

ALVECHURCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Incorporating Community Safety Forum (PACT)

Alvechurch Baptist Church

8th April 2019 at 7pm

The Minutes were taken by Tammy Williams, Clerk.

In attendance: Cllrs A Humphries (Chairman), M Ball, J Cypher, S Lambert, A Willetts, A Smith, M Worrall, P Freeman, T Wallis, N Wise and 24 members of the public signed the Attendance Book

Apologies: Norma Divine, Gill Lungley (Supporting Officer), Louise Humphries, Dean Petters, Cllr R Chima, PC S Albutt, PCSO M Hyder and Adam Kent.

The Parish Council Chairman, Cllr Andy Humphries, chaired the meeting.

The Chairman noted that the Annual Parish meeting is not a normal Parish Council meeting, it is hosted by the Parish Council for local people to ask questions about the Parish and for organisations to promote themselves and for District candidates to present themselves. As the Safer Neighbourhood Team couldn't attend the meeting this evening as there wasn't available resources, the Chairman noted that he had juggled the agenda slightly and some statistics have been left on seats in the Meeting Room (Appendix 1). In their absence, the Chairman asked the existing District Councillors, Kate Van der Plank and Charlie Hotham, in both his District and County capacities to update those present on what they've achieved in the last year or so.

District Cllr C Hotham (Hopwood and Barnt Green Ward)

- Mayfield Farm - In the last 12 months in Hopwood, there have continued to be smell and noise issues from Mayfield Farm. District Cllr Hotham noted that all avenues have been exhausted with Worcestershire Regulatory Services and then District Cllr Hotham reported that he has gone down the community trigger route. Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) has a great officer who has been collecting evidence for 12 months and working with the two companies involved at Mayfield Farm. If the Officer can't solve the issue, then legal action may be taken so that residents aren't blighted by continued noise and smell nuisances.
- Development in Stonehouse Lane – a massive pond was dug out and developed within a green field site with the intention of developing a fishing business. Enforcement action was taken along with BDC. The issue was resolved although the site has not yet been returned to original state. It is hoped that the wildlife will return to the site again soon.

County Cllr C Hotham

- Finances - this is a continuing difficult situation at the County Council as central government funding has been continuously reduced and it's been difficult for the County Council to balance its books. The financial plan for the next financial year involves using up the County Council's Reserves but over the next 2 years the County Council needs to make a £60 million saving. The County Council has a £300 million budget but £200 million of that budget is for Adult Social Care and Children's Services where it's difficult to make cuts so in fact, the County Council can only make cuts from a small remaining pool of money.
- Children's Services – Failed an Ofsted inspection and Children's Services is now run by a company owned by Worcestershire County Council. Educational Services is also being moved into this company as well. This poses concerns about its democratic accountability and whether individual councillors will be able to challenge the company.
- Highways – there is a larger budget for individual members. County Cllr Hotham advised that he is lobbying really hard for a pedestrian crossing on the A441 in Hopwood which is imperative now because of the installation of new play equipment at Hopwood Playing Field which is

unfortunately on the other side of the road to where most children live. The road (A441) splits the community; there was also sadly a pedestrian death on the road. County Cllr Hotham noted that it was really disappointing that there were no funds made available from the Longbridge development for a crossing as the developer had already spent the money when County Cllr Hotham took office.

District Cllr Kate Van der Plank

District Cllr Van der Plank stated that she was happy to report back. It's hard to sum up the role of a District Councillor because it's very broad and varied.

- Active Role at BDC

I have a 100% attendance rate at meetings, and I am working with other Independents with a particular focus on trying to improve financial accountability. I'm also determined to help protect front line services and establish plans in place to reduce problems arising in the future

Transparency and good governance – I actively scrutinise what happens for example, BDC using a consultant for their Green Belt Review who had also helped to write the Hearn report.

