

BETLEY, BALTERLEY AND WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL

28th November 2024

Commenced: 7.30 pm Terminated: 9.30 pm

Present: Councillor Bettley-Smith (Chair)
Councillors Berrisford, Bullock, Ecclestone, Hales, Karling, Owen, and Watkin.

There were 4 Members of the Public in attendance
Also in attendance was PCSO Luke Verrall from Staffordshire Police

1. WELCOME TO PCSO LUKE VERRALL

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everybody in attendance, and particularly welcomed PCSO Luke Verrall, who was new to the area.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Drakakis-Smith, Head and Speed.

Members were advised that Councillor Drakakis-Smith had sustained a fall and was taken to the Royal Stoke Hospital.

All the Councillor absences were accepted as recognised absences.

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council sends Councillor Drakakis-Smith a card, extending the wishes of the Parish Council for a speedy recovery.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Bettley-Smith and Karling declared their interests in the Payment of Invoices and Reimbursements, as they were the recipients of reimbursements. They did not take part in the discussion or voting thereon.

Councillors Bettley-Smith, Berrisford, Ecclestone, Hales and Owen declared their interests in the Planning Application Ref No: 24/00713/FUL Location: Garfield Main Road Betley, as they knew the applicants on a cordial basis. Councillors Berrisford and Hales however, declared strong family relationships with the applicants and therefore left the room during the discussion and voting.

4. STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE

Members received an update from PCSO Verrall on the following matters:-

- There were no issues on the police system relating to the Parish, to report;
- In response to concerns over the number of crashes caused by raised beds which impaired visibility at the A531/B5500 junction, PCSO Verrall agreed to speak to the Broughton Arms over this matter.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 26th September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. MINUTES – EXTRAORDINARY MEETING 2ND OCTOBER 2024

The Minutes of the proceedings of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 2nd October 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7. MINUTES – FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee held on 31st October 2024 were received.

The Clerk sought approval for the Mid Term Review of the Action Plan 2024-2025, that was drafted in response to the Internal Auditor's Report.

RESOLVED

That the Mid Term Review of the Action Plan 2024-2025, be approved.

8. MINUTES – PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning Committee held on 31st October 2024 were received and the resolutions of the Committee that were submitted to Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, were approved.

9. PUBLIC FORUM

A Member of the Public (Mrs Ball) referred to her ongoing concerns over the behaviour of Councillor Drakakis-Smith, and she updated the Parish Council with some actions that had been taken. Mrs Ball then sought written confirmation, in these Minutes, of the names of the Members of the Public who were in attendance at the Annual Parish Meeting.

With the approval of the Parish Council, the Clerk confirmed that the Members of the Public who were in attendance at the Annual Parish Meeting and spoke to documents that were later appended to the Minutes, were Mr Ball, Mrs Ball and Mr Griffiths.

Mrs Ball concluded her update by reporting that she had met with local MP Adam Jogee, who was seeking a parliamentary review to the mechanisms available to Parish Councils, when Members breached the Code of Conduct to an extent that undermined the integrity of the Parish Council.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

10. PLANNING MATTERS

Consideration was given to the following planning matters:-

- **New Planning Applications**

(i) Reference: 24/00778/FUL Location: 20 Ladygates Betley Crewe

Proposal: Single Storey Rear Extension

Councillor Daly reported on this application. All materials were identical to the existing materials. The extension was not overlooked and wasn't an imposing development.

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council raises no objections to this application. (This decision was unanimous).

(ii) Reference: 24/00653/FUL Location: Doddlespool Farm Main Road Betley

Proposal: Single Storey Farm Building, the building is needed as a feed store and wintering cows, sheep, chickens etc, the existing solar panels will be re-located to the southern facing roof

Councillor Berrisford reported on this application. Members expressed strong concerns that the building was unsuitable for livestock. There was no provision for collecting manure, slurry or dirty water, and there was no ventilation.

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council objects in the strongest terms to this application, as the building is not suited for the stated purpose (keeping of livestock), due to the design, lack of ventilation and facilities for the storage of slurry, manure and related animal waste products.

At this juncture (8.15 pm) Councillors Berrisford and Hales retired from the meeting.

- (iii) **Application Ref No: 24/00713/FUL Location: Garfield Main Road Betley
Proposal: Demolition of existing dwelling house and outbuildings. Construction of new self-build and custom build dwelling and ancillary buildings, alterations to driveway and entrance off the road.**

Councillor Daly presented a detailed description of the planning application. He reported that although the footprint had increased by 12%, the proposed style was very similar to that of the existing property. The proposed property would be slightly higher than the existing house by 1.2m (total 6.2m). Parking spaces would be increased from 3 to 5.

