



AUDLEY RURAL PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT FOR ACTIVITIES IN 2020/21

At the time of writing this Annual Report (April 2021) we are still experiencing unprecedented times with the pandemic known as Covid-19 (coronavirus). Our thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones and suffered due to Covid-19.

Audley Rural Parish Council consists of fifteen ward councillors and a Parish Clerk:

Audley Ward	Councillor	Mrs Valerie Pearson
	Councillor	Mrs Catherine Richardson
	Councillor	Mrs Nicola Myatt
	Councillor	Ms Anna Borowski Baskeyfield
Bignall End	Councillor	Mr Nick Hayes (Chair)
	Councillor	Mr Deane Jervis (Vice Chair)
	Councillor	Mr David Butler
	Councillor	Mr Daniel Keen (co-opted Oct 20)
Halmer End	Councillor	Mr Nick Crisp (co-opted Oct 18)
	Councillor	Ms Josie Leydon (co-opted Oct 20)
	Councillor	Mr Rob Moody (co-opted Sept 19)
	Councillor	Mr Mike Joynson
	Councillor	Mr Ron Garlick
	Councillor	Mr Chris C Cooper
Parish Clerk	Councillor	Mr Ian Rowley (co-opted Oct 20)
		Mrs Clare Withington

The Parish Council A.G.M usually takes place in May each year, however due to Covid 19 and a change in way Council's operate this was not held – instead the Parish Council voted to continue with the arrangements for Chair and Vice Chair. Mr Ron Kinnersley and Mr Whitmore stood down in July 2020 due to personal reasons and the Parish Council were grateful for their input over the years. Meetings are normally held on the 3rd Thursday of each month at various locations around the Parish, there may also be additional meetings during the year to cater for any extra volume of business. This year saw a change in the way Parish Councils hold their meetings due to Covid 19. All meetings were held remotely over Zoom.

County and Borough Council Representation

The Parish is represented at Staffordshire County Council by Cllr Ann Beech and at Newcastle Borough Council by Cllr Bert Proctor, Cllr Sue Moffatt and Cllr Ian Wilkes.

Planning applications

Throughout the year, the Council receives planning applications for consultation. The Council is committed to avoiding inappropriate developments and is asked by the Planning Authority to express its views on each application and also any comments passed to it by the residents. This they do in an advisory capacity only, as the final decision in each case rests with the relevant Planning Authority. Between the period of April 2020 and March 2021 – the Parish Council have commented on 64 applications. Where considered necessary some have been called in to the Borough Council's Planning Committee for full deliberation of the decision, usually due to a number of objections and where it involves developing green belt or large developments on the boundary of the Parish. The Borough Council's Joint Local Plan was aborted in November 2020 with a new Borough Local Plan agreed instead. The Local Plan consultation is awaited when amongst other matters policies affecting the Green Belt and new sites for development. The new housing sites will be identified and are most likely to see some development in the Green Belt within the Parish. The Parish Council also took the decision

to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish. All residents are strongly advised to input into both consultations to ensure you have your say – as this may be your only opportunity to shape the future of the Parish.

Allotments

The parish has allotment sites at Audley and Halmer End. The Audley Allotment Association successfully run the Alsager Road site which has 58 plots let and a waiting list of 25. The Parish Council manage the Halmer End Harrison Close site, with all 21 plots let and a waiting list of 7. A large number of plots were terminated again this year due to being unworked and it is now hoped that there is stability now with all plots used to their full potential. New fencing and an improved pathway will be installed at Halmer End Allotments.

Grant Applications and donations

In March 2020, working with the local churches a helpline (consisting of volunteers) was set up to help with prescriptions and shopping. This was promoted through cards in shops and a newsletter which was delivered to all properties in the parish at the start of the pandemic. Collection points for donations for the Newcastle Food bank were also set up and 1750 meals have been provided by Audley Parish through the donations made which were taken on a weekly basis to Tesco and Co-op. A subsidised community transport service “Door 2 Door” was launched with £500 to help vulnerable people access transport. From the launch in October until the end of March there were 17 journeys made, mostly for medical appointments.

This year the parish supported the following groups which contribute to parish life overall:

- Audley Millennium Green £1000 towards maintenance
- Audley Brass Band £200 donation

A new grant programme was launched in December 2020 for small applications for funding from our community groups. The first grants were awarded to:

- Audley Football Club – resurfacing work to the car park £300
- Leddys Field Supporters Group – repair work to the 2 small bridges £300

Parish Council Notice Boards and Website

There are eight notice boards containing the latest Parish Council information across the Parish. A new noticeboard was installed at Bignall End, opposite The Plough. The website was upgraded to meet the new Accessibility standards and is updated at regular intervals. Since the new website was launched in November 2020 it has been viewed approx. 18600 times. Standard information about the Parish Council is also published in Audley Community News (Facebook group) and through local social media groups.

Village Car Parks

The lease for the Butchers Arms car park was finally signed in the autumn of 2020. An architect and drainage consultant have been appointed to draw up a scheme to submit for planning permission to resurface and improve it. Another site is also being explored under a lease arrangement with the Borough Council to create further opportunities for off road parking, subject to affordability.

