk to the Parish Council)		
Apologies	None		
Absent	None		
Minutes written by	Mrs C Robinson (Clerk)		

Note – This meeting has been held using Zoom conferencing facilities. The structure of this meeting has been agreed by all Parish Council Members. The Agenda for the meeting has been circulated to all Members and has been published on the Parish Council web site, members of the public were invited to join by contacting the Clerk for meeting invite details.

Agenda Item	Notes & Actions
1. Apologies	Apologies for Absence – as noted above
2. Minutes of AGM held on 6th July 2020	The minutes of the AGM held on the 6 th July 2020 were accepted as a true and correct record and will be signed by the Chairman and returned to the Clerk at the earliest opportunity.
3. Matters arising from 2020 AGM	No matters from the last AGM needed attention.
4. Chairman's report 2020-21	<p>Ladies and Gentlemen, last year I reported that by any stretch of the imagination 2019 - 2020 had been a different year for the Parish Council. I think it is fair to say that 2020 – 21 has exceeded that. The expansion of the Covid pandemic and then the floods in January have been major issues to contend with.</p> <p>It is a credit to the Parish Council that, at the outset of the pandemic, while some Councils virtually 'shut-down' Acton Bridge maintained an active profile in looking after all issues for the Village. Immediate thanks are due here to Carole for the initial temporary arrangements to have the Pandemic Crisis Management Team (PCMT) established and then following up with the organisation of the meetings using Zoom which, for many of us, was a new concept.</p> <p>The following report gives brief overviews of the main topics that the Parish Council were involved in or actioned in the period June 2020 to April 2021.</p>

Parish Council

Overview

While in 2020, there were National discussions and guidance on whether Parish Councils should hold an AGM, Acton Bridge PC decided to proceed with a meeting. It was agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman would continue in office. At this time, business reasons caused David Edwards to resign and leave the Council. After necessary compliance with regulations for the vacancy, David Charlton was co-opted and welcomed to the Council.

Also in the year, Hazel Bayley had to resign on moving house and leaving the Village. Hazel had given sterling service to the Council over many years and had always taken an enthusiastic interest in Council matters being a member of the Joint Cemetery Committee and a volunteer in the Friends of the Station Group. A further co-option

process was carried out from which Georgina Hayward was chosen and welcomed to the Council.

January Floods

On Wednesday 20th January the Environment Agency issued a flood warning for the River Weaver at Acton Bridge and Weaverham. *'Flooding is expected for: Areas at risk include properties along Warrington Road at Acton Bridge and Sandy Lane in Weaverham. Immediate action required'*. In the morning, the level of water on the A49 was highlighted in several emails that were circulated around the Parish Council. The drains did get some attention from Highways. The fire service had also arrived, as well as a contractor who has been sent by the council to pump the water away, but it was making little impact and the A49 had a significant amount water flowing down it, all the drains were blocked or full. On 21st January, Storm Christoph hit the Country and caused flooding in Cheshire. Our Village suffered at Warrington Road, Acton Lane and adjoining fields. Around 40 residents had to be re-housed, some in a local guest house. The A49 was closed due to the flooding. The floods proved to be the worse since those in 1946.

There are few residents who will have seen the like (in Acton Bridge) of the January floods. In totality across Warrington Road and Sandy Lane (Weaverham) there were approx. 30 houses wiped out at ground floor level, 20 vehicles written off, probably 10-15 boats that were damaged and hundreds of acres of agricultural land extending westwards towards Dutton Locks that were flooded. The whole Village shares the pain of the residents that have been so dramatically affected.

The shining light in the terrible business has been the efforts of our Ward Councillors. Their actions at the height of the flooding were, if you pardon the expression, 'above and beyond the call of duty'. The facts are that their magnificent efforts should have been shouldered by other parties. Obviously, deep investigations are being conducted by all the major parties on what happened, what was done and what should have been done.

Although Cheshire West and Chester Council is the designated Local Flood Authority, it fell to two Ward Councillors, Gillian Edwards and Paul Williams, to carry the immediate load, to liaise with emergency services and to give assistance to residents.

The Parish Council held an emergency meeting (by Zoom) on Sunday 24th January and were given a review and latest update by the Ward Councillors. As will be appreciated, there are many features that require investigation and action. Some update information is:

Long term repair and restoration work is taking place on the evacuated properties. The Government has not recognised 'Storm Christoph' as being so severe as to initiate compensation payments.

Zoom meetings attended by Parish and Ward Councillors have been held by CW&C and also by Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils (ChALC) that involved the major parties covering the events and flooding in CW&C. Parish Council Members attended these meetings and the Council has responded to a questionnaire from CW&C

CW&C have set up a Flood Risk Action Group and Cllr Paul Williams is a member.

