

BERKSWICH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Berkswich Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 3 September 2024 at 7.30 pm at Walton Village Hall

Present: Cllr Alan Taylor (Chair), Cllr Caroline Pearson (Vice Chair), Cllr Tim Luker, Cllr Sue Francis, Cllr Ann Millichap, Cllr Malcolm Millichap, Cllr Beverley Hughes, Cllr Vicky Campbell, Cllr Bob Gilson and Cllr Michael Norris.

In attendance: Four members of the public and Mrs Sue Fullwood as Clerk.

Cllr Taylor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1 Public session

a) Travellers Camping on Milford Common

The first member of the public asked if the Clerk had shared his email dated 19 August regarding Travellers setting up camp on Milford Common again. The Clerk confirmed that she had been on annual leave at the time and had not shared it. The member of the public said he believed that the Council needed to be more proactive on this issue. He said there had been some naivety on the part of the Rangers and the new Site Manager had believed the Travellers when they said they would be gone in a few days. Legal action was not started for nine days. When the Travellers arrived the member of the public was having a meeting with the Site Manager and they watched them enter over the low bunding on Brocton Road. The member of the public felt that the Parish Council and Stafford Borough Council (SBC) both needed to be more involved and should be putting their thoughts straight to Staffordshire County Council (SCC) to get it sorted quickly. He said that Travellers would now come every year and they made a lot of mess and left rubbish in ditches and in the nettles. They had had 14 horses this year and left the manure behind which was bagged up and removed by a group of volunteers in a total of 48 bags.

Cllr Taylor confirmed that he had had personal correspondence with the member of the public as the Clerk was on leave and could not reply on behalf of the council. He had expected SCC to go to court straight away. Cllr Francis added that it was unfortunate that a lot of people were away on holiday at the time including SBC Cllr Edgeller and SCC Cllr John Francis. Cllr M Millichap added that he had experience of the issue from when he worked at the Police and he knew of the distress caused, but it was not an easy problem to solve as all the Parish Council could do was write to or call SCC. The member of the public replied that even that would be more favourable than nothing being done and the removal process should be started as soon as they enter the site.

b) Disused Bus Shelter on Cedar Way

(see also 24/120) The second member of the public had raised concerns about the dilapidated bus shelter on Cedar Way and had sent photos to Cllr Hughes.

c) Safety of the tree on The Village near to Walton Lodge

(See also 24/121) The second member of the public also raised concerns about the tree near Walton Lodge. He reported that a HGV had knocked a large branch off the tree which had subsequently been cut up into smaller pieces and taken away by the neighbours. The tree now had a gash where the branch had been leaving it vulnerable to disease. All the branches were on one side of the tree so it seemed unbalanced. The second member of the public added that it would be really sad to lose the tree after so many years. Cllr Taylor responded that the Clerk would make enquiries regarding ownership of the tree and he imagined that SCC owned it as the Highways authority. Cllr

M Millichap added that the Parish Council could not take action until they knew who owned the tree.

d) Fence along the Chicken Run

The third member of the public raised an issue regarding the fence along the Chicken Run and said that he came home one day to find that 8 fence panels had been replaced, but that other 8 had been left. He said that the driveway/private road was on the deeds for 1 Congreve Close and he thought that the fence would be too. The two worst fence panels were falling towards the third member of the public's house rather than the footpath. The third member of the public said that he wouldn't mind paying for the fence panels to be replaced even though they were not his, but he wouldn't do that until something had been done about the hedge as it caused the fence panels to rot away. Cllr Taylor responded that the hedge would not be the Parish Council's responsibility. He added that use of the Chicken Run had been the subject of a court case in the 1970s when one of the homeowners on The Crescent had closed the footpath and the High Court in London had decided that the footpath should be reopened and there could have been something in the judgement regarding the fence and hedge. Cllr Taylor suggested that the member of public could ask the owner of 1 Congreve Close to show him their deeds. Cllr M Millichap suggested that SCC's footpath officer might have access to the records of the court's decision. **Resolved:** Clerk to contact SCC and to check if any records of the court case were kept by the Parish Council. **Action: Clerk**

