

# LIGHTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REVIEW 2006

This little news-sheet gives you a quick look at the work of Lighthorne Parish Council over the last year. If you've any questions about what's in here, or anything else about the work of the council, please look on the back page for how to get in touch.

The Parish Council holds its meetings at 8pm on the second Wednesday of every month in the village hall. Everyone is invited to come along and you have the chance to speak near the start of the meeting if you want to.

## ***New Blood***

In March, Cllr Tony Rose left the council. The vacancy was advertised but no-one called for an election. At the annual meeting of the Council in May, the members elected Cllr Josette Tait as chairman to replace Cllr Rose. Cllr Sue Langford became vice-chairman. Then at the following meeting Penny Hill was co-opted as the fifth member of council. Cllr Hill is already an active councillor!

## ***Funding Crisis***

As we warned in last year's Review, and again in our 'Lighthorne Life' news-sheet, Stratford-upon-Avon District Council (SDC) has stopped paying us for grass-cutting. They did this in the face of opposition from your Parish Council, many other parish councils in the area, and even the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, of which we are a member.

If you look in SDC's Council Tax leaflet for references to 's136' you can see why – they expect to save £133,000 this way. Of course, the money still has to come from somewhere if we are to keep the grass cut.

This change had a bigger impact on Lighthorne Parish than on many others because of our many large, awkward areas of grass, especially within the Conservation Area. Your Parish Council decided we had to raise the parish precept (council tax) for this year so we could keep the village looking just as good as ever.

This means that that our precept for the year from this April jumped from £23.69 to £38.63 for a band D property. However, you are still paying less than the district average which is now £42.31. (Last year the district average was £37.39. The jump is because of the many other parishes that are in the same boat.)

***The Result?:*** We think that the changes we've made to grass-cutting have made an improvement to our village. Let us know if you don't agree!

## ***What else was done Last Year?***

***Speed Camera:*** You may have been one of the many people who came along to the meeting we set up last year to talk about speed reduction in the village. After that, the Warwickshire Casualty Reduction Partnership measured traffic speed and agreed that something should be done. They put up new signs, and now the 'smile-camera' van visits the village once in a while to check people's speed. We've told the managers at the Ford site at Gaydon, so we hope that the cars from there will keep their speed down now.

***Roads:*** We have been working with the highways team of Warwickshire County Council (WCC) to get potholes in the road repaired and to improve the drains in the road, both in and around the village.

Mountford Rise (evens) hasn't been so lucky. You may have noticed that there has been water leaking onto Bishop's Hill. We told Severn Trent about this a while ago and they made some minor repairs. Things got worse and water affected some of the houses owned by South Warwickshire Housing Association (SWHA). Trying to sort out who was responsible for getting things fixed has been a real nightmare and we had to write quite a few letters. Severn Trent finally did a repair. However, we will continue to watch things and to help the people affected, where we can.

There have been a number of problems during the year caused by articulated lorries trying to use Moreton Morrell Lane. We have been working with Lighthorne Herbs and WCC to try to stop this.

**Planning:** The 'District Local Plan 1996-2011' is now, finally, official planning policy. Several of the arguments we made at the inquiry into the plan last year were accepted and the changes we suggested are now in the final plan. This will help us to fight any new development in the area if we think that it is not suitable.

This year we were told about 26 planning applications within the parish, 5 of which were to do with listed buildings and 5 for tree work within the conservation area. One of these was refused at first but was allowed on appeal. We had another 5 applications relating to Harwoods House and 3 for the Gaydon site, both of which are outside the parish.

We continue to attend regular 'community liaison' meetings with Ford (Land Rover and Aston Martin's parent company), and to keep an eye on their plans for developing the Gaydon site. Ford has been granted outline planning permission for prestigious new office buildings and also for a hotel. We don't yet know if either of these is actually going to be built.

**Lighthorne Sports Association:** Water leaks seem to be a theme of this year's report! Early last year we had a water leak on the cricket field. After we paid for it to be

repaired, Severn Trent sent us several very large water bills: for many thousands of pounds. At long last this has been sorted out and we have not had to pay any more than the normal bill for the year would have been.

**Government:** We keep looking out for consultation documents issued by our government as well as checking any new laws to see if they will affect us.

You will have seen that we asked you, our electorate, if you thought that your Parish Council should use our new powers under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. We didn't get any support to do this, so we have decided to shelve the idea.

**Allotments:** By law, parish councils have to provide allotments if enough people ask us to. Last year you asked us to!

Finding a good place for the new allotments has been difficult. The site we liked best was not available. We could have got it anyway by using our powers, but we decided that the expense and risk in doing that was too much. Instead we have been looking at land we already own by the sports field to see if that can be made into allotments.

**Maintenance:** Due to the money problems we've already talked about, we decided not to do any maintenance work unless it was really needed.

**Assets:** The Parish Clerk pointed out that the deeds to the various parcels of land that the Parish Council owns were not registered with HM Land Registry. We agreed that it made good sense to have these registered so that there was a computer-based copy as well as the bundles of old papers that we keep. This has now been done.