- Interests

I have a particular interest in supporting disadvantaged people in the community. I also get involved in all the consultations that arise from the Green Belt Review consultation, constituency boundary consultation and the proposed cuts to library services. I listen to other people's views and always submit responses to consultations received; I also encourage residents to get involved as well.

- Alvechurch

I get involved in what's going on in Alvechurch. I work with the Parish Council, go to their meetings to report back what has happened at BDC and then in turn take items arising at the Parish Council meeting back to BDC. I've also been involved with the Library consultation and highways issues raised.

The adoption of the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan was a huge achievement. I was keen to support it and encouraged people to vote in the referendum. Then there has been the Christmas Light switch on in Alvechurch and I worked with local businesses to get prizes for the competitions around the event.

- Other issues that I've been involved in:

I've forged close links with the Community Support Team including pulling together a group of key stakeholders to establish what improvements could be made following concerns raised by residents in Hollington Road about children playing in the road and road safety in general, there.

District Cllr Van der Plank noted that she works with PC Simon Albutt to review crime figures; she encourages people to report crime and also keep it in perspective because the fear of crime can be a big problem as well.

- Supporting local residents:

Dist. Cllr Van der Plank advised that she receives varied queries including the need to explain the planning process and make representations on resident's behalf.

Pavement parking has been an issue for residents and District Cllr Van der Plank got some support from the police and BDC Enforcement to resolve some of the issues raised. District Cllr Van der Plank has worked with County Cllr Hotham to address issues raised about disabled access and condition of pavements in the village.

Fly tipping is a blight in country lanes. District Cllr Van der Plank is working with BDC to get it resolved and encourage the analysis of the waste collected to identify the perpetrators.

Dist Cllr Van der Plank has assisted local groups to access community grant funding.

District Cllr Van der Plank concluded by stating that I'm always accessible for local residents: she held surgeries in the early days of office but these weren't well attended although would be happy to resume these again if there was a desire for that. Always attends Parish Council meetings, gets involved with what's being raised on Facebook and is happy to share her contact details.

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 16th April 2018 were approved and signed formally at the end of the meeting.

Chairman's Report:

The Successes of 2018

- The Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan (NHP): great to finish it and so well written, supported by the community and then adopted by BDC. It was the first to be finished and adopted in the Bromsgrove district.
- The Wiggin Memorial Playing Fields: new play equipment installed, work was undertaken on the paddling pool, Finlay's Memorial Garden and the installation of the overhead barrier. Most residents like these visible improvements. The Wiggin is a great asset for the community and has been improved well in last 12 months
- Environmental improvements: five years of pushing by canal volunteers and APC and we finally persuaded the Canal & Rivers Trust that Bridge 64 needed to be demolished. In addition, recent planting by volunteers has improved that area.
- Phase 3 of Street Lighting improvements in the Parish: efficient LEDs have been installed and concrete columns have been replaced
- Grit bins: two new grit bins have been installed in the Parish
- Defibrillator: BDC New Homes Bonus Grant monies have enabled the installation of a defibrillator at Hopwood Community Centre
- Internal changes: General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) as well as addressing Transparency requirements. Risk reviews have also been undertaken by APC.
- The Tender for the Wiggin Play Equipment improvements was run by volunteers.
- Events in the Parish: The Alvechurch Christmas light switch on. It didn't rain and Father Christmas turned up! There was also a Best Decorated House competition. In November there was the Alvechurch Remembrance Service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War.; it was a very fitting commemorative service. Picnic in the Park which is always a fantastic event and which involves a lot of hard work by its organisers but is a great event for the community.

The Issues Arising in 2018

- The Railway Station Car Park "water feature"!
- Insecurity about Alvechurch Post Office
- The future of Alvechurch Library has come into focus. This is a big issue for the County and the community
- Graffiti in the Wiggin: thanks to BDC who came within an hour to clean it up. The BDC staff have been rightly praised for turning up so quickly.
- Swan Street gas chaos: this was a big issue because it wiped out main thoroughfare through the village for about 6 weeks. APC assisted with the communications between Cadent and the residents.
- How has the Parish Council changed? There have been lots of staffing changes. We moved into a new office in George Road. The business support team do a great job there.
- The Parish Council's Staffing committee support the business team. They've had to pick up new pensions legislation and GDPR changes.