e) Land with Parish Council Noticeboard on The Village

The fourth member of the public raised an issue about ownership of the triangle of land which held the Parish Council's noticeboard on The Village. She said the ownership of 21 The Village had changed hands in December 2023 and the new owners had said that the triangle was their property. She thought that in the long term the new owners planned to use the area as a car park space and had been told that the previous owners of number 21 had laid claim to the land on their deeds. Cllr Taylor responded that technically the Land Registry would have an overview. Cllr Pearson added that a parking bay would require planning permission as the road is in the conservation area. **Resolved:** Clerk to do further research into the issue. **Action: Clerk**

Cllr Taylor thanked the members of the public for their contributions and the second and fourth members of the public left the meeting at 8.10 pm.

24/107 Apologies – None.

24/108 Minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2024 - Resolved: It was agreed that the minutes were accurate.

24/109 Declarations of Interest regarding items on the agenda. None.

24/110 Clerk's Report for July and August 2024 - Resolved: the report was accepted.

24/111 Flower Beds on Main Road

Cllr Taylor and Cllr Francis had met with TGM and were waiting for TGM to send them a report. Item deferred to next meeting.

24/112 Potential Speed Indication Devices at Milford

Cllr M Millichap pointed out that circumstances on the Brocton Road had recently changed, the speed limit had been reduced from 40mph down to 30mph. As the SID had not been part of the budget for 2024/25 he suggested that the SID could be included in the budget for 2025/26 and the delay would give an opportunity to assess the impact of the reduced speed limit. **Resolved:** a vote was held on proceeding with the purchase of

a SID with the proviso that it was approved as part of the 2025/26 budget: 5 voted for; 3 against; and 2 abstained - motion carried.

The first member of the public left the meeting at 8.20 pm.

24/113 Moving to a .gov.uk Web Domain

Councillors had read the Clerk's revised report. Cllr Norris noted that the External Auditors had commented that if the Council had not moved to .gov.uk web and email addresses by 31 March 2025 it could result in qualification on the 2024/2025 AGAR.

Resolved: It was unanimously agreed to move to a .gov.uk domain using reCoded Solutions. **Action: Clerk**

24/114 Storage of Important Council Documents

A fireproof box had been purchased by the Clerk and the deeds were now stored in this at the Clerk's home. Walton Village Hall had saved a lockable cupboard for the Council to use if required. Cllr Taylor felt that the box could still be stolen and the Clerk should continue to pursue storage options including solicitors. **Action: Clerk**

24/115 Walton Coppice Fence Repairs

The Clerk had asked at Milford Hall if the groundsmen could undertake the fencing job, but had not had a response. Trentham Fencing had shown an interest in quoting, but had now completed work at Hollybush Coppice and still not given a quote. The Clerk should continue seeking quotes for the repairs. Item deferred to the October meeting.

Action: Clerk

24/116 Review of Attendance at the Barley Mow Macmillan Event 3 August

Cllrs A and M Millichap and Cllr Taylor had attended the event and raised £92. They were all thanked for their attendance at the event.

24/117 Speed Camera on Milford Road near Stockton Lane

The Staffordshire Road Safety Partnership had responded to the Clerk to say that the cameras were prioritised on the basis of recent collision history and that they had reviewed the data from the camera and there was good compliance with the speed limit in that area. No further action.

24/118 Bill on the safety of Lithium-Ion Batteries

Cllr Taylor asked the Clerk to find out what was happening to the Bill following the change in Government and if the Bill would be reactivated. **Action: Clerk**

The Chairman changed the order of the agenda and brought item 24/122 forward.

24/122 Financial Matters:

- i. **Bank Reconciliation and Expenditure for July and August 2024 – Resolved:**
The bank reconciliations and expenditures were unanimously approved.

