

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF EARLS CROOME PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON TUESDAY 22nd JULY 2025 AT 7.30 PM AT EARLS CROOME VILLAGE HALL.

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

In attendance: County Councillor Martin Allen, District Councillor Jeremy Owenson, Malcolm Tomkins (Tree Warden) & Nikki Nicholson (The Clerk) and one member of the public.

1) APOLOGIES

Cllr Tom Goodwin & Ann Smith (Advisor to PC),

2) PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – one resident in attendance

Malcolm advised that the 'boy racers' had been more problematic recently and one night started 1.40am going on loud driving up and down until 4am! This had been reported to the SNT and advice was to call 999 if there were safety concerns.

Malcolm advised that the Commons Bye Law signage was still inconsistent, with the link now working but the list of commons the by-laws appertain to, excludes Marsh Common, and not all the signs had the new stickers on. Jeremy advised that Upton Town Council had new signs and information boards with links to the bylaws, he thought ECPC could get via same funding route, **I didn't note what this was!**

The resident thanked members for the very informative historical booklet that she had been given at a previous meeting, she thought a sign explaining the providence of 'Donkey Lane' could be considered.

The resident offered to trim the end of the 'Donkey Lane' that was very overgrown and the clerk drew her attention to the footpath warden role advertised by WCC.

Resident in attendance to discuss environmental issues regarding the Commons working party and her upset caused by the topping of the bottom of Smithmoor Common, followed swiftly, by early hay making, causing disturbance to flora and fauna in the area. She had directly asked the farmer doing the hay making to leave some areas but he had explained that because the hay had been left on the ground after the crop was ruined by wet weather last year he needed to cut and collect it all to allow full regrowth.

The resident requested the reinstating of the ponds that she had seen on an historical O/S map be considered.

She also offered to do some footpath strimming and had met a farmer onsite who had complained that the WCC reactive strimming team had not cut the correct route so walkers were on the field rather than the path at the bottom of 'Donkey Lane'. The clerk was asked to flag this to the PROW manager.

The Chairman advised that much of the residents requests would be covered with the Commons working party update under item 11.

3) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Margaret re Church Grant request.

4) MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th May 2025 were proposed by Penny, seconded by Giles, agreed by all and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

5) REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS

County – Martin's gave his report as follows:

COUNTY COUNCIL MATTERS

NEW AREA FOR THE WORCESTERSHIRE ON DEMAND BUS

Parts of Wychavon are going to benefit from a new On Demand Bus service, which will be limited to a 9 mile travel area. I have little other information about this service, but I will be watching to see if our residents can take advantage of maybe a trip to Pershore.

COUNTY COUNCIL

The first Cabinet meeting took place in the last week of June. The report to be discussed was a report on the financial situation. The cabinet member for responsibility for finance did not attend. I am unaware as to the reason why. The meeting was just over 20 minutes, and some cabinet members arrived late for the meeting, and one cabinet member was prevented from voting due to their late attendance. I asked a question about Veterans and the Worcestershire On Demand Bus and was assured by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jo Monk that she and her party would continue to support the veterans.

NEW SEND SCHOOL IN MALVERN

There has been some speculation if the new SEND school in Malvern would now go ahead. In full council, a few weeks ago, I understand that the Cabinet Member for Responsibility said that it would go ahead. This is good news, especially as the government is paying for it.

NEW SCHOOL AND MULTI-STORY CARPARK NEAR COUNTY HALL

Earlier in the year I reported that the previous administration has authorised the construction of a new high school and a multi-story carpark for the hospital. I understand that the new administration is looking at this again and may cancel the project.

UNITARY AUTHORITY'S FROM WCC PRESPECTIVE

There has been a briefing about the Unitary Authority situation. Price Cooper Waterhouse gave a very interesting presentation. WCC will be going out to public consultation, once they have drilled down into the data, so that the public can make an informed decision.

CEMEX MINERAL PLANNING APPLICATION

The latest planning application for mineral extraction came before the WCC planning committee on the 1st of July.

The committee was split with the Reform and Conservative members voting in favour of the application and the Libdems and the Greens voting against. The vote was 7 to 5.

The application will now proceed.

#9262 BUS STOP REQUEST OPPOSITE THE DOCTORS SURGERY

28/05/25 follow a request by a Ripple resident and Upton Town Council I have requested that WCC install a bus stop opposite the doctors surgery. I will let you know what response I get from Highways.

