

Wootton Rivers Parish Council

Minutes of The Parish Meeting & Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on 17th May 2021

THE PARISH MEETING

The Parish Meeting was Chaired by the outgoing Chair of the Parish Council, Cindy Creasy who welcomed everyone to the meeting and presented her report on the Parish Council's activities over the past year.

What a unique and challenging year this has been...and continues to be...for us all. With a magnificent rollout of the vaccination programme by our NHS, and the lifting of further restrictions today, we are all in hope of better times ahead while mindful of the uncertainty that new variants may pose. In this context, Parish Councils, although now told to meet, from today, in public for the first time in over a year, and which we are very glad to be able to do, have also been told to keep meetings down to the minimum time possible, preferably no longer than one hour. And so I will be keeping this report short!

The Parish Council moved to its first virtual meeting in April 2020 and under new Covid regulations our AGM and annual report for that year was cancelled and so I have taken the liberty of looking back over two years. Much of what we do is pretty unglamorous! Lots of chasing up of work and meetings on site to get street lights fixed, pot holes filled, road rebuilt (at the Chestnut triangle), white lines painted, fly-tipping removed and gullies cleared. The latter in particular always proving to be a challenge with some deep flooding occurring last year opposite Wootton House. Improvements have now been authorised by WC and we hope that these will help alleviate some of the difficulties with the drainage system although we are not confident that it will fully resolve all the problems.

The other main area of work is planning applications. We have seen quite a high number of these for a small village, not least of all bringing Church Farm development to its final decision following nine more meetings and submissions to Wiltshire Council and to the Planning Inspectorate appeal. We have also sought to keep abreast of proposed National and local planning legislation and policy changes, responding to consultations and reporting on these and the potential impact they might have for Wootton Rivers.

The Parish Council also liaised with local businesses and landowners to agree a 50 year permissive footpath to the north of the village, the registration of the Royal Oak as a Community Asset and improvements/repairs to the canal path.

The Council's finances have remained in good shape while maintaining key services such as recreation ground maintenance and continuing to slowly bring the Parish Clerks salary up to a bit more of a sensible level for the work involved.

But we really are only a small part of what makes village life work...and I would like, on behalf of the Parish Council and all its residents, to give some whole-hearted thanks to the very many people who have contributed so much over the last year and more. Firstly, I would like to thank Amanda Giles and the amazing team of Covid support volunteers and zone coordinators that so rapidly and effectively came together to provide information and practical support across the village and to so many people. Beyond that I think we would all agree that friends, local businesses, and neighbours rallied together and demonstrated what a fantastic community we

have here and how privileged we all are to live in such a very wonderful part of the world during such difficult times.

Thanks also to Nick Mitchel-Briggs for the continual support he provides to so many people in the village through his work in keeping us all updated about how to keep ourselves and our community safer and direct support where people have sadly been a victim of crime. Also, for his marvellous work in promoting BEAM, the community oil purchase scheme, that provides a great price for individual households while also raising a valuable income stream to the Parish.

Thanks also to Tony McGarry for his sterling work in keeping the recreation ground safe and fun to use. We saw how, during lockdown and the consequent closure of the play equipment area, how very keen residents and their children were to see it back open again! Covid has made us all appreciate the use of outdoor space and we hope to make some further improvements in the coming year to further enhance its use. Tony has told us that he is stepping down from the role of over seeing the recreation ground and so we will be looking to recruit new volunteers and, later in the summer, taking the opportunity to both celebrate Tony's contribution over the last 20 years and to provide an occasion at the recreation ground for the village to finally come together (Covid restrictions allowing!!).

I would also like to give my thanks to the other councillors. Meeting on line over the last 13 months has been a very different experience and we were glad to see residents still join us even if we all, at some point, had a "you're on mute!" moment!! In particular I would like to again recognise the work of Neil Worthington as Parish Clerk. Although we are able to provide some financial reward for the formal hours worked, many actual hours involved go unpaid. Neil's patience, knowledge and attention to detail has helped ensure high quality responses to planning consultations, keeping abreast of the changing regulations and guidance for Parish Councils and getting many local problems and issues resolved in a quiet and collaborative way. Neil has indicated that, after 18 years, he also will be looking to stand down from the role by the end of the year. He will be a hard act to follow but given that he's not moving very far, I am confident that he will assist a smooth handover and support to a new Clerk.

In an evening of thankyou and goodbyes... I should also say that I have decided not to stand for nomination to Parish Council Chair this year. I feel honoured to have served the last four years, but a bout with ill-health during that time has made me realise that I would like to take a bit of a step back. However by staying on the Parish Council I intend to continue doing my best to support our village and help keep it a great place to live.