There were significant changes to the facing brickwork and a shiplap larch boarding would be added. The roofing materials of the new building would also be different to the existing house.

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council supports the application as it represents an improvement to the existing building. (This decision was unanimous)

Councillors Hales and Berrisford returned to the meeting at 8.30 pm.

- **Decided Application**

The Clerk reported on the following decision:-

- (iv) **Application number: 24/00665/FUL Location: Meadowside Cottage Common Lane Betley
Proposal: Two storey and single storey rear extension
Decision: Permit with conditions**

11. REPORTS

- **The Chair**

- (i) The Chair reported that Walley's Quarry had been served with a permanent closure notice by the Environment Agency. No further waste was to go onto the site from the following day.

The company had two months to appeal and the Chair had been notified that the company did intend to appeal. However, no further waste could be taken to the site unless appeal was successful.

- (ii) In relation to fires and issues of waste at the Land at Doddlespool Hall Farm, the Environment Agency had notified Chair that they were investigating the matters and could not comment further.
- (iii) An email had been received from former Parish Clerk Mr Gwyn Griffiths, regarding Councillor Drakakis-Smith's failure to answer questions relating to her objections to the Accounts. Chair reported that in his opinion, such conduct towards a former Clerk was unacceptable

- **The Vice Chair**

Councillor Daly reported on the various Remembrance Day events that he had attended, at which he had laid wreaths on behalf of the Parish Council, on behalf of the community. He added that he

had also attended a school footpath walk event that had been facilitated by the Footpaths Working Party.

- **The Clerk**

- (i) The Clerk reported that she had received correspondence relating to a blocked sewer grid at the junction of Church Terrace and The Butts.
- (ii) In relation to the Chair's report on correspondence received from former Parish Clerk Mr Griffiths, the Clerk reported that she had been the recipient of correspondence where Councillor Drakakis-Smith was refusing to send the information asked by Mr Griffiths, direct to Mr Griffiths. Instead, the Councillor had told Mr Griffiths that the Clerk would forward to him, the relevant parts of the extremely lengthy document that she [Councillor Drakakis-Smith] had written. The Clerk added that she had refused to do as Councillor Drakakis-Smith was saying and had liaised with the Chair in relation to this matter.
- (iii) Further to Minute 4 of the last meeting, the Clerk confirmed that a document had been received from Councillor Drakakis-Smith and circulated to Members of the Parish Council.

Members discussed the contents of the document, and agreed that it didn't cover the reasons for her objections to the Minutes, as requested by Councillor Owen. Instead, the Members noted that the document was a script of statements and questions, and it was impossible to make a decision regarding the best way forward.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Drakakis-Smith be asked to write a document which details, in her opinion, how the Minutes dated 27th June 2024, should be written.

- **County Councillor and Borough Councillors**

Members noted the apologies from Councillor Jill Whitmore.

Councillor Berrisford reported that she had raised a question with the Leader of the Borough Council relating to the land at Doddlespool Hall Farm, and had raised an enquiry with the Environment Agency.

Councillor Berrisford had attended a Remembrance Service at the Madeley Centre and concluded her report by advising that she was receiving numerous calls regarding anti-social behaviour, about which she would liaise with the police and Councillor Bullock.

- **Representatives on Outside Bodies**

Councillor Hales reported that he had met with the Betley Trust on Tuesday.

Councillor Daly had attended a Governors Meeting at the Primary School.

Councillor Bullock reported that he had volunteered to attend a meeting of the NHS Integrated Care Board.

12. GOVERNANCE

The Parish Council considered the following Governance Documents:-

- (i) Financial Regulations 2024-2025
- (ii) Code of Conduct 2024-2025
- (iii) Social Media Policy 2024-2025
- (iv) Publication Scheme 2024-2025
- (v) GDPR Policy 2024-2025
- (vi) Retention of Documents Policy 2024-2025
- (vii) Risk Assessment 2024-2025
- (viii) Asset Register 2024-2025 – Members to note that the Assets were inspected and the Asset Register was signed and dated by Councillor Daly

Members referred to documents from Councillor Drakakis-Smith that had been circulated, regarding the Policies, and felt that although the documents contained questions, statements and suggestions, there was a distinct lack of clarity and the Parish Council considered that the documents received to date, could not be considered at this stage.

