

Wootton Rivers Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 15th May 2023

Present:

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

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.

Annual Report for Wootton Rivers PC – May 2023

I am delighted to be delivering my second review of what's been going on in Wootton Rivers during the last year. I am happy to report that, despite momentous national and international events and crises, things in this parish have been re-assuringly quiet and peaceful. Indeed, that is how most of us like it and this is reflected in the Vision Statement that we wrote for the Neighbourhood Development Plan in 2015. I will read this out to you, as I did last year, to remind us all what we are trying to achieve for this parish. It says:

The reference to “changing times” has been particularly pertinent in the last year, especially with regard to energy prices. We have seen dramatic fluctuations in our BEAM price for oil, and even a brief suspension of the scheme, which had serious implications both for individual, household budgeting and also for the budget of the Parish Council, which has seen the financial contribution from the scheme fall by more than 30% year-on-year. We have recently reminded all households of the government support which they should have received but we have not been made aware of anybody for whom the sharp rises in energy and other prices have created real hardship, so very much hope that everybody is coping.

Two other major events also had a significant impact on Wootton Rivers, and the village responded to each in its typically vigorous and generous way. Firstly, a staggering volume of donations were made to support Ukraine and we should again thank Nick, Gavin and Roger for their outstanding efforts in getting these goods to Poland and, perhaps more surprisingly to Hull ! The second big event was the Queen's jubilee in June which was, I think, thoroughly enjoyed by all and for which, as usual, a brilliant team effort by a large number of villagers meant that no individual had to carry a huge burden of responsibility or workload. Again the words of the Vision Statement ring true “... a tranquil, safe, friendly and flourishing place is

sustained by an engaged and mutually supportive community.” , though we do of course have the blessing of Anne Swift to orchestrate us !

There have been a number of successes at the local level during the year. The metal gates were fitted on the footpath to Brimslade, we were able to influence the thinking of Forestry England regarding their ill-conceived ideas for access to the Savernake and the collapsed ditch at the bottom of Martinsell has been fixed. This has greatly improved the road which, though not within our parish boundary, is used regularly by many parishioners. I would also have the new drains under the heading of successes, as their effectiveness in preventing flooding seems to me to outweigh the outrage of some villagers at their lack of aesthetic loveliness!

There also remain a few long-standing issues unresolved. One of the trees hanging over the power-lines by the canal bridge continues to hang, despite a positive engagement with Ms. Davies the landowner. After the initial patching, we also still await the full re-surfacing of the main village road, which we are now expecting to happen in July or August. And it would not be a proper review of life in Wootton Rivers without mentioning the Church Farm development, or rather the lack thereof. The initial demolition of the barns counted as the start of the development, so further work could take place at any time and we will continue to watch and wait with interest.

In terms of new planning applications, there were few of significance this year, though one by the Blanchard farming family managed to establish them as the latest “betes noir” for many villagers. Having put cattle in the barns above Bank Cottage illegally and then gained permission to use them for cattle by slightly underhand means, they complied with one of the requirements of that permission by putting in a very small apron of concrete at the turning off the bottom of The Drove. As a consequence, two days of tractors going in and out of the field muck-spreading created a disgusting and dangerous layer of muck and mud on the road at its most dangerous point. Though they responded quickly when I requested that they clear up after themselves, their reputation in the village has been significantly damaged. The other big planning issue remains the future of our Neighbourhood Plan, as its effectiveness has been under threat from a number of county and national planning changes. As always the vigilant terrier who we all know as Cindy Creasy has been snapping at the heels of the people making these decisions but we still lack clarity on when and how our NDP should be reviewed and updated.

The village has benefited from a number of new initiatives during the year. A new defibrillator has been installed, and plans are underway to repair and re-position the old ticket office from the halt, which it is hoped can be installed at the recreation ground. Special thanks also go to the Village Hall and Rec Committee whose extra events, like the film nights and high teas at the hall and coronation picnic at the rec have managed to involve all sections of the parish community, from the youngest to the most senior.

The Parish Council itself has also experienced some change, with Anne Swift stepping down after many years of exemplary service, for which I would like formally to thank her. She has been replaced by Shelley Whitehead, a long-term resident of Wootton Rivers who brings new skills and wisdom to our group. So Shelley, welcome! Julian, in his first full year as Parish Clerk has continued to be quietly

effective in all he does and I thank him on behalf of the whole village for all the good work he carries out on their behalf, most of it unseen. It should also be noted that, after many years of tight fiscal constraint under the leadership of the excellent Paul Neale, we have decided to raise rather more money through the Precept this year, both to protect us from a possible shortfall in the BEAM revenue and, hopefully, to free up some funds to spend on projects which will improve village services. More of that later in the year, when our financial position becomes clearer.