ORCHARD CLOSE

Despite requests to remove and relocate the trees, WCC has refused. They have a program of tree planting across their land, and they are not willing to consult; despite my efforts to find an agreeable solution.

A38 OVERNIGHT CLOSURES

Between the 28th of July and the 8th of August, there will be overnight road closures on parts of the A38 between Kempsey and the top of Severn Bank in Severn Stoke. This is for resurfacing work to be undertaken.

DISTRICT MATTERS

70 HOMES AT THE MARINA/HOLLY GREEN

This site is in the SWDP allocation and has received planning permission in the past. This has now been approved, it is outlaying only, and it will not determine the type and exact location of any properties.

SWDPR UPDATE

I have been speaking to Councillor David Harrison who is the Portfolio Holder for Planning.

The planning inspectors are due to come back in September, however he now believes they may come back to us sooner than that.

There are only a few issues, however the one that concerns him the most is that the planning inspectors have not accepted the 2205 homes due to be constructed off Taylors Lane near the Ketch Roundabout be counted in the plan.

We currently don't have a 5 year land supply and if the planning inspectors do not accept these 2205 homes into the plan, we will not have a 5 year land supply once the SWDPR is adopted.

Also, as soon as the SWDPR is adopted, we need to start the whole process again.

He urges all Town and Parish Councils to do a Neighbourhood plan; this will give a lot of protection. Although the government have withdrawn funding to help with this process, MHDC is looking at options to help. Hanley have just refreshed theirs.

I asked if the new SWDPR plan now carried any weight, he thought, that as we don't have a 5 year land supply and currently we may not have one at the end of the process, there was some limited weight. We need the 2205 homes to be included.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW DISTRICT COUNCILS

Following a survey that MHDC have held with residents, the residents have come down clearly in wishing for a two unitary authorities to be set up.

Worcester City came back with a narrow margin for one authority and Wyre Forrest has already stated they want one authority. The other district councils want two.

GOVERNMENT HAS WITHDRAWN FUNDING

The Government has announced, as part of the June 2025 Spending Review that the community grant funding for neighbourhood planning is to be withdrawn.

BOUGHTON STUD TRAVELLERS reference number is M/ENF/25/0180

Seb Ash from MHDC Enforcement is dealing with this. A Section 330 Notice to formally confirm land ownership and names of the occupants will be issued. I expect an Enforcement notice to be issued, followed by a planning application.

District –Jeremy advised members regarding the devolution choices, the north districts of Worcestershire had significant social need and the preference for the North /South split was growing especially in the South, where MHDC, Wychavon and Worcester City have worked closely together, it is a concern that increased Council Tax revenue would be required for the ONE Worcestershire option, meaning in reality the Southern districts would be taxed to cover the Northern districts economic needs.

Jeremy advised that the food waste collection would be rolled out early 2026 with small trials initially but not planned in ECPC, once any teething problems were resolved in would be rolled out to every ward in MHDC, there is a plan to use the in house refuse service, to future proof the scheme going forward in to the Unitary Authority.

6) HIGHWAYS MATTERS-

Margaret noted there was some considerable cracks opening up on the Highway on the bridge over the motorway to Dunstall.

7) PARISH PATHS

Malcolm advised the reactive strimming team were doing a good job and had installed a new foot bridge in the field to the south of Woodley's Farm.

Margaret was concerned the BOAT was becoming over grown again, it was noted it had been machine cut after horse rider complaints last year.

8) LENGTHSMAN SCHEME

The clerk advised that the lengthsman had informed her that the VAS wasn't operating properly and was of the older style, the clerk had researched and a service/review would cost be £100 plus VAT. Members discussed the need for a VAS through the village and the locations of the poles, the clerk was asked to find out if there was a location on the A38 it could be positioned as this was thought to be area experiencing the most speeding.

9) ORCHARD CLOSE – Tree Planting

Penny advised that after a bit of toing and froing, WCC had said the trees could not be removed.

10) DEFIBRILLATOR

Charlotte confirmed all operational.

11) COMMONS

Smithmoor – Margaret advised that for a reasonable figure as agreed in the May meeting she can register the commons with Natural England to access funding options.

Margaret asked the clerk to locate the file with the details of which properties had grazing rights on the common.

It was noted that public access to the common was important.

Malcolm, Tom and Margaret, as the working party had met and reviewed what was possible regarding the environmental requests at Smithmoor Common, it was thought the PC maybe able to access funding via a higher level stewardship scheme which would mean it could only be cut after 8th July and a suggested 2 meter wildlife border could be created. Penny asked that the funding for a Parish Council be obtained in writing as a previous application for similar Government funding had excluded Parish Councils.

