

Minutes of the Meeting of Rushock Parish Council

held on Thursday 16th January, 2025 at 7.00pm, Rushock Village Hall

Present:

Cllr. T. Green (TG) (Chairman)
Cllr. D. Cutler (DC)
Cllr. S. Davies (SD)
Cllr. R. Hampshire (RH)
Cllr. T. Jennings (TJ)
Cllr. D. Pugh (DP)

Also Present were:

The clerk Mrs. B J Drew (BD), Cllr M J Hart (MJH)(County / District Councillor), Cllr R M Drew (RD)(District Councillor) and PCSO Kate Easthope (KE).

1. **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Mr I Hardiman (District Councillor).

2. **Declarations of Councillors Interests:**
None declared.

3. **Public Question Time:**

A parishioner raised concerns over the artificial lighting at the Potter Group site and at Rushock Trading Estate. The lighting is very bright, and lights are on all night. Also, concerns were expressed over the continuous noise from alarms constantly going off.

MJH advised that the Potter Group site is in Wychavon District. He has the email address of the Planning Manager at Wychavon and suggested in the first instance he contact them to ascertain what was permitted under their planning consent and check whether they are adhering to this.

RD will look into the issue at Rushock Trading Estate which does come under Wyre Forest.

MJH advised that noise nuisance would come under Worcestershire Regulatory Services. They would need evidence before taking any action.

4. **Minutes:**

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 21st November were duly approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record.

5. **External Meeting Reports:**

TG reported on a CALC meeting in December but TG/BD were unable to attend. There has been no feedback.

6. **County Councillor's Report:** *Report previously circulated*

MJH reported that he is pleased he now has speed data from Clattercut Lane which shows a mean average speed of 36mph. He will have a meeting with Barry Barnes, Highways Liaison Engineer to pursue introducing a 30mph limit in the Rushock Wood area.

MJH advised that WCC are in a precarious financial position, as are most shire councils. WCC are not receiving any money from the £600 million pot Government Recovery Grant as it is being diverted to fund deprivation and Worcestershire does not meet the criteria for being deprived.

The Budget will be approved at a meeting on 13th February.

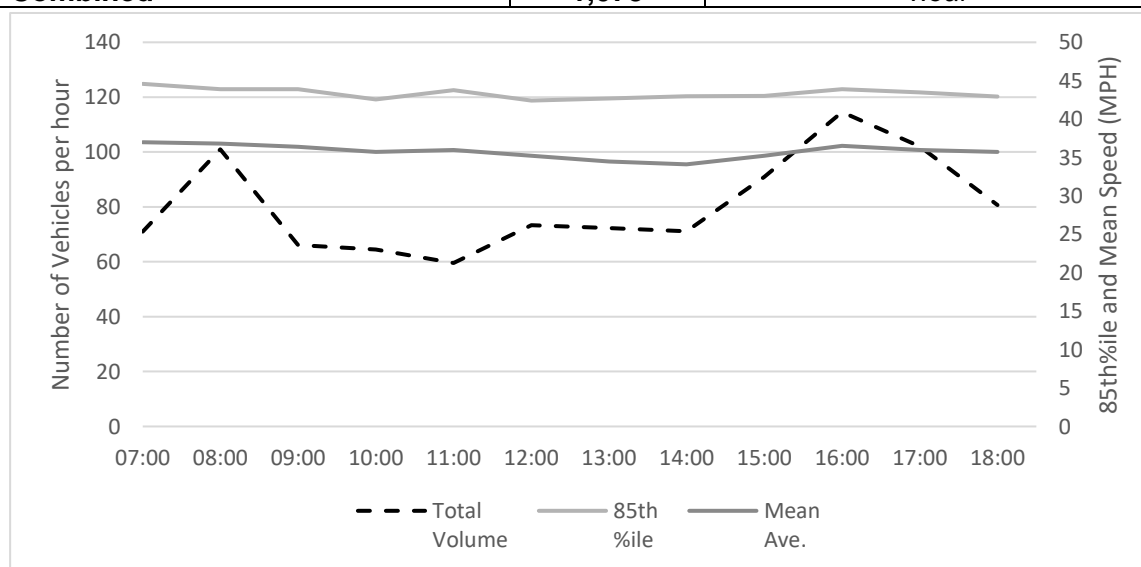
The other major item which is fully covered in his report is the Government's English Devolution White Paper which is to abolish all district and county councils. TG asked how this may affect Parish Councils. MJH advised they will definitely not be abolished and will probably have more power.

