

Wootton Rivers Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 9th May 2022

Present:

Dean Cowley	Parish Council Chair
Clare Bamforth	Vice Chair
Cindy Creasy	Councillor
Nick Jones	Councillor
Steve Rawlings	Councillor
Anne Swift	Councillor
David Butler	Councillor
Julian Beames	Clerk

Jerry Kunkler Wiltshire Councillor

The Chair welcomed members of the public to the Annual Parish Meeting and then gave the following report on the activities of the Parish Council during the year.

Wootton Rivers – Review of the Parish Council Year 2021-2022

I note, from reading the minutes of this meeting last year, that it was the first that we had been able to hold in person, after a year of Zoom gloom. So, it has been a year of stepping out – blinking – from our long period of hibernation and trying to resume all the things which help to keep and make this such a great place to live.

But I thought, before reviewing the things we've done, that it might be helpful to reflect on why we bother. And that took me back to the 'vision' for Wootton Rivers which we wrote when we were preparing the Neighbourhood Development Plan, because I think it provides an excellent context for all the work that the Parish Council does on your behalf. Let me read it to you:

I think that the idea of a distinctive character sustained by a mutually supportive community is spot on, but also the idea that we are not just protecting it (which might sound quite NIMBY) but also seeking to enhance it and to evolve in a way which reflects the wishes and needs of every member of this community.

But although much of our work is in protecting what is good and ensuring continuity, there have been significant changes in the personnel involved over this year. It was after this meeting last year that I took over the Chair and in November the much more momentous change, when Neil handed over the role of Parish Clerk to Julian, after many years of exemplary service. Other long-servers on the Village Hall Committee and at the Rec also passed on the baton and the Committee now running both of these has shown us a fine example of how "Many hands make light work", though I suspect that neither Jo, chairing that Committee, nor Sam leading the oversight and maintenance at the Rec, would recognise the term "light work".

Some things in the Parish Council's year are, of course, as predictable as day following night. We've had to chase Wiltshire Highways throughout the year to get holes filled and gullies cleared; continued to keep a close eye on our Parish Steward to ensure that things get done; and kept a wary eye on the famous "Leaning trees of Wootton" hanging precariously over the parking bays and main power line. And we have had some successes in these areas, with no major flooding this year and the worst of the potholes filled, although the major work required at the bottom of Martinsell remains to be done. We also had a particular success regarding the cutting of grass verges. Our suggestion that one cut a year was inadequate and dangerous was accepted by Wiltshire Council and they agreed to do an additional cut of specific areas which we identified as particularly dangerous. This idea was then taken up by PCAP, who co-ordinate the work of local Parish Councils and seems to have been adopted by Highways as the best way forward. Tiny Wootton Rivers leads Wiltshire forward !!

Another long-running saga has also continued, as we still await the beginning of construction at Church Farm. I note that the AGM meeting last year anticipated a start in the following month of June, but issues over drainage held things up and, although these issues have now been resolved and the barns demolished, we are still waiting to hear when construction work will begin. As in every year, we have also had to deal with fairly regular cases of fly-tipping; this year including the mysterious case of the cooking oil cans, which I'm afraid Hercule Cowley failed to solve.

As I mentioned at the start, the Parish Council tries to ensure that it takes account of the needs of every one of our 220 parishioners and there were a couple of good examples this year. After a long discussion about stopping the production of Contact in a printed form, it was noted that not everybody gets Nick's messages or uses Grapevine and email, so a paper copy of Contact will continue to be put through every door. It was also noted that the access to the Rec was too narrow for double-buggies or wheelchairs to get through without unlocking the gate, so the access was duly widened. Another issue of interest to almost every member of our community is footpaths, so I am delighted that progress has been made on the most regularly used path, which is WR22 from the back of the pub to Brimslade. Some money has been secured from Wiltshire Council to install three, new metal gates, where the stiles have become dangerously dilapidated. We also had a very friendly and helpful chat with Bruce Gauntlett and agreed that he would provide clear signage from the canal, so that people use the current path, rather than the original one which went through the middle of his farmyard. These signs are now in place and look superb.