- Public involvement: APC has tried to involve residents in working groups, for example the “Hopwood Mums” after they told the Council they wanted to make improvements at Hopwood Playing Fields.
- Social media – what a challenge! District Council can answer as they feel fit. The Parish Council can't just lash out as they feel fit because we are bound by Standing Orders. Also, we don't always know who people are on social media as they may go under a false name or they may be commenting on issues in Alvechurch and they may not even live in the village.
- Transparency: the irony being that we have always been transparent!
- Impacts of changes at BDC and Worcestershire County Council (WCC): a few years ago interactions with these authorities was low but it is better if you have active or proactive councillors which has improved at BDC and WCC. This is important because of Localism.
- External funding: over the last 4 or 5 years, APC has raised about £200,000 from external funding sources for the benefit of the parish including Section 106 monies, Sport England grant, BDC New Homes Bonus grants and lottery funding. APC works with colleagues at BDC and WCC to secure funding as well. Precepts are pretty well capped and APC needs external funding to undertake big capital projects like street lighting.

What Will Happen Over the Next 12 months?

- Planning Officers are starting to take on board the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan. This is important because developers will be asking for chunks of the green belt.
- Where should the Parish Council take the Neighbourhood Plan next? It's likely the Steering Group will look at a village centre improvement plan and a transport plan.
- APC is supporting a project to improve play equipment in Hopwood which was initiated by a group of Hopwood Mums. This has been achieved by raising £30,000 of funds. APC will carry on lobbying for a road crossing across the A441 which is vitally needed.
- ROSPA is going to undertake a full risk review of the Wiggin Memorial Playing Fields. The Parish Council is well aware that there are some risks down there; social media has made people aware that we need to be risk aware but its also a big responsibility for users in the Playing Fields too about how they use the area as well.
- Working to complete a Community Resilience plan: a couple of Parish Councillors are working on that.
- The next stage of BDC's Local Plan will be in the autumn and will include a call for sites but how well will that be assessed against the NHP?
- The planning application for Lye Meadow: a big planning challenge at the moment.
- Another key challenge is infrastructure: the Parish Council is working with Network Rail and other key stakeholders to get improvements to our local infrastructure.
- APC is still working with the Safer Roads Partnership regarding speeding on the A441 although we don't stand a chance to get a fixed speed camera on the road.
- Thanks are sent to the Parish Clerk; its been a year of change with Wendy Carney leaving after 17 years at the Parish Council. We also said goodbye to Ron Rand who has been our Parish Lengthsman for almost as many years as well. APC said hello to Gill Lungley and Claire Mason, all of whom work part time and amount to about 2 full time members of staff.
- Thanks are sent to all the Parish Councillors: it's the end of a 4 year stint and three Parish Councillors will be standing down at the next elections. Our Parish Councillors make a supportive team. Thanks are especially sent to Cllr Adrian Smith for all his work on the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Cllr Humphries added that he is stepping down as Chairman this May and it is hoped that the new Council team will give as much support to the new chairman.
- Thanks to everyone who gives up their time to make it nicer to live in this community. You do a fantastic job! In particular, those who work at The Lounge, on the PIP Committee, Rowney Green Association...

The Parish Council is here to help you all so tell us what you think! Please don't put it on Facebook - tell us! Tell us personally! It's so much nicer to get an angry email but also a bit of change is good –

try not to bemoan change. Change is inevitable and you can help your Parish Council to manage change.

Hustings

The Chairman of the Parish Council gave a few guidelines for the proceedings: candidates will stand up to address those present alphabetically and by Ward. Please respect your opponents, no ranting and no mention of Brexit!

