

Minutes of the Parish Annual Assembly of Broxted electors and residents held on Wednesday 13 April 2022 at 7.30pm at Broxted Village Hall

Present were:

Cllr Andy Cousins, Cllr Adam Hume, Cllr Vere Isham (Chair), and Kate Rixson (Clerk). Two local electors and a member of the public.

2022-1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were accepted from Cllr Adams, Cllr Holt, Cllr Kesterton and Cllr Smith.

2022-2 Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Assembly held 11 April 2019

It was noted that the last Annual Assembly had been held in 2019, with meetings in 2020 and 2021 postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on meeting in person or in groups. The minutes of the last Annual Assembly were confirmed to be an accurate record of proceedings and duly signed by the Chair.

2022-3 Chairman's Report

Cllr Isham reported on the council's work since 2019, with reference in particular to:

- The parish council's responses to the district council on numerous planning applications, planning enforcement concerns and the review of parish boundaries, including working with other town and parish councils on responding to proposals for large developments.
- Taking the lead in opposing the appeal for permission to set up a caravan site in Brick End, an issue still not decided after the refusal in 2020.
- Working with and lobbying the county council on broadband, bus services, potholes and repairs to roads and rights of way, flooding and a recent application for a speed limit through Pledgdon Green. Participating in Affinity Water's consultation on water supply.
- Working with the police on reporting and reducing rural crime including hare-coursing and theft.
- Developing the parish council administration with a new website, free accounts software and a custom-made map showing every property in the parish.
- Zoom video-conferencing had been used successfully when physical meetings were not possible and had encouraged greater public participation. (The lapse of the emergency Covid-19 regulations in May 2021 mean that in-person meetings are now required, however.)
- A new bench, to commemorate the contribution to village life of the former parish council chairman Dick Knowles, has been placed on a local footpath. The village sign at Church End has been repaired.
- Thanks to hard-working volunteers Mr and Mrs Clark, the Village Hall has been substantially improved and the land behind it is now fenced. Its finances are currently secure and further work is planned soon.

The chair thanked the parish's county councillor Martin Foley and district councillors Maggie Sutton and Geoff Bagnall for involving themselves in parish council matters and for their support for its concerns.

2022-4 Open Forum

No issues were raised by members of the public.

2022-5 A Neighbourhood Plan for Broxted and Cherry Green

The advantages of managing development and the process of preparing a plan for approval were discussed. Members of the assembly contributed their experience of working on a neighbourhood plan for Great Dunmow in recent years and current work for local villages.

It was noted that

- the area covered by the Broxted Parish Council has been officially designated (after an application by the parish council) as an area for a “Broxted and Cherry Green Neighbourhood Plan”
- A Neighbourhood Plan, once approved, would become part of local planning policy and legally-enforceable. However it could not conflict with anything in the District Council’s Local Plan.
- Provided the Broxted Plan complied with the DC’s Local Plan at the “Regulation 18” stage, it would not be necessary to change the Broxted Plan if the Local Plan changed after that date. However the Local Plan would always override the parish’s Neighbourhood Plan.
- £2,500 to fund the Plan has been promised by the District Council.
- Other funding is likely to be available but the amount and process for applying is uncertain currently as a funding round has just concluded. Most of the funding would be used to pay for expert advice and help from, for example, housing needs analysts and planning advisers.
- Evidence of housing needs and evidence of local people’s views on other local issues (e.g. where houses or small businesses should be built or located) was essential and would need to be collected in a systematic way. The plan would eventually be reviewed by an independent planner who would check that it reflected the views of the whole community. If not satisfied with the evidence underpinning the Plan’s policies, the planner would reject the Plan.
- This parish is one of the smallest areas, in terms of the number of residents (about 520), to try to make a plan. However the parish of Birdham in the Chichester area of West Sussex was only slightly larger (650 people) and had finalised a plan in 2016. This is publicly available on <https://www.chichester.gov.uk>.
- The district council can provide expertise when the time comes to write specific planning policies into the plan
- Locality, the independent body commissioned by the government to support communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans, can provide expert advice and reports.

The Parish Council needed to set up a separate working group of volunteers, reporting to the council, to manage the process. In discussion, concerns were expressed that

- without a Neighbourhood Plan the parish would find it hard to avoid unsuitable development
- support from local residents was essential to organise and drive the Plan – it could not be pursued by the parish council alone.

Members of the public expressed support for more discussion with local residents who might be interested in participating.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 9pm.