And so for our final thankyou and goodbye tonight... as many of you will know, earlier this year the Village Hall Committee decided that the time had come for them to stand down in their entirety. A successful call to the community has allowed them to formally do so at their AGM last week, with the reins being handed over to a newly elected team (which we will hear more formally about at the meeting of the Parish Council to follow). The team have done extraordinary work on behalf of the village, organising an amazing range of wonderful (and memorable!) events, raising money and running the hall. They leave it in great shape, with extensions and improvements made to maintain the hall as a high quality, welcoming and well-equipped space for community events, and local clubs and groups. The hall is run as a charity, on behalf of the village, and we are hugely grateful to the long standing committee; especially Linda Hopkins who, as chair for 18 years, has provided sterling leadership under which these many events and improvements have taken place; to Maggie

Worthington, as Treasurer for the last 18 years; to Christine McGarry, serving on the committee for 13 years and secretary for the last 7; to Lynne Fox on the committee for 9 years and especially to Pauline Dickens who has served in various capacities for over 30 years! Anne Swift kindly organised a virtual village whip-round and it has seen an amazing response with so many people coming forward wishing to show their appreciation. Although sadly we are unable at this time, to organise a village get together to celebrate their work, we could not let them go without a mark of our collective respect and thanks.

Finally, the next four years will no doubt throw up a variety of challenges, and hopefully opportunities, for our village and community, and I have no doubt that the Parish Council, together with the amazing, talented and kind people in our community, will see our wonderful village thrive.

A vote of thanks was expressed by Councillors to Cindy and supported by the many residents present for the way in which she has chaired the Council over the last four years and for her leadership and hard work especially over the past year.

There were no questions from the floor and the Parish Meeting was declared closed.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

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| Present: | Dean Cowley | Parish Council Chair |
| | David Butler | Councillor |
| | Cindy Creasy | Councillor |
| | Nick Jones | Councillor |
| | Steve Rawlings | Councillor |
| | Anne Swift | Councillor |
| | Neil Worthington | Clerk |
| | Jerry Kunkler | Wiltshire Councillor |
| Apologies: | Clare Bamforth | Parish Council Vice-Chair |

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Dean Cowley was proposed as Chair for the next year by Cindy Creasy, seconded by Anne Swift and as the only valid nomination was duly elected.

Clare Bamforth was proposed as Vice-Chair for the next year by David Butler, seconded by Steve Rawlings and as the only valid nomination was duly elected.

2. Declarations of Interest and the granting of dispensations.

Councillors were reminded of the Code for Conduct and the need to declare any interest relating to the items on the Agenda.

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising.

The Minutes of the Parish Council Meetings held on the 15th March and 4th May 2021 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

4. Matters arising from the Minutes

Notice Boards – the plywood to repair the notice board was to be obtained. *Action: Steve Rawlings*

Tourist Information Board – it was agreed that there was insufficient additional content to warrant the cost of an additional tourist board in addition to the current one at the Royal Oak and the one already being prepared for the church.

Road maintenance – the hole above the highway drain outside the church entrance had been repaired but the gullies north of the village still needed emptying and no date had been given for the improvements planned to prevent further flooding outside Wootton House. Jerry Kunkler undertook to chase the highways engineer and come back with a date for the outstanding works to be undertaken.

Church Farm CIL – a query had been raised with the CIL team following the commencement of demolition works and they had confirmed that, as demolition had been carried out under a separate planning notice, the CIL payment was not yet due. Jerry Kunkler advised that he had checked with the planning officer who had confirmed this was the case. The latest information was that building work would start in June.

Canal – works to improve the towpath had commenced in the area and should include the areas around Wootton Rivers. David Butler advised that there had been instances of large trees near the canal being felled for firewood and that anyone noticing such activity should contact him.

5. Report from Wiltshire Councillor

Jerry Kunkler advised that grants administered by the Area Board had restarted for applications by community groups and any applications should go through Richard Rogers and be copied to him.

The new election for the post of Police and Crime Commissioner would be held on 19th August 2021.

The next area board meeting was being held on 28th June 2021.

Wiltshire Council had a new leader, Richard Clewer and Jerry was being appointed to the Environment Select Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committees.

In response to an enquiry Jerry advised that the full re-opening of the re-cycling centres was under review.

6. Planning

Application PL/2021/04079 – replacement windows at Pheasant Cottage – it had been clarified by the Conservation Officer that planning permission was not required and had been withdrawn. However Listed Building Consent for the changes was still required. Following discussion, it was agreed that there was no issue with replacing rotting windows but it was suggested that as the windows being replaced were of modern design the opportunity could be taken for the replacements to be similar to the original windows elsewhere in the building – ie with horizontal glazing bars and no top vents.

Cindy Creasy updated the meeting about WALPA's discussions with Wiltshire Council and the pressure they were under with developers taking advantage of the shortfall in the number of houses in the 5 year plan. Some applications had been refused and appeals being made against WC decisions are being defended.

Wiltshire accept that there are issues resulting from the requirement for Neighbourhood Plans to be renewed after 2 years and are taking legal advice on how these reviews should be carried out (our local MP's are sympathetic).