Virgin Bank Reconciliation as at 19 July 2024

Receipts			
Company	Description	Amount	Date Received
Zurich	Insurance credit	69.82	28/06/2024
Walton High School	Maintenance	£78.75	10/07/2024
Staffordshire County Council	Grass cutting 2024-25	£3,120.00	12/07/2024
Berkswich Parish Council	Opening chq from Virgin account	£500.00	17/07/2024
Hampshire Trust Bank	balance transferred to C/A (before being split between 2 short term investments)	£26,036.27	17/07/2024
Total Receipts		£29,304.84	

Payments						
Paid to	Description	Invoice date	Cheque #	Gross Incl. VAT	VAT	Net
Walton Village Hall	Room hire 4.6.24	28/06/2024	864	£20.00	£0.00	£20.00
TGM	Grounds maintenance June 2024	28/06/2024	865	£1,695.31	£282.55	£1,412.76
HMRC	Employer NI contributions July 24	31/07/2024	866	£30.81	£0.00	£30.81
Staffs Pension Fund	July 24 contributions	31/07/2024	867	£285.55	£0.00	£285.55
Mrs S Fullwood	Salary July 2024	31/07/2024	868	£953.27	£0.00	£953.27
Berkswich Parish Council	Deposit to open Unity Trust account	09/07/2024	869	£500.00	£0.00	£500.00
				£2,984.94	£282.55	£2,702.39

Cashbook

Opening Balance at 20.06.2024	23,469.10
Add:	
Receipts 20.06.2024 to 19.07.2024	29,304.84
Less	
Payments 20.06.2024 to 19.07.2024	2,984.94
Cashbook Balance at 19.07.2022	49,789.00

Current Account

Bank statement Balance at 20.06.2024	27,214.78	
Less payments made	5,259.14	
Less: Unpresented Cheques		
	Chq No.s	Amount
	857	£171.85
	858	£30.00
	866	£30.81
	867	£285.55
	868	£953.27
Add: Receipts	1,471.48	
Add: Unpresented Receipts	29,304.84	
	0.00	
C/A balance carried forward 20.07.2024	50,760.48	
Available funds in C/A	£49,789.00	

Bank Reconciliation as at 31 August 2024

Receipts			
Company	Description	Amount	Date Received
Berkwich Parish Council	Cheque from Virgin Account	23252.73	13/08/2024
Total Receipts		£0.00	

Not actual income therefore not in reconciliation

Payments						
Paid to	Description	Invoice date	Cheque #/Unique transaction ref	Gross Incl. VAT	VAT	Net
Virgin Money Current Account						
Teachers Building Society	Transfer from Hampshire Trust Bank	06/08/2024	870	£14,109.31	£0.00	£14,109.31
Stafford Railway Building Society	Transfer from Hampshire Trust Bank	06/08/2024	871	£11,926.96	£0.00	£11,926.96
Berkswich Parish Council	Transfer funds to Unity account	06/08/2024	872	£23,252.73	£0.00	£23,252.73
Unity Trust Bank						
Walton (Berkswich) Village Hall	Room hire 2.7.24	31/07/2024	online	£20.00	£0.00	£20.00
Staffs Pensions	Empee & Emper contributions Aug 24	31/08/2024	522786592	£285.55	£0.00	£285.55
Mrs S Fullwood	Clerk salary Aug 24 + expenses Jul & Aug 24	31/08/2024	661347260	£1,140.39	£21.19	£1,119.20
HMRC	Employer NI Aug 24	05/08/2024	976851969	£30.81	£0.00	£30.81
TGM	Grounds Maintenance July 24	31/07/2024	386160047	£1,524.97	£254.16	£1,270.81
Total Payments				£17,111.03	£275.35	£16,835.68

*Chq returned, SRBS balance must be under £75k
Not expenditure therefore not in reconciliation

£0.00

Cashbook

Opening Balance at 20.07.2024	49,789.00
Add:	
Receipts 20.07.2024 to 31.08.2024	0.00
Less	
Payments 20.07.2024 to 31.08.2024	17,111.03
Cashbook Balance at 31.08.2024	£32,677.97

