

BETLEY, BALTERLEY AND WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL

11th April 2024

Commenced: 7.30 pm

Terminated: 9.35 pm

Present: Councillor Bettley-Smith (Chair)
Councillors Berrisford, Bullock, Drakakis-Smith, Ecclestone, Hales, Head, Owen, Speed, and Watkins

Councillor Paul Northcott, Staffordshire County Council Councillor
PCSO S Forrest (Part)

There were 23 Members of the Public in attendance

326/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daly and Karling

327/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Head declared his interest in Minute 336/24, planning applications 24/00033/LBC and 24/00032/FUL as he knew the applicant personally. Councillor Bettley-Smith declared his interest in Minute 331/24, Rural Runabout as he was the Chair. In his capacity as Chair, Councillor Bettley-Smith updated the Parish Council on this matter, and there were no decisions taken on this matter.

328/24 STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE

PCSO Forrest reported on the following policing matters relating to the Parish Council:-

- A road traffic collision;
- 2 incidents of criminal damage;
- A public order incident;
- Cones for Brassington Street;
- Vandalism to the Bowling Green - there would be no further action from the police.

329/24 MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 11th February 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Councillor Drakakis-Smith objected to Minutes 308/24; 310/24; 311/24; 312/24; 314/24; 316/24; 320/24; 321/24; 322/24. The Clerk explained that the nature of this item was simply to approve the Minutes as a correct record, or not. This was not an item for debate.

330/24 UPDATE ON THE INVESTIGATION BY THE MONITORING OFFICER OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST A MEMBER

- (i) The Chair provided an update and reported that this matter was not yet concluded, therefore Members of the Parish Council were not expected to make any comments, nor could this case be discussed under the Public Forum. He added that a Hearing had been convened, following an investigation by a solicitor appointed by the Monitoring Officer, to look at the allegations against Councillor Drakakis-Smith which would take place on Tuesday 30th April 2024 at 7.00 pm in the Astley Room at Castle House, Barracks Road, Newcastle, Staffordshire. ST5 1BL (entry via the Library). The Hearing would be open to members of the public. After the Hearing the matters relating to the case could be discussed. Those directly involved in the matter had received a notice of the hearing from Mr Geoff Durham, Support Officer at the Borough.

- (ii) The Parish Council considered an invoice received from Newcastle-Under-Lyme in the sum of £23,865 for the Standards Investigation relating to complaints about the conduct of Councillor Drakakis-Smith, and the potential impact of this invoice on the Community.

The Chair reported that he was in contact with the Borough at a senior officer and political level and was looking to have further discussions with the Borough Council on the legal basis of submitting the invoice to the Parish Council, particularly as the invoice was in excess of the Parish Council's reserves. The meeting would not take place until after the Hearing on 30th April 2024. The Chair noted that he could not go beyond what he said until after the Hearing and the consequential meeting.

Members expressed their concerns over the invoice, particularly as the Parish Council had certainly not authorised the expenditure.

331/24 UPDATE ON THE RURAL RUNABOUT (POLICE INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION)

The Clerk reported on a communication received from the Chair to a number of Parish Councils who were members of the Rural Runabout Scheme, on the outcome of the recent Court Case, (R v Ashbolt). Ian Ashbolt MBE, a former Trustee and Chairman, had pleaded guilty on 15 March 2024 to Fraud by Abuse of Position to the amount of £4,200. Sentencing would take place during week commencing 13th May 2024.

332/24 PUBLIC FORUM

The following matters were raised by Members of the Public during a lengthy Public Forum when 23 members of the public attended:-

Mr Jeff Gibson commented on the invoice to the Parish Council detailed in Minute 330/24 (ii) saying that he considered the incidents reported to the Monitoring Officer, to be a 'storm in a tea cup' and considered the cost excessive.

Mr Steven Ball, remarked that he was one of the complainants who had contacted the Monitoring Officer over his concerns regarding the behaviour and conduct of the Councillor under investigation, and added that he certainly didn't consider the matters under investigation to be a storm in a tea cup. Mr Ball also confirmed that he had spoken to the former Monitoring Officer over the possible costs involved. When the Monitoring Officer had indicated that a case of this nature could cost over £20,000, he had clearly stated that he wished the matter to be resolved, at no cost to the Parish Council.