Alvechurch South

Trevor Bland (Conservatives)

Good evening! My name is Trevor Bland and I am Chairman of Beoley Parish Council. There is Alvechurch Village which is the major ward and Alvechurch South which is a small slice of Alvechurch. Alvechurch South includes Rowney Green, Beoley and Portway and all the roads in between.

The reasons I'm here? In my view our ward hasn't been represented as well as it could have been over last 3 years. Moving forwards, I'm used to working with people and with people's issues. Nobody can have any impact on Brexit; its important to understand that! I'm just as frustrated as you about that but I can look at issues that hit at a local level including:

- The reduction in funds left, right and centre at BDC, WCC and the Parish Council level.
- Development creep is another issue: in Beoley's case, development is creeping from Redditch. In 1965 there was a buffer, like in Alvechurch and if we allow that to be eroded then and handed over then our community will also be impacted.
- The state of the roads...planning – development creep.
- Travellers: Beoley has had enormous help from BDC. Beoley has an issue where a group of travellers bought the land and then illegally moved caravans on to the site without planning permission. BDC has done everything they can to help within the law.
- I've represented the people. Where else can they turn? Parish Councillors can only make recommendations on planning matters and need to rely on BDC.

Obviously, I know more about that (Beoley) side of the ward than this one but if you have any specific issues please raise them with me or Annette English, because it's our job to look into them. To me politics has no place; keep politics out of it and give local people a voice at the BDC level.

Annette English (Independent)

It's my worst nightmare talking about myself because I would rather get stuff done! I have really close links with Alvechurch...my family home is in Bromsgrove and I lived in Alvechurch for 24 years. Alvechurch South is a huge district even The Square in Alvechurch is in Alvechurch South so it's a massive area.

I used to work at Alvechurch Middle School, then I went to train to be an Educational Psychologist and then worked on government projects to help deliver services collaboratively with other stakeholders. I hope that will be good experience in getting people to work together to get things done.

I couldn't believe the political in-fighting at the District level: what a waste of time political point scoring.

I do want to work collaboratively: communication is a "biggy". Collaboration and commitment, trying to get people to work together.

I'm an active listener. I like to ask people's views and problem solve with you.

I have a commitment to anything I put my hand to and I'm really committed to hear what Alvechurch South residents are saying.

Alvechurch Village

Neil Harris (Conservatives)

Evening! I'm going to speak to you about my credentials and about who I am, the skills I've got and what I've done over the last 20 years. I'm a local lad and I've lived in the north of the county for all my life. I live in Rowney Green and have 4 daughters who went to school in Alvechurch. I understand what drives a lot of things in Alvechurch and in the parish.

I'm a Chartered Surveyor; I'm the Harris in Harris Lamb. We have over 80 employees in the business including surveyors and we even have a Batman and a Bat Woman! I know how to build a business, how to balance the books and how to put budgets together. At Harris Lamb we have a low staff turnover rate and we have been awarded "Investors in People" for the last 15 years. I know how to make a business run well. I also do a lot of business with local authorities and I'm a passionate believer in protecting the Green Belt. I know what goes through the minds of land developers when land is released and I know the drivers for developers. I know the tricks of the trade.

I was a Governor at Crown Meadow First School for a number of years. I also helped to draw up the Alvechurch Design Statement which Tony and I saw all the way through to completion. I know what Alvechurch people want and don't want. I'm passionate about cleanliness and the need for dynamism when shops close. We need entrepreneurship to build on the life in village. I believe in Alvechurch and I want to serve the village.

Kate Van Der Plank (Independent)

I'm the local candidate and live in the heart of the village. I'm the only Independent so I can say that! I have a track record and you can see what I've been doing in last 2 years. Why am I standing again? Alvechurch is my home. I love living here; I love the feel of the community and I'm passionate about supporting that.

