

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF EARLS CROOME PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON TUESDAY 21st MAY 2024 AT 7.30 PM AT EARLS CROOME VILLAGE HALL.

PRESENT: Mark Smith (Chairman), Penny Green & Ian Wilson (Members) and the Clerk. Malcolm Tomkins (Tree Warden).

1) ELECTION OF CHAIR

Penny proposed Mark, Ian seconded the proposal, which was agreed by all. Mark signed the declaration of Acceptance of Office form, specified under Section 51 of the local Government Act 2000.

2) APOLOGIES

District Councillor Jeremy Owenson, Tom Goodwin, Margaret Herbert, Giles Steiger, Charlotte Bloomfield (Members)

It was noted that District & County Councillor Martin Allen had delivered his report in the Annual Parish meeting that preceded this meeting.

3) REGISTRATION AND DECLARATION OF INTEREST

- (i) The Clerk advised members that they should ensure their Registration of Interest forms are kept up to date and any changes notified to the monitoring officer of the Malvern Hills District Council Standards Committee.
- (ii) No declarations were declared.

4) TO NOTE THE CODE OF CONDUCT, STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Code of Conduct for Members, which had been adopted by the Council in May 2022, and the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, which had also been adopted by the Council in 2018/2019 were noted. The Standing orders were currently under review and the new revised Standing Orders would be circulated for adoption at July's meeting. The Clerk advised there were new model Financial Regulations and she would review these over the summer with a view to adopting in September's meeting.

5) PUBLIC:

It was agreed to retain Malcolm Tomkins and Ann Smith as special advisors to the Parish Council, with permission to contribute to meetings with no voting powers.

6) DELEGATION OF PLANNING AND OTHER MATTERS

- (a) It was agreed by all members that the function of responding to the Local Planning Authority be delegated to the Clerk.
- (b) It was agreed by all to re-adopt the terms of reference for the Staffing Committee, including delegated powers for recruitment, performance reviews and disciplinary & grievance procedures.

7) REPRESENTATIVES TO BE APPOINTED

Those present reviewed the delegated responsibilities and they were reviewed as follows:

Open Spaces (Including the Commons) - Tom, Margaret and Giles

Playing Field – over seen by Ann Smith

Highways (including flooding and drainage) – Tom

Planning coordinators – Mark, Ian & Margaret

Staffing Committee – The Chair + Penny & Charlotte

SWDPR Monitoring – Mark & Ian

Website – The Clerk with Penny checking

Social media – Tom

Defibrillator (Including phone box – Charlotte

Finance (Including monthly bank reconciliations) Penny & Charlotte

8) LEGAL DOCUMENTS AND CONTRACTS

All legal documents regarding the ownership of the Village Hall and Playing Field are kept with Whatley Recordon, Solicitors in Malvern.

It was noted that currently some minutes books are held with the solicitors and some with the clerk. It was agreed to move the minutes books to be retained in the archives at the Hive and note in the minutes annually.

The contract with Worcestershire County Council to provide a Parish Lengthsman is effective until 31 March 2025, and the Parish Council's contract with Mr A Millward to provide the services of Parish Lengthsman is effective until 31 March 2025.

The Chairman advised members that the insurance contract with ANSVAR is due for renewal on 1st June 2024 the renewal cost was £377.37. It was noted that disappointingly they won't cover the lengthsman's public liability going forward. Members agreed to renew the policy.

9) MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2024 were proposed by Penny, seconded by Ian, agreed by all and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

10) REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS

**Martin Allen had delivered his Annual report in the Annual Parish Meeting
Apologies from Jeremy Owenson.**

11) HIGHWAYS MATTERS- None

12) PARISH PATHS

The Clerk confirmed that the WCC proactive strimming schedule had been received.

13) TREES

Members discussed the advice received from CALC regarding undertaking 5 year tree surveys and getting a 5 year action plan that can be budgeted for.

The clerk had received a quotation from Chris Arnold to undertake this work for £450 the survey. (there is an additional £225 to produce the written report) Members discussed advice the clerk had lifted from the document: 'The Common sense approach to tree management' received from the Malvern Hills Trust and in general, expectations regarding land owner responsibility. The clerk advised she was obtaining a further tree survey quote. Members agreed to go ahead with a survey, Malcolm advised that in past Chris Arnold had recommended felling one of the poplars in the hedge at Dunstall Common.

