

Ledbury Town Council

Annual Town Meeting 30th April 2015

Report from Environment & Leisure Committee Chairman – Cllr Martin Eager

The Environment and Leisure Committee has traditionally had the majority of Ledbury Councillors as its members, the diverse and wide ranging remit of the committee means that it has a large budget covering areas such Dog Hill, The Recreation Ground, The Cemetery, The Closed Churchyard, Christmas Lights, Hanging Baskets and a large representation on outside bodies, in fact the size of the committee and the sometimes sizable agenda has often caused comment and suggestion that delegated powers should be adopted in this committee's decision making process.

Since my deputy Cllr Keith Francis reported to you at last year's Annual Town Meeting progress and completion has been made on many projects but it pains me to say, has stalled on others.

First the positives in no particular order; we have set up a Skate Park management committee where local youngsters are making a valuable contribution to the future of the skate park, with funding from this council and hopefully additional outside sources we will be putting a plan to replace some equipment and enhance the skate park to make it even better. We hope that local youngsters will carry on with fund raising ideas and suggestions for further improvements.

We have set aside an amount of money to replace several rides in the recreation ground including the Aerial Runway and also installing a wheelchair accessible roundabout, a long term management plan is also being put together to ensure that replacement equipment can be factored into future budget setting meetings.

Whilst on the subject of the recreation ground, apart from sometimes serious litter issues we experience very few problems with behaviour or vandalism, I will remind everyone that we have 24 hour recording CCTV in the area, but fortunately it has only been called upon less than half a dozen times for relatively minor incidents.

And finally we have registered the Recreation Ground with the Centenary Fields Programme which will give the area complete protection from developers as it is now recognised as a WW1 memorial.

The dilapidated boundary stone wall saga in St Michaels churchyard is now finally drawing to an end, most of the major repairs have been completed with just a small section left to repair, and just a week ago this council authorised moderate expenditure to complete the works. If anybody has recently visited the churchyard they cannot help but appreciate the marvellous job the contractor has done, and well below the original enormous figures that had been bandied about.

Ledbury's Christmas Lights were once again switched on during an extravaganza of entertainment and fun for all the family, hundreds of people enjoyed several hours of entertainment with food, music, train rides and performers once again welcoming Father Christmas to Ledbury where he met and gave out presents to hundreds of children. It is intended that this event carries on again but the workload currently put upon to council staff and councillors must be further shared with others if this event is to continue in its current format. This year long standing Chairman of the working party Cllr Phil Bettington stood down and I extend my gratitude to his hard work these past 10 years and of course to all the staff members who all work very hard not only on the day but in the build-up, and of course a big thank you to Noel Roberts who is responsible for making sure we have a Father Christmas.

This year we appointed a new contractor to look after Dog Hill Wood, he started a few weeks ago and so far we are very pleased with his work, some of you may recognise him as he already litter picks and cuts the grass on the recreation ground and the closed churchyard.

In spite of the negative and sometimes inaccurate publicity the cemetery received in the local press I am pleased to announce that drainage issues that effected some of the new burial plots has now been completely sorted and the area around the children's' graves has been transformed as a result of the cooperation of the bereaved families, and the hard work of our grounds officer. The new council will meet soon after the election and further discuss the internal improvements to the cottage and devise a strategy to progress future works.

Dog fouling in Ledbury raised its head during 2014 and thanks to initiatives from this council the streets, parks and churchyard became virtually dog mess free, though as I write this report I feel that a similar initiative will again be required before or during this summer.

One highlight of 2014 was the War Memorial Working Party's 1914-1918 exhibition at St Michael & all Angel church last August. This would not have happened without the tremendous effort and time put in by Brenda Hill and Jenny Harrison and my

thanks go to everyone who contributed material for the exhibition. The working party now renamed as The Ledbury Commemoration Working Party is now working to restore our War Memorial in the High Street, unfortunately the bid to get funding to rebuild the monument was not successful so now at the meeting set for 19th May we will have to give serious consideration to how we progress this restoration project, please come along to this meeting if you wish to be part of this initiative. Help will also be accepted for the future planned exhibitions relating to WW1 and WW2 over the next few years including a major **Ledbury & Gallipoli 1915** exhibition that will be held in St Michael's & All Angels church from July 31st to August 10th of this year.

Last year we had a fantastic hanging basket display, we changed our usual supplier and used water saving baskets which resulted in a marvellous display, this year the same supplier has been appointed and it is also worth noting that the cost to the council has decreased.

Last year one of the most talked about issues was grass cutting, or to be more exact, the lack of in public open areas. To say we were let down by Herefordshire Council's new public realm contractors Balfour Beattie is an understatement, grass was allowed to virtually grow unchecked in many areas which prompted complaints from all quarters, many complaining to us even though we had no control of the situation. Recognising that similar issues would again surface this year the Town Council entered into talks with both Herefordshire Council and Balfour Beattie during which the Parish Lengthmans scheme was continually cited as a part solution where we could employ our contractor to help with the grass cutting and we would then receive recompense from Hereford. Several times my fellow councillors and myself attended Balfour Beattie presentations at Hereford, we held meetings with various representatives, were given false information, had our hopes dashed, and raised again only to be dashed again. As a result of all this nonsense the only positive outcome is that we have joined the Parish Lengthmans scheme though public realm grass cutting will not feature at all, our contractor will be doing some gulley cleaning, verge tidying on minor roads, litter picking and as a result of recruiting a full time Parish Footpaths Officer will also keep our footpaths clear.

Some have criticized that we have not joined the extended scheme and taken on the Town's potholes, those of us who have been involved in what has been a test of patience and fortitude think that the scheme should be tested and seen to be working to our satisfaction, and then when we are ready we could take on the pot hole filling.

In the meantime current evidence already indicates that we are in for another year of poor quality grass cutting from Balfour Beattie together with little or no general maintenance of our Town Trail or Riverside Park except for emergency works only, and whilst at the moment this council does not have the resources or money to take on either of these amenities, it must be a consideration sometime in the future if we want to keep them open and usable for everybody.

This leads me on to thank you's.....

My first thank you must go to our Deputy Clerk Maria Bradman, without her dedication and attention to detail much of this committee's work would not be achievable, she is a constant source of information and inspiration, she is, and I hope will continue to be a valuable staff member who in my humble opinion is wholly dedicated to this council and the work we do.

My other thanks of course goes to her boss Karen Mitchell our Clerk, again her knowledge and help has been invaluable in making my roll easier.

My thanks to our Grounds man Mark for his hard work and dedication in keeping our cemetery in good order and the work he did around the children's graves that has transformed and improved this sensitive area.

I thank my deputy Cllr Keith Francis for his words of wisdom and help in preparing and presenting meetings, and to all the committee members who have given so much of their time not only with committee matters but for their time and input on the various working parties and outside bodies. We all give our time voluntarily and without the considerable effort by a few then this town would be a poorer place to live.

I will mention again Brenda Hill & Jenny Harrison, without them there would not have been a 1914/18 exhibition in the church, and I know for a fact that they are both working extremely hard in getting the August exhibition ready.

Finally my thanks to the rest of the background staff in office, managing such a large remit that this committee has is a team effort, and they all play a part in some way or another.