Finally, I would like to welcome all newcomers to the parish and to say farewell to those we have lost. The arrival of Nigel and George Havers caused a flutter in a number of matronly hearts, and we have also welcomed a few other entrants, many of whom are currently renting property here. There were sadly also some notable deaths in the village this year, starting with David Milsom who many of you will have known through his water-divining and his help to Roger Dickens in finding old wells. Another well-known member of the Dickens clan, Den, also died, as did Rosa Jones after many decades as the formidable landlady of the Royal Oak. After a much shorter stay Colin Light also died here, having recently moved in with his family at Church Farm and finally we experienced the sad and sudden loss of Rachel Watson-Smythe, one of the village's most engaged and kindest residents. The village will miss them all!

Thank you

Following his report, the Chair invited the residents to ask any question or make any comments. No comments or questions were made and so the Chair closed the meeting and The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council then followed:

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Present:

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

1. Election of the Chairman and Vice Chairman

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

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

2. Apologies for absence. - No apologies

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 13th of March 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by Dean Cowley - Chair.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

5.1 Relocation of the Railway Ticket Office – Sam Keyes Toyer was asked to present a summary of the project so far and the plans for the relocation of the GWR Hut to the recreation ground and the other planned new facilities. He explained that the overall plan and layout for the new facilities had been agreed and this was outlined to the Council. (see document appended to the minutes). Sam also explained that the team had applied for grant funding to cover the costs of moving and renovating the hut, and the outcome of this application was expected in June. The other facilities (play area and petanque pitch) are being costed and it is expected that further grants will need to be sort to cover these costs. It is hoped that progress can be made on moving the hut later this summer and the progress on other facilities will be dependent on the funding becoming available.

The consensus of the Council was that the plans as outlined were suitable and that the project should proceed as outlined.

5.2 Roads Up-date – The Clerk reported that he had been invited to a meeting in Pewsey by Jerry Kunkler to meet with the Wiltshire Council Highways management team. The purpose of the meeting was to brief clerks on the implementation of the new highways contract with Milestone Infrastructure and to hear comments regarding the Parish Steward scheme. There was general dissatisfaction expressed by the local clerks regarding the current service especially the lack of communication and visibility regarding what the stewards achieved on their visits. The Highways team stated that the new contract did emphasis the need for adequate supervision of the Stewards and that the supervisor would now be more actively managing the team rather than being office based. After some debate it was agreed that all the councils would provide up-to-date contact details for the stewards and that it would be emphasised to Milestone that stewards must check-in with the clerk prior to their visits and also report on the completed tasks. In return the clerks would also up-date the priority sheets, so the stewards knew exactly what they were expected to accomplish.

6. **Report from Wiltshire Councillor** – There was no report.

7. **Planning** – No matters to consider.

8. **Finance**

8.1 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)

8.2 The Clerk stated that the AGAR had been completed and circulated to all Councillors for review and confirmation that they were happy that the Council met the requirements to sign the Exemption Certificate and to approve the Annual Governance & Accounting Statements. The clerk confirmed that the signed internal audit report had been received from Rob Mitchenall and there were no issues raised.

8.3 A Resolution to approve the signing of the Exemption Certificate and to approve the Annual Accounting & Governance statements was proposed by Cindy Creasy and seconded by Clare Bamforth and passed unanimously by the Council.

8.4 The Exemption Certificate and the Annual Governance & Accounting Statements which had been signed by the Clerk/RFO were then counter-signed by the Chair.

8.5 Finance Report

The Clerk confirmed that the Wiltshire Council Precept of £4,098 had been received from Wiltshire Council.

The Bank balances were reported as follows:

Business Account:	£2,500.44
Treasurers Account:	£8,293.56

8.6 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. 23/1)
2. Glasdon UK Limited – New waste bin for the recreation ground. £393.25
3. WALC subscription (pending approval) £106.09 Ref 23/3)

The Council unanimously approved the payments.

8.7 Council Insurance - The Clerk reported that he had requested three insurance quotations and that the three quotes had been reviewed. The Clerk recommend that the Council accept the quotation offered by BHIB Council's Insurance underwritten by Aviva as it offered the best overall coverage and was the middle quotation in terms of price at £468.22. The recommendation was unanimously accepted by the Council and as a result the Clerk would accept the quotation from BHIB.

1. Council's Insurance Renewal - £468.22 (Ref. 23/4)

9. Correspondence Received

The only correspondence received was an email from Forestry England which outlined the new strategy for Savernake Forest. The Chair had reviewed its contents and reported that no action was needed currently but as more detail was provided on more specific topics it would be kept under review.

10. Matters Raised by The Public

There were no matters raised by the public, but Councillor Butler mentioned to the meeting that he was noticing more travellers parking overnight in the Martinsell car park. Whilst not a major problem currently he would keep watch in case the numbers grew, or any became long term residents.

Date of the next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Parish Council is planned to take place on Monday 10th July 2023

Signed as a true record.....Date

Dean Cowley – Chair