14) LENGTHSMAN SCHEME

It was reported that Andy had agreed to continue as the lengthsman for 24/25. Andy, due to having to purchase his own Public Liability insurance and the increases in fuel costs had requested a £1.50 per hour increase to his lengthsman fee. The clerk advised that his rate was in keeping in general than other lengthsman and that due to a small increase from WCC budget it would likely cover the increase Andy had requested and be cost neutral to the Parish Council. It was proposed by Ian to increase his rate to £14.50 from 1st June, seconded by Penny and agreed by all.

It was suggested Andy should side out the pavement footpath to the crucifix and suggest mow with lawn mower rather than strim to make it useable for pedestrians.

15) COMMONS

a) Smithmoor

The clerk gave an update on the winter maintenance that had been done by S Coole. Due to exceptionally wet winter conditions work had been limited to topping of the top end brambles and keeping the access track clear for use.

The clerk advised there had still been no payment for the Gilders grazing. It was noted that Tom was dealing with this.

b) **Dunstall** – N/A

a) **Marsh** – N/A

16) PLANNING

Correspondence had been received from Ripple Parish Council regarding working together to liaise with the developers regarding development at Blue Bell Farm. Members agreed this was a good approach and that the Planning Team working party would meet with the Ripple PC representative and report back in the July meeting.

17) FINANCE

- a) The monthly bank reconciliation for March & April 2024-2025 was confirmed by Charlotte & Penny.
- b) Following a review of the draft accounts, it was agreed by all that the draft accounts and annual bank reconciliation should be signed by the Chair and Clerk and adopted as the Council's annual accounts for the year ending 31 March 2024
- c) It was agreed that the Parish Council would use the services of Mr Mike Clemas as the internal auditor.
- d) Following a review of the AGAR exemption document, it was agreed by all to authorise the Chairman & The Clerk to sign the exemption certificate and return it to the external auditor.
- e) Following a review of section 1 of the Council's annual return for year ending 31 March 2024, it was agreed by all to authorise the Chairman and Clerk to sign section 1 of the Council's annual return for the year ending 31 March 2024.
- f) Following a review of Section 2 of the Council's Annual Return for the year ended 31st March 2024, it was agreed by all to authorise the Chairman and Clerk to sign Section 2 of the Council's Annual Return for year ending 31st March 2024
- g) It was agreed by members that 3rd June would be the commencement date for the exercise of Public Rights.
- h) Insurance Renewal – members discussed the insurance renewal offered by Clear Councils, it was £377.37, this was less than Zurich had been 2 years ago, but it was noted that not covering the lengthsman public liability insurance had a cost implication. The clerk was asked to explore the potential of a long term arrangement with the insurance provider.

Payments made since last meeting were noted as follows:

Mr A Millward – Lengthsman payment – March	£182.00
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Salary- April (S/O)	£289.66
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk working from home allowance April (S/O)	£20.00
Mr A Millward – Lengthsman payment – April	£208.00

It was proposed by Penny and seconded by Ian and agreed by all to authorize the following payments:

a) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk salary – May (S/O)	£289.66
b) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Working from home allowance May (S/O)	£20.00
c) Mrs N Nicholson OPE	£17.58
d) CALC – Membership Subscription	£162.26
e) Business Services at CAS Ltd – ANSVAR Annual Insurance premium	£377.37
f) Mr A Milward – lengthsman payment – May	£TBC
g) Mr A Milward – lengthsman payment – June	£TBC

Members agreed to move the discussion regarding the giving of the following annual grants until July's meeting. The clerk explained that the levelling up bill December 2023 had made it easier for Parish Councils to grant towards Churches and other religious organisations. The clerk did advise that best practice would be that grant request is received with some indication of cost and what the grant would be used for and each grant discussed and determined on its merit and available Parish Council funds at the time of the request. Regarding the Village Hall grant it was thought it may be more appropriate and cost effective to pay for the meeting room hire. Penny would table on the Village Hall Committee meeting agenda.

Church Yard Grant	£175.00
Village Hall Grant	£130.00

Remittance:	
MHDC Precept payment	£2475.00
WCC lengthsman reimburse – March	£182.00

18. TRAINING

It was noted that New Councillor training was available for £30pp should Ian or Giles wish to attend.

19. CORRESPONDANCE

As discussed under Planning.

20. INFORMATION AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Parish Council Meeting will be held on Tuesday 16th July 2023 at 7.30 pm at Earls Croome Village Hall

Minutes of last months and previous meetings and other relevant information can be found at:

[My Parish \(worcestershire.gov.uk\)](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk)

Meeting Closed 8.50pm.