

Residents Association Report To Balsall Parish Council Assembly- 2013

Mr Chairman

Thank you for this opportunity to present a report on the activities of the Balsall Common Village Residents Association.

As with the Parish Council, we have had a change of officers, resulting from our AGM in April. On a personal note, if you have been following the workings of the Association you will know that at last year's AGM I announced that I was vacating the chair; my intention had been to serve a three month handover period, in the event I served a full term. At this year's meeting I achieved the objective and Keith Tindall has taken over as chairman and I have reverted to vice-chairman. Keith would have liked to have been here this evening to present this report, but unfortunately, long standing holiday arrangements means he has had to send his apologies. Other changes are: Cedric Lea deciding to stand down from the committee. We are pleased to report that Terry Hughes, who has been a loyal supporter of our meetings, has agreed to join the committee and take on Cedric's role of treasurer. We are equally pleased to announce that Paul Lucas has joined the committee. We are sure you will agree that though he has been a sad loss to the Parish Council it is excellent news that he will still be making a valuable contribution to the community.

The committee has also taken a decision to move meetings to alternate months for a six month trial period.

This has been a busy year for Balsall Common and the Association has been very much involved with all of the events which are having or are going to have a significant impact on the village.

In no particular order of merit the areas in which we have been involved are:

The Chattaway site which was put up for sale by the bank funding the original developer. As expected the new owner, the Northhold Group, submitted a revised design. Councillor Tony Diccico and I met with Sam Miller, a Director of the Group, and he attended our normal residents meeting in July and a special meeting that we called to discuss his proposals. We are pleased to report that he listened to the suggestions that were put forward and revised the design to take account of them. He also employed a contractor to clear up the site and to re-erect the hoarding and fencing, which had been blown down. Solihull Planning committee approved the revised application. Unfortunately, again the wheels are grinding exceedingly slow. The latest report we have is that the developer is in the final stages of selecting a builder; we are assured that finance is in place and building work is expected to start in the next 6 – 10 weeks..

Parking around the schools continues to be a headache. A scheme has been put in place to alleviate the problem around the entrance to the Primary School, but a solution has yet to be found for the Heart of England. Solihull Council put forward a proposal for double yellow lines in Gipsy Lane. Representatives from the Highways Department attended one of our meetings to debate their scheme with residents and are in the process of re-examining their proposal in the light of comments made. We are working closely with Councillor Tony Diccico to try and find a solution to the problem.

Anti-social behaviour is a major problem at night in the Library car park. Will Heard, from the RA committee, is leading an initiative, with residents, police, Solihull Officers and Councillors to find a solution, hopefully with the support of both Parish Councils.

Further changes have been proposed to the bus routes serving Balsall Common and we must again thank Alan Head, a former committee member, for his advice and Keith Tindall for attending the Solihull Forum and responding on behalf of the Association to attempt to get the best deal for local travellers.

Coming on now to the items which we think will have the biggest impact on Balsall Common and the surrounding districts.

Whilst the Association supports the extension of the runway, at Birmingham Airport, with the improved services it will offer, we have joined with residents and this Council in expressing concerns about the effect on the village of the proposed route changes which have been put forward as a consequence. The change to the departure path, in particular, with the removal of the Hampton Turn, will see more noise impact on the village. Dave Ellis, from our committee, has been working closely with the residents' action group to persuade the airport to adopt a more sympathetic proposal for departures. Their efforts have borne some fruit with the consultation having been extended and a further proposal having been put forward. The fight continues.

Next is the project of which the whole country is aware, namely HS2. Keith Tindall has our thanks for doing a sterling job representing the Association on the Heart of England High Speed Railway Action Group. Whilst we are supportive of the opposition to the project as a whole our prime concern is mitigating the impact on the village and ensuring a fair and comprehensive compensation package is available. The recent unexpected announcement of construction compounds on the edge of the village gives great cause for concern, not only for the disruption during the 3 years of their projected life, but the use to which they will be put when work is completed.

Last but certainly not least are two other activities which we believe will have a significant affect on the future of Balsall Common, namely the Local Development Plan being constructed by Solihull Council and the Governance Review to examine the boundary between Balsall and Berkswell Parishes.

Dealing firstly with the Governance Review, knowing that it would be impossible to gain a consensus across all residents, the RA committee made the decision to submit a personal view, which was to bring Balsall Common under a single authority. I have to report that we are disappointed that the well co-ordinated opposition from Berkswell against the apathy from Balsall resulted in a decision to make no change to the boundary between the two Parishes. The only change agreed is to set up a new Parish to encompass Chadwick End. It will be interesting to see how a Parish of 250 households will support a committee of 5 Councillors.

This time last year we had joined with Balsall Parish to respond to the consultation on the proposed Local Development Plan. Our response was to oppose the development of two sites off the Kenilworth Road, in support of the residents' opposition group BARRAGE; and asking for a moratorium on development and the removal of the bypass line until a Master Plan for Balsall Common is drawn up. Solihull made no changes, affecting Balsall Common,

following the consultation and the plan was submitted to the Secretary of State, for the appointment of an Inspector to carry out a public review. The hearing stages of this have been completed and the Inspector has issued a preliminary report. At this point it is not clear as to whether or not he will recommend the plan.

We were disappointed that both Parish Councils stated that they were not prepared to consider the production of a Master Plan for Balsall Common, preferring to produce two separate Neighbourhood Plans on the understanding that they will co-ordinate them where they overlap, in Balsall Common.

Despite this, we were pleased that, to achieve this, a joint meeting of the Parish Councils was held last June, where a commitment was given to work together in three key areas; Planning, Communications and Environment. Unfortunately, despite the initial enthusiasm, no apparent progress appears to have been made, though we are aware that Berkswell has done work on all three areas.

This lack of progress, particularly on planning, concerns us greatly as we believe that our community faces unprecedented challenges in the years ahead from HS2 and development that will potentially change the environment of Balsall Common and Berkswell forever, and it's very disappointing that the two Parish Councils are not working in closer co-operation to address these challenges. We urge you to ensure that this happens in the future.

To finish on a lighter note, we are pleased to report that our monthly e-mail newsletter now goes to over 530 households, a copy is made available in the Library and we are drawing up plans to increase further the circulation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this report.