

**Minutes of Berkswich Parish Council Meeting held on
Tuesday 1 November 2022 at 7.30 pm at Walton (Berkswich) Village Hall**

Present: Cllr Sue Francis (Chairman), Cllr Malcolm Millichap (Vice Chairman), Cllr Ann Millichap, Cllr Alan Taylor, Cllr Ben Rowell, Cllr Tim Luker, Cllr Caroline Pearson, Cllr Margaret Crossland, Cllr Graham Kilford and Cllr Clare Barton-Blake

In attendance: Approximately 60 members of the public, Cllr Andy Cooper from Stafford Borough Council and Mrs Sue Fullwood as Clerk

Public session

1

22/128 Planning application 22/36536/OUT for 40 dwellings at land off Old Croft Road

- a) Cllr Francis welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that the Parish Council were not a decision-making body with regards to planning applications, but had been consulted by Stafford Borough Council (SBC). Berkswich Parish Council would listen to residents' opinions in the public session, but would then discuss and agree their response as part of the meeting where the public were not able to comment. Cllr Francis added that the public were welcome to stay and observe the rest of the meeting should they wish to.
- b) An Old Croft Road resident said that housing had to be covered by a parish housing needs report. Cllr Taylor replied that the developer would no doubt say that they had done a local housing needs assessment, but that covered the whole of Stafford borough, not specifically Walton on the Hill.
- c) A resident from The Village said that the area was not on the existing local plan as an area with potential for development. Berkswich was in the 10% least deprived areas in the country and a development with 100% affordable housing would then become unaffordable to those who need them. She had obtained statistics from SBC and there were currently 99 families on the waiting list for a home which is a small waiting list compared to other authorities. The average wait was 3 months which was a short time period compared to other authorities. She felt that the report was flawed in this respect. Why was it necessary to build on greenfield land? There was a large development on the former GEC site so this development was not necessary. She added that the highways situation alone should be enough to stop the development.
- d) Cllr Cooper explained that he was on the planning committee at SBC. He said that the existing Local Plan for Stafford was still in place and a new Local Plan was being consulted on. Cllr Cooper didn't believe that this specific site had been identified for development. Cllr Cooper suggested that the Parish Council might want to consider preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.
- e) A Victoria Way resident said that she regularly walked her dog along Old Croft Road and the traffic there was awful already. Cllr Taylor said that the application covered just the field and that there were no proposals for any off-site highways improvements.
- f) A representative of Berkswich Football Club which uses the field opposite the proposed site said that the development would decrease the ability to provide parking

for parents which would compromise the safety of people using the football field who ranged from 4½ to 60 years old. There were very few pitches at this end of Stafford and if they were to lose this site it would affect the Club's ability to provide the opportunity to play football. The Club had 35 football teams including 10 girls teams – if the Club were not able to use the site the opportunity for all those children to play recreational sport would disappear.

- g) Another member of the public who was an ecologist said that there had been no traffic assessment along the road and the plans didn't mention anything about a footpath on Old Croft Road at all. All the bus stops were over 800m away. A flood risk assessment had not been submitted, they hadn't done a community assessment and the ecology report said that the development wouldn't make a biodiversity net gain. There would be a big impact on the open countryside. The character of Walton on the Hill was not typified by such dense housing.
- h) Another Old Croft Road resident felt that the plans were for a new car-dependent settlement on farmland. She felt that food security was a big issue and that once one field had changed use, the surrounding fields would all follow. Many people regularly walk in the area to enjoy the open countryside and the plans would have a negative impact from an environmental point of view. Also, water pressure in the area is quite low and an additional 40 homes would make the problem worse.
- i) Cllr Cooper responded that the Borough Council planning committee would only be able to consider this application on its own merit and couldn't consider what could happen in the future.
- j) Another Victoria Way resident added that the speed that cars travel up Old Croft Road was horrendous. He was also genuinely concerned about local infrastructure – Walton High School, Berkswich Primary and Oakridge Primary were all full and the GP surgery at Weeping Cross was also full and difficult to get a GP appointment.
- k) Another member of the public said that as part of the planning process the company would have to show that they had approached Severn Trent Water (STW) regarding sewage – they had done this and STW had said that sewage systems would be ok. There was no requirement to show that there was adequate water supply. The resident had contacted STW directly and asked them to comment on water supply for the planned development. He believed that the water main terminated at 65 Old Croft Road in the cul de sac. Water came from the borehole at Milford and the pipes were initially meant to connect to the mains at Cannock Road, but this never happened.
- l) Another resident said that they were concerned that SBC councillors were “already in the know about the proposals” and would look at the plans favourably because it was affordable housing. They believed that 100% affordable housing contravened government regulations. Cllr Cooper replied that the first borough councillors would see of the application was when it had been validated and it was publicly available to everyone.
- m) A different member of the public queried if the application was for planning permission or building rights. He felt that the hedgerow should not be disturbed as it was mature and some trees/bushes were 50 to 100 years old. The application was for a small field, but that field was part of a big field. The proximity to the bridle path was also a concern.