Current Account

Bank statement Balance at 20.07.2024 (Virgin + £500 Unity)	51,260.48
Less payments made	858, 866, 867, 868, 870 + online
	18,094.30
Less: Unpresented payments	
	488.21
Add: Unpresented Receipts	0.00
C/A balance carried forward 31.08.2024 (Unity £21067.37 + Virgin £12098.81)	33,166.18
Available funds in C/A	£32,677.97

Chq No	Amount	
857	£171.85	
871	£11,926.96	Chq cancelled
522786592	£285.55	
976851969	£30.81	
		488.21

- ii. **Budget Report for August 2024 – Resolved:** The budget report was unanimously approved.

Budget Report August 2024

RECEIPTS	To date	Budget	Less / more than budget
Precept inc concurrent function	20,285	42,781	-22,497
Council tax support grant	705	705	0
SCC Minor Highways Agreement	3,502	2,750	752
Interest Stafford Railway BS A/c	0	600	-600
Interest Teachers A/c	0	350	-350
Interest Hampshire Trust	26	70	-44
Grants	9,192	0	9,192
VAT Reclaimed	1,339	0	1,339
Misc. Receipts (e.g. wayleave payments)	193	300	-107
Total income	£ 35,241	£ 47,556	-£12,315

PAYMENTS	To date	Budget	Under / Over budget
Staff costs	6,348	15,820	9,472
Office costs	2,354	4,541	2,187
Maintenance costs	5,128	11,650	6,522
Additional maintenance	-	750	750
Play Area	-	2,610	2,610
Capital purchases	-	500	500
Community support	295	2,385	2,090
Projects	675	9,300	8,625
Total Expenditure	£ 14,800	£ 47,556	£32,756

Earmarked Funds Allocation

Elections	£10,000
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	£39,616
Total funds	£176,116

The third member of the public left the meeting at 8.40 pm.

24/119 Rural Speed Limits

The Clerk had forwarded an email from SPCA asking for thoughts on an SPCA policy position. Cllr Taylor stated that he felt that where necessary the speed limit had already been altered, but the issue was lack of enforcement. Cllr Francis added that driving at 20mph was not good for emissions, therefore the environment and this should be taken into consideration. Clerk to feed back to SPCA. **Action: Clerk**

24/120 Bus Shelter on Cedar Way

(See also b) on page 1.) The Clerk had asked SCC if they were the owners and they had responded that it was owned by SBC. **Resolved:** Clerk to ask SBC to remove the bus shelter as soon as possible. **Action: Clerk**

24/121 Safety of the Tree near the bench on The Village

(See also c) on page 1.) Clerk to approach SCC to establish who owns the land and the tree. **Action: Clerk**

22/122 See above.

24/123 Planning Matters

i. **Response to planning application 24/39545/HOU – 12 Birch Close**

Cllr Taylor proposed that the council should respond to say it had no objection to the proposal. **Resolved:** agreed unanimously. **Action: Clerk**

24/124 Reports from other Meetings

- i. **Environment Group** – At Walton Coppice, some of the new planting had grown ferociously whilst others were not growing as well. The hazel in particular was doing very well. The undergrowth was getting very overgrown and Cllr Taylor suggested hiring a petrol brush cutter to clear some of it with the help of volunteers. If this was successful consideration would be given to purchasing a battery powered one for the Council.
At Hollybush Coppice, Trentham Fencing had completed the gate and passage from the school, but the entrance seemed to be too narrow. This would be discussed at the September Environment Group meeting.
- ii **Village Hall Council of Management** – nothing to report.

24/125 Agenda Items for the Next Meeting scheduled for Tuesday 1 October 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Main Hall, Walton Village Hall

Agenda items agreed were: production of a parish leaflet; 80th Anniversary of VE Day; benches at the playing fields; planters; notice board on The Village; RoSPA recommendations for Hollybush Playing Fields; Emergency Planning Requirements; and Remembrance Sunday.

The meeting closed at 8:50 pm.