- 1) I have helped to build on and encourage a vibrant community spirit: I was one of the co-founders of The Lounge 5 years ago.
- 2) I've been the Chair of Crown Meadow First School Parents Teachers Association
- 3) I am a volunteer at Picnic in the Park

I am passionate about protecting the village: I don't want it to become part of Birmingham. I know we need more houses, but we also need to be sympathetic to the natural environment and we need to look for gaps of land. We need to look at brownfield sites before giving up the green belt. I also don't own any land, so I don't have a conflict of interest in this.

I have been a strong voice at the District level on the Hearn Report, the library consultation and on financial scrutiny. I want to carry on being a strong voice even though I'm in a minority group.

I believe in collaboration; there are different organisations that contribute to the village. I work with the Parish Council, County and District Councillors, PC Simon Albutt and our police team. I have also worked with Sajid Javid MP and have managed to get his support on things. We are working together for the best interests of our community. It has to be a priority.

Never has our country been more divided. Party politics has played a part in the current Alvechurch South representation at the District Council with Alvechurch South District Councillors being very difficult to get hold of; there was even a cardboard cut-out of a previous candidate because no one knew what he looked like!

Its also not acceptable to have main candidates block votes for party candidates there to support party politics. It needs to be better at the district level; we need to put people before party politics. Independent candidates have a track record of doing things for local people.

Barnt Green and Hopwood

Charlie Hotham (Independent)

I don't know what I can add to Kate's statement! There isn't a place for party politics at district and county level. I stood 4 years ago after feeling fed up with the District representation in Barnt Green but then I came along to Alvechurch Parish Council meetings and found the District representation for Alvechurch was even worse than in Barnt Green! Hereditary seats shouldn't be part of district work. I

have challenged that. I have worked with APC and I think we have achieved a lot here and in Barnt Green. I know Trevor well; he would make an excellent Independent candidate!

You will have seen the performance at BDC. Sometimes there is a need for something to go through, like the Budget for example but the rest of the time there are policies going through at the District level that have a real impact on all of us. My passion is representing residents and giving it all I can to make sure we get the best for residents at the District level. I stand by my record for the last 4 years and hope to carry on if I'm re-elected.

Mary Marsh (Conservative)

Good evening! Let me introduce myself: My name is Mary Marsh and I'm standing for the Hopwood ward. I have to pick up on an Independent's point: as a parish councillor you need someone who lives in the village. When you get to the next level of government, it is political – no bones about it. I am standing for the conservatives and I'm looking forward to working with the conservative team. Is there anyone here from Hopwood?

I have children and grandchildren and although I don't live in Hopwood I do live locally. A local representation belongs to the Parish Council but at the District level the thing you need most is the best person for job not the most local.

Being a District Councillor is a varied job; it's about helping people and I wanted to help the community and make the community somewhere you want to live in. I want to improve the community as a whole in the district that we live and work in. There are issues in transport and road congestion. Hopwood has the A441 and with it, serious issues with speeding vehicles and issues crossing the road. People have, for a number of years, been trying to solve these issues without success. I have already spoken to the Police and Crime Commissioner to try to solve the issue of the A441 which is a highways issue and resolution to its issues are long overdue.

I have said I won't make promises I can't deliver. I will do my best to work with parish councillors and if I can't then I will know someone who can. I would like to send huge congratulations to the Parish Council regarding the adoption of its Neighbourhood Plan and I'm sure it will be fed into the Local Plan at the district level.

The Chairman to the Parish Council then drew the Hustings to an end referencing a quote that he had seen on a t-shirt "Deeds not words" which comes from the suffragette movement and the Chairman to the Parish Council stated that Alvechurch would feel very let down if Bromsgrove District Council didn't take that on board

Local Organisations:

Picnic in the Park (PIP) 2019

Sarah Courbet spoke:

This is the 7th or 8th year for this community event which is all about bringing people together. The PIP event seeks to raise money for local charities with 50% of profits made going to the Lounge and we're now supporting the Hopwood Mums with their project to get new play equipment at Hopwood Playing fields. This year the PIP will continue to support the Hopwood Mums' project.

