

WOLVERLEY & COOKLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 9th January 2024, 7.00pm, Cookley School

Present:

Mr D Cox (Chairman)
Mr R Drew (Vice Chairman)
Mrs V Bordewich
Mr B Brookes
Mr J Hart
Mr M Hart - from 8.15pm (due to previous meeting)
Mr D Jones
Mr B McFarland
Mr C Sherrey
Mr W Southam
Mr A Webber
Mr J Wood

West Mercia Police: PCSO Kate Easthope
County Councillor: Councillor I Hardiman
District Councillors: Councillor R M Drew, M J Hart, I Hardiman.

136. **Apologies**

Councillor C Nicholls due to ill health.

137. **Declarations of Councillors Interests**

- a) Register of Interests: Councillors are reminded to complete and need to regularly update their register of interests.
- b) To declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in items on the agenda and their nature. Cllrs D Cox, D Jones, W Southam and J Wood in budget item for Quarry as previously declared DPIs.
- c) To declare any Other Registerable Interests or Non-Registerable Interests in items on the agenda and their nature. None declared.

Public Question Time:

The Chairman welcomed members of the public and asked for any speakers.

Several members of the public spoke about Lea Lane with varying opinions being expressed on whether it should be reopened to traffic or remain as it is at present. Concerns were expressed over the failure of Worcestershire County Council to maintain the lane during the considerable time it has been closed. A resident queried why Worcestershire County Council are not consulting with residents on its future use.

The meeting was reconvened.

138. **To consider the adoption of the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 5th December 2023 at 7.00pm**

These having previously been circulated it was resolved unanimously to receive and adopt the minutes as a true record of the meeting and these were signed by the Chairman.

Matters for Discussion / Decision:

139. **Police Report.**

PCSO Easthope reported;

COOKLEY

Police have received a report of suspicious Circumstances on the Lea Castle Estate. On 3rd December at approximately 03:30am two males have been witnessed approaching properties on Cypress Close and commenting on the security of the property and items in the properties. It is believed that they have arrived in a vehicle, parked on Lea Castle Drive, then walked around the estate along Lea Castle Close, Crocus Way, Cypress Close, around the pond and show homes by Ash Way and Beech View.

00497_I_13122023 - We are appealing to the community for information following an attempted burglary at a home on Wolverhampton Road (Castle Road) which took place at approximately 1700hrs on 13th December. At this time, dogs have been heard barking downstairs and it is believed unknown persons have attempted to access the property via the kitchen door. No items have been stolen.

116_I_21122023 - We are appealing to the community for information following a burglary at a home on Lea Castle Drive. The burglary happened between 1700hrs on 20th December and 1130hrs on 21st December 2023. The offender or offenders have gained entry to the home and stolen a number of items from the address, including a TV and laptop.

We have also had a burglary on one of the newest builds at Horse Chestnut Close. Offenders have forced a rear window of a property causing considerable damage.

WOLVERLEY

00124_I_17122023 - We are appealing to the community for information following a burglary at a home on Franche Road, Wolverley. The burglary happened between 1900hrs on 16th December and 0830hrs on 17th December 2023. The offender or offenders have gained entry to the home and stolen items from the address.

All of these burglaries have taken place as the houses have been un-occupied and in darkness. Please can we remind residents to always leave a light on from 3pm onwards.

We continue to have speeding as our priority along with your quarterly priorities.

140. **To discuss communication from Cllr I Hardiman, County Councillor regarding Lea Lane.**

The Clerk had circulated email received from County Councillor I Hardiman.

Important Communication Re: Lea Lane Landslip / Road Closure to Through Traffic:

I have been informed by Hayley Steele, County Highways Liaison Engineer that I am required to ask Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council to establish whether their parishioners wish for the present situation where pedestrians and cyclists are able to travel along Lea Lane fully but motor vehicles cannot, to become adopted permanently.

County Highways require a decision by the end of February 2024 and importantly have said that if the preference is for Full reinstatement of the Lane for through traffic usage, then the County Council would not accept any future requests for the Lane to be returned to 'no through-traffic' restrictions!

I acknowledge that the Parish Council has said they would prefer to wait until highway reinstatement is completed before seeking parishioners' views but County Highways now require your swift clarification.

The reason for this is related to the very difficult and costly business of using C.P.O. powers in order to construct the necessary support wall on the canal bank land presently in private ownership.

i.e. it would make no sense incurring large costs to see the wall and highway reconstruction completed if, afterwards, parishioners decide they would prefer restricted use only of the Lane!

Please confirm that, as requested, you will consult all parishioners as a matter of urgency.

Cllr Jones commented that this is not a matter for resolution by the Parish Council and believes that it should be referred back to Worcestershire County Council. Residents are divided in their views, and it would not serve the Parish well by voting on this as a Parish Council. Cllr McFarland totally agreed and stated it is a Highways matter which has been going on for almost five years without resolution. Worcestershire County Council should carry out a referendum, at their cost, using their personnel.

