

West Knoyle Parish Council

Parish Clerk – Ms H Hunt

Minutes of the West Knoyle Annual Parish Meeting, on Tuesday, 12th May 2026 in West Knoyle Village Hall.

Present

Chair: Cllr Paul Yates (PY)
Councillors: Cllr Paul Vita (PV), Cllr Tony Davis (TD),
Cllr Matthew Dawson (MD)
Wiltshire Councillor: George Jeans (GJ)
Clerk: Harri Hunt (HH)
Apologies: Cllr Louise Davis (LD)
Members of Public: Corinne Leonard (CL), Wendy Croft (WC), Janet Howard (JH).

1. Meeting convened

The Chairman Cllr Paul Yates opened the meeting at 7.13pm.

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Cllr Louise Davis who had a clashing appointment and who would be arriving later.

2. Minutes.

Paul Yates proposed that the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th May 2025 be recommended for approval as a correct record of proceedings. Proposal seconded by Paul Vita and carried.

3. Report from the Chairman of the Parish Council

- a) The long awaited road repair was carried out (from The Street, west to the parish boundary and beyond towards Gillingham). Followed by water main repair on the same stretch, but all in all an improvement for West Knoyle and all who use the road.
- b) Sofya Samokhina resigned her post as Clerk and was replaced by Harri Hunt in November 2025.
- c) Alex Davies resigned as Councillor following her move out of the parish, and was replaced by Matthew Dawson in 2026.
- d) Another successful West Knoyle Christmas Lights competition was held and the winners confirmed as: 1st. Richard and Paula Hull, 6 Oderne, 2nd. Janet Howard, Dhuli Fou (who also gave credit to Adam Filleau), 3rd. Phil and Shirley Singer, 2 Stoney Bridge
- e) Planning Permissions - both (at Bush Farm and Land North of The Street) as yet to be decided.
- f) A new Parish Council website has been created and a successful First Aid / Defibrillator Training evening was held at the Village Hall.
- g) The Play Area was repaired in 2025 and cleaned (thanks to George & Louise Davis and Martin Hasket) in 2026. Enhancements to the Play Area / Land Adjacent are to be discussed and decided in the coming months, after gathering information about what villagers would like to see there.

3. Statement of the Parish Council Accounts for the Year Ended 31.3.26 - report from the Clerk of the Parish Council

- a) The Year-End Balance on 31st March 2026 was £18,774.46.90. Total receipts for the year amounted to £5,808.65 with expenditure of £5,407.09 resulting in surplus of £401.56.
- b) The Receipts for the year consisted of £5,670.00 for Precept, and accumulated interest on the Business account of £138.65.
- c) VAT reclaims for the previous year (2024/25) and 2025/26 have been submitted, but as 2024/25 was not submitted in 2025, this should be paid alongside 2025/26.
- d) WKPC still has the CIL money (£3,344.65) to invest before 2028.
- e) Expenses in comparison to the previous year:

- Subscriptions, Insurance and Administration - £731.01; up ~£300 but £250 of this was Wiltshire Council Election Cost.
- Clerk's salary - £1,710.50; up ~£20
- Grass cutting in the playing field - £560; up £80
- Grants and donations - £679.18; down ~£1
- Less routine expenditure this year included playground repairs and a new defibrillator battery - £1,512.00 total.

f) In accordance with regulations, the electorate will be able to inspect the accounts from 3 June to 14 July and the forms will be posted on the Parish Council website before 3 June. The Parish Council qualifies as a smaller authority as both its gross income and/or expenditure did not exceed £25,000. This means that we can certify as Exempt for a limited assurance review under Section 9 of the Local Audit Regulation 2015.

The Chairman and Clerk responded to a question from Janet Howard: "Does the Parish Council donate to Mere Matters magazine, and if so how much?"

It was confirmed that the WKPC donation to Mere Matters magazine was £80 in 2025. JH requested more content (including a report on this APM) from West Knoyle be sent to the Editor for inclusion, as since the removal of "and so does West Knoyle" from the magazine's title she felt the original purpose of the magazine (as a parish magazine for the Mere Benefice, ie. St Michael's Church in Mere and St Mary the Virgin in West Knoyle) was being overlooked by the Editor.

The Clerk reported that a piece for inclusion had been sent to the Editor about the cleaning of the West Knoyle playground.