Members of the Public referred to a number of incidents since the last meeting of the Parish Council, where the Councillor under investigation had published a number of comments in her blog and more importantly in a letter, which they felt were particularly disrespectful. These included:- referring to a Member of the Parish Council who had been a tradesman earlier in his career, as the DIY Councillor; referring to the Bonfire Committee as a 'beast'; referring to silhouettes and poppies to commemorate Remembrance Day and those who had died for their country, as 'clutter'.

Concerns were expressed by a Member of the Public over the condition of the horse chestnut tree located at the Village Hall. Councillor Head agreed to discuss this with the Member of Public at a later date, in his capacity as Chair of the Village Hall Committee.

Mr Ball thanked the Clerk for her work to support the Parish during this difficult period.

RESOLVED

That the reports and comments from the members of the public, be noted.

333/24 REPORTS

Reports were received from:-

(i) **The Chair**

The Chair reported on the following:-

- **Flooding issues on Checkley Lane** – the Chair and Councillor Northcott updated the Parish Council on the significant work and correspondence in which they had been involved regarding this matter;
- **Smoke control objections** – the objections of the Parish Council to the proposals had been submitted to the Borough Council and were being considered during the public consultation, which had now closed;
- **Land at Doddlespool** – Despite a recent prosecution of Mark Oulton for various offences, further investigations were taking place due to alleged additional breaches;
- **The Annual Parish Meeting** – this would now be held on Wednesday, 22nd May 2024 at 7.30 pm

(ii) **The Vice Chair**

There were no reports for consideration by the Vice Chair

(iii) **The Clerk**

- **HS2** – Members noted that the Clerk had forwarded to them correspondence on this matter on 18th March 2024.
- **D-Day Flag** – Members were asked to approve the purchase of a 5' x 3' flag, at a cost of £28.80 including vat post and packaging. This would be flown during the month of June.

RESOLVED

That approval be given for Councillor Owen to purchase a 5'x3' flag, as detailed above.

- **Speed of Tractors** – correspondence had been received from a Member of the Public relating to the speed of tractors, and the ability to stop quickly in an emergency. The Member of the Public had asked the Parish Council to approach the local farmers and contractors, to ask them to limit their speed to 15 mph. Members discussed this matter, but as the legal limit was 30 mph, the Parish Council did not have any jurisdiction to make this request.

(iv) **County Councillor and Borough Councillors**

Councillor Paul Northcott reported on the following:-

- Changes to the Cabinet at Staffordshire County Council;
- Pothole repairs should now be commencing and an improvement should be seen by the end of the month;
- The layby at the frontage of Malt Kiln Farm had been seeded and the ability for cars to park had been removed. This work had been completed by the County Council and not the owner of Malt Kiln Farm. Members were disappointed that the Parish Council had not been consulted in this action, as it significantly impacted on the safe parking of post office vehicles and had resulted in the Parish Council spending a significant amount of time on the issue dealing with public enquiries and requesting information from the County Council;
- A meeting had been held with the new portfolio holder and support portfolio holder, regarding the complex issues causing the flooding on Checkley Lane;
- 400 new apprenticeship placements were to be made available across Staffordshire;
- An investment into 6 new children's homes would be made in the County;
- Household recycling centres had been reintroduced in the County, with positive feedback;
- The County had secured funding of £286m for transport projects, to be made available over a 7 year period, commencing 2025-2026;
- Nominations were being accepted for foster carer awards;

- 9 out of 10 parents in the County had received their first choice of primary school and 90.8% of secondary applicants had received their first choice. 99% of pupils had been allocated one of their top three schools of preference;
- The Staffordshire Annual Events would be held on 1st May 2024;
- Last year's selling of assets had raised £30m extra to tackle defects in the road (£15m to be spent this year and £15m to be spent next year).

(v) Representatives on Outside Bodies

On behalf of the Village Hall Committee, Councillor Head reported that the Trustees were very upset over the damage to the horse chestnut tree caused by United Utilities. They were hopeful however, that its condition might improve, after taking advice from an arboriculturist and completing the works suggested. A Wine Tasting Event would be held on 22nd June, and the details would be circulated in the parish magazine.