The 2019 PIP will be on Sunday 26th May. We took the decision in the past to move the date of the event to the second May Bank Holiday weekend because of the weather!

The format remains unchanged kicking off with a dog show followed by 5 hours of entertainment. After 5pm people can move on to the Cricket Club to carry on the party in the evening.

Alvechurch Village Society (AVS)

Ray Yarnell spoke:

I have recently been elected as Chairman of AVS. This year is the 50th anniversary of AVS which was initially established as the community vehicle to object to the building of the M42. It just demonstrates how things change...I don't know what we would do without the M42 now! AVS has a serious responsibility towards how people live and how the village develops and at the same time we've introduced walks and talks and we look after the footpaths in the Parish. We've tried to introduce a

programme of social events like Christmas parties and quizzes. AVS is always trying to get new members, but particularly younger people, to join AVS. Our next 3 events are family-focussed with a Treasure Hunt on the 24th April which is also free of charge. On 25th May, "Cecilia", the Canal Society's canal boat will be sailing between The Weighbridge Public House and The Hopwood House Inn and we'd be delighted if we had families join us. On 26th June its AVS's 50th anniversary event which is being held in Alvechurch Village Hall which will include food and drink and a car show. There will be a Community Litter Pick this Sunday, 14th April. All AVS events are non-profit making and support Alvechurch Village Hall and the Canal Society.

AVS's membership comprises of 66 life members and 147 paying members. Membership numbers change each year but fortunately we always gain more members each year than we lose! AVS has a new president: Professor Chris Mayle who has been a member of AVS for a long time.

Finally, the Morris Men group will have been running for 30 years in 2019 as well and they are holding a big event in June. The Village Hall is 90 years old in 2019 and will be celebrating by holding an Afternoon Tea in May.

Worcester, Birmingham and Droitwich Canal Society

Tony Brannon spoke:

The Worcester, Birmingham and Droitwich Canal Society is celebrating its 50th year with a large spectrum of events this Saturday at The Crown public house. The Canal Society was spoken about and formed in Alvechurch after a meeting held at The Crown Public House 50 years ago. The Society is mainly centred here in Alvechurch because the majority of its members live here and the canal boat "Cecilia" has its permanent mooring here. Cecilia is a canal boat for the whole community to use and we loan it out for anyone who wants to use it for social use and the Society can crew it for a half day trip out on the canal. Look at the Society's website and Facebook page for more details. There is a Worcester, Birmingham and Droitwich Canal Society Festival every year in Droitwich. Quite a few people support us from Alvechurch. If anyone wants to volunteer to help out at that event please do so! It is being held on the first May Bank Holiday weekend.

Alvechurch Walking Buddies

Tony Brannon spoke:

This is a group on Facebook with about 140 members. We go for a walk on Thursday mornings. Anyone who wants to join us for a walk can do so with walks around the countryside or sometimes we get on a train to go a bit further. We also meet socially in the evenings as well as meeting on the weekends for walks.

Worcestershire Dementia Buddies

Tony Brannon spoke:

This is a Facebook group for people suffering with dementia. It's a light-hearted group - please do come along if you, or anyone you know, is suffering from dementia. We also put lots of links up on the Facebook page to help signpost people to relevant services.

Peck Wood

Dorothy Snaddon spoke:

It has been another successful year at Peck Wood. This year the bluebells have come early so Peck Wood will be open to the public on Easter Saturday and Sunday, cream teas will be available on May Day and Peck Wood will also be open on some dates in between those two public holidays. Further details can be found on posters around the Parish.

Alvechurch Library

A representative from Alvechurch library advised there is a wide selection of books on dementia at Alvechurch library and that she had attended the meeting to find out what was going on.

