

# **RICHARDS CASTLE (HEREFORDSHIRE) PARISH COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2024 at 19.00 at Richards Castle Parish Hall**

### **Present**

Councillors: Sebastian Bowen (in the Chair), Peter Enzer, Gillian Harding and Chris Cadman

### **In attendance**

Clerk Helen Tinson – on behalf of HALC (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils); Ward Councillor D. Hurcomb; 2 Representatives West Mercia Police Safer Roads Partnership; and 0 members of the public.

#### **1. Apologies for absence:**

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Martin Atkins.

#### **2. Declarations of interest & written dispensation requests:**

There were none.

#### **3. Co-option of a Councillor for the Parish:**

Members were informed that a parishioner had applied to be co-opted onto the Parish Council but was not present at the meeting.

**It was RESOLVED:** to defer the co-option to the next meeting.

#### **4. Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024:**

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

#### **5. Open Session:**

##### **5.1. To receive report from the Community Policing Team:**

Members received a report noting the following matters:

**5.1.1.** Operation Night Owl: Policing team out on patrol during the evening and throughout the night looking for any crimes taking place, checking vehicles, checking local areas etc.

**5.1.2.** Operation Rogue Traders: Policing team out on patrol spot checking tradesmen to ensure they are legitimate and speaking with residents. The team often work closely with the Trading Standards team and have had some significant successes. Advice if concerned is to report vehicle registration numbers and description of individuals.

**5.1.3.** Neighbourhood Matters Newsletter: Members were encouraged to sign up to receive this via email.

**5.1.4.** Police Academy Sports Star Events: The Safer Neighbourhood Team are holding two events for 9–11-year-olds: Wigmore School 24<sup>th</sup> July and Halo Leominster Bridge Street on 14<sup>th</sup> August. The events are aimed at building relationships between the young people and the local policing team. The events are free of charge and include a series of games and challenges with refreshments. The Parish Council was asked to promote via the noticeboards.

**5.1.5.** Police Superbowl: The Safer Neighbourhood Team are also holding an evening of bowling at The Grove Golf and Bowl to build a rapport with selected children.

- 5.1.6. A request was made for an update on statistics from the 'We Don't Buy Crime: Smartwater' project last year. It was noted that a different team operate the scheme, but the local team will ask for data and provide a report.

The Policing Team left the meeting at 7.20pm.

## **5.2. To receive report from Ward Councillor:**

The Ward Councillor distributed a written report, as appended (Appendix A). In particular, it was noted:

- 5.2.1. Congratulations to Ellie Chowns MP and thanks to Sir Bill Wiggin for his 23 years of service.
- 5.2.2. Proposed changes to the planning system expected from the new government will be carefully monitored.
- 5.2.3. PC Summit held by Herefordshire Council on the 9<sup>th</sup> July went well. Slides will be distributed in due course.
- 5.2.4. Local Drainage Fund Scheme has been signed off and will be shared with parishes shortly. 80-85 parishes have submitted an Expression of Interest. The deadline for detailed applications will be requested by 30<sup>th</sup> September and will include up to £2000 for ditching works (based on a day rate), opportunity to identify assets, gully cleansing and adhoc drainage schemes.
- 5.2.5. £5million road surfacing scheme has started across the county.
- 5.2.6. Richards Castle Soap Box Derby took place on the last Sunday of June and was understood to have raised £16,000. Thanks were given to the volunteers and organisers of the event.
- 5.2.7. The Ward Councillor also attended the last coffee morning of the season and enjoyed the opportunity to meet with parishioners.
- 5.2.8. The Chairman expressed disappointment that the Locality Steward has not attended a site meeting and asked the Ward Councillor to intervene. It was noted that the Locality Stewards weekly briefing emails often include information of when she is available in the parish. The Acting Clerk was asked to share the briefings with members when they arrive.

## **5.3. To receive representation from members of the Parish:**

There were no members of the parish present. However, Cllr Cadman reported a lamppost on the corner of Orchard Rise and Castle Road that had fallen and subsequently removed. Cllr Hurcomb undertook an action to investigate further and report back.

## **6. Policies:**

### **6.1. Financial Regulations:**

Members considered the new model Financial Regulations supplied by NALC (National Association of Local Councils). Amendments to edit the policy to reflect the practice of the Parish Council were considered.

**It was RESOLVED:** to approve the amendments and adopt the policy. The policy is to be renewed annually.

### **6.2. Risk Register:**

The Chairman requested that the Risk Register is amended to reflect the risk rating pre and post mitigating action. This item was deferred pending the amendments.

### **6.3. Asset Register:**

Members considered the Asset Register at 31.3.24. It was noted that a new laptop and printer had been purchased within the year and a contribution made towards trees planted to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III. The cost of these items were added to the asset register.

**It was RESOLVED:** to approve the Asset Register at 31.3.24.

### **6.4. Reserves Policy:**

Members considered the draft Reserves Policy. Earmarked reserves as detailed on the cash book were noted.