- n) Cllr Francis closed the public session and thanked everyone for attending. Cllr Francis suggested that everyone make their feelings known about the application via the SBC planning portal.
- o) A resident added that at a public meeting that afternoon, 80 people had been against the proposals and 3 people had been for them. He had made enquiries with SBC and the case officer had not been to the site to put up a notice about the application so there was time for people to comment.

2 Pavement along Main Road, Milford – a resident had sent a message to the Council asking if anything could be done about the pavement at Milford where hedges, trees and weeds had become so overgrown that the pavement was single-file and vehicles travelled at speed down the hill causing a hazard to pedestrians, in particular children. **Resolved:** Clerk to ask TGM to cut back the weeds and clear as much of the pavement as possible. **Action: Clerk.** Cllr Kilford asked if it would be possible to prune the trees on Main Road from School Lane down to the bend as they were making the houses opposite quite dark. It was agreed to start with the pavements.

Approximately 45 members of the public left the meeting at 8.10 pm.

22/129 To note apologies for absence – none.

22/130 To record Declarations of Interest regarding items on the agenda – Cllr Rowell declared interests in Walton High School if the discussions on item 22/128 affected it.

22/128 Planning application 22/36536/OUT for 40 dwellings at land off Old Croft Road - The Chair returned to item 22/128 to agree the Council's response to the application now that the public session had ended.

- p) Cllr Taylor suggested that there were several reasons that the Parish Council should object to the proposals:
 - the land was outside the residential development boundary for Stafford and not allocated for housing – it was not eligible for any development. It was not in the emerging Local Plan either;
 - it doesn't qualify as a Rural Exception Site – the area is rural, but it is part of Stafford;
 - the parish-based housing needs assessment has not been undertaken. The assessment with the application looks at housing need across Stafford borough, but it needs to be parish specific;
 - the Affordable Housing Statement document is not credible as it mentions South Gloucestershire twice, at paragraphs 3.29 and 3.40. Cllr Taylor was not aware of a need for affordable housing in Walton on the Hill and there is an argument that there is no need for it;
 - the development would encroach into views of Cannock Chase AONB, contrary to the Local Plan;
 - in 2000 the Methodist Church on The Rise applied for permission to move to the land next to 65 Old Croft Road. The application was declined as it was contrary to policy, an encroachment of the countryside around Walton on the Hill and due to highways safety issues with the narrow lane and lack of pavements;

- the development would be a self-contained plug-in with no landscaping. The housing would not be characteristic of this area.
- q) Cllr Taylor felt that the application was a test to see if permission would be given and he suspected that the applicants would go to appeal – the application wouldn't just go away. Cllr Rowell felt that the proposals felt like “land banking”, where someone buys land with the intention of developing it at a future date, it is speculative.
- r) Cllr M Millichap felt that the application could be objected to because it proposed building on agricultural land. Domestically produced food was still needed and the development would have a significant impact on the local community. The grade of the land could also be considered – was it 2 or 3A? The hedgerow had been there for well over 30 years and could fall under the Hedgerows Act 1997. Education provision should also be looked at as all the local schools were full. Cllr Rowell responded that while Walton High was full, some students were from outside the school catchment – Berkswich and Oakridge Primaries were probably the same.
- s) Cllr Francis added that in paragraph 2.3 of the Planning Statement referred to a Public House and shops, but they were not in the village of Walton on the Hill. Cllr Kilford said that developers were normally required to ask local GP surgeries if they could cope with increased patient numbers. Cllr Rowell said that he doubted that there was any development further away from shops and amenities. Cllr Francis added that there were not even buses to Walton on the Hill.
- t) Cllr Taylor proposed that Berkswich Parish Council objected to the proposals for the reasons above, seconded by Cllr M Millichap and unanimously agreed. Cllr Taylor would draft a response to be agreed with councillors before being submitted by the Clerk to SBC. **Action: Cllr Taylor/Clerk** Cllr Cooper agreed to call-in the application to planning committee.