As Councillor Drakakis-Smith was not in attendance at the meeting, Members agreed to consider the documents tonight in their current format, adopt them, and place an item on the Parish Council Agenda in February, to offer Councillor Drakakis-Smith a further opportunity to submit any amendments. The amendments should be received two weeks before the February meeting, to enable Members to consider.

RESOLVED

- (i) **That the Parish Council Governance Documents, as listed above and circulated with this Agenda, be approved and adopted. (For the purpose of the Minutes, this decision was unanimous)**
- (ii) **That Councillor Drakakis-Smith be offered an opportunity to submit to the Parish Council, her suggested wording of the documents.**

13. BUDGET AND FINANCE 2024-2025

Members considered the following report of the Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer:-

(i) Application for Financial Assistance

RESOLVED

That a grant in the sum of £650.00 to the Church for the Communities Burial Ground, be approved.

(ii) Unity Trust Bank

Members were not asked to transfer any money from the Co-op Bank to the Unity Trust Bank at this meeting.

(iii) Transactions – Unity Trust Bank

RESOLVED

That the following transactions in the Unity Trust Bank, be approved:-

DATE	DETAILS	RECEIPTS	PAYMENTS
30/09/2024	Invoice 500 - August Maintenance Memorial Garden		£135.00
30/09/2024	PAYE September 2024		£113.00
30/09/2024	September Salary		£427.35
30/09/2024	September Pension		£158.27
30/09/2024	Quarterly Service Charge		£18.00
04/10/2024	Transfer from Co-op	£2,000.00	
16/10/2024	VAT Refund	£558.77	
31/10/2024	Service charge		£5.40
01/11/2024	Invoice 511 - September Maintenance Memorial Garden		£180.00
01/11/2024	Room Hire Invoice 4184		£136.50
01/11/2024	Payroll Services October-April		£246.60
01/11/2024	October Salary		£427.35
01/11/2024	PAYE October 2024		£113.00
01/11/2024	October Pension		£158.27
01/11/2024	Wreath		£27.50
05/11/2024	Transfer from Co-op	£2,000.00	
15/11/2024	Cable Ties		£17.93

(iv) Transactions – Co-op Bank

RESOLVED

That the following transactions in the Co-op Bank be approved:-

DATE	DETAILS	RECEIPTS	PAYMENTS
04/10/2024	Transfer to Unity Trust Bank		£2,000.00
05/11/2024	Transfer to Unity Trust Bank		£2,000.00

(v) Payment of Invoices and Reimbursements

RESOLVED

That the following payments be approved:-

Luke Rimmer	Invoice 516	£730.00
M Clough	November 2024 Salary (including Backpay)	£577.00
HMRC	November 2024 PAYE	£153.32
Staffordshire Pension	November 2024 Pension	£213.71
M Clough	December 2024 Salary	Unknown
HMRC	December 2024 PAYE	Unknown
Staffordshire Pension	December 2024 Pension	Unknown
Church Grant	Grant for Maintenance of Community Burial Ground	£650.00
	Petrol Reimbursements 05/06/2024 – Public Right to Inspect 32.00 miles 20/06/2024 – Notices 32.4 miles 28/06/2024 – Laptop Repair 17.2 miles 29/06/2024 – Post Office Bunbury (Chq) 6.8 miles 01/07/2024 – Laptop Repair 17.2 miles 05/07/2024 – Laptop Repair 17.2 miles 12/07/2024 – Laptop Repair 17.2 miles 18/07/2024 – Notices 32.4 miles 26/07/2024 – Post Office Bunbury (Chq) 6.8 miles 07/08/2024 – Training 23.6 miles 19/09/2024 – Notices 32.4 miles 30/09/2024 – Post Office (Chq) Tarporley 9.4 miles 03/10/2024 – Post Office (VAT) Tarporley 9.4 miles 24/10/2024 – Notices 32.4 miles 21/11/2024 – Notices 32.4 miles	
M Clough	Total miles – 318.80 @ 0.45p per mile	£143.46
Newcastle plumbing	Long cable ties	£23.40
Councillor Bettley-Smith	Sweets	£48.30
Councillor Bettley-Smith	Cable ties	£23.77