Parish Council has agreed that a Contingency Plan should be in place for reaction to any future flooding. Work on this has been commenced by Cllr D Charlton (Warrington Road). Cllr Charlton also prepared a very informative chronicle, from on the spot observations, of the events on Warrington Road / Acton Lane leading to and after the floods.

The Parish Council must keep a careful check of what actions and planning for the future are put in place when the 'inquests' are completed. It is no consolation that the report of the flood incidents of 2019 have just been published.

Inter-active Speed Indicating Devices (ISID)

In 2018, four sites for ISID (Acton Lane, Hill Top Road, Milton Rough and Station Road) were agreed with CW&C Highways and the necessary permissions for work to be done on the highway to install the mounting posts for the signs was agreed.

In 2019, two signs with data recordings facilities were purchased and installed in Station Road and Milton Rough. At the same time, two mounting posts and solar power units were installed in Hill Top Road and Acton Lane. A third sign was purchased and installed in Hill Top Road in 2020 and the fourth sign was fitted in Acton Lane this year to complete the project.

The data downloaded from the signs is forwarded to the Police and to Highways. The Parish Council is concerned that, in spite of the evidence, more is not done to enforce the speed limits in the Village. A recent survey by ChALC revealed that a large majority of Villages in Cheshire put speeding at the top of their concerns, so many that ChALC arranged a meeting on the issue and so many Parishes responded that two meetings had to be held. It is interesting to note that many Parish Councils have contacted Acton Bridge regarding cost and procedures for installation of ISID and are following our lead.

Planning Matters

The Parish Council (as Consultees) has to consider many applications for building and extensions in the Village, some significant in terms of proposed new building work and large extensions. The Council has to consider every application in the light of National Planning Policy Framework and CW&C Local Plans. It must consider all applications on their content, without fear or favour and judge against the guidelines, being consistent in its comments and observations on all applications.

Reference to the CW&C Local Plans shows that Acton Bridge is not classed as a 'local service centre' and therefore building in the Village is restricted to 'limited infill' again as defined by CW&C Local Plans. Of particular relevance to this principle is the outcome of the appeal that had been made by Punch Partners against refusal by CW&C Planning for the proposed development of the Maypole Inn car park. After a long period of time, when the appeal was with the Inspectorate at Bristol, a decision was finally made refusing the appeal. This decision is particularly significant as during the period when the appeal was pending, the Maypole Inn and carpark had been sold and two new applications received. One application was to alter and extend the Maypole while the second was to build one large detached property on the car park site. Because of the status of Acton Bridge as not being a 'local service centre' and the findings of the appeal Inspector, the application for the 'infill' house on the car park has now been refused by CW&C Planning. After amendment to the size of the extension, the application to convert the Maypole was approved. A piece of Acton Bridge history comes to an end.

This decision clearly has significant implications for any future applications for 'infill' in the Village. It is noted that no new 'infill' applications have since been approved.

A major planning application received in October 2019 was for nine park homes to be installed on the site of the former nursery on Station Road. An open meeting for all residents was held in the Parish Rooms where there was total opposition to the proposal. The Parish Council forwarded objections, as did many residents. The application was subsequently withdrawn. There have not been any further proposals officially put forward for planning permission for the site.

Security, Police Work & Road Safety

We welcome a new PCSO to cover Acton Bridge and the other Parishes of our Ward. PCSO Michelle Gillett has quickly established good relations with people of the Village. She regularly publishes reports of all the activities in the Ward. She carries out some speed enforcement on Station Road and Milton Rough. The data obtained from the speed signs is invaluable in identifying 'hot spots' and so making the best use of Police time.

It is her intention, as soon as Covid restrictions allow, to hold surgeries in the Parish Room each month where people can come along and raise issues of concern. Consideration is being given to the day and times of the surgeries.

Our sincere thanks to the volunteer 'downloaders' of the speeding data for preparing the monthly reports and issuing them to the Parish Council.

Financial Matters

The Parish Council decided that the Acton Bridge component of the Council Tax should be unchanged this year. Although the ISID project has been completed the Parish Council is to work with CW&C Highways (as mentioned above) to consider further speed calming measures and thus the Parish Council decided that the Council Tax figure should not be reduced yet in case of additional measures on speeding.

Because the Parish Council expenditure is under £25000 the accounts are not subject to external auditing. Under the new arrangement, the Parish Council is allowed to apply for an Exemption Certificate from the National auditors. However, the regulations stipulate that the accounts must be published on the web site and still be checked by an Internal Auditor. Residents also have to have access to view the accounts, by arrangement with the Clerk, if they wish.