22/131 To approve minutes of the Council meeting held on 4 October 2022 – Resolved: agreed as a true record.

22/132 To approve minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 October 2022 – Resolved: agreed as a true record.

22/133 Update on matters arising which are not agenda items – none.

22/134 To discuss the contractor for School Lane Trees – adjourned to December meeting Action: Clerk

22/135 Queen's Green Canopy – Cllr Taylor had found a nursery in Cheshire with 69 oak trees – costs would be £78 for thin trunks or £168 for thicker trunks, plus around £60 for a device to stop deer from eating it. **Resolved:** The Clerk could place an order up to the value of £250 if Cllr Taylor found a suitable tree. **Action: Cllr Taylor**

22/136 Clean Air Campaign – adjourned to December meeting. Action: Clerk

22/137 Parish Newsletter Distribution – The Clerk asked if the Council wished to distribute the Christmas newsletter between themselves or if they would prefer to

pay to have them distributed. **Resolved:** Cllr Luker, Cllr Pearson, Cllr Francis and Cllr Crossland agreed to share the distribution with the Clerk. **Action: Clerk**

22/138 Fencing at Milford – Part of the work had been done, but there was still a hazard to the public from the part that had been left. **Resolved:** Clerk to contact the landowner again. **Action: Clerk**

22/139 Telephone Box – The Clerk had asked the Brocton Clerk who had painted their phone box and it had been done by the Brocton Councillors. The Brocton Clerk had given the Clerk the contact details of the man who had repainted the Box at Ingestre and the Clerk was trying to set up a meeting to get a quote from him. TGM were unable to undertake the work. **Action: Clerk**

22/140 Tree growing near to The Crescent – The Clerk had written to the nearest homeowners, asking them to move the tree to their own property or the Council would move it to Walton or Hollybush Coppice. Cllr Luker, Cllr Pearson and Cllr Rowell had walked down to look at the tree and felt that it was not doing any harm at the moment.

Cllr Cooper left the meeting at 8.50 pm.

22/141 Plans for 2023/24 – adjourned to December meeting **Action: Clerk**

22/142 Proposals for Walton (Berkswich) Village Hall being a Warm Space – Cllr Kilford had been working on this, but it had not been possible to get the same time slot every week. The Methodist Church and the Village Hall were the only two places who had offered to be involved at this end of town. Cllr Francis added that Warm Spaces needed a minimum of two volunteers at all times for safeguarding purposes.

22/143 Cllr Pearson's role when representing the Parish Council at VHCM Meetings – Cllr Pearson asked that as she had no particular interest in the Village Hall and the meetings generally seemed to be about bookings, security, etc, could she act as the link to the VHMC rather than be a Trustee. **Resolved:** Cllr Pearson to act as the Parish Council link with the VHMC, but she did not need to attend all the meetings.

22/144 Financial Matters

i. Bank Reconciliation and expenditure for October 2022 – Resolved: Unanimously approved.

Bank Reconciliation as at 31 October 2022

Receipts			
Company	Description	Amount	Date Received
Stafford Borough Council	Precept October 22 - March 23	£ 14,268.50	10/10/2022
Total Receipts		£14,268.50	

Payments						
Paid to	Description	Invoice date	Cheque #	Gross Incl. VAT	VAT	Net
ICO	Renewal 22/23	28/09/2022	714	£40.00	£0.00	£40.00
SLCC	Membership fee 22/23	01/10/2022	715	£171.00	£0.00	£171.00
TGM	Maintenance Sept 2022	30/09/2022	717	£2,066.10	£344.35	£1,721.75
Mrs Sue Fullwood	Clerk Salary & expenses Oct 22	30/10/2022	718	£1,286.49	£0.00	£1,286.49
Staffs Pension Fund	Oct 22 pension contributions emper & empee	30/10/2022	719	£425.16	£0.00	£425.16
HMRC	NI contributions Oct 2022 emper & empee + income tax empee	30/10/2022	720	£140.53	£0.00	£140.53
Walton (Berkswich) Village Hall	Room booking 4 & 13/10/22	26/10/2022	721	£60.00	£0.00	£60.00
Total Payments				£4,189.28	£344.35	£3,844.93