**It was RESOLVED:** to adopt the policy reserving 20% of the precept in the General Fund.

## **7. Finance:**

### **7.1. Financial Report and Q1 Budget Monitoring Report:**

It was reported that the Acting Clerk had not received the current bank statement and therefore the financial report with Q1 budget monitoring was deferred to the next meeting.

### **7.2. 2023/24 End of Year Cash Book:**

Members considered the 2023/24 end of year cash book prepared by HALC. It was noted that the VAT had not been separated to allow a VAT reclaim. Members expressed concerns about the level of expenditure on specific budget headings and that the precept had been overspent by £2500. The Acting Clerk suggested that members consider setting up a Finance Working Group and Employment Working Group.

### **7.3. Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/24:**

**7.3.1. Internal Audit Report:** Members received and noted the Internal Audit Report for 2023/24. The recommendations were noted.

**7.3.2. Annual Governance Statement:** Members considered the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24. It was acknowledged that the answer to Assertion 1 must be 'No', as council had been unable to meet after the preparation of the Internal Audit but before the 30<sup>th</sup> June and therefore was not able to meet the statutory deadline. It was also acknowledged that the answer to Assertion 2 must be 'No', following comments noted in the Internal Audit Report. Members were able to answer 'Yes' to all further assertions.

**It was RESOLVED:** to approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24. The statement was duly signed.

**7.3.3. Annual Accounting Statement:** Members considered the Annual Accounting Statement for 2023/24.

**It was RESOLVED:** to approve the Annual Accounting Statement for 2023/24. The statement was duly signed.

### **7.3.4. Eligibility to claim Exemption from an External Audit:**

Members considered their eligibility to claim exemption from an External Audit.

**It was RESOLVED:** that the accounting statement met the criteria for exemption. The Certificate of Exemption was duly signed.

**7.3.5. Period for the Exercise of Public Rights:** Members considered the dates of the Period for the Exercise of Public Rights. It was noted that the statutory deadlines could not be met, and this would therefore need to be reflected in the 24/25 AGAR.

**It was RESOLVED:** to set the dates from Monday 15<sup>th</sup> July to Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2024.

#### **7.4. Transfer of Balance and Closure of Barclays Account:**

Members considered correspondence from Barclays Bank noting that the bank account has not been used for some time and that the account would be closed if no action is taken. It was reported that a previous resolution had been made to close the account. The letter had been addressed to the ex-ex clerk but it was understood that authority had been transferred to the ex-clerk. However, as the ex-clerk is also no longer in position and able to progress the closure, members considered seeking the support of ex-councillors who may still be registered as a signatory on the account. The balance on the account is very small and it was thought likely relates to the interest paid on the balance transferred to the new account with Unity Trust Bank.

**It was RESOLVED:** to approve two ex-councillors that are still registered signatories to act on behalf of the Parish Council to close the account (Cllr Enzer to progress).

#### **7.5. Payments:**

**It was RESOLVED:** to approve the following invoices for payment:

**7.5.1.** HALC, Clerk Cover June and July, and Internal Audit 23/24, £944.28 including VAT

**7.5.2.** DC Gardening Services, June Lengthsman Duties, £348.00 including VAT

It was noted that the HALC fees for May Clerk Cover has not been received.

**7.5.3.** The Acting Clerk asked members to consider an invoice from Christopher Davies for churchyard strimming that had been missed from the agenda. It was thought that the invoice related to a regular contractor for approved work in the current budget. Members noted that the invoice was unexpected and wished to understand more fully the arrangements in place before authorising the payment.

**It was RESOLVED:** that the Chairman undertake enquiries and report to the next meeting. Payment of the invoice was therefore deferred to the next meeting.

### **8. Lengthsman/Highways:**

**8.1.** Members received a report noting:

**8.1.1.** Balfour Beatty have now cut verges as required for visibility.

**8.1.2.** The Acting Clerk reported that she had been in contact with a contractor licensed to spray weeds who would be happy to assist later in the year.

**8.1.3.** Cllr Enzer confirmed that he would assess the verges on Woodhouse Lane for visibility over the next few days.

#### **8.2. Local Drainage Scheme:**

Members considered possible schemes for inclusion in the local drainage scheme application, including the drain on Woodhouse Lane by the crossroads, and the drain that runs from the crossroads to the village into the stream. It was understood that communication from Herefordshire Council is imminent. Deadline for applications is 30<sup>th</sup> September.

**It was RESOLVED:** to present a proposal for approval at the next meeting (Cllr Enzer to progress)

## **9. Footpaths:**

Members were asked to ratify the submission of the PROW grant funding application that had been agreed via email and submitted between meetings (as approved 4/6/24 minute 9.2). It was noted that the application was for the supply of hardware and a question was raised about the cost of installation. The Acting Clerk reported that the Herefordshire Ramblers may have a volunteer team who might be able to undertake the installation work. Cllr Cadman undertook an action to inquire.

**It was RESOLVED:** to ratify the submission of the application.

Members wished to minute their thanks to Cllr Cadman for his work on the application.

## **10. Employment Matters:**

### **10.1. Update on Recruitment of new Clerk:**

Members were informed that no applications have yet been received.

