

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF EARLS CROOME PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup>  
JANUARY 2025 AT 7.30 PM AT EARLS CROOME VILLAGE HALL.**

**PRESENT:** Cllr Mark Smith (Chairman), Cllr Tom Goodwin, Cllr Ian Wilson, Cllr Giles Steiger & Cllr Charlotte Bloomfield, Cllr Penny Green, Cllr Margaret Herbert.

**In attendance:** County Councillor Martin Allen, Ann Smith (Advisor to PC), Malcolm Tomkins (Tree Warden) & Nikki Nicholson (The Clerk)

**1) APOLOGIES**

District Councillor Owenson

**PUBLIC – one**

A local resident wished to raise her concerns regarding the drainage ditch clearance that had been undertaken at Smithmoor Common, she is particularly concerned regarding loss of habitat for 'curlews'.

Tom and Margaret advised that the ditch works were long overdue and it was the natural drainage ditch that had back filled over the years, members had agreed to the works, but reassured the resident, that it was a one-off big job that would now just be maintained, tree and shrub removal had been necessary to access the ditch to do the works.

It was noted that the clear up work had not taken place due to the correspondence and the timing of this meeting and now unfortunately Tom & Steve were awaiting dryer weather to get machinery onto the Common. Tom advised that no more work was required and that his works would increase drainage for both his land and the Common. Members agreed that clear up was needed and debris could not be left as it would be too difficult for hay making and topping, also unsightly.

Members advised that the Common was managed using no pesticides and that a review of practices had taken place in 2023. With advice sought from Worcestershire Wildlife trust, the common had hay taken most years and regular sheep grazing when not too wet!

The resident advised that she thought there could be funding via 'restore nature'. It was agreed that Tom and Margaret would review the report she had emailed in, and then liaise with the resident directly. It was advised that historically lots of funding was unavailable to the Parish Council due to being a local government body.

Malcolm asked regarding the annual litter pick, the banner was reviewed and the date set for Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 10am.

**2) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**3) MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024 were proposed by Tom, seconded by Giles, agreed by all and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

**4) REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS**

County – Martin gave an overview of the likely changes that may be seen due to the Government’s devolution plans, which could see Worcestershire becoming a Unitary Authority. This is now likely and within 2 years there will no longer be a MHDC.

Martin advised that the County Council had a huge funding deficit and therefore it is likely that services will be cut and there will be no new spending.

District – Jeremy’s report has been circulated, he had asked for ideas of local schemes the District could support be advised to him. The clerk had submitted resurfacing of the Village Hall car park and members suggested a grant pot towards future maintenance of the Commons.

**5) HIGHWAYS MATTERS-**

None

**6) PARISH PATHS**

Malcolm advised there were no new issues, he is looking into re-submission of ongoing historical issues.

Malcolm was making a sign to direct horse riders one side, and foot walkers the other, at the entrance to Marsh common as the horses were churning things up making it difficult for walkers. Members thanked Malcolm.

**7) TREE SURVEY**

The clerk advised the tree works at Marsh Common had taken place and the wood removed by Steve Coole, all that remained was for Steve to clear the brash which he would do once the ground was less wet.

The ‘Crack Willow’ had also been addressed.

The work on the poplar at Dunstall House was scheduled for February.

Tom suggested he lop the low branches at Church Lane/Quay Lane junction – members agreed.

**8) LENGTHSMAN SCHEME**

No additions items were raised.

**9) PLAYING FIELD GRASS CUTTING**

Penny advised that Jack Marklew was doing a good job, the clerk was asked to confirm with Jack that he was happy to continue for this summer at the same cost of £40 per cut this included the perimeter strimming.

This cost had been added to the draft budget for 2025-2026.

**10) DEFIBRILLATOR**

Charlotte advised that the pads are not required until 26/27, the phone box requires a spring clean.

**11) COMMONS**

Smithmoor – Drainage works as discussed in democratic time.

Tom would approach the Gilders regarding further sheep grazing but it was still thought to be too wet at present.

Steve Coole was aware that the bottom end of the Common required a good cut back/topping, it would be addressed once ground was dryer.

Dunstall – It was noted that the damage at the ditch remained but it was agreed it was currently too wet to address, review again at March meeting.

Marsh – nothing to report in addition to tree works discussed under item 7 and bridleway entrance under item 6.

**12) PLANNING**

M/24/013512HP The Annex, The Great Barn, Dunstall, two storey side extension and associated listed building consultation. No objection.

Joint Parishes meeting regarding the proposed solar farm – Mark advised that representatives from ECPC, Defford PC and Hill Croome had met and formed a small working party. They had agreed an initial response to the developers, in reply the developers had advised there were awaiting approval from the National Grid and thought that not likely until July when they would be back in touch.

### 13) FINANCE

Online Banking – This was progressing all signatories had applied and await card readers.

The Bank reconciliation for November had been checked and confirmed by Penny & Charlotte via email.

Precept 25/26 – The budget was reviewed and although the % increase was higher than members would like, there was a need to ensure a good reserve for unexpected items and a need to prepare for the likely loss of the free 'Parish Pages'. It was proposed by Penny and seconded by Charlotte to request £5300.00

Payments made since the last meeting were noted as follows:

Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Salary- November (S/O)	£289.66
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk working from home allowance November (S/O)	£20.00
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk salary – December (S/O)	£289.66
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Working from home allowance December (S/O)	£20.00
Mr B Arrowsmith – lengthsman payment – December	£182.00

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

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| a) Westcotec – VAS batteries                                 | £84.00  |
| b) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Salary – January (S/O)            | £289.66 |
| c) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk working from home allowance (S/O) | £20.00  |
| d) Mr B Arrowsmith – Lengthsman payment – January            | £TBC    |
| e) Mr B Arrowsmith – lengthsman payment – February           | £TBC    |

Remittance: WCC Lengthsman reimburse November & December £388.50

### 18. CORRESPONDENCE

Resident in attendance regarding Smithmoor ditch works

Information regarding devolution and proposal to move to a Unitary Authority.

### 19. DATES OF THE NEXT MEETING:

**Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> March to be held at Earls Croome Village Hall, 7.30pm**

Meeting closed 9pm