Dunstall – It was noted that the damage at the ditch remained, the clerk confirmed she had recently written to Mr Troughton and members would review this again in September.

Margaret advised that Steve Coole had given her a spare key to the common gate – she would bring this to the September meeting for the clerk to hold.

Marsh – As advised in public time, Malcolm would assess the Ash die back and report in September's meeting.

Margaret noted the electricity pylons as follows and asked the clerk to check the PC were receiving the correct Wayleave payments - this had been reviewed in the March meeting.

Dunstall x2

Marsh x4

Smithmoor x2

DO WE NEED TO INCLUDE THIS? I CHECKED ITS IN MARCH MINS

12) PLANNING

M/25/00770/LB. Associated ref: M/25/00771/HP. The Old Rectory, Church Lane, Earls Croome. Internal alterations to the main house, together with construction of a single storey rear extension and extension of the terrace area.

Ian noted the works were being undertaken by a reputable company and the works had permission/support from Natural England, the members decided to support the application.

Site formally known as 'Baughton Stud'

It was noted since the last meeting, one lodge and 2 touring caravans had arrived onto the site, enforcement had been informed and visits and notices served, however the families have advised they will be submitting an application for 2/3 plots and Jeremy advised that this would change the timeline on the enforcement notices.

It was noted that despite contact from ECPC clerk, Hill Croome had met the occupiers and had them attend their Parish Council meeting excluding to inform ECPC and notably Giles who lives very near the site. The Clerk was asked to advise Hill Croome of ECPC displeasure, noting that over the years ECPC have always supported Hill Croome in any planning views regarding the 'Baughton View' site.

The application would need to be reviewed and assessed once it was received.

13) FINANCE

Internal auditor – it was noted following the internal audit that the Parish Council should have a formal risk register for all its activities, the clerk had reviewed CALC guidance and used a model to draw one up it would be circulated for review and adoption at the September meeting.

It was noted that the internal auditor had not requested payment but as a goodwill gesture the members agreed to purchase a £25 Malvern Theatre voucher to be sent to M Clemas for doing the audit.

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

Churchyard Grant – The treasurer of the PCC had requested a grant towards the Churchyard grass cutting, historically ECPC had given a grant of £175 per year. This was proposed by Penny, seconded by Giles and agreed by the majority, Charlotte wanted it noted that she did not think precept money should be used for a religious organisation.

Payments made since the last meeting were noted as follows:

Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Salary- May (S/O)	£293.32
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk working from home allowance January (S/O)	£20.00

Mr T Hughes – lengthsman services – May	£101.35
Ms J Arrowsmith – Lengthsman services – April	£187.00
Jack Marlew – Grass cutting	£40.00
Lloyds Bank – service charge	£4.75
Mr T Hughes – lengthsman services – June	£130.00
Jack Marklew – grass cutting	£40.00
Earls Croome Village Hall – annual hire fee	£100.00
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk salary – June (S/O)	£293.32
Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Working from home allowance (S/O)	£20.00
Lloyds Banking – banking fee	£4.25

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

a) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk Salary – July (S/O)	£293.32
b) Mrs N Nicholson – Clerk working from home allowance (S/O)	£20.00
c) Mrs N Nicholson – clerk OPE	£42.95
d) Mr T Hughes – Lengthsman payment – July	£TBC
e) Mr T Hughes – lengthsman payment – August	£TBC

Remittance: WCC Lengthsman reimburse – April £187

It was noted that the 24-25 VAT reclaim had been submitted for £571.98

14.) WEBSITE and gov.uk

The clerk advised that she had ascertained in order to fulfil the AGAR requirement the Parish Council only need the clerk to have a .gov.uk email address, this is being offered free via Paish Online company. The website maybe required in the future if and when the WCC MyParishPages is discontinued (advised by CALC to be retained until Sept 2026), she suggested the PC obtain the free email, but retain the website allocation in the budget going forward.

All members agreed and asked to clerk to go ahead.

15.) CORRESPONDANCE

As discussed under public participations and under common correspondence had been received regarding the topping and hay making at Smithmoor Common that was being reviewed by the Commons working party.

DATES OF THE NEXT MEETING:

23rd September 2025 to be held at Earls Croome Village Hall, 7.30pm

Meeting closed 9.30pm