The biggest issues each year are almost always related to planning and this year was no exception. This was evidenced by an attendance of nearly 40 parishioners at the meeting to discuss the applications to build next to The Halt and in front of Manor Farm. To our delight and huge relief, the NDP was still given full consideration by the Wiltshire planners, who resoundingly rejected both applications. We also had to intervene when cattle were put into the new barns above Bank Cottage, in contravention of the terms of their permitted development permission, and I'm pleased to say that the cattle have now been completely removed from that site. But our planning involvement is not just about saying "No". We have been pleased to support further work at The Little House, improvements to Primrose Cottage, Goblins Hold and Lock Cottage and, of course, the modest new garage at Somerset's Farm,

plus various bits of necessary tree work. Our battle to ensure that our Neighbourhood Plan remains effective continues and I think special mention for Cindy is merited here. Without her knowledge and diligent commitment to monitoring planning law, Wootton Rivers would by now probably bear a passing resemblance to Manhattan.

Two final issues to note. Firstly, the leaking of a proposal to ban vehicles from the Savernake caused understandable outrage among the many of us who walk and run there and love its unique tranquillity. I have written to the Chief Executive of Forestry England expressing the strong opposition voiced at our recent parish meeting on the subject and wait to see how they respond. Secondly, the recent suspension of the BEAM arrangement, which normally provides households with a competitive oil price and the Parish Council with a useful bit of income. As energy markets have stabilised, we have been relieved to see a resumption of normal service. So, my second special mention tonight goes to Nick, for running the BEAM system so effectively, as well as providing the excellent email updates on which many of us rely.

Thanks also go to Clare and my other fellow Councillors and to Julian, who has proved both effective and diligent in his first few months as Parish Clerk. Thanks also to the new Village Hall Committee, especially for taking on responsibility for the Rec as well and looking to develop new services at both sites. Thanks also to Amanda Giles and her colleagues for making progress on Rights of Way but, more than anything, enormous thanks to all the residents of this amazing parish. Their commitment and engagement were perfectly exemplified by the delivery of supplies to Ukraine. Not only were Nick, Linda, Roger, Fran and Gavin prepared to step up but also the levels of support and donations were astonishing.

We are truly fortunate to live in this very special place!

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Following his report, the Chair invited the residents to ask any question or make any comments. Several questions were raised by member of the audience.

It was asked if there was any back-up plan in place for the village email messaging system in the case that Nick Mitchell-Briggs was away or unable to send messages. It was stated that previously during the early period of the pandemic a back-up system had been put in place and that it would be reviewed. This would have to take due consideration of the confidentiality of people's email addresses and that the Parish Council would not want to take an active part in this for this reason.

A second question was raised regarding the development at Church Farm. It was stated by the Chair that the landowner had assured him that as soon as any timescale was known they would advise the PC so this could be passed on to residents.

The meeting was then closed, and The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council then followed:

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Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on 9th May 2022

Present:

Dean Cowley	Parish Council Chair
Clare Bamforth	Vice Chair
Cindy Creasy	Councillor
Nick Jones	Councillor
Steve Rawlings	Councillor
Anne Swift	Councillor
David Butler	Councillor
Julian Beames	Clerk

Jerry Kunkler Wiltshire Councillor

1. Apologies for absence: None

2. Election of the Chairman and Vice Chairman

Nominations for the post of Chairman were sought and Dean Cowley offered to stand. He was duly elected with the unanimous support of Councillors

Nomination for the role of Vice Chairman were sought and Clare Bamforth offered to stand. She was duly elected with the unanimous support of Councillors

Declarations of Acceptance of Office were signed by both the Chairman and Vice Chairman and counter-signed by the Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council

3. 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 declarations or dispensations were declared or sought by Councillors.

4. Agreement of Minutes

The Draft Minutes of the Parish Council Meetings held on the 14th of March 2022 were agreed as a true record and signed by Dean Cowley - Chair.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

5.1 Rights of Way up-date – Cindy Creasy reported that the metal gates were due to be delivered at the end of May and a working party was being organised to install them at the designated locations.

5.2 Up-date on Trees overhanging Forest Road – The Chair reported that he had written to the landowner and re-iterated the Council's concerns regarding the state of the trees overhanging the car park spaces and their proximity to the

power line. The letter made clear the legal liability of the landowner in the event of an incident or accident caused by the state of the trees.

5.3 Village Hall Funding

Cindy Creasy gave an up-date regarding the application for a match funding grant which had unfortunately been unsuccessful as all the funds had been allocated to other projects.

5.4 Progress with Road Drainage and other Village Works

The Clerk reported that there had been further progress on the filling of potholes and clearing of drains. We are still awaiting news regarding the works at the bottom of Martinsell Hill.

It was suggested by Jerry Kunkler that a meeting with Matt Perrot might be arranged to review issues with roads in the Parish. The Clerk undertook to contact him to try to arrange a visit.