Councillor Hales represented the Parish Council at a recent Betley Trust meeting, and reported that the Trust was in good order.

334/24 MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE

The Chair reported on the timetable of the mobile library and added that it made numerous stops on Church Lane on the following dates, between 9.20 am and 10.00 am:-

26th April 2024;
 10th and 24th May 2024;
 7th and 21st June 2024;
 5th and 19th July;
 2nd, 16th and 30th August 2024;
 13th and 27th September 2024;
 11th and 25th October 2024;
 8th and 22nd November 2024;
 6th and 20th December 2024;
 3rd, 17th and 31st January 2025;
 14th and 28th February 2025;
 14th and 28th March 2025.

Councillor Drakakis-Smith wished to raise further items regarding this Service and agreed to draft a report for consideration at a future meeting.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

335/24 HS2 PHASE 2A HIGHWAYS SUBGROUP

Consideration was given to a report from Councillor Berrisford.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

336/24 PLANNING MATTERS

The Parish Council considered the following planning matters:

(i) New Planning Application/s

- **Application Ref No: 24/00190/FUL** Summer House New Road Winehill Crewe Cheshire CW3 9BY. Proposed change of use of outbuilding building within curtilage of Listed Building from Garage, to self-contained Holiday Let Unit, including associated external works. The applicant attended the meeting and offered answers to any questions.

RESOLVED

That no objections be raised by the Parish Council, to this proposal.

- **Application Ref No: 24/00191/LBC** Proposed change of use of outbuilding building within curtilage of Listed Building from Garage, to self-contained Holiday Let Unit, including associated external works. | Summer House New Road Wrinehill Crewe Cheshire CW3 9BY
- (ii) **Ongoing Planning Applications (including appeals/enforcement issues, decided and other planning matters)**
- **Application Number 17/00186/207C2 – Land at Doddlespool, Betley.** Members to note the decision of the Planning Committee as follows (link [Minutes Template \(newcastle-staffs.gov.uk\)](#)):
Resolved: (i) That the information be received
(ii) That a report be brought back to Committee in two months' time.

RESOLVED

That the ongoing investigations by agencies, be noted.

- **Application Ref Nos: 24/00033/LBC and 24/00032/FUL Betley Court Main Road Betley Crewe Cheshire.** Proposal - The works relate solely to the reinstatement of the Ground Floor Yewside apartment and alterations to the already approved layout to the Fletcher House apartment. There was already planning permission and listed building consent for works to the Fletcher House apartment but the proposed layout of the apartment has now been slightly revised and so the revisions are included here. Applications permitted.
- **Application Ref No: 23/00751/COU** Proposal: Change of use from an agricultural grassland to a dog exercise pen. Location: Land At Fields Farm Church Lane Betley. The Parish Council submitted its comments relating to this application. Application approved
- **Application Ref No: 23/00519/FUL** Proposal: Site Of Former Wrinehill Garage Main Road Betley. Variation of condition 1 of planning permission 23/00519/FUL to substitute the approved site layout Drg No. 696-SL-01 with Drg. 2320.00.002 to amend the site layout due to existing site constraints. Application permitted.
- **Application Ref No: 24/00027/FUL** Site of Former Wrinehill Garage Main Road Betley Crewe Cheshire CW3 9BZ. Proposal - Variation of condition 1 of planning permission 19/00875/FUL to substitute the approved site layout Drg No. 696-SL-01 with Drg. 2320.00.002 to amend the site layout due to existing site constraints. Application permitted.

337/24 KEELE UNIVERSITY – VOLUNTEER DAYS

The Chair reported that to mark the 75th Anniversary, there would be 750 volunteer days available to the community this year.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and the Clerk explore matters relating to the volunteer days with Keele University.

338/24 SCOUTS/CUBS ACTIVITIES

Members were asked to consider a request from the Scouts/Cubs for suitable activities within the Parish in which they could become involved.

RESOLVED

The the report be deferred to a future meeting of the Parish Council.