Cllrs PY, PV and Cllr GJ discussed that perhaps the magazine had sought to widen its appeal, whether other parishes contribute financially, and concluded that ongoing donations would be discussed in the usual manner at the WKPC meeting (to follow the APM).

4. Report from George Jeans, Wiltshire Councillor.

George Jeans provided a summary of his wide-ranging update on local issues, council decisions, community initiatives, and future plans affecting the Mere Division (Mere, Kilmington, Stourton, West Knoyle, and Zeals), alongside broader developments across Wiltshire. He highlighted ongoing pressures on services, infrastructure challenges, and significant policy changes expected over the coming years.

Roads, Transport & Infrastructure

Road conditions remain a major concern across the division, with several areas in poor repair. While repairs have been carried out (e.g. West Knoyle), issues persist, partly due to utility works undoing improvements. Encouragingly:

- Over **2,700 potholes** have been repaired this year.
- An additional **£5 million** is being invested in preventative maintenance.
- Wiltshire has received a "**green**" **national rating** for road maintenance, indicating relatively strong performance.

There are also ongoing concerns about **HGV traffic**, particularly around Maiden Bradley and key junctions like Coombe Barn. Plans are underway to explore enforcement of weight restrictions.

Speed management is progressing:

- 30mph limits introduced in places like Mere and Kilmington.
- New housing developments are expected to adopt **20mph limits**.

Public transport has seen a major shift with the launch of **Wiltshire Connect**, an on-demand bus service replacing several traditional routes. While innovative and flexible, it has caused some confusion and teething issues.

Flooding remains a recurring issue in parts of the area. Residents are increasingly expected to take **personal responsibility** for flood protection (e.g. sandbags), as council resources prioritise key infrastructure.

Broadband, Mobile & Digital Connectivity

Digital connectivity remains inconsistent:

- **Mobile signal “not-spots”** (especially in Kilmington) limit access to modern services like smart energy tariffs.
- Fibre broadband rollout has **stalled in several areas** due to funding issues and competition between providers.
- Some progress is expected through government-backed schemes (e.g. Project Gigabit), with **Kilmington scheduled for 2026 rollout**.

However, uncertainty remains, and residents are encouraged to register interest to improve chances of future investment.

Cost of Living & Financial Support

Wiltshire Council continues to provide support through the **Household Support Fund**, with:

- **£4.8 million allocated** for 2025–2026 (a 12% reduction from the previous year).
- Support targeted at vulnerable groups, including families, pensioners, and disabled residents.

Assistance includes:

- Food and energy vouchers
- Help with housing costs
- Essential household items (e.g. furniture, white goods)

Notably, over **1,200 residents aged 80+** received £300 energy payments due to gaps in national winter fuel support.

Additional cost-saving initiatives include:

- **Thermal imaging cameras** available from libraries to help identify heat loss.
- Advice services and energy efficiency support.

Public Services & Community Safety

Several key public services are under pressure:

Fire Services

- The proposed closure of Mere Fire Station is a major concern - the last few days of the campaign to save it would include evenings at the Fire Station to give people information about how to respond to the survey.
- A public consultation is ongoing, with strong local opposition.
- Concerns focus on increased emergency response times, especially given proximity to the A303.

Policing

- Local policing presence has reduced, with response teams moved to Trowbridge.
- This has led to concerns about **longer emergency response times**.
- A national restructuring of policing is being considered.

Healthcare (Dentistry)

- NHS dental access is declining.
- The Mere dental practice will largely stop treating NHS adults, reflecting a wider national trend.

Social Support

- **Carer Support Wiltshire is closing** due to funding issues, though services will transfer to another provider.
- A new **Dementia Awareness Group** is being developed locally.

Council Governance & Finance

Following the 2025 elections:

- No party has overall control.
- A Liberal Democrat minority administration now leads the council.

Key financial decisions:

- **£567 million budget** approved for 2026/27.
- Council tax increased by **4.99%** (including adult social care levy).
- Average Band D total council tax: ~£2,571/year.

Other notable decisions:

- Free disabled parking reinstated.
- Continued recruitment drive for foster carers.
- Concerns raised about low parish council election participation and voter ID awareness.

