

Wootton Rivers Parish Council

www.woottonriverspc.co.uk

DRAFT - Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 20th May 2024

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 2024

Good evening everybody and welcome to our annual Parish Meeting. I am honoured to be delivering my third update on what has been happening in the parish over the last twelve months. It has again been a generally quiet and peaceful time, a tranquillity which most of us value very highly, but unfortunately the flooding in early January caused really significant short-term disruption and medium-term difficulties, so I will cover that towards the end of my update. As I have done before, I would like to start by reading you the Vision for Wootton Rivers which was prepared for the Neighbourhood Development Plan in 2017 and which still provides the key objectives for the Parish Council and for parish residents: We live in a very beautiful and happy place and I was very struck by something that Colin Heber-Percy, the vicar in Burbage, said at a recent memorial service. He had just moved in and, walking out one lovely spring morning, he met another villager. "Isn't it beautiful here!" he cried enthusiastically; to which the response was "Oh don't worry dear, you get used to it". Can I exhort you all never to get used to Wootton Rivers but always to appreciate it and to do everything within your power to maintain and enhance it. Two things we don't expect to have to get used to here are major crises and regular crime, but we have determined during the year that, in the event of a national or local crisis, like a sustained power failure, we and the emergency services would use the Royal Oak as our Emergency Contact Hub. While there is generally little crime in the parish, we have had a couple of cars broken into and thefts from outbuildings. However, the suggestion that we might therefore consider CCTV as a deterrent was not considered justified. There are, however, small investments in village infrastructure that we might like to make going forward and we do occasionally have to deal with unplanned costs, such as the possibility we might have to pay for the costs of holding elections. We also face a continuing fall in the bonus income that the Parish Council gets from the BEAM oil deal. We have therefore adopted a changed financial approach which will deliver a regular surplus in income to cover these various things. Though the 15% increase in the Precept that we agreed only costs a

few pounds per household each year, it should ensure that we do not face the financial embarrassment experienced by some city and county councils and should be able to fund some small projects in the parish. It's been a fairly quiet and uncontroversial year for planning applications, with virtually all the small improvements to village properties for which planning permission was required receiving the support of this Council. One notable exception was our objection to the building of an additional cattle barn to the north of Bank Cottage, when we felt that the applicants were abusing the planning system, but sadly Wiltshire agreed to it with only minor modifications. We have also kept a very close eye on the development and issuing of the new Local Plan for Wiltshire, within which we are required to operate. We can assure you that it does not incorporate any major threats to the continued effectiveness of our own neighbourhood plan; but we will continue to be vigilant in this key area of policy. One significant improvement to our local infrastructure which did happen last year was that the County Council finally re-surfaced the main road from the forest through the village. Despite some minor issues at the time, most people agree that this has been very successful; but sadly, the people who repair our roads are rather less effective than those who resurface them. We have continued to have problems with potholes either side of Cuckoo's Knob, on the far side of East Wick farm and on the far side of the canal bridge, where the wilful blocking of a drainage channel by the landholder has made the mud and the standing water even worse. One thing to note regarding potholes is that, were you to be unlucky enough to damage your vehicle in one, you would only be able to claim against Wiltshire Council if that pothole had already been reported to them. So please do report any new holes that you see to Wiltshire Highways department. Another important element in making our surroundings so beautiful is the wide variety and siting of trees, so I just wanted to make a couple of points on that subject. Firstly, there is regularly a need to trim trees and occasionally to remove them from our properties, so please do so thoughtfully, involve experts when appropriate, and ensure that each household leaves more, and more suitable, trees than it inherited. Secondly, trees can also become a nuisance. We have, over many years, been asking the landowner to clear the trees between the Manor House and the road (alongside the Mathesons' drive), as they both obstruct the view and present a major risk to the village power cable which runs beneath the trees which are leaning on the boundary wall. I'm pleased to report that all the trees at the rear of this plot have now been cut down, restoring the lovely view from the canal bridge to the church. The lady concerned has also promised me that the remaining (and most dangerous) trees will be felled this summer. Don't hold your breath, but we are finally getting there! And now to drains. As you will remember, a number of new drains were installed in the village street last year and have been very successful in keeping 90% of that street clear of standing water. The canal also provides a very helpful outlet for all the surplus groundwater in the village. But we have known for years that the main pipe leading into the canal, between the church path and the canal bridge, gets regularly blocked, causing flooding on the road outside Wootton House. We have repeatedly contacted Wiltshire Council, both to come and clear the pipe and to provide a long-term solution to prevent the root growth into the drain that causes the blockage. A number of approaches were made to the Chief Engineer in the autumn and Charlie Woodhead even raised a Freedom of Information request to force the Council to share all their information with us, but before the promised visit from the Engineer and full survey of the drain, we had a major flood on the evening of January 4th. A few houses had problems particular to their local drainage issues, but the main flood above the canal caused real hardship. There was significant water