Children’s Play areas and Wildlife Areas

The Parish provides and maintains 8 play areas situated at Alsager Road Audley, Albert Street and Bignall End Road in Bignall End, Miles Green, Halmer End, Alsagers Bank, Rileys Field and Scot Hay. This year a number of changes had to be made to limit the risk of Covid 19. For an initial period of time all play areas were closed due to Government restrictions however these were reopened in July 2020. Some pieces of equipment have been removed during Covid-19 in line with the Government guidance, these will be put back as soon as social distancing is no longer required. Play areas are

subject to monthly inspections and reports are considered at the Parish Council meetings. On-going painting and maintenance of all the equipment is carried out as required during the year. Dog fouling on the playing fields still continues to be a problem although it has improved thanks to the responsible dog owners. If you see a dog owner failing to pick up, please do report it to the dog warden (www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/all-services/environment/dog-wardens) who will fine people if they are known. A new bin has been installed at Halmer End play area to help with the litter problem. We also fund the bin to be emptied at CARA by the gates. The scheme for £60k new play equipment for Albert Street was finalised following consultation and tendered. An install date is being agreed following appointment. A pump/BMX track was installed in May 2020 at CARA Queen Street with £10k funding from National Lottery 'Awards for All', plus a contribution from CARA and also the Parish Council. The site remained closed for most of the year but was opened in December 2020.

Annual Maintenance Programme

The Annual Maintenance programme of the Parish assets continues, and the contract has been awarded to a local contractor to provide a 3-year maintenance contract until March 2024.

Report from the Audley Parish Bowling Green

The Committee (Audley) appreciates the Parish Council's 'Umbrella' which enables the committee to provide sporting facilities in the Parish, especially in providing leisurely but necessary exercise for senior members. It has been a difficult year, but after the lockdown we shall continue to enter competitive teams in various leagues in the area, so we get teams visiting Audley on a regular basis, which can only engender community spirit. Our finances are in good shape. We are mindful of the council's wishes to keep the membership rate as low as possible, and ours continue to be £25 per year - with free tea and biscuits – why not join us! We are 100% behind the vaccine programme.

Public Seats, Bus Shelters, Grit Bins

A total of 75 seats and 5 parish owned bus shelters are located around the Parish. An ongoing maintenance programme will continue to keep these in good condition. We have also installed a further 7 grit bins and will keep them topped up with grit (16 in total) to help keep the Parish moving in bad weather.

Leddy's Field and Bluebell Wood, Alsagers Bank

Leddy's Field wildlife area was put to good use during the lockdowns, providing a place for people to enjoy being outdoors. We are pleased that the Leddys Field Supporters Group has been revived and they are already doing some fantastic work. The fourth phase of tree thinning was carried out in the summer of 2020, along with the ongoing routine maintenance. Bluebell Wood continues to be monitored for any future work that is required.

Margaret's Garden, Church Street

Mrs Pearson continues to maintain this area with the help of volunteers, and it provides a lovely feature for the centre of the village.

CCTV

The CCTV cameras have assisted the police with their investigations. A total of £1750 was spent as a result of ASB/criminal damage to Parish owned assets. A large amount was as a result of damage caused to a basket swing at Bignall End Road by dogs which was captured on CCTV. The police have received the footage and are carrying out an investigation. Police resources are allocated based on the numbers of crimes reported. Please do your bit and report non-urgent incidents to 101 or online, as soon you can.

Annual Awards

The Parish Council annually awards three trophies:

R. W Edwards Community Award – This year it was jointly awarded to Mr Brian Dodd and also Mr Heath (Postmaster of Audley Post Office) for their services to the community. This is due to the lengths they both went to in order to help Parish's vulnerable and elderly during the pandemic.

Capewell Naylor Trophy for Services to the Environment – This year it was awarded to ex-Parish Councillor Mr Matt Whitmore for his many years of dedicated service helping to protect and maintain our local environment.

Elsie Kelsall Young Persons Award – The Parish Council were delighted to award this to Miss Elsa Hackforth for her amazing efforts and letters which helped to keep the residents of the Poplars residential home in good spirits during lockdown.

Audley LAP Litter Pick

Thank you to those who have helped with the bi-monthly litter pick in Halmer End, Bignall End and Audley. All are welcome to join to help keep the Parish clean and tidy.

Vehicle Activated Signs and Speed Indicator Devices

The Parish Council have installed 8 speed indicator devices at key areas across the Parish in order to slow the traffic. So far these seem to be working well.

Parish Finances for 2020/21

A total income of £200,260 was received. This consisted of the Precept £156,698 and a grant of £4,397 for the reduced Council Tax Base. The rest of the income (£39,165) is from other sources such as funding bids, grants, VAT reclaim etc. There is approximately £23,000 of un-ringfenced reserves going forward (plus committed spend of £129,000 for Albert Street play area, Butchers Arms Car park and other sites).

A total amount of £184,673 was spent as follows:

£32,494	18%	Staffing costs (inc on costs)
£26,961	15%	Play area (maintenance)
£21,813	12%	Play area (investment in new equipment)
£21,081	11%	Special Projects (inc Xmas lights, CCTV, Community Transport)
£18,613	10%	Bus subsidy
£15,509	8%	VAT
£13,510	7%	Highways Speed devices
£10,655	6%	Wildlife areas (maintenance)
£8,844	5%	Office administration costs including insurance
£3,024	2%	Misc. spend – unadopted land and other Parish assets
£2,955	2%	Parish bowling green (Audley)
£2,729	1%	Seats, bus shelters, notice boards and grit bins (Parish)
£1,869	1%	Donations to community groups and other S137 activities
£1,577	1%	Maintenance and fees for the car parks
£1,239	1%	Parish allotments
£1,200	1%	Chair's allowance
£600	0.3%	Parish Grants Programme

The coming year (2021/22) will see a small increase of 1.5% to the Precept (previously £60.83) now £61.77 per year for Band D Council Tax. More information can be found on the Parish Council website – www.audleyparishcouncil.org