Rushock Issues

Ongoing Issues

1. I have reported water ponding in Well Lane. I know this was raised as an issue as a result of the surface dressing potentially changing the levels and the water not running down the drain. I have previously said that if this is still an issue when we have heavy downpours let me know and I will get highways to investigate.
2. Following an enquiry by your chairman, I can confirm that the markings on Clattercut Lane were used to target price the planned pre surface dressing patching works that are scheduled for March 2025. No other scheduled works will take place until then.
3. Further to my November report, I am looking to see if WCC will introduce a 30mph limit in the 'Rushock Wood' area. Below is the speed data. I am chasing if this is enough to get a 30mph speed limit, especially as this is in a national speed limit.

Site No.	24000254		
Site Location (Click for Map):	C2018 Clattercut Lane, Rushock Green		
Survey Period:	From 28/11/2024 To 06/12/2024		
	Daily Volume	Mean Av. Speed	85th %ile Speed
Southbound	507	36	44
Northbound	566	36	44
Combined	1,073	<i>Figures above shown in miles per hour</i>	



New Issues

None.

Wyre Forest Issues

Bewdley Bridge is back to operating one way over the bridge into the town for approximately 18 months whilst the Environment Agency (EA) undertake the work for the construction of the flood defences. This is now circa a £9.3m scheme, of which £500k is from WCC and the rest from the EA. The Government increased the capital funding by an additional £1.5m from the original funding grant for additional work.

Strategic Issues County Wide

County Hall is still closed whilst contractors assess the scale of the RAAC issue. At its July cabinet meeting, Cabinet approved a budget for this work to be undertaken. Investigations are protracted and we still await a final report on this.

WCC has published its draft budget which sees a net revenue budget of £495million, the highest I can remember.

Council tax is proposed to be an increase of 2.99% with the adult social care levy of 2%. This is a poor settlement for WCC with the council receiving not one penny of a new £600 million pot it has made available for councils (Recovery Grant) with the money being diverted away to largely urban unitary metropolitan areas on the basis the Government wishes to fund deprivation and Worcestershire does not meet the criteria for being deprived.

Due to social care funding pressures, Home to School Transport and SEND we still have a £33,6m funding gap with further savings to be identified before budget setting takes place by Full Council on 13th February. In nearly 20 years serving on Worcestershire, I have never known a budget as challenging as this.

We are currently forecasting a £14.2m overspend for 24/25 which is 3.3% of our net revenue budget. We started the year planning to use £7.9m of reserves to balance the budget and this means we will use £22.1m of reserves this year to balance the budget. This is not sustainable.

We forecast for 25/26 pressures of £9.8m for children's and adult's social care and Home to School Transport, pay inflation of £4.5m, contract inflation of £20.9m, demand of £15.6m, investment of £21.2m, revenue to service the capital budget of £4.5m, which totals £76.7m, plus £15.3m of 24/25 pressures which gives a total of £92m for 25/26 pressures.

I also wanted to touch on the Government's English Devolution White Paper, which came out on 16th December 2024 which is to abolish all district and county councils in the remaining 21 two tier areas during the lifetime of this Parliament.

By way of background, I have been a member of the District Council and of the County Council for 20 years or more. For much of that time, I have had the honour of serving in senior leadership roles, including 10 years as deputy leader of WFDC and almost 7 years as leader; and I have served in many different Cabinet roles at the county council, over the last 15 years, including as its current Deputy Leader. I have a deep understanding of the benefits of the current structure of principal authorities in Worcestershire and believe that the county council and its district councils have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to work together effectively – while recognising that sometimes we don't agree. Relationships in the local government family in Worcestershire have been much stronger than

many other county areas and we have worked collaboratively for the benefit of residents and businesses that we serve.

My starting point is that I do not seek reorganisation or believe that it is necessary if Worcestershire councils are able to continue working together positively. As can be seen by my service as a county and district councillor I am a strong advocate of the current two tier model. It is therefore very sad that the Government has decided that the current structures should end within a relatively short time. But we have to realise and accept that the Government has set out its policy agenda very clearly in the English devolution white paper, and that it has a large majority in the House of Commons to drive through change even though these proposals were not set out in its manifesto last year. It is clear to me, that whether we like it or not, this is going to happen.