Action - Clerk to contact Matt Perrot to arrange visit

6. Report from Wiltshire Councillor

Jerry Kunkler reflected on the difficult year that we had all faced in Wiltshire. He was able to report though that Wiltshire Council is now back to having meetings in person again although many meetings are still taking place via Microsoft Teams, and this is avoiding unnecessary travel saving costs and reducing the carbon footprint. Jerry is still leading the Pewsey Area Board and he reported that the CAPG group has now been re-titled to the Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Group (LHFIG) and urged Councillors to bring forward projects to the group if they saw areas where small improvements could be made.

He was then asked a question by Councillor Butler regarding the Road between Pewsey and Burbage and whether anything could be done to improve its safety and to alleviate the flooding which regularly happens. Jerry said that he had worked with the highways Department to have the area around Easton Royal re-surfaced but doubted there was anything that could realistically be done about the flooding as it was caused mainly by water run-off from the surrounding fields.

Councillor Butler also urged Jerry to try to ensure that the cashpoints in Pewsey are maintained and retained as there were fewer of these important facilities available to local residents. Jerry agreed and stated that there were three currently still operating in Pewsey at the Co-op, the Spar shop and the Garage.

7. Police matters

There were no Police matters to report

8. Planning

8.1 There were no planning decisions made since the last meeting

8.2 PL/2022/03077 - St Andrews House – Proposed outdoor Pool, associated landscaping, and glass veranda

No objections were raised regarding the proposal. The only comments made were regarding noise which might be generated by the air source heat pump system and the proximity of the pool to the Church Grounds in the event of a service being held in the cemetery. It was stated by the applicant that they had always ensured they were respectful of any services being held at the Church and would continue to do so.

A resolution to support the application was proposed by Anne Swift, seconded by David Butler and this was passed unanimously

8.3 PL/2022/03020 – Clare Cottage – Tree Works.

The application is seeking permission to prune back a large beech tree to the rear of the house and to prune back two smaller trees in the front garden to their previous pruning points. There were no objections to the proposed works although it was noted that the timing of the work should be planned to lessen any health effects on the tree and to take due consideration of nesting birds.

A resolution to support the application was proposed by Steve Rawlings and seconded by Anne Swift and this was passed unanimously

8.4 Cattle at Blanchard Barns

The Chair reported that the enforcement case with regards to cattle being kept in the new barn which has been constructed at the Northern end of the village had been resolved and the cattle removed.

9. Finance

Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)

The Clerk stated that the AGAR had been completed and now required signing. To allow this the Council needed to pass several resolutions.

9.1. Exemption Certificate

Councillors were asked to pass a resolution confirming that the Council met the criteria for exemption for 2021/22 and wished to claim the exemption.

The motion to do so was duly proposed by Steve Rawlings and seconded by Anne Swift and was passed unanimously by the Council.

The Exemption certificate which had been signed by the Clerk/RFO was then counter-signed by the Chair.

9.2 Annual Governance Statement

After due consideration Councillors were next asked to confirm that there are sound systems of governance in place by passing a resolution to that effect.

A resolution was duly proposed by Anne Swift and seconded by Steve Rawlings and the resolution was passed unanimously by the Council.

The Annual Governance Statement was then signed by the Chair and the Clerk/
RFO

9.3 Annual Accounting Statement

Next the Accounting Statements for 2021/22 were presented for signature.

With regards to the last financial year the Council had spent less in 2021/22 than in the previous year (£3,616 vs £4,322) and spending was below budget by £440.

The Council's income was higher than anticipated (£5,395 vs £4,056) mainly due to the fete donation and higher than anticipated BEAM income.

A resolution to approve them was proposed by Nick Jones, seconded by Cindy Creasy, and was passed unanimously by the Council.

The Chair then signed the accounting statement

9.4 Finance Report

The Bank balances were reported as follows:

Business Account:	£6,573.41
Treasurers Account:	£5,468.52

The Clerk confirmed that the Wiltshire Council Precept of £3,547.19 had been received along with the Wiltshire Council grant towards the Jubilee celebrations of £150.00.

The following payments which had been made since the last Council meeting needed to be approved:

1. IDverde invoice for grass cutting	276.38 (Ref. 22/1)
2. Village Hall Hire Fees	£136.00 (Ref. 22/2)

The following invoices due for payment need to the authorised for payment:

1. Wiltshire Association of Local Councils membership fee	£105.37 (Ref. 22/3)
2. Payment to the Clerk for defibrillator bulbs x 2	£13.01 (Ref. 22/4)

The insurance renewal quotation had been received from the insurance brokers Arthur J Gallaghers and they had recommended that the Council insure with Pen Underwriting Limited as the most suitable policy.