Planning, Housing & Development

Planning policy is undergoing major disruption:

- The current Local Plan has effectively been rejected after years of work.
- A new plan may not be adopted until **2029**.
- This delay increases the risk of **unplanned/speculative development**.

Housing pressure is significant:

- Around **50,000 new homes** required by ~2042.

There are also moves toward **regional (Wessex) planning structures**, reversing previous decentralisation.

Environment, Waste & Sustainability

Environmental policy is evolving in response to national legislation:

- By **2027**, households must separate:
 - Food waste
 - Flexible plastics
- Wiltshire plans to adopt a **three-stream recycling system**.

Other initiatives:

- Investment in electric vehicles and vehicle-to-grid charging.
- Air quality improvements required in new developments.
- Strong community involvement in:
 - Litter picking (thousands of bags collected)
 - Environmental and biodiversity projects

Community Initiatives & Local Life

There is strong emphasis on community engagement:

- Over **143,000 people benefited** from council-funded projects.
- Youth programmes (FUEL) provided activities and meals to over 1,700 children.
- Continued promotion of fostering opportunities.

Health and wellbeing initiatives include:

- Smoking reduction targets (aim to halve numbers by 2030)
- Mental health campaigns (e.g. Blue Monday support)
- Encouragement to participate in national campaigns like **Stoptober**

Tourism and culture are also supported through:

- Local festivals and events
- Participation in national tourism partnerships

Key Ongoing Issues

Several recurring concerns stand out:

- Dog fouling complaints increasing
- Flood risks and limited council support
- Connectivity issues (mobile and broadband)
- Pressure on emergency services
- Rising costs and reduced funding

Positive Developments

Despite challenges, there are notable positives:

- High local election turnout (above Wiltshire average)
- National recognition for road maintenance performance

- Community awards (MBE/BEM recipients)
- Strong volunteer participation across the area
- Investment in local projects and infrastructure

Overall Conclusion

The report reflects a period of **transition and pressure**:

- Public services face financial constraints and restructuring
- Infrastructure is improving but still uneven
- Communities are increasingly expected to **take greater responsibility**
- Significant **policy changes** (planning, waste, transport) are on the horizon

At the same time, there is clear evidence of **strong community engagement**, local resilience, and ongoing investment in key services and initiatives.

5. Report from Corinne Leonard, West Knoyle Village Hall and Social Club.

At the Social Club's AGM last year, we were fortunate in welcoming two members on to the Committee which helps spread the workload, particularly on manning the bar. And so, we returned to Wednesday evening opening for the months of June to September, in addition to our usual Friday evening and Sunday lunchtime. We are stocking more zero-alcohol beer and cider which is proving very popular. Our membership numbers for 2025/6 went down slightly to 59 and the hall has been hired out 5 times.

In March we held a first aid defibrillator training session '3 ways to save a life' which was given by St John Ambulance and thanks go to Harri for organising. As there was no charge, the club made a donation of £75 to St John Ambulance, which the Parish Council matched. The evening was open to all villagers and we had 18 attendees; all of whom felt it was a worthwhile evening.

We now have membership to Community First who provide information and guidance applicable to village halls, such as Safeguarding and Data Protection and we now have the appropriate policies for these in place.

We had some 36 small electrical items PAT tested and this testing will be continued on a regular basis.

On the maintenance side we have wood stained the garage and gates and painted the smoking shelter as well as the usual general tidy up and thanks go to the committee members who helped with these tasks.

Last month Andre returned to complete the job of repointing the gable end, the cost of which will show in the 2026/27 accounts. We are always mindful of the condition of this Victorian building and will continue to maintain and keep it in good repair as required.

Lloyd's bank closed its Gillingham branch in January and the online banking facility is working well, with cash being deposited via the Post Office. Our overall profit for the year was just over £2,100 and we continue to maintain a healthy bank balance, half of which is attracting interest in a Savings Account, which helps to offset the bank charges we now have.

Once again, the Social Club have enjoyed another year of our usual events, ten in all, including a Movie Night. All events were well supported and successful thanks to the efforts of our hard-working Committee.

Corinne Leonard

Chair, West Knoyle Management Committee

May 2026

6. Open Forum

Cllr GJ highlighted that other banks eg Zempler might be worth considering for small organisations and charities in the light of increasing charges from the bigger banks.

The Chairman Cllr Paul Yates closed the meeting at 7.53pm.