

RICHARDS CASTLE (HEREFORDSHIRE) PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 29th May 2025 at 19.00 at Richards Castle Village Hall

Present

Councillors: Sebastian Bowen (in the Chair item 1), Martin Atkins (in the Chair), Chris Cadman, Peter Enzer, Jayne Bromhall, Clerk Helen Tinson – on behalf of HALC (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils); Ward Councillor D Hurcomb and 4 members of the public.

Cllr Sebastian Bowen opened the meeting and chaired the first agenda item:

1. Election of Chairman:

Cllr Sebastian Bowen and Cllr Martin Atkins were both proposed and seconded for the office of Chair. Cllr Sebastian Bowen excused himself from the meeting and left the room during the vote.

It was RESOLVED: to suspend Standing Orders to allow a vote by paper ballot. Members proceeded to hand their paper votes to the Clerk.

It was RESOLVED: to elect Cllr Martin Atkins as Chairman of Richards Castle (Herefordshire) Parish Council. Cllr Atkins signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office form.

Cllr Sebastian Bowen returned to the room. Cllr Atkins took the Chair.

2. Election of Vice Chair:

Cllr Chris Cadman was proposed and seconded for the office of Vice Chair.

It was unanimously RESOLVED: to elect Cllr Chris Cadman as Vice Chair of Richards Castle (Herefordshire) Parish Council, proposed Cllr Martin Atkins, Seconded Cllr Peter Enzer. Cllr Cadman signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office form.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Bowen for his service as Chair and Cllr Enzer for his service as Vice Chair.

3. To consider any Apologies for Absence:

There were none.

4. To consider any Declarations of Interest and Written Requests for Dispensation and to remind all Members to check their Register of Interests and update if necessary:

There were none.

Members were reminded to check their Register of Interests and update them if necessary.

5. To consider and approve the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting on 27th March 2025:

It was RESOLVED: to approve the minutes as a true record of the meeting. The minutes were duly signed by the Chair.

6. To consider any matters arising from the Annual Parish Meeting on 20th May 2025:

Members noted the following matters raised at the Annual Parish Meeting:

- 6.1. PCSO's will no longer work during the evening, therefore, police attendance at meetings may be reduced moving forwards. It was suggested that a written report is requested if a representative is unable to attend.
- 6.2. The proposed playground at the Village Hall was discussed with both parishioner support and objections noted. It was agreed that a combined village approach would be appropriate, and it was suggested that a representative of both Parish Councils and the Village Hall form a Working Group to support the project. Members were warned of a potential conflict of interest in the event of a planning consultation. It was therefore suggested that only one Parish Councillor represent the Parish Council on the Working Group, and that this Parish Councillor abstain from any future planning discussions. Members also noted the traffic concerns raised and a suggestion was made to form a Road Safety Group.

7. Open Session:

7.1. To receive report from the Ward Councillor:

In addition to the full report presented to the Annual Parish Meeting, Cllr Hurcomb reported:

- 7.1.1. The resurfacing of B4362 has been brought forward to 9th June – 13th June with the Kings Road part to be completed later in July. Cllr Hurcomb has requested that drainage is assessed.
- 7.1.2. Herefordshire Council have published their finances for the year just ended. £500,000 has been assigned to Reserves, which now stands at 4.2% (recommended level is 5%).
- 7.1.3. Cllr Hurcomb has been promoted to Cabinet Member for Local Engagement and Community Resilience.
- 7.1.4. The PRoW Grant Scheme for 2025-26 has been shared with parishes. There is no application deadline this year though works must be delivered by 31st March 2026. Applications can include labour this year.
- 7.1.5. Deadline for applications for the Local Drainage Grant Scheme is September, again for works to be delivered by 31st March 2026. Survey and jetting options have been removed.
- 7.1.6. Local Plan update: a call for sites will be launched shortly.
- 7.1.7. BBLP have reintroduced weedkilling on the public highway for road safety improvements.
- 7.1.8. Ed Bradford has been promoted to Contracts Director. A replacement for the Head of Highways position is currently being recruited. Gemma Dando is Chief Operating Officer.

7.2. To receive representations from Members of the Parish:

- 7.2.1. Cllr Hurcomb was asked about the diversion route for the forthcoming road closure.
- 7.2.2. Cllr Hurcomb was congratulated on his promotion and for progressing road improvements. The improved level of communication was also noted and appreciated.
- 7.2.3. A Councillor expressed concerns about farming land being brought to the market and a view that the Parish Council should engage with the Neighbourhood Development Plan process.
- 7.2.4. A recommendation for a local contractor with a licence to apply weedkiller was shared.
- 7.2.5. A member of the public expressed support for co-ordination between the Shropshire and Herefordshire Policing Teams and asked that this be encouraged by the Parish Council.
- 7.2.6. Concerns were expressed about poor footway access between the village and the Village Hall for those with mobility issues (surface uneven, no drop kerbs). It was noted that the width of the footway is impaired due to an overgrown hedge. It was agreed that Cllr Atkins would contact the Landowner. Cllr Hurcomb undertook an action to share a copy of the recent BBLP Footway Survey.

8. Finance:

8.1. To note the Bank Balance:

It was reported that the bank balance was £18,824.60 at 29/5/2025.

8.2. To consider the end of year 2024-25 Cash Book:

Members noted the 2024-25 Cash Book and that the VAT Reclaim is in progress. There were no queries.

8.3. To consider the 2024-25 Internal Audit Report:

Members were informed that the Internal Audit Report had not yet been concluded and therefore the following agenda items could not be considered.

8.4. To consider and approve the 2024-25 Annual Governance Statement:

It was RESOLVED: to defer this item pending receipt of the Internal Audit Report.

