BPC article for The Voice magazine, November 2022 issue

by Clare Turner (Chair)

Blockley Parish Council (BPC) is responsible for the upkeep of not only the cemetery but also the churchyard in Blockley, following a decision many decades ago to relieve the Church of this duty. A significant portion of the annual budget is spent maintaining these areas (along with the various parks and green spaces around the parish) and faced with the same choice today, a different decision might have been made!

The churchyard is home to a selection of interesting tombs some of which are listed monuments and, having joined BPC in 2020, I’m still learning about the intricacies of the processes involved in conserving them. Several need attention and it is evident that some budget will need to be allocated to works soon. The churchyard also boasts an impressive stone wall on its boundary with the Manor House, and essential remedial works were undertaken on around half of its length in recent years. Maintenance work on the remaining section is also looming and will require significant investment, hopefully with the support of grant funding. Thankfully the day-to-day management of these parcels of land is both less complex and less expensive.

The contractors tasked with the upkeep of these areas have been doing a great job, delivering spaces that feel nurtured and serene for parishioners celebrating happy occasions, grieving for loved ones and everything in-between.

As many of you will know, the aesthetics of the churchyard and the associated buildings have also contributed to the BBC filming the Father Brown series in and around Blockley for the last decade. Although, for some, this brings an element of inconvenience for a few days each year, many parishioners welcome the return of the cast and crew and the benefits they bring to Blockley: direct revenue to local businesses we value, indirect revenue via increased visitor numbers, some income for the village halls and an important source of income for the Sports and Social Club who host the behind-the-scenes set up in their car park during filming. BPC also receives renumeration for use of council owned or managed land and in 2022 this sum was £2,500; the money has yet to be allocated to a project or activity. The budget as a whole, for the next financial year will be discussed at the November council meeting; please do join us if you would like to find out more or share your views. The monthly meetings also routinely covers planning, updates from our District and County Councillors and updates from councillors leading on different areas such as the Environmental and Sustainability Committee.

The Church and BPC share a common goal to nurture and enhance biodiversity within the parish and this involves striking a balance between well-manicured areas that meet the expectations and needs of parishioners or visitors using spaces such as the cemetery and churchyard, and wilder areas that better serve the plants, insects and other animals that need our support. I hope most people would agree that patches dedicated to biodiversity, such as the wildflower area of the churchyard, add something for people too. The wildflowers, and insects they sustain, support our well-being (who doesn’t love to see an orchid in bloom?) and deliver essential pollinating services. Regular visitors to the cemetery will no doubt have seen Green Woodpeckers frequenting it, drawn in by the ants which form a crucial part of their diet. The numerous anthills may seem a little “untidy” at times but are a valuable part of our ecosystem.

Unfortunately, an attractive Ash tree had to be felled in the cemetery last month, following the advice of arboriculturists who identified evidence of ash-dieback disease. We will be replacing the tree in due course and we’re pleased to report that the stretch of native hedging recently planted in the cemetery (bordering the gardens of Winterway residents in the upper half of the cemetery) has survived the summer drought.

One challenge facing the parish at present is the dwindling space available for burials in the cemetery; so much so that reservation of plots is no longer possible. BPC continue to explore solutions and would be pleased to hear from any local landowners that would like to discuss ideas to increase provision for burials in the future. Please contact the clerk Nikki Holt on 01386 701602 or via parishclerk@blockley.org.uk if you have any suggestions.

We’re still keen to co-opt additional councillors too with only 6 out of 11 vacancies filled at present. If numbers dwindle to low, the powers and decision making will revert to the Cotswold District Council and local governance will be lost. Please do get in touch if you’d like to know more or join us at a meeting to get an idea of how things work. The next full council meeting is scheduled for 17th November at Draycott Mission but do check noticeboards or the website for any updates.