**Hilderstone Parish Council**

**Annual Public Meeting**

**On Wednesday 25th May 2022 at 7.00pm**

**At Hilderstone Village Hall**

**Attendance**:

Cllr J Davies (Chairman) Cllr A Stringer (Vice Chairman) Cllr H Woodward

Cllr R Clark Cllr J Crump

Nikola Evans – Clerk

2 x Members of the public

**Minutes**

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| 1 | Chairman’s Welcome  Cllr J Davies welcomed everyone to the meeting. |
| 2 | Apologies  Cllr P Davies, Cllr M Shelley and Cllr A Harp – Apologies accepted |
| 3 | Chairman’s Report  Cllr J Davies read out a report to all that attended  **CHAIRMAN’S ANNUAL REPORT.**  This is my first annual report as Chairman of the Parish Council and I should like to thank the Council for the privilege of serving the village in that position. I should also like to thank my predecessor, Michael Shelley, and the rest of the parish councillors and the parish clerk for handing over to my chairmanship a council in such good shape.  I’d like to continue by making it clear that the legal powers and responsibilities of a parish council are limited compared to those of a district council (Stafford Borough in our case) and the County Council. Many problems that arise can be resolved only by the authority which has the specific responsibility.  The Parish Council is an active member of the Stone Area Parish Liaison group, along with most of the other parishes that comprise the wider Stone community, which enables us to benefit from the experience of others and to have a louder voice alongside our partners. A common theme is the great frustration felt at parish level when higher-level councils either ignore our reasonable requests or fail to deliver the services for which they are responsible. For example, the County Council’s intransigence in refusing to allow over-16s to use spare seats on school transport even when parents are prepared to pay for the service.  It has been good to see the villagers working together in the face of recent challenges. To mark that good work, at the meeting in November 2021, the Council presented the Village Hall Committee with a formal certificate of thanks. Now, after a long period of anxiety and restrictions, we are grateful to see over the past year a steady weakening of the Covid pandemic and a return to ‘business as usual’  Our parish clerk, Nikola Evans, has been with us now for over a year and has been providing us with excellent support and guidance.  On the other hand, Bill Holmes has finally had to recognise that increasing age cannot be ignored for ever. Bill has looked after a great number of the village maintenance needs over many years and we are all extremely grateful for his work. It will be a pleasure, shortly, to present Bill with a token of our thanks together with our best wishes for a long and happy rest from his labours.  **Planning**  An important responsibility is to consider relevant planning applications and make comments and recommendations. The Parish Council itself cannot determine any planning applications but the Local Planning Authority (LPA), Stafford Borough, should give due weight to our opinions and we rely on our Borough Councillors to ensure that happens. However, unlike the vast majority of district councils in England, Stafford Borough does not afford parish councils a specific right to address the Planning Committee on relevant applications. It is disappointing that the Borough Council has rejected a specific request to amend this anomaly.  Over the past year the Council has considered 9 applications of which it raised objections to one, 33718. That application has yet to be determined but the Conservation Officer has made a very strong case for its refusal.  **Roads, Traffic and Footpaths**  The village suffers from perennial problems:   * **The narrow and twisting route of the B5066**. There is no prospect of any complete solution; the mitigation measures of traffic calming and the speed indicator devices are helpful but ultimately safety is in the hands of the individual road users. * **Parking.** Inconsiderate parkingcontinues to cause nuisance and potential danger. Enforcement is primarily in the hands of the Borough Council whose enforcement resources are extremely limited; when was the last time we saw an enforcement officer in the village? * **Road Maintenance**. The village suffers equally with the other villages in the area from defects such as unfilled potholes and worn road markings. We also suffer from blocked drains and recent efforts by the County Council’s contractors have not fully resolved that issue. Villagers can help by reporting defects promptly directly onto the County Council website. Our County Councillor is very much aware of these problems. * **Footpaths**. Councillor Philip Davies (no relation) has continued his excellent work in monitoring the condition of the footpaths in the parish.   **Village Maintenance**  Generally, the appearance of the village continues to be good, thanks to the efforts of individual householders, of Bill Holmes and of the parish council’s contractors. However, the problem of overgrown hedges continues with impacts on road safety and on the users of footpaths. Unfortunately, the parish council has limited statutory powers and has to rely on persuasion and encouragement. It is disappointing that commercial landlords seem reluctant to engage with the parish council to ensure that the grounds of the properties they control are correctly maintained.  **Facilities and Events**  The village benefits hugely from Christ Church, the Roebuck inn, and the Village Hall. The Parish Council is extremely grateful for all those who give up so much of their time to ensure that these facilities continue to serve the village and to attract visitors. It is excellent to see a return to the usual events programme we have enjoyed in the past. Supporting the villagers with the provision of valuable information is the Village Information Network whose work is also much appreciated.  **Finance**  The Parish Clerk is the Responsible Finance Officer and she ensures that we conduct the financial affairs of the Council in accordance with the rules. In turn the elected members of the Council are responsible for overseeing the financial operation of the Council. I’m pleased to report that finances of the Council are being managed correctly and prudently. The Council is funded by a small precept as part of the council tax most of us pay. For the current financial year, the Council Tax for a Band ‘D’ property in Hilderstone is £1,938.33 of which the Parish Council’s share is £42.73.  A statement of the up-to-date financial position is published each month by the Parish Clerk and is attached to the agenda for each parish council meeting.  **Conclusion**  The Parish Council has continued to play its crucial role in Hilderstone to the best of its ability and powers. However, the success of the village is also dependent on the dedicated work of the parishioners themselves and the various local organisations. |
| 4 | Borough Councillor’s Report - None |
| 5 | County Councillor’s Report – None attended |
| 6 | Public Participation  Presentation took place for Bill Holmes for providing over 35 years’ service to the Parish Council for maintaining the village. |