It was agreed we would stay involved with WALPA.

Wiltshire Councils planning consultation to which we had contributed had had many responses and the draft local plan would take these into consideration

New national planning legislation was being planned and a new planning bill was included in the recent Queen's speech – this will have implications for our NP.

In order to reduce the number of meetings to the minimum, and following guidance from Wiltshire Council, it was agreed that the Clerk should be delegated to decide minor planning applications that do not warrant a separate physical parish council meeting and which cannot be made at a scheduled meeting due to the time limit on comments. It was agreed that such applications would be circulated to give Councillors the option to hold a meeting if they felt it was a significant application which should not be delegated. Should it be agreed that a decision be delegated the application will be publicised to residents and any comments received from residents and councillors will be taken into consideration. This delegation of powers will be reviewed in September.

7. Village Hall Committee

Jo Cowley reported that following the Village Hall Management Committee AGM a new committee had been formed to take over from the outgoing committee who had all served for long periods and had left the hall in great shape both physically and financially. She confirmed the new committee were :-

Chair – Jo Cowley

Vice Chair – Amanda Giles

Treasurer – Clare Bamforth

Secretary – Amanda Parshall

Health and Safety - Emma Woodhead

Bookings - Sarah Amroth.

Grants Fundraiser - Kate Bradford.

Events - Lucy Francis.

Gardening - Sara Wardlaw.

There was also a team of villagers willing to support the committee as necessary.

8. Finances

8.1 The WRPC financial year 2020/21 ended on 31st March 2021

8.2 Rob Mitchenall had undertaken the Internal Audit and had signed the Annual Internal Audit Report with no actions being required.

8.3 It was confirmed that WRPC met the conditions of the Certificate of Exemption and would therefore be able to self-certify as exempt from a limited assurance review as both income and expenditure did not exceed £25,000 and the other circumstances did not apply. The Certificate was signed by Dean Cowley (Chair) and Neil Worthington (Clerk).

8.4 Section 1 – The Annual Governance Statement 2020/21 was approved by the Council for signature by Dean Cowley (Chair) and Neil Worthington (Clerk).

8.5 Section 2 – The Accounting Statements 2020/21 were approved by the Council for signature by Dean Cowley (Chair) and Neil Worthington (Clerk)

- 8.6 The Certificate of Exemption form would be submitted to the external auditor and Sections 1 and 2 and the Internal Audit published on the PC website as required by the auditors. Also required to be published were various other documents including the Bank Reconciliation, the Explanation of Variances and the Explanation for 'high' reserves. This last document, an explanation required where the reserve is more than twice the precept, confirms that £1040 of the reserve is ringfenced for recreation ground expenditure.
- 8.7 The following payment which had been made since the last meeting was authorised:
- Idverde – grass cutting Rec (Jan-Mar 2021) - £276.38
- 8.8 The Precept of £3,188.06 had been received.
- 8.9 The insurance renewal quote from Came & Co had been received. There were no changes to the insured items and cover remained in place for the statutory Public and Employers Liability and Council legal liability insurance together with cover for the playground equipment, defibrillator and computer equipment. We were still in the 3 year long term agreement which was entered into in 2020 and the amount of cover has increased by 3% for inflation. The premium has increased because of this to £438.76. Last years premium was £427.44 and this increase was within the budget. The renewal quote was approved.
- 8.10 The following payments were authorised to be made by BACS :-
- WALC subscription - £106.39
 - N Worthington for monthly payments made for the Zoom platform for April and May - £28.78 It was agreed that the subscription to Zoom should be cancelled as physical meetings had resumed.
 - Rob Mitchenall – ex-gratia payment for carrying out the internal audit - £20.00 .
 - PC insurance - Arthur J Gallagher - £438.76
 - WRVH village hall hire - £28.00

9. Broadband

Amanda Giles had attended the Zoom meeting with Danny Kruger MP and reported that in comparison with other areas WR was not badly served. There was a voucher scheme which was worth £1500 to individuals or £3000 for businesses to give people in rural areas financial help to get gigabit speeds.

However, for Wootton Rivers to get improved speed the exchange in Burbage needed upgrading which had been costed at £450,000. This would require rollout of Project Gigabit (the national investment programme for countrywide 1000mbps broadband).

The details of how this would work in Wiltshire had not yet been made public. Danny Kruger had confirmed that he would hold further meetings once details were available and would lobby government on additional funding that the Gigabit and voucher programmes do not cover.

Amanda confirmed she would attend the next meeting and report back.

10. Village Clean Up

It was agreed to hold this on 5th June 2021.

11. Matters raised by the Public

The excavation works continuing around the barn owned by Blanchard Farms was discussed. Attempts had been made to contact the owners for clarification of the work but no information had been received. It was agreed that a letter requesting further information should be sent. *Action: Clerk*

Dates of the next meetings – 12th July 2021 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

Signed as a true record.....

Dean Cowley – Parish Council Chair