**Rights of Way:** WCC asked for comments on a draft new Countryside and Rights of Way Access Plan. Your Parish Council replied with some suggestions and many of these were accepted. We thought that the second version of the plan was very good and we made no more comments.

## Summary of Finances

Our 2004/05 accounts passed audit without qualification or comment of any kind. Arrangements for looking at the final 2005/06 accounts were posted on the notice board as usual.

For 2005/06 we requested no increase in the precept. That had been the third year without an increase. So once again we got £5,500. The summary of the accounts (below) shows you how the money was spent and compares what we did to last year:

	2005	2006
We received:		
Precept (Council Tax)	£5,500	£5,500
Grass-cutting Allowance	£1,740	£1,143
Interest on Investments	£435	£341
Donations / Awards		<u>£208</u>
	<u>£7,675</u>	<u>£7,192</u>
We spent:		
Administration	£2,018	£1,921
Grass-cutting	£2,623	£1,427
Insurance	£1,396	£1,448
Post Office	£575	£595
Grants / Donations	£528	£1,073
Repairs / Maintenance	£295	£14
Street Lighting	£237	£295
Sports Association	£30	<u>£292</u>
	<u>£7,702</u>	<u>£7,065</u>
Underspend / (Overspend):	<u>(£27)</u>	<u>£127</u>

The biggest changes are to grass-cutting, which has already been discussed, and to grants / donations. We gave a sizable grant to the village hall this year to help with fitting out the new kitchen.

## What about the Year Ahead?

Here are some of the things we will be doing or watching during the next year:

### Maintenance:

The village notice board is deteriorating and we are looking at the idea of erecting a new, more secure, notice board close to the mailbox by the village hall. We still hope to be able to extend the life of the old notice board.

The idea of forming a ‘Garden Army’ to improve the appearance of the village did not go ahead, but if we can get a group of people together for this kind of work then your Parish Council would very much like to enter next year’s Best Kept Village Competition. Please get in touch with Cllr Tait if you can help.

**Roads:** There is still more work to do on drains in the road. We have asked WCC Highways to install more drains on Bishop’s Hill and by The Green, and to ensure that the ones already there are open and flow freely. This will help to lower the chance of any further flooding after heavy rain. We have also pointed out the need for a new ‘grip’ to be built opposite Newbold Barn.

We are also looking at other ways of reducing speed in the village but, because of the conservation area, there are some things that we cannot do. New legislation expected shortly may help. We will be watching.

**Government:** There is much talk about the future of local government at the moment. We had the paper ‘The future of local government: Developing a 10 year vision’ last year and we expect to see further important papers issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government later this year.

Last year’s paper seemed to suggest that government wanted to keep parish councils. It used the words ‘neighborhoods’ and ‘communities’ many times. But there has also been talk of replacing district and county councils with unitary authorities. Until the new paper finally appears we won’t know just what changes to local government central government is really suggesting.

**Planning:** We recently heard that the number of houses allowed by the ‘new’ local plan has already been built. This means that no further housing development will be allowed in the whole SDC area (unless it is entirely ‘social’ housing). However, it is likely that this will be challenged in the courts and will not be allowed to stand right through until 2011, but it certainly takes the pressure off for the short term.

National planning policy is changing again and we are keeping a very close eye on things to try to ensure we are not caught out. We may decide that there is a need to develop a parish (or village) plan. Such a plan would be adopted by SDC. It must then be taken into account when planning applications in our parish are being discussed by SDC. It would give our parish more control over any future housing development here.

Your Parish Council feels that such a plan should be led by the community, and not directly by the Parish Council. So if there is anyone reading this who agrees with us and would like to help with such a project, please get in touch with us so that we can look at how we apply for grant aid to get started.

**Lighthorne Sports Association:** The Khalsa cricket club is doing very well and has been promoted into a higher league each year for the last four years. However, they are now the only real users of the sports field and the current Sports Association is now little more than a shell. So it is probably time for the Parish Council to look at the way things

should be run. If anyone reading this would like to make comments about this we want to hear from you.

**Allotments:** The piece of ground we are looking at is not ideal. The drainage is poor and there isn't enough topsoil. It will also need fencing to keep out the rabbits. But there is water already on the site, and the pavilion could prove useful.

If we can sort out these problems without spending too much money then we think that an allotment association might be formed in the near future. Please contact Cllr Tait for details.

**Parking on the Pavement:** We are still getting complaints about cars parked on the pavement. May we again remind everyone that pavements are for people, not cars. On a road where there is a pavement on only one side, please park on the other side – opposite the pavement. This keeps the pavement clear for people, but allows it to be used (when absolutely necessary) by other vehicles which need to pass.

## Who are the Parish Council?

### Members

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For Parish Council information on the web visit [www.lighthorneonline.com/PCHome.htm](http://www.lighthorneonline.com/PCHome.htm)

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