Against this backdrop, I firmly believe it is important for Worcestershire to be proactive, to avoid the Government imposing a solution on the county. The Worcestershire local government family should be masters of their own destiny and decide what the future should be for the benefit of our residents and businesses. If the Government sticks to its policy position, then in my view a single unitary council for Worcestershire is far and away the preferable solution. It fully meets the Government's criteria in the devolution white paper of "creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more".

I respect that others may take a different view and I know there are district leaders who feel there should be two unitary councils. Even if they could persuade the Government to abandon its policy position of 500k population (which I don't believe would happen), such a structural solution would in my view, make the unitary authorities unviable from the start given the financial pressures that the provision of statutory duties around children's and adult's social care and SEND would bring.

Moreover, if reorganisation is a stepping stone to a devolution deal that would encompass Worcestershire and other areas, then – if we believe that devolution will bring benefits by transferring decision-making and resources away from Whitehall to the area – we owe it to residents and businesses in Worcestershire to get on with the process as quickly as possible.

If the Government accepts that reorganisation should happen in Worcestershire as swiftly as possible, in 2027, then it would be a gross waste of tax payers money to hold elections for the county council in May 2025 only for elections for a shadow council to be held a year later. We would be effectively electing councillors to abolish their organisation in 2 years time. It would also delay the work on the working up of proposals. Whilst I am a democrat and in no way would wish to deny or delay the democratic process, there is precedent for this and a clearly compelling case in this situation.

I therefore agree that, in the context of the clear policy from the Government, a "One Worcestershire Council" offers the best opportunity to create an authority that is more financially sustainable, able to deliver good local services and positively shape and improve Wyre Forest and other parts of the county.

I will be working positively with the county council and district council and other partners to deliver proposals for reorganisation.

I also feel that this is a great opportunity for Parish and Town Councils to take on even more local services and feel they will play an even greater role for the local communities that they serve.

7. District Councillor's Report: *Report previously circulated*

MJH advised that WFDC have reached an agreement that they will not manage Weavers Wharf car park, it will be self managed and will be taken out of the car park places order. This is a legal decision.

MJH reported that WFDC hope to start works in Brintons Park as soon as possible, it has been delayed due to Badgers.

Local Issues

We have been dealing with the usual routine casework, reporting litter and fly tipping on the main A roads and along the country lanes.

Wyre Forest Issues

Work to commence on our ECV points in our pay and display car parks, by the contractor Flowbird is still to commence. We are chasing a start date. There will be a mixture of speed types.

WFDC handed over the Piano Building on 27th August to our contractor Speller Metcalfe (who are doing the Town Hall work too) and they are starting on internal work and work that doesn't require planning permission. The planning application was approved at the September meeting.

WFDC have let the contact for the next phase of the Connectivity Project and work has commenced on the construction of the urban park. The contractors are Shropshire based building and civil engineering contractors McPhillips (Wellington) Limited and as of 21st August they were mobilising. The main body of the work should be done by the end of the year and the Green Space by Spring 2025.

Work on the Creative Hub (The Old Court) as it will be named and so you will see the name start to be used by WFDC and their marketing agents. The building is being marketed now. The building has been handed back to WFDC and we hope to hit the ground running with tenants to provide a revenue income with large parts of the building already now proposed to be let. The official opening is on 30th January.

Work on the £2.4m HLF project at Brinton Park has been slightly delayed due to badgers but we are hopeful it will commence very soon!

WFDC have commissioned a feasibility study for Worcester Street, Market Street, the former Crown House site and Lionfields (former Glades site) and this will report later in the year. We are keen to see more residential development in the town centre. We will be bringing proposals forward to cabinet this spring.

WFDC's cabinet proposed its draft budget on 18th December and launched a budget consultation which can be found on the website which closes at 5pm on Thursday 16th January 2025. The proposals include additional funding for an additional two man litter blitz squad to tackle litter hotspots, tackling illegal parking by employing an additional two civil enforcement officers and also employing an additional environmental protection officer taking the team from two to three officers to tackle issues like fly tipping and dog fouling. We believe these investments are in line with what the public want. We are also proposing to install an additional £50k worth of inclusive play equipment in our district parks.

Council tax is proposed to increase by 2.99% which is approximately £7 per year on a Band D property or 13 pence per week!

Full Council will make the final decision at its meeting on 26th February.

8. Police Report:

Report had been circulated.