8.5. To consider and approve the 2024-25 Annual Accounting Statement:

It was RESOLVED: to defer this item pending receipt of the Internal Audit Report.

8.6. To confirm eligibility to claim exemption from an external audit and sign the certificate:

It was RESOLVED: to defer this item pending receipt of the Internal Audit Report.

8.7. To confirm the dates of the period for the exercise of public rights:

It was RESOLVED: to defer this item pending receipt of the Internal Audit Report.

8.8. To consider a grant for an Oracy Project at Orleton Primary School:

Members considered a request to provide a grant for an Oracy Project at Orleton Primary School. The scheme aims to improve children's thinking, reasoning and speaking skills and is aimed at children around 6 or 7 years of age. Cllr Bromhall declared experience with Early Years Teaching and expressed an interest in the scheme. The HALC Clerk explained that any grants agreed must comply with Section 137 requirements and members should identify the number of Parishioners who will directly benefit from the grant and decide whether the level of expenditure is reasonable and commensurate with the benefit they will receive.

It was RESOLVED: to undertake further research and defer further discussion to the next meeting.

8.9. Payments:

Members considered the following invoices due for payment:

8.9.1. Autela Payroll Services, £71.64

8.9.2. Zurich Insurance, £264.00

8.9.3. DC Gardening Services, £2,160.00 (to be reclaimed from Drainage Grant)

It was RESOLVED: to approve the invoices for payment. It was agreed that the Member responsible reviews the invoice in advance of the meeting.

8.10. To note receipt of the PRow Grant £244.74 and Lengthsman Grant £882.00: Noted.

8.11. To note receipt of Precept Payment £8,200.00: Noted.

8.12. To note receipt of the PCC Grant for the Speed Indicator Device: Noted.

8.13. To note there is £2,078.61 remaining of PRow grant left to claim: Noted.

9. Communications:

9.1. To consider migration to .gov.uk communications:

9.2. To agree a budget to cover HALC and Eyelid costs:

Members considered both agenda items together. It was reported that costs to migrate the website to a .gov.uk domain and set up new .gov.uk email addresses would be:

£150.00 to Eyelid Productions to migrate the content of the existing site to a new .gov.uk domain

£100.00 annually to Eyelid Productions for annual maintenance (as already paid)

£125.00 every 2 years to HALC for the domain name

£50.00 annually to HALC for hosting fees.

It was RESOLVED: to migrate the PC website and email addresses to a .gov.uk domain.

It was RESOLVED: to request that the new website enable parishioners to upload photographs.

It was RESOLVED: to approve all costs as above.

10. Meeting Dates ... to consider the dates and frequency of meetings for 2025-26:

Members considered moving from bi-monthly meetings to monthly meetings to ensure matters raised are addressed as quickly as possible.

It was RESOLVED: to hold monthly meetings on the 4th Thursday of each month, excluding August and December, pending hall availability.

It was RESOLVED: that Cllr Atkins would book the Village Hall for 25th September 2025, 30th October 2025, 27th November 2025, 29th January 2026, 26th February 2026, 26th March 2026, 30th April 2026, 28th May 2026 (Annual Meeting of the Parish Council), pending hall availability.

11. Lengthsman and Highways:

11.1. To receive report and agree next steps:

Members received a brief report noting difficult road conditions on Woodhouse Lane due to regular use by large farm machinery. There were no actions agreed.

11.2. To appoint the Lengthsman for 2025-26

It was RESOLVED: to appoint DC Gardening Services as Lengthsman for 2025-26.

11.3. To consider the Annual Maintenance Plan for 2025-26

Members considered the Annual Maintenance Plan. Cllr Hurcomb reported that long term flooding concerns have been raised with Herefordshire Council.

It was RESOLVED: to approve the Annual Maintenance Plan for 2025-26. Cllr Enzer was asked to forward the approved document to the HALC Clerk.

11.4. To consider Herefordshire Council Lengthsman Scheme Contract for 2025-26

It was RESOLVED: to sign the Lengthsman Scheme Contract with Herefordshire Council. HALC will submit this to Herefordshire Council upon receipt of the Annual Maintenance Plan.

12. Footpaths: to receive report and agree next steps:

Members received a report from the Parish Footpaths Officer noting a significant learning curve during 2024-25. It was acknowledged that the PRow scheme was underclaimed this year though some small stile repairs have been completed. The Lengthsman was asked if he could support but is currently at capacity. Several volunteers have offered support which has been gratefully received. The HALC Clerk informed Councillors that if they accept the offer of volunteer support, they should adopt a Volunteer Policy, Risk Assessment and maintain a Volunteer Register. The Parish Footpaths Officer attended an informative PRow Briefing held by Herefordshire Council and received a small bag of tools and a First Aid Kit.

13. Correspondence:

The following items of correspondence were noted:

13.1 Cllr Gillian Harding has resigned from the Parish Council due to ongoing commitments.

13.1 HALC Information Corner.

14. Items for the Next Agenda:

14.1. To consider the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2024-25 (June EOM)

14.2. To consider Road Safety Group

14.3. To consider representation on Playground Working Group

14.4. To consider Speed Indicator Devices

14.5. To consider Oracy Project at Orleton Primary School

14.6. To consider Volunteer Policy, Risk Assessment and Register

14.7. To consider the following policies for re/adoption:

14.7.1. Standing Orders

14.7.2. Financial Regulations

14.7.3. Risk Register

14.7.4. Asset Register

14.7.5. Reserves Policy

14.7.6. Grants and Donations Policy

15. To note the date of the next meeting:

15.1. **Monday 23rd June 2025 at 7pm (Extra Ordinary Meeting to consider AGAR) at Richards Castle Village Hall**

15.2. **Thursday 31st July at 7pm at Richards Castle Village Hall**

The meeting closed at 8.28pm

SIGNED

DATE