There was considerable further discussion on this matter with all Councillors in agreement. It was proposed Cllr McFarland, seconded Cllr Jones and agreed with one abstention the Parish Council write to County Councillor Ian Hardiman, copy Hayley Steele, County Highways Liaison Engineer and advise that the Parish Council are stunned that after over four years being closed, you, after being informed by Hayley Steele, County Highways Liaison Officer, is asking the Parish Council to consult their parishioners on the future of Lea Lane and provide County Highways with a decision by the end of February 2024. The Parish Council are adamant that this is a matter for Worcestershire County Council to resolve and not the Parish Council. If Worcestershire County Council wish to know the views of the parishioners, they should carry out a referendum.

141. **County / District Councillor Reports.**

District Councillor Report;

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.

We are aware that dog training activity is still taking place on land at Drakelow Lane. The planning inspector allowed until 26th December to cease activity. We are in active liaison with our planning enforcement officer and are requesting urgent action.

We are very pleased to report that the potential dog walking field at the top of Lowe Lane which was refused consent and the subject of an appeal to the planning inspector has been dismissed on appeal.

Officers are in liaison with the owners of Cookley Post Office regarding the signage and replacement door and a visit is planned for later this month.

The wall at The Cedars, Axborough Lane is ongoing and there is liaison with WCC as the wall has actually been built on highway verge.

There is a container at land at Mill Lane, Wolverley and an enforcement notice was issued and the date for compliance has now passed and a site visit is planned by officers in January to monitor compliance.

Officers are also looking at an enforcement issue at Wyre Mill House.

Officers are actively monitoring the discharge of conditions on land at Six Acres, Wolverley for the conversion of the works to the Piggery into a dwelling and have assured ourselves they will not allow this to drag on.

Wyre Forest Issues

Work is well under way with the Connectivity project in Worcester Street, Kidderminster where 4 large redundant retail units are being demolished to open up this area of town. There will be much more gradual steps to what are currently there now called the 'Step Entry' and also a gradual path down, with benches and a park/public open space. We need to make this area of town attractive to urban living and link up the former Glades site which we want to see developed for residential with the wider town centre. Planning consent has now been granted for this project.

Work is also well under way at the former Magistrates' Court, which is being branded as the 'Creative Hub'. This will be office spaces that can be permanently let and there will be flexible lets and venue space too.

There will be free parking for 1 hour Monday - Friday between 8am-6pm from 6th November 2023 to 31st March 2025 to encourage people still to visit Bewdley due to the unprecedented disruption of the bridge being only open one way whilst the flood defence work is undertaken by the EA. You will need to display a ticket for this.

WFDC is currently consulting on its budget and please have your say. Details of how to comment are on the WFDC website. We are proposing increasing council tax by the maximum 3% allowed which is circa an additional £7 per year for a Band D property! We are proposing investing in services that are important to the public unlike the previous administration. For example, we are proposing two full time litter pickers across the District to act as a litter blitz squad responding to non-routine work. We are also proposing an additional Civil Enforcement Officer to tackle parking on double yellow lines. We plan to be more open and transparent than the previous administration and will be funding the webcasting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. We are further proposing 1 hours free carparking Monday - Friday in one car park in each of the District's 3 towns. We will also be investing £50k in accessible play equipment at Brinton Park and Stourport Riverside. Each District Councillor will also have £1,000 for the community leadership fund to spend on projects or organisations in their ward.

We are proposing additional commercial income from a wide variety of areas to fund our investments. We will still have circa £3million of unallocated reserves in 2024-2025 and indeed will still have reserves at the end of the 3-year medium term financial strategy. We are also taking a totally different approach to localism and not simply transferring services to town and parish councils unless they want to.

County Councillor Report;

Lea Lane Landslip (CLOSURE):

I have communicated to the Parish Council, as directed by County Highways Officers, requesting the Parish Council to seek the views of parishioners on whether they wish for the present situation where through traffic is prohibited, to become adopted permanently. Your findings should kindly be reported via myself by the End of February.

Wolverley School Pick-up Parking:

I am pleased to report that County Highways have fortunately re-considered my request for Double Yellow Lines around the Blakeshall Lane / Drakelow Lane junction to prevent the chaos and congestion caused by inconsiderate drivers, and are now proposing installation of Yellow Lines on both corners of Drakelow Lane.

Sunday Parking Problems, Brown Westhead Football:

County Highways have responded that they will not agree to install Yellow Lines along this road, even at the turning head at the far end of the road. Therefore, Cllr Hart, Cllr Drew and I are chasing a response from the WFDC Operational Services Manager on whether he has been able to create more parking space within the Football curtilage.