(vi) BUDGET EXPENDITURE TO 20TH NOVEMBER 2024 – UNITY TRUST BANK

RESOLVED

That the following Budget Head expenditure to 20th November 2024, be approved:-

Budget Head	Total	Budget Allocated	£ Difference
Salary	£4,296.03	£7,200.00	£2,903.97
Pension	£1,261.12	£1,660.00	£398.88
Admin - Insurance	£898.92	£900.00	£1.08
Admin - Audit Fees	£250.00	£625.00	£375.00
Admin - Venue Hire	£261.50	£450.00	£188.50
Admin - Subscriptions	£313.45	£330.00	£16.55

Admin - Website	£0.00	£135.00	£135.00
Admin - Other	£758.92	£500.00	£258.92
Highways	£600.00	£1,500.00	£900.00
Footpaths	£2,448.00	£2,448.00	£0.00
Grants	£0.00	£1,200.00	£1,200.00
Miscellaneous	£181.41	£270.00	£88.59
Sandy Croft	£0.00	£1,100.00	£1,100.00
Memorial Garden	£1,820.00	£4,000.00	£2,180.00
Neighbourhood Plan	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Chair's Expenses	£0.00	£250.00	£250.00
	£13,089.35	£22,568.00	£9,478.65
* Footpath Budget increased from £1000 to £1,095 due to donation £95.00 on 12/04/24			
* Footpath Budget increased from £1095 to £1,585 due to donation £490.00 on 05/06/24			
* Footpath Budget increased from £1585 to £1,745 due to donation £160.00 on 09/08/2024			
Members approved the allocation of the majority of the VAT Refund in the sum of £1,344, as follows:-			
Insurance Budget increased from £850 to £900 on 26/09/2024			
Audit Fees Budget increased from £40 to £625 on 26/09/2024			
Footpaths Budget increased from £1745 to £2448 on 26/09/2024			

(vii) Explanation of Variances

Members were referred to the Draft Budget-Precept 2025-2026, where additional Budget Heads were being recommended, to address any overspends within Budget Heads.

(viii) Bank Reconciliation as at 20th November 2024

RESOLVED

That the following Bank Reconciliation for Royal Bank of Scotland and Unity Trust Bank as at 20th November 2024, be approved:-

Bank Reconciliation 20th November 2024	
BETLEY BALTERLEY AND WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL	
Financial year ending 31 March 2025	
Prepared by: Muna Clough, Parish Clerk & RFO	
Balance per bank statements as at	£
Current Account UNITY (20500409) - 31st October 2024	£5,286.18
Reserve Account CO-OP (49148300) - 4th October 2024	£29,965.25
Less: any unrepresented cheques/payments	
Current Account UNITY (20500409)	£1,307.15
Reserve Account CO-OP (49148300)	
Add: any unbanked cash - Unity	
Net bank balances as at 20th November 2024	£33,944.28

The net balances reconcile to the Cash Book (receipts and payments account) for the year, as follows	
CASH BOOK	
Opening Balance	
Unity Trust Bank @ 1st April 2024	£420.69
Co-op Bank @ 1st April 2024	£23,099.25
Add: Receipts in the year	
Unity Trust Bank	£2,647.69
Co-op Bank	£20,866.00
Less: Payments in the year	
Unity Trust Bank	£13,089.35
Co-op Bank	
Closing balance per cash book [receipts and payments book] must equal net bank balances above	£33,944.28

**(ix) UNITY TRUST BANK STATEMENTS
RESOLVED**

That the Unity Trust Bank Statements at 30th September 2024 and 31st October 2024, as submitted, be approved.

**(x) CO-OP BANK STATEMENT – 4TH OCTOBER 2024
RESOLVED**

That the Co-op Bank Statements at 4th October 2024, as submitted, be approved. (The Clerk reported that one Statement had not been received, and she had contacted the Bank over this matter, and was expecting a replacement)

14. EXTERNAL AUDIT 2023-2024

Members considered the following documents:-

- (i) Report of the External Auditor;
- (ii) Notice of Conclusion of Audit – Year ending 31 March 2024;
- (iii) Externally Audited AGAR Section 1 – Governance Statement 2023-2024
- (iv) Externally Audited AGAR Section 2 – Accounting Statement 2023-2024

The Clerk provided explanations, in respect of the Report of the External Auditor, as follows:-

