

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF EARLS CROOME PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON TUESDAY 25<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2025 AT 7.30 PM AT EARLS CROOME VILLAGE HALL.**

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

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

### **1) APOLOGIES**

District Councillor Owenson & Cllr Ian Wilson.

**PUBLIC** – None

Malcolm advised that the spring litter pick had been a fantastic effort, he advised that his neighbour Vince Pearce had been using his van to collate the bags ready for MHDC to collect. Mark asked the clerk to send the members thanks to Mr Pearce.

### **2) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Mark – re Lavant Lodge planning application. 00068/FUL

### **3) MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2025 were proposed by Margaret, seconded by Giles, agreed by all and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

### **4) REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS**

County – Martin's report had been circulated, it was an overview of WCC corporate plan.

District – No report had been received from Jeremy.

### **5) DEVOLUITION UPDATE –**

Charlotte updated members following her attendance at the CALC briefing on devolution. Charlotte advised that CALC had warned that the transition to a Unitary Authority could lead to more pressure and work for Parish Councils and diluted services. Charlotte advised that it was currently expected that the Unitary elections would be held in May 2027 with the District Councils ceasing to exist by March 2028.

The current 270 Councillors would reduce initially to 114 and then finally to 80, causing a democratic deficit, but it is thought this will produce some significant cost savings.

### **6) HIGHWAYS MATTERS-**

Mark noted there was some considerable debris left on the A38 after a serious crash the week before.

### **7) PARISH PATHS**

Malcolm advised there were no new items for discussion.

### **8) TREE SURGERY**

The clerk advised that all the items in the tree survey had now been addressed and paid for.

### **9) LENGTHSMAN SCHEME**

The clerk advised that the lengthsmen had requested a rate review, from £14 per hour to £17 per hour, the clerk advised that with cost of fuel and cost of living increases this was a reasonable request and in some areas Parishes were having to pay significantly more to recruit lengthsmen. The clerk advised that to enable ECPC to do this using the WCC lengthsmen fund, it would see a reduction of approximately one hour per

month in lengthsmen hours. Members agreed this seemed reasonable and the increase was proposed by Penny and seconded by Margaret and agreed by all.

#### **10) PLAYING FIELD GRASS CUTTING**

Ann advised members of the sad news of Bob Dugan's passing, members agreed to a £25 donation towards the collection. Members discussed asking Jack Marklew the new contractor to enter into a three year agreement, it was decided to defer this until the autumn, he had already agreed £40 per cut for this summer season.

#### **11) ORCHARD CLOSE – Tree Planting**

Penny advised that 4 trees had unexpectedly been planted in Orchard Close, this was a WCC funded planting scheme, Martin had ascertained that if the residents really did not want the trees they could be removed, Penny had consulted with the other residents of Orchard Close and 6 of the 8 residents wanted the trees removed, due to future maintenance costs and potential damage to pavements and driveways.

#### **12) DEFIBRILLATOR**

Charlotte confirmed that the spring clean/sweeping out of the phone box had been completed.

#### **13) COMMONS**

Smithmoor – Tom had not been able to clear up after the drainage works due to the waterlogged ground and it was now thought this was best left until the autumn due to bird nesting season. Member suggested Tom gather all the material to be burnt on the common into one large bonfire.

It was suggested by Malcolm that Steve Coole be asked to address the trees, hedge and rough at the top right hand side, this autumn as part of the winter maintenance programme.

Tom was hopeful that the sheep would graze again but not until autumn.

There was some concern regarding the grass growth for hay as last years hay had been left as it was cut due to rain last summer. Tom thought they would be surprised, the growing season had been delayed by the exceptionally cold February and he thought the growth would push through enough for hay to be made.

A working group made up of Tom, Margaret and Malcolm, would be meeting in the coming weeks to look at the funding suggestions and conservation suggestions made by a member of public, they would then be asked her join the working group who will present suggestions to the full Council either in the May or September meeting. The clerk thought that some of the funding would be reliant of land registry documentations and the Parish Council would need to budget to register the Commons with the Land Registry to access the funding.

Dunstall – It was noted that the damage at the ditch remained, Margaret agreed to approach Mr Troughtman and remind him to repair the damage.

Malcolm advised that a substantial Ash Tree had been illegally felled and all the wood taken, the clerk was requested to notify the police.

Marsh – Mark had noticed some trees had had branches cut, Malcolm advised this was the works the Parish Council had undertaken with Chris Arnold. (Mark do you want this bit in?) I could reword to the Chair noted the tree works undertaken by C Arnold had addressed branches over hanging the highway..

Letter to residents undertaking grass cutting around the commons – As discussed at a meeting prior to undertaking the tree surgery, it was agreed to send a letter to the residents around the commons who maintain and cut grass near their homes to thank them but also to remind them the land is owned by the Parish Council. Malcolm agreed to deliver these letters.

#### **14) PLANNING**

M/25/00068/FUL Levant Lodge, Worcester Road, Earls Croome. Change of use of land to form extended garden. Erection of garage and workshop, with solar panels following demolition of existing garage. Members excluding Mark were consulted and no objection had been submitted.

#### **15) FINANCE**

Online Banking – Penny and Charlotte were fully set up and Charlotte had set up the any 2 from 3 mandate. Following a long phone call, Marks application was progressing it was agreed that in general Panny and Charlotte would authorise payments having seen the invoice first (Via the WhatsApp banking group) Mark would authorise if either was away and unable to authorise.

The Bank reconciliation for December, January & February had been checked and confirmed by Penny & Charlotte via email.

Payments made since the last meeting were noted as follows:

Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Salary- January (S/O)	£289.66
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk working from home allowance January (S/O)	£20.00
ICO Date protection fee (DD)	£35.00
Mr B Arrowsmith – lengthsman services – Jan	£182.00
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk salary – February (S/O)	£289.66
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Working from home allowance February (S/O)	£20.00
Mr B Arrowsmith – lengthsman payment – January	£182.00
Chris Arnold – tree surgery Marsh Common & Cracked Willow(FPO)	£1740.00
Mr B Arrowsmith – Lengthsman services – February	£210.00
Lloyds Banking – banking fee	£5.25
Nick Denley – Tree surgery – Dunstall	£960.00

It was proposed by Margaret and seconded by Giles and agreed by all to authorize the following payments:

a) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Salary – March (S/O)	£289.66
b) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk working from home allowance (S/O)	£20.00
c) Mrs N Nicholson – clerk OPE	£TBC
d) Mr B Arrowsmith – Lengthsman payment – March	£TBC
e) Mr B Arrowsmith – lengthsman payment – April	£TBC
f) Bob Dugan funeral collection – donation	£25.00

Remittance: WCC Lengthsman reimburse - Jan £182.00

Margaret asked if the Parish Council were receiving the correct amount of Wayleave payments for the columns on the Commons, the Wayleave remittance advice was reviewed and thought to be correct.

## 18. CORRESPONDENCE

Resident regarding suggestions on ponds, ditches and general enhancement of Smithmoor Common, to be discussed by the working party.

## 19. DATES OF THE NEXT MEETING:

**27th May 2025 to be held at Earls Croome Village Hall, 7.30pm, this meeting will be preceded by the Annual Parish meeting at 7pm.**

Charlotte gave apologies for the May meeting.

Meeting closed 9.30pm