I am still awaiting the County Highways officers' report on whether any further improvements are to be made within the parish.

A449, Lea castle/ Park Gate/ A449, The Crescent, S278 Highway Re-configuration Works:

I met recently with Highways Design officers and was disappointed when advised that:

S278 Works are expected to commence early/Springtime for the Crescent/A449 junction, entailing blocking off the lay-by/widening the A449 to create an improved splay. However, No Pelican-Crossing or even a central reservation is intended, nor speed reduction for this area! Only crossing Highways Studs will be installed!

The A449/Park Gate Crossroads & Lights reconfiguration works (to include pedestrian crossing control) will not commence until Mid/Late 2024.

Therefore, my District Councillor colleagues, and I are unhappy with these intentions which fall short of appropriate safety measures so are meeting with the WFDC Planners today 9th January to register our dissatisfaction and to seek improvements.

Cllr Hardiman updated following the meeting today and stated the junction at the crossroads of A449/Wolverley Rd and Park Gate Rd has been confirmed to include 2 Puffin crossings with safety refuges. A new footpath and cycle lane from Lea Castle Estate joining the current one in Kidderminster on the southern direction of the A449. The junction will be reconfigured to include a turn-right lane when traveling out of Kidderminster to allow access onto Park Gate Road. These works are planned for 2024.

The Junction on the A449 from The Crescent will also be reconfigured... original plan had no Puffin Crossing or safety refuge. However, with phase 2 now being accepted this junction will be reconfigured to provide the proper safety measures necessary. A review of the speed limit being reduced is ongoing. All of this work relies on negotiations with the builders/developers through S106 agreements and then WCC Highways safety assessments.

There was much discussion on this, and concerns were expressed that the infrastructure is being done too late and this is an accident waiting to happen. Councillor Webber echoed concerns over delays creating additional risks but understands the need for joined up thinking regarding the second phase and suggested the Parish Council keep the pressure on all parties. Councillor Sherrey suggested inviting officers to a future meeting, this was seconded by Cllr Jones and agreed. The District Councillors will update following receipt of written report giving timescales for reconfiguration works.

Wolverley, by Cost-Cutter Kerb & Drainage:

I have been assured that a works order has been raised to see this resolved soon.

STRATEGIC ISSUES COUNTY WIDE:

Here2Help is continuing to co-ordinate our Ukrainian Refugee programme working with the 6 District Councils. We have several Hundred refugees in the County and a number of families have come to Wyre Forest and children are taking up places in local schools.

The County Council's Cabinet will meet this Wednesday to approve its draft budget for consultation. Full Council will need to approve the budget on 15th February.

We are facing significant in-year pressures in respect of Children's and Adult's Services and SEND & Home to School Transport.

The proposal is to increase our net revenue budget from circa £400million to circa £430 million in 2024 -2025.

Also, the proposal is to increase council tax by 2.99% (maximum is 3%) and to increase the Adult Social Care Levy by 2%, therefore 4.99% overall on a Band D property.

We are receiving an additional £11million for adults as a result of the Local Government Settlement, however overall in respect of grants we are £1.5million less.

In month 7 we are already showing an overspend of £22million due to pressures as above, the gross structural deficit forecast for 2023-2024 is circa £35million. This is being mitigated in part by an additional £4million income from business rates and a use of £9million worth of reserves and thus a net forecast overspend of circa £22million.

Looking forward the Council is facing additional cost pressures of £51.5million plus the £35million (23/24) makes a total pressure of £86.5million. It is proposed to mitigate this by £21million of additional government funding overall, £20million of additional Council Tax income and £25.5million of identified savings and efficiencies. This still leaves a gap of £20million; further savings and further use of reserves are currently being looked at.

142. Ownership of land - Former Pub Car Park, Rock Tavern, Causall.

Councillor Drew advised that Wyre Forest District Council have undertaken a Land Registry Search which shows the land being owned by the applicant. Worcestershire County Council Highways,

however, are disputing this in their comments on the planning portal. The Planning Application has been withdrawn and correct ownership is being established.

143. **Financial Matters.**

- a) To agree Budget for the financial year 2024/2025.
Cllr Sherrey provided financial statements and all budget figures except the Quarry Legal Fees were discussed.

Cllrs Cox, Jones, Southam and Wood left the room. Cllr Drew took the Chair.

Cllr Sherrey advised that he had been asked to put in the budget a sum of £9,000 for potential Quarry Legal Fees.

Discussion on this ensued. Cllr Webber commented that this could impact a lot of local people but £9,000 (10% of Precept) is a significant figure when costs are unknown and proposed a reduced sum of £3,000. Cllr M Hart stated that the Parish Council have been supportive of the campaign previously, which is demonstrated by the £1500 paid but this decision needs careful consideration as it is taxpayers' money. He feels this case needs to be looked at in isolation. There are a substantial number of parishioners this affects, and it is right and proper that the Parish Council do make an allocation for the new financial year. It is not clear whether the £9,000 is the total sum or a contribution but a figure of £3,000 would be in order and he seconded the proposal from Cllr Webber. Cllr J Hart suggested a figure of £5,000 but this was not seconded. The original proposal for £3,000 was carried with one vote against.