As per last year, the arrangements for the internal audit has been carried out by Mr David Frith. David also carries out a similar audit of accounts for the Joint Cemetery Committee. The Parish Council is very grateful to Mr Frith for taking this on and thank him for his work.

Village Matters - General

The Parish Council respond to many ad-hoc topics raised by Councillors and residents affecting the Village. Examples of the topics are;

Superfast Broadband

Openreach and Connecting Cheshire carried out considerable work in the Village to supply new services. Residents using Hill Top Road and Cliff Road witnessed the amount work that extension of the superfast service entailed. A recent initiative to improve Nationwide access and speed has been launched by BDUK with a 'Project Gigabit' scheme and an associated 'Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme'. Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme provides a rapid method for communities to club together and get a subsidised upgrade. CW&C have registered an interest in the schemes and the Parish Council are examining possible involvement for the Village.

Footpaths and PRoW

Part of the Parish Council duties involves protection of Public Footpaths and PRoW. We have been notified of changes made to footpath signage by persons unknown at some locations in the Village. These have been followed up by the Parish Council with CW&C.

Action by residents resulted in a replacement stile being fitted in the PRoW that runs from Hill Top Road to Strawberry Lane. The replacement of a footbridge that was destroyed by the floods is in hand.

Remembrance Plaques

Following the closure of the Methodist Chapel (in Chapel Lane), the Parish Council liaised with the Rev T Simms (of the Chapel) to retain, for the Village, the two memorial plaques from the Chapel. One plaque records the names of men from the Chapel who were killed in the first World War and second is a particular memorial to an Acton Bridge soldier also killed in the War. Thanks to the good offices of residents and local businesses, the plaques have been transferred to the Parish Rooms. All work, time, materials and expertise was provided free of charge by local businesses, Edmund Nagle, Yoxall Joinery Ltd, Whitby's Memorials plus Trigg Engraving Ltd. of Stoke on Trent. The Rev Simms has offered to rededicate the plaques when lockdown restrictions permit. A date of November 2020 had been fixed but had to be postponed.

It is poignant thought to consider that some men and boys who are in photographs witnessing the opening of the Parish Room in 1909 now have their names recorded there. The Parish Council also thank Bob Heaton for his works on the plaques and particularly for arranging production of an additional plaque that records the names of all men of the Village that fell in the two world wars.

Hazel Pear Wood - Woodland Trust

Woodland Trust and groups of volunteers have worked on the maintenance of the woods and link in with other volunteers from outside the Village to arrange working parties. The hedge bordering on to Station Road is cut on a 3-yearly basis for top and sides by Woodland Trust. The side bordering the pavement is to be cut each year.

Town Farm Quarry

Town Farm Quarry has for many years been a thorn in the flesh of residents, especially those along Station Road and Milton Rough, caused by the volume and speed of vehicles to and from the Quarry. Clr Fifield, the Parish Council with associated neighbouring Parish Councils and together with the Action Group have strived to regulate and bring to a conclusion the workings at the Quarry. It is pleasing to report that extraction work is finished and restoration work on the site is almost completed. A huge thank you to Clr Fifield and all people concerned with the Action Group.

Warrington Road

Residents on Warrington Road had been having all kinds of problems with so called 'illegal' parking near their own properties. There has been parking problems for some time and CW&C had proposed a system of enforcement that would have impacted on residents. The January flood has moved this topic off the agenda but Clrs Gillian Edwards and Paul Williams, who had worked with CW&C to find a suitable resolution will monitor any developments..

OTHER COMMITTEES & ORGANISATIONS

The Parish Council has representation on a number of committees and associations that serve the Village.

The Joint Cemetery Committee

We have Parish Council members on the Weaverham, Cuddington and Acton Bridge Joint Cemetery Committee. Most people will be aware that this committee manage the Cemetery Grounds at Gorstage. This local facility is a very valuable asset for our Village. Two councillors, Clare Ballantyne-Roberts and Trevor Brocklebank represent the Council. We thank our members for their work on our behalf.

Weaverham and Acton Bridge Trust

The Trust is a joint charitable organisation that functions under the Chairmanship of the vicar of Weaverham St Mary's church. It is now made up of what was once a number of separate charitable bodies in the locality, including what was once the Milner Trust in the Village. The Trust looks after deserving cases and applications for

financial support. Clrs David Hall and Rob Forbes are our representatives and ensure Acton Bridge is not forgotten.

Cheshire Associations

The Council are members of the Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils Association (ChALC) and Cheshire Community Action. Both these organisations provide established forums to raise and discuss matters in association with other parishes. ChALC are additionally available for consultation on many legal and procedural matters. Together with the National Association, ChALC produce guidance on many subjects as required, typically the Covid restrictions. Most people will be aware of the recent fame foisted on Jackie Weaver (Chief Officer) of ChALC.