Alvechurch Ex-Servicemen Association

A representative from Alvechurch Ex-Servicemen Association noted that Alvechurch Parish Council had helped with the arrangements for the Alvechurch Remembrance Parade in 2018. As the Veterans' Association is no more the former members would like the Parish Council to confirm that the Parish Council will continue to hold the annual Remembrance Service. The Chairman to the Parish Council replied that the Parish Council is happy to help and we will certainly do our best to help!

Alvechurch Village Hall Committee

Annette English spoke:

The Village Hall Committee has undertaken a 5-year plan to develop the hall starting with a ramp to improve disabled access. The plans for the ramp are in the village hall to be viewed and planning permission has been granted. Also, the Village Hall Committee will be applying for government funding for Village Halls which has recently become available.

Hopwood Residents Association / Footpath Group

Adrian Smith spoke and introduced himself as both Chairman of the Hopwood Residents Association, Parish Footpath Warden and also Parish Councillor for the Hopwood ward until the elections in May. Adrian thanked District Cllr Charlie Hotham for his support with the Hopwood Residents' Association. Adrian also noted that the Footpath Group is adjoined to AVS. The Footpath Group still needs volunteers to maintain our 28 miles of public rights of way. Anyone who wants to join AVS can also join the Footpath Group. Adrian Smith also wanted to take the opportunity to laud the benefits of independent candidates.

Open Forum

The Chairman of the Parish Council asked those present if they had any questions:

Q: Mary Marsh you have a full page leaflet out at the moment introducing you as the Conservative candidate wanting to represent Hopwood and Barnt Green at the District Council but it's all about Barnt Green and not about Hopwood. Hopwood residents have noted that there isn't any mention of Hopwood in the leaflet and I don't think you've taken to heart the problems in Hopwood.

Mary Marsh: You're quite right. This is the first survey that I sent out to everyone on the Electoral Roll. I've received similar questions about it. I'm fully aware that Barnt Green and Hopwood have separate issues and I've have now developed two leaflets for these different villages.

Q at Mary Marsh: Does everyone get the opportunity to have more than one leaflet?

Mary Marsh: The Conservatives have chosen how candidates will be publicised. The Independent candidates get a small pot of money.

Q at the Party aligned candidates: When push comes to shove, whose interests are you going to be supporting? Your parishioners' or your party's?

Trevor Bland: I can easily answer this...would I always comply with conservative policies? No because what is good for local people isn't necessarily what's good for party politics. I've got this big thing about party politics not involving themselves in local government. I wish it wasn't there but that's the system we work under. I have already made that clear.

District Cllr Charlie Hotham to Trevor Bland: You will be a unique candidate if you manage that.

District Cllr Kate Van Der Plank: Are you saying you won't have a whipped block vote for the Conservatives?

Trevor Bland: I can abstain

District Cllr Kate Van Der Plank: That's not allowed.

Trevor Bland: That's what was said when I agreed to stand as a Conservative candidate and if that turns out to not be the case then we'll have to see...

Mary Marsh: I can see how this is difficult in people's minds to understand. We're on a Conservative team and we all have individual issues and we will work hard to solve these issues and we've got a big team with an overall plan for the district which we feed into and I said I won't make any promises that I can't deliver. We all have our independent views.

Q: One issue we have at the parish level is speed restraint. We would like a 20mph zone through the village. There seems to be a view at council level that it can't be done.

County Cllr Charlie Hotham: I will answer this as Highways matters come under the County Council. The project is being pursued and is likely to be delivered in the future but will need extensive public consultation about it. I'm in talks about it with the County Council Highways Engineer. It is about the extent that it can happen because we have to adhere to the County Council's policies that are in place. Some roads in the village centre adhere perfectly to the Council's policies but as we move further out the village centre they don't adhere with the policies. We're working on it.

Parish Cllr comment: We need to see a proposal that is affordable and reasonable

Q to Neil Harris: You raised the fact that you work for a property consultancy and you say it represents private and public developers. Will that lead to a conflict of interest when you're involved at the District level. What can you tell us to allay those fears?

