

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Earls Croome Village Hall on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2023.**

**Apologies:** Tom Goodwin, Charlotte Bloomfield, Margaret Herbert, Giles Steiger (Parish Councillor's) Jeremy Owenson (District Council), Revd Jane Frasier, Ann Smith & David Beavan.

It was noted that David Beavan had sent special thanks to Martin Allen for his work resolving the surface water drainage at Earls Grange and had also sent thanks to all members of Parish Council for all they do.

**Those Present:** Mark Smith (Chairman of Parish Council), Penny Green (Member of Parish Council), Ian Wilson (Member of the Parish Council), Malcolm Tomkins (Tree Warden), Martin Allen (County & District Councillor), Nick Elwell (West Mercia) and the Clerk.

**Welcome by Earls Croome Parish Council Chairman:** Mark opened the meeting and welcomed the Members and Member of the Public. Mark thanked the members, the lengthsman, The Special advisors, Malcolm & Ann, and the clerk for all their time, work and support over the last 12 months.

**Minutes of the last meeting:** The minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023 were reviewed, unanimously agreed and signed by the Chairman.

The only matter arising was how to get more attendance at the Annual Parish meeting! In 2023 it was suggested to advertise in The Bridge, that sadly has now been discontinued. Malcolm suggested a gathering for coffee and cake after the annual litter pick to try engage more with the community and promote the Annual Parish Meeting then.

**Nick Elwell – West Mercia**

There was a Q&A session with Nick from the SNT (Safer neighbourhood team).

Nick confirmed that Earls Croome was a low crime area.

Hill Croome speeding was discussed and Martin Allen proposed a location for the speed camera bike.

Antisocial driving at Dunstall Common was raised.

Drifting and accidents at the new roundabout was discussed.

Nick advised that traffic police do frequent these locations and are aware of the issues.

Mark thanked Nick very much for attending and sharing information.

**Report from District Councillor Jeremy Owenson:**

Mark gave a summary of the report sent by Jeremy.

**Report from County Councillor Martin Allen:**

Martins delivered his report as follows:

## **COUNTY COUNCIL MATTERS**

### **ON DEMAND BUS**

Just a reminder that this service was officially launched in January 2024, it is charging £2.50 per trip, with a second person on the same booking being charged £1.25. The buses will take you to anywhere within the designated County Council Divisions of Croome and Powick.

Also, it will now take you to: Tesco's in St Peters, St Peters Garden Centre, B&M Bargains and Aldi. County Hall/The Countywide Centre, Croome Court, Worcester Parkway Railway Station, Upton Upon Severn, The Retail Park in Malvern, both of Malvern's Railway Stations and Church Street in Malvern.

I promised last November to you that Tewkesbury would be added as a destination, I am pleased to report I have been successful, and it has been added.

I have sent your parish clerk a PDF of the new leaflet; this is an improvement from the last one.

### **VETERANS BUS PASSES**

In November 2022 I brought a Motion to a full County Council meeting for all veterans who live in Worcestershire to receive a bus pass, similar to the pensioners bus pass. This passed unanimously and was to become live this April. The majority of veterans who live here are retired and already receive a pensioner's bus pass, so the costs will be relatively small.

However, the ruling administration have now delayed the start of the scheme and intend to look at it again in September 2024. I feel very disappointed with this outcome.

However, I'm not prepared to give up, I have requested that the cabinet member responsible for transport look at providing a trial with the Worcestershire On Demand bus in Bromsgrove and the divisions of Powick and Croome.

### **COUNCIL TAX**

2024 INCREASES FOR A BAND D HOME: WCC £73.14, MHDC £5.00, FIRE £2.82 and the POLICE £13.00

2023 INCREASES WERE: WCC £69.00, MHDC £5.00, FIRE £5.00 and the POLICE £14.84

### **WCC BUDGET HAS NOW BEEN APPROVED**

We have had the full WCC meeting on 15/02/2024 and the budget has now been approved.

WCC are going to spend £98.989 million pounds of its reserves, by the end of March 2026 it is expected that the reserves left will be just £45.208 million pounds, which may seem a lot, but isn't.

### **HS2 MONEY TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL FOR 2025/2026 ONWARDS**

Following the Government's announcement that part of HS2 is now cancelled, WCC are going to receive £209 million pounds over 7-years. Personally I believe a quarter should go into reserves, however we will have to wait and see on how the administration intend to use the funds. I did contact the leader of the council, Cllr Simon Geraghty about this funding and its use for a Veterans Bus Pass and received this reply:

*Hi Martin,*

*Many thanks for your email regarding the Veterans Pass and the recent announcement of a new Local Transport Fund as a result of the changes made to HS2.*

*Whilst this source of funding for future transport projects is most welcome, the guidance has not been published yet as the fund commences in 2025/26 rather than the next financial year. My understanding is that the majority will be for capital rather than revenue projects and so unlikely to help fund revenue spending. However, we will have to await the guidance before this can be confirmed or otherwise.*

*I appreciate this will be disappointing news but hope it provides some clarity that it's not available for us in 2024/25.*

*Kind regards*

*Simon*

As the funding is to be used for transport, I still have hopes it can fund the Veterans Buss Pass.