ingress into the Wootton House annexe and the first two properties in Somerset's Cottages were inundated so badly that the residents have still not been able to return. On behalf of the Parish Council, I apologise unreservedly that this happened and, although we have done a great deal since to prevent any repetition, I can understand if this feels to those affected like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. A root cutter has now thoroughly cleared the drain, so major flooding should not happen again in the immediate future, while we continue to press the County Council for a more permanent solution. The promised removal of the nearby trees behind the wall will help, but we are committed to finding a more effective and sustainable resolution of this major issue. And finally, some thank yous, some welcomes and some farewells. Thank you firstly to Nell Light, for the excellent recent training on how and when to use the defibrillator. There was a great turn-out, so many of us now know how to use this precious and potentially life-saving resource. Thanks also to the Village Hall committee who make such a great job of looking after both the hall and the recreation ground, and we look forward to the forthcoming improvements planned for the rec. On behalf of the village, I'd also like to thank the members of the Parish Council and say the biggest thank you to your Parish Clerk, Julian who quietly and diligently does so much on your behalf. Few people choose to leave this lovely place, but Verity has inexplicably chosen the bright lights of America over our few and dim street lights, so we wish her and Lynne Fox our best wishes in their respective new homes. We have sadly also said both welcome and then farewell to Henry and Caroline Gibson but just a very warm welcome to Sue Croll and Phillip next door, to Paul and Kath on Cuckoo's Knob, to Mr. Hewer on St. Andrew's Close and to Gifton and Melanie in both their new homes. This village has thrived, and will continue to thrive, while we all appreciate how lucky we are, and all do our best to make this a brilliant place to live.

Following his report, the Chair invited the residents to ask any question or make any comments.

Tony McGarry raised the subject of the upkeep of the recreation ground, stating that it was not looking in a good condition and that the grass was very tall. The Clerk responded that he had spoken to the contractors, and they had admitted they were behind on their normal cutting cycle due to the very poor weather which we had in the spring. As a result, they could not cut the grass at the beginning of April because it was still waterlogged, and the machines would have seriously damaged the area if they had gone onto it. The grass will be cut this week, and it will be monitored. Jerry Kunkle also stated we were not alone in respect of struggling to maintain local recreation grounds as several parishes locally have the same issue.

The meeting was then closed and followed by the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council.

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Present:

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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.

Councillor Cindy Creasy expressed an interest in the planning application from St Andrew's Church and would not take part in the discussion.

4. Agreement of Minutes

The Draft Minutes of the Parish Council Meetings held on the 11th of March 2024 were agreed as a true record and signed by Dean Cowley - Chair.

5. Report From Local Councillor

Jerry Kunkler congratulated Dean and Clare on being re-elected and thanked them for volunteering to take on these roles again.

The next Pewsey Area Board meeting will take place on the 17th of June in Bedwyn and any bids for grants should be submitted in advance.

The Police and Crime Commissioner was re-elected, and Jerry asked Nick Mitchell-Briggs if Police had been attending crime scenes locally as he is concerned by the Police response generally. Nick's feedback was that generally they had not responded to 101 calls and that sometimes 101 calls should be treated as Emergency calls, and this is not happening.

Cindy Creasy asked Jerry what was happening regarding the Local Plan as it had all seemed to go very quiet. Jerry stated that this was going to be on the agenda for the full Wiltshire Council meeting in October but would follow up on the points raised by her regarding the revised wording around infill developments.

David Butler asked Jerry about the number of empty shops in Pewsey to which Jerry responded that efforts were being made to revitalise the shops and that there was encouraging signs with planned new businesses including a bistro, wine bar and new shop hopefully opening soon.

6. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Drainage

Following the CCTV inspection of the drain, no update has been received from Wiltshire Highways on any planned works to rectify the problems. This is despite being chased and asked for up-dates. Jerry Kunkler stated that if he could not get information from Highways then he would invite Andy Cadwallader to a future meeting in order to have the information.

Post Meeting Note.

The following response was received on the 21st of May from Andy Cadwallader at Wiltshire Highways:

Hello Julian,

Thank you for your email concerning the above.

Following the root cutting operation the drainage team reported that there was a sag in the pipework which was causing flow rate issues.

I am allowed 5 major drainage projects for the 2 communities I look after, and the work to rectify the sag in the line will be one of these projects. This work will be carried out by the major drainage team and so will be programmed as part of their works therefore, I cannot give you a date for the start of these works. As soon as I have further details on the project, I will inform the parish.

7. Report on Actions Arising from the Minutes

The Chair reported that he had contacted the owner of the trees which are overhanging the road near the canal, and she had promised that these trees would be felled this summer. The tree felling needed to be co-ordinated with SSEN as the trees are in close proximity to the powerline.

8. Complaint regarding Cars parking on the southern end of Bridleway WRIV1

A resident has raised the issue of cars now regularly being parked in front of Upper Farmhouse. Photographic evidence was presented of a number of cars being parked

during the day and overnight. The parked cars make it very difficult and dangerous for residents who are exiting from their properties to access the main road as the vehicles obstruct the view of on-coming traffic.

The Council were supportive of the complaint as it was considered dangerous to park cars on the junction as they constitute an 'obstruction'. A "No Parking" sign might be considered in the future but in the meantime The Council would ask that all residents refrain from parking in this area, as it is in contravention of the Highway Code to park on a junction and also to park on a bridleway.

A message will be sent out by email and Grapevine to make all residents aware of the issue and request their co-operation and the Chair will contact the main offender to request that they refrain from parking in this space.

9. Planning

9.1 PL/2024/04195 – Tree works – St Andrews Church

The tree works were considered necessary, and the Council resolved unanimously to Support the works.

9.2 PL.2024/03713 – Alterations to Cart Shed to create home office and demolition and rebuild of section of existing boundary wall.

Charlie Woodhead explained that the wall was in poor condition and made up of various sections with different bricks. The plan was to take down the entire wall from the Gate house to the lane entrance and rebuild it reusing the existing bricks where possible, adding reclaimed bricks to the extent necessary.

The corner of the new wall would be taken back by about a metre to make accessing the lane easier with a wider grass bank in front.

Regarding the changes to the cart shed an oak staircase would be added to the outside with a door facing the road. Three heritage style rooflights would be added into the north facing side of the roof.

The Council considered the changes acceptable and resolved to support the application but did request that the door facing the road be solid rather than half glazed in order to reduce light pollution onto the road.

10. Finance

10.1 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)

10.2 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.

10.3 Separate Resolutions to approve the signing of the Exemption Certificate and to approve the Annual Accounting & Governance statement and the Accounting Statement 2023/24 were proposed by Steve Rawlings and seconded by Clare Bamforth and all passed unanimously by the Council.

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

10.5 Finance Report

The Clerk confirmed that the Wiltshire Council Precept of £4,679.23 had been received from Wiltshire Council.

The Bank balances were reported as follows:

Business Account:	£1,653.48
Treasurers Account:	£10,882.88

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

1. WALC subscription	£101.76 (Ref 24/1)
2. J. Beames - Refuse sacks and gloves	£16.03 (Ref 24/2)

The Council unanimously resolved to approve the payments.

10.7 Council Insurance - The Clerk reported that the insurance renewal was due and that the quote for this year was from Clear Councils Insurance was £475.72 which was a rise of just £7.50. The Council resolved to approve the renewal quotation.

Council's Insurance Renewal - £475.72 (Ref. 24/3)

11. Report on Police Matters

Nothing to report.

12. Correspondence Received

None received.

13. Matters Raised by The Public

None

14. Date of the next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Parish Council is planned to take place on Monday 8th July 2024

Signed as a true record.....Date

Dean Cowley – Chair