Neil Harris: Conflicts of interest at a public body can't cross the borders into professional life. I'm aware of the sites where Birmingham is hoping to build 1000s of homes in Worcestershire. Planning permission was refused to build houses on North Worcestershire Golf Club and now it's stood empty. I supported that planning application to provide housing. However, it's a hypothetical situation for me because my company isn't working on applications in Alvechurch. Its first and foremost parishioners that I represent. Alvechurch needs to be represented by the biggest group at the big table and by voting for an independent candidate there's a danger that Alvechurch won't be properly represented at the District Council level.

Trevor Bland: Conflict of interest is a big thing. I was an architect for my whole working life, although I'm retired now. If you need to declare an interest at the Parish Council level you put your hand up and leave the room. But for me I'm retired so as long as I don't take on any architect jobs then there won't be a conflict.

Q: Planning is a principle function of BDC. There's a planning application in at the moment to build 25 four-bedroom houses on Alvechurch Football Ground. Can we please hear the Alvechurch South candidates' thoughts on this please?

Trevor Bland: I've got to see what people think about. It's not a bad suggestion. Housing is needed and the houses could be sited in worse places. Local opinion may well differ though, and I will have to listen to that. Small scale developments are not an issue but Beoley nearly got stuck with 2000 extra houses. Bromsgrove District is desperate for houses. We've got to look at all the possibilities.

Cllr Adrian Smith: We've got an adopted Neighbourhood Plan in Alvechurch Parish and this application goes against all the policies of the Local District Plan although the District plan is going to be reviewed.

Trevor Bland: The planning rules are tight. The Green Belt review and the adoption of the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan is good for the local community.

Anette English: The Neighbourhood Plan says what kind of housing we should have, and villagers have said they want more affordable housing and housing for older people. The Neighbourhood Plan is another layer of protection for what people want.

Q: Have any prospective candidates read the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan?

Trevor Bland: Not all of it but I've speed read it.

Mary Marsh: I've read it and I've got a copy of it in my bag.

Neil Harris: I've speed read it.

Q: Can I ask candidates how they're going to represent me at the planning level? There is bound to be a time when there's a clash between parish, borough and what I need?

Annette English: I would listen to your views and if you had a case I would support you all the way checking how your needs fit in with local policies.

Charlie Hotham: I'm fully aware of the circumstances of this particular case (referencing the member of the public who had asked the question) and you were badly let down by the system. I would really hope it never happens again. Marc Worrall (Chairman of the Parish Council's Planning Committee) has established some specific guidance on planning process and has published it on Alvechurch Parish Council's website.

Neil Harris: I am a major agitator for planning applications. If someone has a planning related issue and they live on my doorstep, and in particular if it's not being raised properly at the District Level then I'll see it through.

Trevor Bland: I would want to listen to you; you'd need to tell me about it. I've had so much feedback from Portway residents who want applications decided by the planning committee not behind closed doors (by Planning Officers at the District Council). I can't speak to 2500 people but residents can come to me. (To the member of the public who asked the question) I don't know about your story and I'm quite happy to speak to you about it after.

Q: Is the Parish Lengthsman's job still vacant?

Andy Humphries: We've asked Bromsgrove District Council to take over the role until the end of March to see how it works. There are pros and cons to this arrangement and the Parish Council will make a judgment at the May meeting about if it's working properly. They don't make it too easy for individuals to do it and we need to weigh up whether individuals will carry on after training.

Q: Does anybody know what's happening with the post office in Alvechurch?

A: I'm pleased to answer that. I understand that they (the Post Office) have been talking to the applicant who put in the application for Simply Fresh. The latest that we've heard is that there is likely to be an application that includes the post office.

The Chairman of the Parish Council finished the meeting by stating: "When it comes to 2nd May remember to vote!"

The meeting ended at 9.08pm.

Chairman's Signature.....

Date.....