PCSO Kate reported no issues in Rushock but there have been lots of burglaries in the neighbouring areas, especially farm machinery. On a positive a landrover stolen in Blakedown was recovered and returned to the owner.

9. Finance:

a) Budget for the financial year 2025-2026

The proposed budget had been circulated to all Councillors. TG explained figures contained therein. It was proposed DC, seconded TJ and unanimously agreed to accept the budget for the financial year 2025-2026.

- b) Precept for the financial year 2025-2026
After discussion it was proposed by SD and seconded by DC to increase the Parish Precept by 5%, giving a total Precept payable of £3,977.82. This will show as a 3.7% increase on the Council Tax Bill as the property base has increased by 1 to 81. This was unanimously agreed.
- c) The financial spreadsheet was duly circulated, and it was in accordance with the bank statements. The bank balance as at 20th December 2024 was £7412.82 with two unpresented cheques of £160.80 making it £7252.02. BD will check the date of cheque 286 to Rushock Village Hall as it may be out of date and can be written off.
- d) The following were unanimously approved for payment: -

Already Paid:

BWP Creative Ltd (Domain Name and Hosting)	£453.60
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Bannuttree Landscaping & Gardening Services Ltd (Strimming)	£80.00
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D Cutler (Crib Chocolates)	£39.60
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Meadowfields Ground Maintenance Ltd (Lengthsman November 24)	£40.80
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To be Paid:

Meadowfields Ground Maintenance Ltd (Lengthsman December 24)	£40.80
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TG/BD will look into online banking and report back at the next meeting.

10. Update on memorial post:

SD advised that all preparations have been done and it is a very interesting shape. It will be erected in due course.

11. To discuss Biodiversity Project / Nature Walk:

There were discussions on future biodiversity projects and the possibility of a nature walk.

DC suggested more bulbs in the community orchard, ordinary daffodils. DP is happy to plant in September.

DP offered use of his land to do something with the children. SD will give this some thought and bring ideas to the next meeting with a view to do something in Spring/Summer.

12. Planning:

The Planning spreadsheet had been circulated. TG reported on Planning since the last meeting. The application at Callimore Farm was approved on 19th December with numerous conditions. If anyone suspects anything is being done contrary to what has been permitted, it should be reported to WFDC planning department. RD offered to look at the Callimore site.

TG advised there had been no further update on the Lunnon Lane and Clattercut Lane enforcement issues that Sam Hawkins, Enforcement Officer has been dealing with. RD will get an update and send to the Chairman.

13. Highways and Verges:

TG advised of damage to Park Lane verges when Chaddesley was flooded and additional cars were using Park Lane, MJH will ask the Highways Liaison Engineer to inspect.

The drain on Clattercut Lane by Greyholme is still blocked. MJH will report.

TG reported on recent flooding but Rushock was ok. Also, the grit team were out promptly and did an excellent job.

TG advised that he and the Clerk are going to arrange to meet with the Lengthsman to make him aware of jobs that need doing on a regular basis, such as clearing gullies. RH reported the one in Lunnon Lane which has a build up of debris and thus the road quickly starts to flood.

TG reported that there is still a considerable amount of Lengthsman budget not spent and suggested that the Parish Council seek permission from the County Council to use some of this budget to put down planings over a membrane to stabilize the surface of the verge in New Wood Lane which is used as a passing place. BD to ask WCC if they approve this.

TG asked MJH if he can ask for Rushock to be done last on the verge cutting schedule.

TG questioned whether it is worth planting wildflower seeds along Park Lane. TJ suggested planting on muddy areas, this would need to be done in early Spring. Seeds can be obtained from Emorsgate Wildflower seeds.

14. Footpaths:

TG reported on blocked footpath between Lunnon Lane and Clattercut Lane which has been reported.

15. Rushock Village Hall:

TG advised that at the recent meeting the committee resigned and were re-elected. Four electric panel heaters are being purchased, MJH kindly donated £500 towards this. A new microwave has been purchased and the Hall is financially sound. The AGM is in November.

TG also advised that the land registry for the village hall has now been completed.

DC thanked the Parish Council for sponsoring the crib service.

16. Agenda items for future meetings:

TG commented that the Parish Council still has a vacancy. He will advertise in the magazine. Please advise Clerk of any future agenda items.

17. To note the date of the next meetings.

- 8th May 2025
- 11th September 2025
- 20th November 2025

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.52pm

Signed..... (Chairman)

Dated.....