

Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Annual Parish Meeting

7th May 2025

Commenced: 7.35 pm

Terminated: 8.15 pm

Present: Councillor Bettley-Smith (Chair)
Councillor Daly, Bullock, Watkin, Hales, Karling

There were 15 members of the public in attendance

1. WELCOME

The Chair of Betley Parish Council (styled as Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council), welcomed everyone in attendance.

Councillor Bettley-Smith explained the purpose of this statutory meeting, the intention of which was to enable the Electors and Parish Councillors, to come together once a year, to discuss parish affairs.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Berrisford, Ecclestone, Head, Owen and Speed.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the Parish Council.

4. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair introduced his presentation by extending to former Parish Councillor, Dr Drakakis-Smith the very best of wishes in her recovery from a recent accident, and he thanked her for her service to the Parish Council.

The Chair then presented a review of the activities of the Parish Council over the last 12 months, including:-

- Footpaths initiative – this initiative was going from strength to strength due to the ongoing commitment of Councillors Berrisford, Bullock and Owen;
- Thanks were extended to previous MP Aaron Bell, former County Councillor Paul Northcott and former Borough Councillors Simon and Gary White for their work on behalf of the Parish Council and for individual residents, during their tenures in public office;
- Councillor Helen Arnold was welcomed as the newly elected County Councillor and Mandy Berrisford and Jill Whitmore were welcomed as the new Borough Councillors;
- The Clerk was recognised for her ongoing work to support the Parish Council, which over the last 12 months, were often in challenging circumstances;
- Councillors Daly and Head were recognised for their work on the Village Hall Committee;
- Councillor Bullock received recognition for his ongoing liaison with the police and for administrating the Parish Council's social media account;
- Finally, all Parish Councillors were thanked for their work to the Parish in order to support the residents.

Councillor Bettley-Smith referred to the Parish Council's finances, and stressed that he did not accept and had never accepted a personal allowance from the Parish Council. In relation to the Precept for 2025-2026, it was unfortunate that this had to increase, as a result in the additional payment of Employer's National Insurance, together with general increasing costs. He added that over the last few years, the Parish Council Reserve had reduced, with some Reserves being used to meet expenditure.

He continued to explain that as the cost of a Parish Council by-election could be in the region of £11,000, it was prudent to ensure that a healthy Reserve was available should the need for unexpected expenditure arise.

Councillor Bettley-Smith reported that repairs and maintenance within the Parish had returned to normal, with much work being carried out by Members of the Parish Council on a free of charge basis. Sandy Croft was well used and well cared for and the Memorial Garden was often used to highlight celebrations. The Parish Christmas lights would be switched on at an event to be held on 28th November 2025.

In closing his speech, Councillor Bettley-Smith was disappointed to report that little to no progress had been made regarding flooding and drainage on Checkley Lane and repairs to some footpaths remained outstanding. Road drainage in some areas was an issue, whilst other areas had been improved. The Parish Council and individual Councillors however, would continue to urge the Borough Council and County Council to complete these necessary works.

5. PRESENTATION FROM MEMBERS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor Bullock reported on the Community Speed Watch and encouraged residents to volunteer for this initiative, as volunteer numbers were low.

6. LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

There were no local organisations in attendance.

7. OPEN FORUM

A resident advised that the Parish Council had not acknowledged VE day appropriately.

Councillor Bettley-Smith replied that the Parish Council had acknowledged the sacrifice of those lives that were sadly lost in the war in a number of ways:

- Silhouettes had been placed on the Memorial Garden, in Balterley and in Wrinehill, along with an appropriate flag on the memorial garden flagpole.
- The Chairman of the Parish Council had also attended a Memorial Service on the Memorial Garden earlier in the evening, led by the Rev Tim Watson, at the time the Surrender was signed.
- In recognition of the 80th anniversary of the VE Day celebrations on 8 May 1945 a red, white and blue festoon had been mounted across the trees and shrubs at the back of the Memorial Garden.

Reference was made to the condition of the pavements, and residents were urged to contact the MP, the new County Councillor (Helen Arnold) and Leader of the County Council direct, as the Parish Council was already putting pressure on these organisations and the matter had been well reported via the Staffordshire Highways reporting portal.

A number of residents expressed their concerns over the possibility of development on a parcel of land which was being sold in close proximity to the village. The Chair and Deputy Chair reassured the residents that the Parish was protected by a draft Borough Plan that was advanced in its stages of approval, as it was currently with the Planning Inspectorate. Furthermore, Betley was protected by Conservation Area status and a significant proportion of its land was protected by Greenbelt status. If an application was submitted for development on the land the Parish Council would call a special meeting for the residents.

The former longstanding Clerk to the Parish Council (in position from 2006-2023) reported on the imminent Anniversary of Laudy Croft (10th May). He congratulated the Footpaths Working Group for their improvements and referred to S106 monies in respect of the Bluebell site that were still held by the Borough Council, which should be earmarked for affordable housing. Finally, he reported that the Year 2026, was the 800th Anniversary of the Market Charter of Betley, issued by King Henry III.