

LITTLE WOLFORD PARISH MEETING

MINUTES OF THE PARISH ANNUAL MEETING

HELD ON 22 APRIL 2015 IN LITTLE WOLFORD VILLAGE HALL

Present: David Farman (DF, in the Chair), Diz Farm an (DiF), Gill Cotter (GC), Beryl Braithwaite (BB), Jim Heritage (JH), Chris Heritage (ChH), Charles Hobbs (CH), Michael Revere (MR), Jane Revere (JR), Bob Large (RL), Shirley Large (SL), Arran O'Dell (AO).
By Invitation: Councillor Stephen Gray (SG), Councillor Chris Saint (CS).

The meeting **opened** at 7.30pm with a welcome to all from the Chairman.

1. Apologies: Colin & Gill Ablewhite, Chris Cond, Jane Hobbs, Roz & Henry Warriner (HW).

2. Election of Chairman for 2015/16:

David Farman was proposed by CH and seconded by JR; all were in favour. DF thanked all present for their confidence in him, and was happy to serve a further year; he suggested that, since this would be his fifth year as Chairman, it might be time for a change next year.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting:

The draft minutes of the meeting of 18 November 2014 were approved (proposed JR, seconded BB) and signed by the Chairman as a true record of that meeting.

Matters arising:

- 1. Road Safety:** The local policing team has advised that they deal only with enforcing 30 and 40mph speed limits, so cannot help with speeding on the A3400. One of the team has promised a paper advising parish councils how to request speed limit enforcement, but this has yet to materialise.
- 2. Chairman's Report:** It was the Audit Commission, rather than the National Audit Office, that has been abolished. Although a new framework has been established for local public audit, the current audit arrangements will continue until the existing contract with Grant Thornton expires, which will be with the audit for the financial year 2017/18.
- 3. Website:** A website has now become a mandatory requirement (see item 4.4, below).
- 4. Broadband:** DF had investigated alternative approaches to the provision of higher-speed broadband for Little Wolford; he had circulated details of the current status of the CSW Broadband upgrade programme as it affects the parish, and of the extension of the Broadband Connection Voucher Scheme to Warwickshire. AO suggested that it might be possible, by agreement with a resident of Great Wolford, to extend that parish's Superfast Broadband provision to Little Wolford via a microwave link, perhaps utilising the church spire. DiF undertook to take this to the Parochial Church Council.

4. Chairman's Report

1. Planning:

- The Hollows: Planning consent not required to fell trees, as not in conservation area.
- Wolford Field Barns: Application to re-site the existing vehicular access and previously approved driveway at Wolford Fields Barns: no comment to be submitted.
- Pepperwell Lodge: Application to remove an agricultural tie. A request having been received for this application to be discussed as a separate agenda item, discussion was deferred (see item 10.1, below).

2. **Highways:**

- Various potholes reported to County Highways: some of these have been patched, others still await repair.
- GC raised the issue of the dip in A 3400 beyond Mitford Bridge, but this lies beyond the parish boundary; CS will take back to Birmingham Parish Council.
- Verges within the 30mph speed restricted part of Little Wolford Road are not being cut as previously agreed: Matt Austin (SDC) has inspected the verges and will ensure that the contractor's maps are updated to reflect the introduction of the speed restriction.

3. **Transparency Code:**

The government has repealed the external audit requirement for "smaller authorities" and replaced it, with effect from 1 April 2015, with a "Transparency Code". This requires "smaller authorities" to publish, within specified timescales, a wide range of data, including details of all expenditure over £100 and minutes of all meetings, "at a website which is publicly accessible free of charge".

Some County and District Councils have offered to make pages available for this purpose at their own websites: neither CS nor SG was aware that their respective authority was intending to do this, but undertook to check; it seems likely that the Parish Meeting will need to continue to fund its own website.

5. **(County) Councillor Chris Saint:**

CS emphasised the importance of all tiers of local government working together in order to make best use of available funds. Local authorities in Birmingham and the Black Country were keen to create a West Midlands combined authority, along the lines of the "northern powerhouse" authorities proposed for Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, although CS feared that the consortium might also seek to "snatch" Coventry, to the detriment of its residents; (Coventry City and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Councils have since declared an interest in joining the proposed combined authority).

The County Council component of Council Tax has risen by 2%, as has the Police component; some cost saving were being achieved, in areas such as Fire & Rescue, by pooling resources with Worcestershire and Herefordshire, and possible areas of cooperation with Oxfordshire were being investigated.

In response to questions from the floor, CS advised that, although West Midlands Ambulance Service cooperated with counterparts in adjoining areas, it remained a bit of a mystery as to how ambulances were assigned to emergency calls in the local area, which is served by acute hospital Trusts in three different counties. Although some attendees reported good response times, DiF reported an unacceptable 50-minute wait for a paramedic when in acute respiratory failure, and emphasised the vital role of the volunteer First Responders within our community.