Cashbook

Opening Balance at 01.10.2022	17,036.95
Add:	
Receipts 01.10.2022 to 31.10.2022	14,268.50
Less	
Payments 01.10.2022 to 31.10.2022	4,189.28
Cashbook Balance at 31.10.2022	<u>27,116.17</u>

Current Account

Bank statement Balance at 01.10.2022	20,039.98
Less payments made	5,123.53

Chq No.s	Amount
687	£30.00
707	£30.00
710	£96.60
718	£1,286.49
719	£425.16
720	£140.53
721	£60.00
	2068.78

Add: receipts	14268.50
Add: Unpresented Receipts	-
C/A balance 31.10.2022 carried forward	<u>29,184.95</u>
Available funds in C/A	<u>27,116.17</u>

- ii. **budget report for October 2022 – Resolved:** Unanimously approved.

Budget Report October 2022

RECEIPTS	Total	Budget	Outturn
Precept	28,537	25,523	3,014
Council tax support grant	0	1,231	-1,231
SBC (Concurrent Function Allowance)	0	1,507	-1,507
SCC Minor Highways Agreement	5,094	1,500	3,594
Interest Stafford Railway BS A/c	0	185	-185
Interest Teachers A/c	0	125	-125
Interest Hampshire Trust	0	85	-85
Misc. Receipts (e.g. wayleave payments)	36,487	50	36,437
Total income	£72,842	£35,206	£37,636

PAYMENTS	Total	Budget	Outturn
Staff costs	10,173	14,700	4,527
Office costs	3,891	4,082	191
Maintenance costs	8,221	14,300	6,079
Additional maintenance	700	2,300	1,600
Play Area	29,446	21,100	- 8,346
Capital purchases	-	-	-
Community support	1,106	4,500	3,394
Projects	-	33,200	33,200
Total Expenditure	£53,538	£94,182	£40,644

Earmarked Funds Allocation

Elections	£10,000
Playground Equipment	£0
Crime Prevention Measures	£24,000
Walton Coppice Maintenance Fund	£12,500
Hollybush Coppice Maintenance Fund	£10,000
Asset Replacement Fund	£45,000
Environmental Care	£35,000
General Reserve	£40,166
Total funds	£176,666

22/145 Policy/Procedure Review

- i. Data Protection Policy
- ii. Privacy Policy
- iii. Privacy Notice - general
- iv. Privacy Notice – for staff
- v. Subject Access Requests Policy
- vi. Publication Scheme
- vii. Freedom of Information Policy
- viii. Data Retention Policy

Cllr Rowell had read through and suggested amendments to the policies, which the Clerk had then updated. **Resolved:** all policies were agreed unanimously. Clerk to upload the policies onto the website. **Action: Clerk** Cllr Francis thanked Cllr Rowell for his work on these policies.

22/146 Planning (see also 22/128 above)

- i. **22/36483/LDCPP 2 Walton Grove, The Village** – Cllr Taylor felt that solar panels could sometimes look intrusive and the roof where these panels would be placed was visible from the pathway to Jacob’s Ladder. **Resolved:** Cllr Taylor to send the Clerk text to send to SBC regarding this application. **Action Cllr Taylor/Clerk**
- ii. **22/36568/HOU 7 Oak Avenue** – **Resolved:** Clerk to send ‘no comment’ letter regarding this application. **Action: Clerk**
- iii. **22/36577/HOU Beech House, Victoria Way** - **Resolved:** Clerk to send ‘no comment’ letter regarding this application. **Action: Clerk**

22/147

- i. **Environment Group** – They now had a date for the Holdiford Road survey – 16 November.
- ii. **Village Hall Council of Management** – Cllr Pearson had sent apologies. Cllr Kilford felt that progress had been satisfactory.
- iii. **TVCG** – Cllr Brendan McKeown had requested the meeting on 17 November 2022 to consider the new Local Plan for Stafford Borough.

22/148 Agenda items for the next meeting

The next Berkswich Parish Council Meeting would take place on Tuesday 6 December 2022 at 7.30 pm at Walton (Berkswich) Village Hall. Agenda items agreed were: Budget for 2023/24; Precept demand for 23/24; fencing at Milford; telephone box; Queen's Green Canopy; planning for 23/24; clean air campaign; School Lane Trees; the ex-Vauxhall Garage.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9.10 pm.