Weaverham High School

Clr David Hall continues to serve as a Governor of Weaverham High School. David has served in this arduous role for many years. His expertise in financial matters is put to good use with the school finances. We thank David for his services and his many hours of effort in his role as our representative.

INTERFACE WITH VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

The Parish Council works with the main organisations in the Village but particularly the Acton Bridge Community Association (ABCA).

Acton Bridge Community Association

I cannot speak too highly of the value to the Village of the work done by ABCA in the upkeep, maintenance, organisation and control of the Parish Rooms and its facilities. Although the Council own all property and facilities on behalf of the Village, ABCA manage and operate them for the Council on a 'pepper-corn' lease arrangement. ABCA is a registered charity and has its own constitution. ABCA organises its own fund raising so that by and large the Rooms and facilities are provided with little direct cost to the Parish.

The past year has been a very difficult time for ABCA. The impact of the lockdowns has made control and management of the facilities extremely arduous. Usage and thus rent has suffered but has been compensated, to some extent, by grants. Also, when open, usage has demanded special procedures and routines for cleaning and recording of people (for track and trace) to be imposed. A complete 'Risk Assessment' had to be developed and applied to usage of the Rooms.

Under the guidance of Trevor Brocklebank (vice chairman of the PC) and Selina Rooney (Chair of ABCA) the exceptional circumstances of the virus pandemic meant that some residents could have been in need of support for many reasons. The combined efforts of Trevor and Selina brought together a group of volunteers willing to assist and provide a safety net for the Village. A terrific effort and grateful thanks are offered to them and the volunteers.

We are sincerely grateful to Selina and her team (principally Gill Spanton as secretary to ABCA and bookings secretary together with Peter Hurst treasurer) for the control of business and the not insignificant ABCA finances. A special mention also to Bob Heaton for the management of the maintenance work for the Parish Rooms and the many and varied jobs in keeping the Parish Rooms in top condition. He also keeps tabs on the various contractors employed to do work, e.g. the new power supply to the Bowls facility. Added to this is the actual hands-on work that Bob does. We recognise that we are greatly in his debt and give our grateful thanks to him.

There are two sub-sections of ABCA that deserve special mention. These are the Tennis section and Bowls section. Each manage, under the umbrella of ABCA, their own facilities and operation. Again, this year the usage of the bowls and tennis facilities has been very restricted. These sub-sections have been successful in

securing large grants of many thousands of pounds for the renewal of the playing surfaces for their respective sports. The playing facilities are in great shape and will give many years of enjoyment to the bowls and tennis members. Bowls section have just purchased and installed a replacement storage building and, via ABCA, obtained a grant towards the power supply to the building. Very well done and congratulations to all on your great efforts.

Once again, I thank ABCA on behalf of the Parish Council and the Village for all that they do for the Parish Rooms, the social events that they hold and for the very high quality Newsletter – thank you very much.

Womens Institute

The Acton Bridge WI, like WI groups across the Country, fills that vital role in rural villages of being the ready source of assistance in the many and varied activities in the village. The supporting work that goes on all the time is not mentioned so we would like to say thank you to the WI for all their efforts in the Village.

Friends of Acton Bridge Station

‘Friends of Acton Bridge Station’ are a diligent group of volunteers that look after the Station and the car park. The Group liaises with representatives of the recently appointed operators London Northwestern Railway (LNR). Last year, artwork produced by the Crowton Primary School and the Acton Bridge Preschool was converted by LNR into wall plaques and mounted in the entrance to the Station. The efforts won a ‘Little Gem’ certificate at a recent prize giving.

Conclusion and Thank You

The heavy load brought on by the pandemic has fallen on our new Clerk, Carole Robinson. Carole joined at a very difficult time and has had to cope with the unusual circumstances thrown at the Council by the pandemic. The initial organisation of the Council during lockdown and the management, through Zoom, of full Council meetings has been a big challenge. A sincere thank you does not seem half enough for all you have done.

To our vice chairman, Trevor Brocklebank, I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation of his support and help in many matters, not the least being in our joint efforts with Carole at the start of the pandemic. Again, as a recent new member, not an easy thing to do but everything was thoroughly and efficiently done. Thank you very much Trevor.

I offer my sincere thanks to all the Council members for all that they do and the jobs and actions they take up on the Councils behalf. I believe we have an exceptional team that can be relied upon to do their best for all the Community.

Cllr Forbes thanked the Chairman for the work involved in putting his excellent report together.

5. Village Matters and topics

No residents were present and none were raised.

There were no other matters and the AGM was closed.

Signed (Chairman)

Date.....