

Wootton Rivers Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 8th of January 2024

Present:

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

1. Apologies for absence from:

Nick Jones Councillor

2. Agreement of Minutes

The Draft Minutes of the Parish Council Meetings held on the 13th of November 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by Dean Cowley - Chair.

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. None were recorded.

4. Report from Wiltshire Councillor

General

Jerry Kunkler reported that there had been some serious flooding in the Pewsey Ward with Pewsey itself affected by river flooding in the centre of the village and obviously Wootton Rivers had been affected too.

Wiltshire Councils budget will be set on the 20th of January, but Jerry was able to report that Wiltshire Council finances were in a generally good position unlike some others and more funding was being put into roads. However, he stated that 69p of every pound spent by Wiltshire Council goes into adult and childcare services leaving only 31p for everything else.

Jerry also mentioned that there are still grant funds available left for local projects so if anyone has a project needing funding they should apply before the next area board meeting.

Jerry also mentioned a prostate cancer screening event which will take place in Pewsey on the 24th of January. Any men over forty years of age can book a test and come to the Bouverie Hall between 09.00 – 14.30. The cost of the test is just £25. A poster with further details will be placed on the Village Hall noticeboard.

Flooding

Jerry was aware of the flooding that had taken place in Wootton Rivers having been contacted by the clerk on Friday morning after the event and was told that several properties had been affected.

He was appraised of the fact that two families were flooded out of their houses with the ground floors being completely inundated resulting in them being uninhabitable. The families have moved to temporary accommodation until such time as the houses

can be dried out and the renovation/repairs carried out. In addition, at least four further properties had water ingress either from water reaching their doors/walls or from ground water coming up through the floors.

The most badly affected properties were flooded due to the build up of water near to the canal which is the result of the blocked drain which has been a long-term issue which has not been addressed by Wiltshire Council Highways Department despite repeated requests over many years and investigations having been carried out very recently.

Huge frustration was expressed by many residents and the Council that despite all the pressure exerted on the Highways Department they have only ever carried out short term fixes by clearing the pipe rather than addressing the real problem (which they are fully aware of), which are the defects in the main drain which cause it to block.

It was also pointed out by residents that this flooding was not like that in Marlborough and Pewsey which is more of a long-term issue connected to climate change. Most of the flooding in Wootton Rivers was due to a defective drain which should have been fixed by Wiltshire Council many years ago.

Jerry undertook to contact Highways this week and to be in contact with the Clerk to provide information on the findings of the recent investigation and the plan to address the problem. [Jerry will also advise when flood grants become available to apply for.](#)

The Chair then asked for people's views on what we could do differently in the future until such time as the drain is fixed to help avoid further flooding.

1. It was suggested that an emergency group could be formed on WhatsApp which people could join. This would only be used for things like flooding, fires, criminal activity, and medical issues in the village.
2. Councillor Butler is going to investigate whether a pump could be attached to some of his farm machinery which could be used to help pump water.
3. It was suggested that a pump could be purchased/hired by the Council.
4. Sandbags could be purchased to be available to help protect properties.
5. Having more flood and road closure signage available to try to stop cars entering the floods.

The Chair said the Council can look at the suggestions but that if we can get the drain fixed then most of these measures should hopefully not be needed.

There was also some concern raised regarding the sewage system and this probably being overloaded with flood water. The Chair said he would speak to one of the residents who contacted Wessex Water to find out the outcome of those discussions.

Action: Chair to report on the discussion regarding the sewers.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Local Plan Update – Councillor Creasy reported that the Council's response to the consultation had been submitted with the main point raised being the new definition of 'infill' which now omits the previous wording which limited 'infill' to 'a few, normally one property'. This could potentially open a 'loophole' for developers to claim sites are infill as the new definition omitted any size constraint. There was also a 'typo' in the draft (of / or) which significantly altered the meaning of the sentence again opening another loophole. Jerry undertook to investigate both matters.

The Chair also reported that he had received answers to several questions which he had raised with Wiltshire Council.

1. They had confirmed that Wootton Rivers does lie within the Hampshire Avon River catchment area for planning purposes and so restrictions due to phosphate build up do apply.
2. No Wootton Rivers households are currently listed on the housing register as requiring social housing.
3. Local housing need would have to be assessed when the NP is reviewed, and developers would have to show how their proposal met the need if they proposed developments in the village.

6. Report on Actions Arising from the Minutes

Trees on Forest Road – The chair reported that since the last meeting several trees have been felled in the paddock near the canal and that the owner of the land had stated that she was planning to remove the remaining trees overhanging the road but was waiting for the tree surgeon to carry out the work. The Chair has emailed the owner to remind her that she should apply for permission before removing any trees in the conservation area and that the Parish Council would fully support such an application.

7. Planning

No current Applications or Decisions

8. Finance Report

Bank balances: are currently as follows:

Treasurers Account £1,130.51

Business Account – £6,843.25

The Parish Council expenditure continues to be in line with the agreed budget and a surplus will be generated this year with lower-than-expected billing from IdVerde and the increased precept.

Payments

The following payment needed to be approved.

IdVerde	Grass Cutting	£129.26
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This was unanimously approved.

2024/25 Budget and Precept

The clerk had proposed a budget for the coming year which had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting. The budget had been increased to take account of expected increases in the cost of grass cutting, insurance and the Clerk's salary.

The Clerk's salary had been proposed to increase by 5.2%, to a level which just met the legal minimum hourly wage which will apply in April 2024. The Chair proposed the salary should be increased further (by 10%) and with this single change agreed the proposed budget was unanimously adopted by Councillors.

The Chair proposed that the precept should be increased to generate another small surplus this year to allow the council to have available funds for projects in the village and considering the continued decline in income from the BEAM scheme due to residents using less oil and moving to other heating systems. The responsibility for election costs has not yet been clarified but, if charged to the PC, would be about £170, payable over one-or-two years.

Councillor Creasy expressed her view that the Council should strive to reach a point where the Council's on-going day-to-day running costs are met entirely by the precept and any BEAM income is available for discretionary spending.

It was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Bamforth that the Parish Council precept be set at £4,679.23 (a 15% increase). This will add £4.73p to the annual council tax bill for a typical band D property in the village. The Council resolved unanimously to accept the proposal and the precept was agreed.

9. Report on Police matters

Nick Mitchell-Briggs reported that there has been another vehicle break-in near the canal bridge and the car's handbrake was released and it appeared that there was an intention to deliberately allow the car to roll into the canal. Fortunately, it hit the fence and gate near the entrance to The Halt and was stopped just above the steep bank into the canal. In addition, a substantial amount of money was stolen from another car parked in the village recently. Councillor Jerry Kunkler asked if the police had attended any of the incidents and Nick reported that they had not attended to any of them. Jerry then mentioned that the Wiltshire Chief Constable will be attending an up-coming Area Board Meeting and that he will be challenging her on the lack of response to crimes in the local area.

There was then a discussion about whether signs should be put up to warn people about car break-ins or if CCTV could be installed but it was felt that this would probably be an over-reaction at the time but will be monitored.

10. Correspondence received.

None

11. Matters Raised by the Public

No more matters were raised.

12. Meeting Schedule 2024/25

The scheduled meeting dates of the Parish Council for the coming year will be as follows:

Monday 11th of March 2024

Monday 20th of May 2024

Monday 8th of July 2024

Monday 9th of September 2024

Monday 11th of November 2024

Monday 6th of January 2025

All meetings will take place in the Village Hall starting at 7:30pm

Signed as a true record.....Date

| Dean Cowley – Chair

Initial