3. Council's Insurance renewal - £469.24 (Ref. 22/5)

A resolution to approve the payments previously made and authorise the payment of the due invoices was then proposed by Clare Bamforth, seconded by Anne Swift and this was passed unanimously by the Council.

9.5 Smaller Authorities Audit Appointment (SAAA) scheme

The Council was requested by the Clerk to confirm their willingness to continue to participate in the Scheme and pass a resolution to this effect.

This was duly proposed Dean Cowley, seconded by Steve Rawlings and passed unanimously by the Council.

10. Savernake Issues

The Chair reported that he had written to the CEO of Forestry England following the public meeting that had been held recently and expressed the feeling of the community regarding the proposals that had been made. There was strong opposition from residents to the proposals which were felt to be unnecessary and would considerably limit the enjoyment currently gained from the forest.

The Chair will be attending the Savernake Parish Meeting on the 10th May to assess feeling in Savernake and report back

A copy of the letter has been placed on the noticeboard outside the Village Hall and the letter will be circulated via email to residents.

11. Jubilee Weekend Celebrations

Anne Swift reported that the preparations for the Jubilee weekend celebrations were in hand. A grant of £150.00 had been secured from Wiltshire Council towards the costs.

It is planned to hold a picnic on the Village Recreation Ground on the Thursday afternoon followed by the lighting on the beacon on Martinsell Hill in the evening.

There will be a flower festival at the Church in the three days leading up to the Church service on the Sunday.

There will be an art exhibition in the Village Hall.

On the Sunday the main village road will be closed between 09:00 to 18.00 between the Church entrance and the Royal Oak Public House (road access to the pub will be maintained), with a street party being held with a lunch and tea. All residents of the village will be receiving an individual invitation in the next few days to the street party.

12. Canal & River Trust Issues

The Clerk had written to the CRT to enquire about the lack of a lifebuoy at the lock and the CRT had responded by saying it was removed due to vandalism. It was felt

that this was an unsatisfactory explanation as no vandalism of the equipment could be recalled by anyone In addition, a previous instance of vandalism isn't a acceptable reason not to replace safety equipment. The Clerk has now requested that the local CRT Operations Manager makes contact to discuss the issues further.

13. Emergency Planning

David Butler has been nominated to lead on this working group. Various scenarios that need to be considered were discussed and it was agreed that the group should formulate plans. Nick Jones also advised that he could offer a generator from his work in case of emergency.

14. Correspondence Received

The only correspondence received was a letter from the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust urging the Council to question the CRT on current maintenance of the canal as they are concerned by the lack of funding to replace lock gates which are coming to the end of their life.

15. Matters Raised by The Public

Tony McGarry suggested a 'spring clean' of the Recreation Ground was needed. It was agreed that as the responsibility of the Recreation Ground was now with the Village Hall Committee that this suggestion would be passed to them.

Tony then asked whether there was long term plan for the Royal Oak Public House to ensure its continued viability and longevity. Nick Jones responded by saying that the major issue affecting the business currently was the shortage of staff. They are continually struggling to attract staff despite considerable efforts to recruit. The fact that most staff must commute by car to the village due to the lack of public transport adds to the difficulty of attracting staff. This is exacerbated by the increasing cost of commuting etc. Despite this they continue to cater for as many clients as possible in order not to turn away business.

Nick Mitchel-Briggs and the other members of the team who recently delivered aid to Ukraine wished to publicly express their grateful thanks to the Village Hall for all the support they provided for the trip by making the hall available. They also wished to publicly thank Keith Fryer of Fort for supplying bulk bags and paying for some of the fuel used during the trip. They also wished to thank Nick Jones for providing the large number of cardboard boxes into which the donations were packed. Finally, they wished to thank everyone who had donated either money of goods for their enormous generosity.

Nick informed the meeting that a sum of £13,850 had been raised on the Just Giving page which was outstanding. He also stated that a further trip is planned in October when the remainder of the items collected or bought with the cash donations, will be delivered. This mostly consists of bedding and sleeping bags which will obviously be extremely welcome as winter approaches again.

Date of the next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Parish Council is planned to take place on Monday 4th July

Signed as a true record.....Date

Dean Cowley – Chair