339/24 BROADBAND FACILITIES IN THE PARISH

The Chair reported that Councillor Gary White had raised matters relating to broadband at Borough level. He added that he was still looking into this matter and had raised the issues experienced by the Parish.

RESOLVED

That this matter be deferred to next meeting.

340/24 FOOTPATHS WORKING PARTY

Councillors Hales and Ecclestone declared their interests in this item. They did not participate in the discussion or voting thereon.

The Parish Council received a report from the Members of the Footpaths Working Party. Councillor Berrisford sought approval for the design of an information sign for the Common Lane Circular Route, and Members approved the design circulated.

RESOLVED

- (i) That approval be given to the Working Group drawing up plans to develop a project for the replacement of stiles with gates at a total cost of £2,000 (£1,000 from reserves), with an alternative of a £5,000 (£2,500 from reserves) project;**
- (ii) That the Parish Council supports Staffordshire County Council in its bid for funding.**

341/24 REPORT OF ROADS IN WRINEHILL

Members considered a report by Councillor Drakakis-Smith.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

342/24 REPORT ON RURAL TRANSPORT

Members considered a report by Councillor Drakakis-Smith.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Drakakis-Smith to provide an updated report together with grant information for consideration at a future meeting.

343/24 BUDGET AND FINANCE 2023-2024

The Clerk reported on the following matters:-

- (i) An application for financial assistance had been received from a resident, relating to the works that he had carried out to reduce flooding. The Parish Council regretted that this work however, did not meet the criteria of the fund and was unable to assist on this occasion. In the meantime, the Members recognised and thanked the applicant for his significant contribution to the community.**
- (ii) Unity Trust Bank**
RESOLVED
That the sum of £2000 be transferred from the Co-op Bank to the Unity Trust Bank (two cheques in the sum of £1000 each).
- (iii) PAYMENT OF INVOICES AND REIMBURSEMENTS**
The Clerk circulated the invoices for payment for Members to examine, if they wished to do so.

RESOLVED

That the invoices/payments detailed overleaf be approved:-

M Clough	March 2024 Salary	£420.09
HMRC	March 2024 PAYE	£111.20
Staffordshire Pension	March 2024 Pension	£161.18
M Clough	April 2024 Salary	£420.29
HMRC	April 2024 PAYE	£111.00
Staffordshire Pension	April 2024 Pension	£155.62
Luke Rimmer	Preparation for Memorial Garden for Easter	£130.00
Shires Payroll	Payroll and Pension fees 06th November 2023 - 05th April 2024 - Month(s) 08 to 12 of tax year 2023/24	£151.80
SPCA	Good Councillor Guide	£14.49
Davenport Accountants	Internal Audit	£250.00

**(iv) Budget Expenditure for the 2023-2024 Financial Year
RESOLVED**

That the Budget Expenditure for the 2023-2024 Financial Year, detailed in the report submitted, be received.

(v) Bank Statements (dated 4th March and 31st March 2024)

The Chair reported that all transactions were now being made from the Unity Trust Bank, which enabled 24 hour access to view balances by the signatories, there was no longer a need to sign the bank statements. The balance in the Co-op Reserves at 31st March 2024 was £23,099.25.

RESOLVED

That the procedure be approved.

(vi) Bank Reconciliation as at 31st March 2024

RESOLVED

That the Bank Reconciliation circulated with the report, as at 31st March 2024, be received.

(v) Shires Accountants

RESOLVED

That Shires Accountants be engaged as the Parish Council's payroll provider for the 2024-2024 financial year.

344/24 AREA MATTERS

RESOLVED

That this matter be deferred to the next meeting.

345/24 REMEMBRANCE ARRANGEMENTS (FIGURES AND POPPIES) FOR 2024

RESOLVED

That this matter be deferred to the next meeting.

346/24 D-DAY CELEBRATIONS

This matter was considered under Minute 333/24 (iii).

347/24 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted the following arrangements for the next meetings:-

Annual Parish Meeting – Wednesday, 22nd May 2024 at 7.30 pm

Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council – Thursday, 30th May 2024 at 7.30 pm

348/24 URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no items of Council Business that required consideration as a matter of urgency.