### **300 VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCIES FOR WCC**

WCC are currently looking for 300 voluntary redundancies.

150 WCC LONG TERM EMPLOYEES ARE FACING A PAY CUT

WCC are about to cut the pay of some of the lowest paid employees of WCC by 5.4% from April this year.

### **SEND SCHOOL IN MALVERN UPDATE**

This is a Government funded project; it is expected to open in September 2027. Currently there are 83 children of primary school age with Special Educational Needs, each costing £58K per year to send them out of area for education. The long trips to school are not ideal. By building the school, we will shorten their travel time and reduce the cost to £25K per pupil. Initially the school will be designed to take up to 120 children, but with the capacity to be extended to take 160 if required.

### **MORE NEWS ON THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL IN WORCESTER NEAR THE COUNTY COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS**

There are currently 89648 children in Worcestershire, 80K attend school. The remainder are either too young to go to school or they are home schooled. The new school opening has

had to be set back to September 2028, there are problems with the access onto the school from the highway. Also, it was announced during the last WCC full council meeting that the costs has provisionally increased by £12.5M.

### **MOTION ON SCHOOL SAFETY VOTED DOWN**

During the last 12 months, at a full County Council meeting, my group presented a motion to reduce the speed limit to 20mph outside all schools, and also to make it an offence to park on the zigzag lines. I am sorry to say that the ruling conservative administration all voted it down.

I was sad to see a non-party political motion thrown away.

### **FUNDING**

I have managed to find you extra funding which you should have received by now.

### **QUAY LANE**

Jacobs are the design engineers for WCC, they are currently working on a design to improve the entrance from the A38 onto Quay Lane.

### **CHURCH LANE**

I am really pleased that my persistence has paid off and that additional gullies/drains have now just been installed at the junction with Church Lane and Earls Grange.

I know that some of the residents have wanted this to happen for the last 10 years.

### **DISTRICT MATTERS**

#### **SWDPR UPDATE**

This process is still ongoing, the two inspectors, Mr Dean and Mr Lewis have come back asking more questions. One of the main issues appears to be that the County Councils 2019 Transport Modelling/Data although having been revised since 2019 is not robust enough and more up to date information will need to be provided by the County Council.

I am aware the Wychavon, MHDC and Worcester City Councils are seeking to meet with the County Council.

Could I make it clear that MHDC are reliant on the other three parties, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council, and the County Council to fulfill all their obligations.

If just one drags their feet, we cannot move forward, and the risk speculative planning applications will be put forward.

### **FOUR YEAR LAND SUPPLY**

Because MHDC is part of the planning review process, the SWDPR, it currently does not have to produce a 5-year land supply, it only has to produce a 4-year one. While the developers do not get going with the 2500 homes to be built by the Ketch Roundabout and another 2000 homes in Rushwick, there will be speculative planning applications.

## **DISTRICT COUNCIL FINANCES**

MHDC is having to make savings over the next five years of £1.55M to balance the books.

The good news is that MHDC do not have any debts hanging over them. There is a sensible plan to resolve this problem, part of which is to levy an additional 100% Council Tax Charge on Second Homes. currently there are 418 second homes within the district, 375 our Band D. This would raise £780664.00, of which £65K would go to MHDC, the remainder going to WCC, The Police and H&W Fire Brigade.

## **2 MILLION POUNDS PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT**

MHDC have now received £2M which has been placed into reserves. MHDC are aware that the government is looking for all district councils to start collecting food waste in 2026. MHDC will need to purchase the food caddies and modify the refuse vehicles. I would expect part of this £2M for this purpose.

## **CAR PARKING CHARGES FIRST INCREASE IN 12 YEARS.**

The consultation has now ended, and the following has been decided:

£1 charge for two-hours parking will remain, other charges have had a modest increase. MHDC have some of the lowest charges in Worcestershire.

As well as this, there will be an increase to three hours for vehicles displaying a valid disabled person's blue badge across all sites.

## **MHDC 5-Year Plan**

MHDC have voted through the next five year plan. You can view it on their website if you wish.

The main points are that MHDC will continue to concentrate on Health & Wellbeing, the Economy including Tourism and the Environment. There was the possibility of consultation with district Councillors attending the Oversee and Scrutiny committee meeting prior to the full council meeting to vote this through.

## **WARD BUDGET**

The ward budget for district Councillors has been increased to £1000, with the reduction of councillors to 31, many councillors have to cover a wider area. My number of parishes I cover has increased from 2 to 4, this seems a sensible increase; considering how it can make such a huge difference locally, such as providing a hot meal in the depth of winter at the Baptist Church.

**St. Nicholas Church:** There was no annual report from the Church.

## **Residents Forum:**

There were no issues raised by the one resident in attendance apart from trying to increase engagement with the residents of Earls Croome.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 7.55p.m. The next Annual Parish Meeting will be at a similar time next year to coincide with the Annual Parish Council meeting.

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