### **10.2. Allocation of Responsibilities and Associated Costs whilst a new Clerk is being sought:**

Members were asked to consider allocating the responsibility of tasks normally undertaken by the clerk whilst a new clerk is being sought. It was reported that HALC have undertaken additional administrative work that is not covered under the fee for Clerk Meeting Cover.

#### **10.2.1. Administrative Tasks:**

**It was RESOLVED:** that HALC continue to undertake administrative tasks, on a pro rata day rate of £500 plus VAT (7 hours)

#### **10.2.2. Monitor Emails:**

**It was RESOLVED:** that Cllr Peter Enzer take receipt of the laptop and monitor emails, sharing emails with council members as necessary.

#### **10.2.3. Temporary Responsible Financial Officer:**

**It was RESOLVED:** that Cllr Peter Enzer take on the role of the Temporary Responsible Financial Officer and that this will include maintaining the cash book, providing budget monitoring reports, financial reports and bank balances.

**It was RESOLVED:** that HALC would set up the payment of invoices approved earlier in the meeting. The Acting Clerk was asked to clarify the current bank signatories, understood to be Cllrs Bowen, Enzer and Cadman.

#### **10.2.4. Noticeboards:**

**It was RESOLVED:** that Cllr Gillian Harding would undertake to post any required notices on the two parish noticeboards.

## **11. Correspondence:**

**11.1.** Members noted a request for Q2 priorities for the Community Policing Charter (noting previous priorities as Speeding, Rural Crime and County Lines)

**11.2.** Members noted receipt of the Police and Crime Commissioners Town and Parish Council survey

- 11.3. Members noted an email from Herefordshire Council concerning Orleton Parish Council's application to designate a new neighbourhood area. It was noted that this required a response from the Parish Council but had arrived too late for inclusion in the agenda.

**12. Items for the Next Agenda:**

- 12.1. To consider Risk Register 24/25  
12.2. To consider response to Orleton Parish Council's application to designate a new neighbourhood area

**13. Date of the Next Meeting:** Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024, 7pm at Richards Castle Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.

SIGNED ..... DATE .....

**APPENDIX A: WARD COUNCILLOR REPORT (July)**

The last month has certainly been a busy one and I am glad that the election is over and normal service can now resume. On the subject of the election I would like to congratulate our new MP for North Herefordshire and wish her good luck in her new role. I look forward to working with Ellie on the issues that matter for residents locally – particularly funding for our roads. I would also like to thank Sir Bill Wiggin for his 23 years of service to the area and wish him well with his future endeavours. Nationally, change is clearly afoot and I will keep you updated with what this might mean for Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council going forward. It is particularly important that we understand the implications of the Government's planned changes to the planning system and how this might impact our draft Local Plan and our local Neighbourhood Plans which I know many residents put a great deal of effort into. Neighbourhood Development Plans give local communities more control over what happens in their local area and I sincerely hope they do not fall victim to the push for more housing.

At a local level the Council is trying to improve its communication with Parish Councils in recognition of the vital role that they do. As part of this the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jonathan Lester, has restarted the Parish council summits and the first of these was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> July. I was able to attend the summit and gave a presentation on our plans for the Public Realm after our relationship with Balfour Beatty concludes in May 2026. The event started with a "market stall" style layout where attendees could meet council officers and network – I found this very useful and I hope that those who could attend did too. Later on in the evening there were presentations on the County Plan, the Delivery Plan and the budget consultation as well as a chance for questions from those in attendance. It was clear from the questions Herefordshire Council needs to improve the way it communicates on key areas like the Public Realm and Planning and I am pleased to say that the Leader of the Council has committed to driving this forward.

Parish Council Schemes

If you have not yet submitted a PROW Scheme application (the deadline was the 1<sup>st</sup> July) or have identified additional items you wish to include then please do let me know as there may be some flexibility. Equally, if you have not heard back following a submission then please do not worry as the responsible officer has been on annual leave and does not return until 15<sup>th</sup> July. The Local Drainage Fund is due to be launched this month and the scheme will allow for ditching works, mapping of local highway drainage assets, gully cleansing and ad hoc drainage schemes that prevent the flooding of the highway network. The deadline for submissions is going to be the end of September to allow every Parish Council who has expressed an interest to have adequate time to submit a response without having to hold an emergency meeting in August when they might otherwise had had a fallow month.

### Road Investment

I have talked frequently about the upcoming £5 million road resurfacing programme and I am pleased to say that the work is starting this month and will roll through until the end of September/early October. The roads selected have been chosen following a combination of defect reports, Locality Steward reports and professional surveying. The more eagle eyed amongst you may have already spotted the white markings on the roads which denote where resurfacing will occur. The aim is to improve key A & B routes between communities, Market Towns and Hereford. Locally this will see significant improvement to the A4110 (Canon Pyon Road) from Leintwardine through to Hereford with several patches earmarked for Kingsland. Locally we have also benefitted from the patching and surface dressing scheme which has seen work done to the Lugg Green Road between Bicton House and Baskets Gate (outside Oaker Wood Leisure). I continue to push for the inclusion of the B4361 (Patches in Richard's Castle & Eyecote, Luston) and the B4362 (Comberton) into the next phase of Surface Dressing.