- (a) There should be no reason for the Parish Council to answer 'No' to Assertion 2 of the 2024-2025 Annual Governance Statement, as no weaknesses identified in 2023-2024 had been present during 2024-2025.
- (b) The Parish Council answered 'Yes' to the assertion on public rights compliance in the 2023/2024 annual governance statement, because it had complied with the public rights period for that financial year. However, the assertion for the public rights document actually related to the 2022/2023 public rights period, when the Parish Council did not comply, so the Parish Council should have answered 'No'. The year in question was not specified on the document, so the Parish Council considered the 2023-2024 document, rather than the 2022-2023 document.
- (c) The evidence to support the Precept income was the Bank Statement. The Clerk had held a long conversation with the External Auditor over his query, and she had also sent him the

Bank Statement to support her figures. The Bank Statement quoted a precept income of £18,568, so this is what was written on the Accounting Statement. Unbeknown to the Parish Council however, this money also included a Council Tax Support Grant, which meant that the Precept figure (Box 2 on the Accounting Statement should have stated £18,187) and the Total other receipts figure (Box 3 on the Accounting Statement, should have stated £13,728 instead of £13,347).

- (d) The Asset Register had not been updated by the Parish Council for a couple of years, which was why the figures used in the 2023-2024 AGAR were the same as the previous year.

RESOLVED

That the External Auditor Report and associated documents be received and accepted by the Parish Council.

15. LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES PAY AGREEMENT 2024

Members noted that the Local Government Services National Pay Agreement from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, had been agreed, and the increase equated to 2.5% per annum.

16. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2025-2026

Members considered a detailed report of the Clerk (circulated with the Agenda) on the proposed Budget and Precept for 2025-2026.

Members thanked the Clerk for her detailed report.

RESOLVED

- (i) **That the Proposed Budget for 2025-2026, as detailed in the report submitted, be approved.**
- (ii) **That the Proposed Precept for 2025-2026 in the sum of £22,191.00, to be requested from Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, as detailed in the report submitted, be approved.**
- (iii) **That the existing contract for the Internal Audit be continued with Davenport Accountants;**
- (iv) **That the existing contract with Luke Rimmer for Grounds Maintenance work to the Memorial Garden be continued for 2025-2026;**
- (v) **That the existing contract for Payroll Services be continued with Shires for 2025-2026.**

17. BROADBAND

Councillor Berrisford reported that whilst ITS Technology Group had been assigned to the contract, there was no assurance that Betley would be included in the current phase of work.

Councillor Daly added that the current broadband service was having a huge impact on the Primary School, as it was struggling to function with an inadequate broadband connection. Councillor Berrisford agreed to continue to pursue this matter.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

18. FOOTPATHS WORKING PARTY

Councillor Berrisford updated the Parish Council on a large list of works that had been completed, together with a significant number of proposed works for the next financial year.

The Parish Council wished to extend its thanks to the Working Party for its considerable hard work and noted the impressive and significant progress with this project over the course of the year.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

19. AREA MATTERS

There were no area matters for consideration at this meeting.

20. SAKURA CHERRY TREE PROJECT

The Chair reported on an opportunity to participate in this Anglo-Japanese initiative.

RESOLVED

That the Clerk be authorised to bid for five Sakura Cherry Trees, for the following areas within the Parish of Betley:-

One for the village of Wrinehill;

Two for Betley;

One for the village of Balterley;

One for the Ravenshall hamlet.

21. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Members noted that the next Meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee would be held on **Thursday, 23rd January 2025 at 2.00 pm at Betley Village Hall;**

The next Meeting of the Planning Committee would be held on **Thursday, 23rd January 2025 at 2.30 pm (or at the rise of the Finance and Audit Committee) at Betley Village Hall;**

The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council would be held on **Thursday, 27th February 2025 at 7.30 pm at Betley Village Hall.**

22. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair was of the opinion that the following items of business should be considered as a matter of urgency due to time constraints.

23. PLAY BORROW RETURN

Councillor Owen proposed placing a box at the play area next to the Village Hall, and one at Sandy Croft, with some toys, provided by the Parish Council. A local resident had offered to build two boxes.

RESOLVED

(i) That the proposal be approved;

(ii) That Councillor Owen to complete a risk assessment to be considered by the Finance and Audit Committee in January.

24. BULBS

The Chair reported that the Borough Council had given the Parish Council a considerable number of daffodil bulbs that required planting as soon as possible.

Councillor Bettley-Smith agreed to divide these amongst the villages, and Councillor Berrisford would be responsible for planting the bulbs in Wrinehill, Councillor Karling, for Balterley and Councillor Hales would plant the bulbs in Betley.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.