The Cllrs with DPIs returned to the room.

Cllr M Hart explained that for correctness the Cllrs with DPIs could not agree the full budget therefore;

It was proposed Cllr Cox, seconded Cllr Wood and unanimously agreed Schedule 2A (without Quarry) be agreed.

It was then proposed Cllr Webber, seconded Cllr Hart and agreed Schedule 2B be amended to reduce Quarry Legal Fees to £3,000.

- b) To agree Parish Council Precept for the financial year 2024/2025.
Cllr M Hart thanked Cllr Sherrey for his work on the financial statements. After discussion it was proposed Cllr M Hart, seconded Cllr Webber and unanimously agreed a 5% increase in Band D Council Tax. With an increase in tax base of 13 to 2001 this makes a total Precept payable of £98,119.04.
- c) To agree the accounts to be paid.
Proposed Cllr Sherrey, seconded Cllr Drew and agreed accounts be paid including lighting charges. The Lengthsman has not submitted an Invoice this month so will not be paid.
Cllr Sherrey has transferred £50k from the deposit account to the normal account to cover the lighting bills.
- d) Contract Negotiations progress.
Cllr Sherrey / Cllr Jones and Cllr J Hart to deal with late Jan/ early Feb contract negotiations for Lengthsman, Bin Emptying, Grass Cutting and maintenance of Planters.

144. **Police Crime Commissioner Grants.**

Noted.

145. **Co-option of Vacancy.**

Notices have been displayed inviting applications. Cutoff date is 2nd February 2024.

146. **Consultation in the Parish.**

Agreed this be taken off the agenda.

147. **Street Lighting Column - Franche Road, Wolverley.**
Following a further site visit by Cllr Drew and Sherrey it was agreed the Parish Council will not pay for the column to be moved.

148 **Planning Applications for Consideration: -**

PC No WFDC No/Details

3702 23/0892/HOU: Part demolition of garage/store and replacement with single storey side and rear extension at 16 Westhead Road, Cookley,
Recommend Approval

3703 23/0895/FUL: Change of use of Class Q dwelling to holiday let, to include external alterations and increase in curtilage, conversion of building for ancillary use, and construction of bird hides and fishing pegs at land as Os 383575 280035, The Shortyard, Wolverley,
Recommend Approval subject to conditions on the application to ensure it remains a holiday let and information requested by North Worcestershire Water Management being provided.

3704 23/0908/HOU: Construction of a two storey and single storey rear extension at 26 Gaymore Road, Cookley,
Recommend Approval

3705 23/0191:OUT - Revised Application: Erection of 3 new dwellings and provision of 6 spaces for the adjacent development and Rock Tavern Cottage at car park adjacent Rose Cottage, Caunsall Road, Caunsall,
Withdrawn

3706 23/0914/CLP - FOR INFORMATION ONLY: Lawful development certificate for the proposed siting of 12 residential mobile homes for year-round occupancy at Kinverdale Chalet Park, Wolverley.

Planning Decisions.

22/0775/FUL: Refusal - The Dell, Sheepwash Lane, Wolverley

23/0631/FUL: Permits - Riverbank House, Bridge Road, Cookley

23/0657/FUL: Refusal - Wyre Mill House, Mill Lane, Wolverley

23/0815/CLP: Certificate of Lawfulness - Bay Cottage, New Road, Caunsall

22/0958/FUL: Appeal Dismissed - Land at Shatterford Lane, Wolverley

Parish Matters for Update Only - no decisions required.

149. Clerks Report. (Clerk) Noted.

150. The Wolverley Memorial Charitable Trust / Wolverley Tennis Club. (Clerk) Clerk advised that The Wolverley Memorial Charitable Trust had responded that they do not anticipate that mediation will be required. Cllr J Hart updated that a letter is to be sent to the Wolverley Tennis Charitable Incorporated Trust today or tomorrow.

151. Wolverley Village Flooding. (RD) Thanks were expressed to WCC for drain work which kept the village from flooding.

152. Planning Training. (RD) 1stFebruary, 5.30pm, meeting room, Queens Head, Wolverley.

153. Update on Lengthsman. (RD/WS) Cllr Southam / Drew reported no work completed this month.

154. New Issues / Items for Next Meeting. (All) Cllr Jones requested Wolverley Memorial Charitable Trust / Tennis Club.

155. Date of Next Meeting - to confirm the date of the next meeting which is scheduled for Tuesday 6th February 2024.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.40pm