6. **(District) Councillor Stephen Gray:**

SG reported that SDC had invested £5m in the ongoing refurbishment of Stratford Leisure Centre. SDC was within the top ten authorities in the country for recycling, with a rate of 60%. SDC was looking to save money on cutting verges and by looking at sharing services with Cherwell DC. A reduction in the number of councillors from 53 to 36 would also save £63k in expenses. This year would, once again, see no increase in the District Council component of Council Tax.

SDC's Core Strategy (the lack of which has been responsible for a number of large housing developments being approved against council wishes on appeal to the Planning Inspectorate) had finally been submitted for inspection, but had been deemed to require further work in the areas of housing requirements and economic growth; it is expected to be resubmitted next year (by which time further large developments can be expected to be approved by the Inspectorate).

DiF sought clarification regarding local press reports that the document originally submitted for inspection had contained significant errors of fact: CS played down such criticism, which he felt amounted to misrepresentation and a personal vendetta on the part of one reporter.

SG was thanked for his attendance and contribution, and left the meeting at 8.15pm.

BB asked CS about the possibility of a roundabout at the Portobello crossroads, a notorious local accident blackspot at which a fatal accident had recently occurred. CS advised that WCC Safety Officers consider the junction signage to be “tired” and will improve this using emergency funds; any decision on a roundabout would need to await a coroner’s report into the recent fatal accident. This junction was 23rd on WCC’s priority list, whereas there is currently funding available only for the top three. DF expressed interest in how relative priorities were assessed, and whether they were subject to regular review; CS advised that he had asked for a road safety review of the Warwickshire stretch of the A429 between Stretton-on-Fosse and Ettington, to which he would present the views of the meeting.

CS was thanked for his attendance and contribution and left the meeting at 8.25pm.

7. Expenditure incurred under delegated powers:

None had been incurred since the previous meeting. The following expenditure was anticipated before the next meeting:

- WALC membership renewal (£10);
- Registration renewal of the littlewolford.org.uk internet domain name for the next two years (approx £8);
- Setting up web hosting in the Parish Meeting’s own name (approx £27 for the first year).

8. Accounts and Annual Return

1. The Chairman, as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), tabled the summary accounts for the year ended 31 March 2015, following internal audit by GC. CH proposed, BB seconded and all present **agreed** that the accounts be approved and adopted. Electors will now be given 30 days in which to exercise their right to inspect the accounts, before submission to external auditors as part of the Annual Return.
2. The RFO presented a risk assessment, as required by the Annual Return. The risks identified were the same as those reported last year, management of which relies upon the individual reputations of the RFO and authorised cheque signatories and the vigilance of our Internal Auditor; the Parish Meeting has previously agreed that these risks are insufficient to warrant insurance.
3. The RFO read out the Governance Statement which forms part of the Annual Return. JR proposed, BB seconded and all present **agreed** that the Governance Statement be approved.

9. Issues of local importance

The Chairman reminded the meeting that power to parts of the village would be interrupted the following day to facilitate cutting of trees in the vicinity of power lines. A 5-minute interruption at around 7.30am would allow the substitution of a temporary supply from a diesel generator; normal service would be restored following a further 5-minute interruption at around 3.30pm.

10. Matters raised by Electors of the Parish

1. Application for a Lawful Development Certificate in relation to Pepperwell Lodge

The Chairman outlined the issues involved and invited comment. The property owner sought removal of an agricultural tie on the grounds that the property had been occupied continuously in breach of that restriction for a period of more than 10 years; provided it was content that this was indeed the case, SDC was legally obliged to remove the tie by granting a Legal Development Certificate. The Chairman therefore recommended that the meeting

offer no comment on the application. This was proposed by CH, seconded by MR and **agreed** by all present.

2. **Memorial Bench on the Village Green**

The bench had been erected in 2005 by Jenny Matthews and family in memory of her late husband, but had fallen into disrepair. JR felt the bench to be unsafe, and had approached The Wolfords Village Fund, which had offered a contribution of £90 towards its replacement, which JR believed would cost around £240.

Whilst noting that the Parish Meeting might also be able to make a contribution (under LGA Section 137) towards the cost of replacing the bench, the Chairman raised three issues:

- (i) the bench, together with its memorial plaque, remained the property of the family, whose permission would be required for its removal or replacement;
- (ii) replacement would also require the consent of SDC, which owns the village green;
- (iii) the bench should not become the property of the Parish Meeting, on account of the need for public liability insurance and responsibility for future maintenance.

JR offered to speak to Mrs Matthews, who now lives in Brailes. GC felt it would be appropriate for the Matthews family to continue to own and maintain bench. DiF suggested that the Chairman should write to Mrs Matthews in the first instance, and this was agreed (**Action: DF**).

The meeting **closed** at 8.50pm, following which the Chairman offered hospitality.