

Minutes of the Meeting of Rushock Parish Council

held on Thursday 25th November 2021, 7.30pm, Rushock Village Hall

Present:

Cllr. T. Green (TG) (Chairman)
Cllr. D. Cutler (DC) (Vice Chairman)
Cllr. S. Davies (SD)
Cllr. R. Hampshire (RH)
Cllr. T. Jennings (TJ)
Cllr. J Nicholls (JN)

Also Present were:

The clerk Mrs. B J Drew (BD), District Cllr Mrs L Jones (LJ), Parish Lengthsman Mr Bill Waldron (BW), West Mercia Police - Nikki Merson(NM) and resident Malcolm Linney.

1. **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr M Hart (District/County Councillor) and Cllr I Hardiman (District Councillor).
2. **Declarations of Councillors Interests:**
Cllr. S Davies and Cllr. R Hampshire in Planning Application 21/1082/Full – Erection of Agricultural building at Lunnon Cottage, Lunnon Lane as it is their property.
3. **Public Question Time:** None
4. **Minutes:**
Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 9th September, 2021 were duly approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record.
5. **Progress Reports:**
Modifications to Wyre Forest Local Plan - reviewed by all.
CALC meetings/AGM – attended by Chairman and Clerk.
Memorial Bench – SD has some costings, also looked at upright oak which would take up less space, would put plaques on it which would need to be standardised, Clerk to put on next agenda, consideration to be given to suitable locations.
Crib Service – Unanimously agreed Parish Council pay for chocolates for children, approx. £30.00.
6. **County Councillor's Report:** *Report previously circulated – Clerk read report.*
Rushock Issues

I am pleased to report that a minor junction improvement scheme for Clattercut Lane with the installation of yellow backed junction warning signs have been installed on the A448. I am also pleased to report that after persevering WCC have agreed to consult on a speed limit reduction for the A448 between the 50mph zone to the 30-mph zone as you come into Chaddesley. This is currently national speed limit and the proposal is to reduce it to 50mph. The police are supportive of this. I appreciate that this is in the Parish of Chaddesley but obviously very much affects Rushock residents.

The verge cutting issues in Lunnon Lane and the poor quality of the cutting is an ongoing saga I am afraid and embarrassed to say. Paul Green and I met with a local Lunnon Lane resident on site to discuss this issue. It was agreed that WCC's contractor would no longer cut Lunnon Lane and we potentially would ask Bill the lengthsman but Bill doesn't have the smaller equipment needed. Paul is seeking someone to do this work.

Meanwhile, having been told there were to be no more cuts this year, Lunnon Lane and indeed the rest of the Parish and indeed Chaddesley and other surrounding areas have been cut! I have been told it was WCC by Paul Green who says, "It was part of a wider contractual agreement where we do a full width cut every 4 years to each quarter of the County. This cut was an oversight and a mistake on my part for not raising this directly with the team."

I have expressed my displeasure at this as it just shows complete incompetence on the part of the County Council I am sorry and embarrassed to say! I did ask for further details from Paul and he has obtained a further response which says:-

"The flailing of vegetation along this stretch of road was carried out by Worcestershire County Council's highways team. As a pollinator friendly county, we have a duty to ensure that roadside verges are maintained in a manner that will allow the best opportunities for wildflowers. Twice a year we cut back all highway verges to a width of either 1 or 2 m from the carriageway edge depending on the road type. The verge width beyond this cut is left available for biodiversity benefits. This area can be quite considerable across the whole network delivering a considerable amount of habitat and wildlife corridors available to pollinator species. However if this area is never maintained we will start to see the development of scrub and self sett trees along all the verges. The scrub clearance actually opens the verge up to a grassland environment offering habitat and food sources for pollinator species. Each year, a quarter of the county has its verges flailed back hard to remove this self sett scrub and saplings and ensure that the valuable grassland is given an opportunity to flourish. Although this procedure looks harsh it is endorsed by our ecology team and commended by national wildlife charities."

I did suggest to Paul that this response won't really fly given the damage to the ancient Woodland!

I met with Paul Smith, Asst. Director on 18th November to raise this and he is investigating. I think they have confused themselves as well over the Lunnon Lane verge issue, thinking that poor cutting earlier was on private land as opposed to the highway verge!

I have this morning as I am completing this report received an update from Paul Green stating that he has clarified with officers the issue with the verge and the concerns of the size of the vehicles affecting the quality of the cut. He says, "WCC can't remove from the cutting schedule and indeed obviously residents would like it cut – the issue is the quality/state of the cut and we can't seem to find another way to have it cut reliably and very little we can do to placate the concerns other than promise to take more care"!

This is all 'verging' on ridiculous I know. I will keep pressing to sort this mess out.

Regarding the two recent road closure notices they are both BT open reach however from different departments. The Lunnon lane work is going to be pushed back and carried out after the first is completed.

Wyre Forest Issues

The new Hoobrook island has now been operational with the traffic lights for nearly 2 months. It has had a number of safety audits undertaken. These only take place with the island fully operational to assess movements, flows and driver behaviour. There have been minor lining and signing modifications regarding the lanes. The flow is now working very well now that Comberton Hill is fully open again.

However, so far so good, it seems to be working very well and the lights having the desired effect and on Wilden Lane drivers able to pull out in the gap in the traffic as the lights change.

The Quarry at Lea Castle, Wolverley, has still not been determined yet.

There has been a pre-consultation engagement in Blakedown for an 87 space car park. We await a formal planning application. This has certainly divided opinion!

Strategic Issues County Wide

WCC is operating as normal now, with most staff working a hybrid from the office and at home. County Hall is open and had had video conferencing facilities installed.

DC commented on the statement “although this procedure looks harsh it is endorsed by our ecology team” and queried whether Natural Networks had been asked as they would not endorse such harsh cutting.

7. **District Councillor’s Report:** *Report previously circulated* Cllr Mrs Lisa Jones reported;

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.

The Callimore Farm Planning Application was refused on 9 September 2021. We have not received any information that this has been appealed.

Wyre Forest Issues

Wyre Forest House is still closed to the public as is the Green Street Hub save for dealing with housing and homelessness applications.

Following the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement 2021 and Comprehensive Spending Review announcements, please see below some key points.

The £17.9m levelling up fund bid for Kidderminster has been approved in full.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund worth over £2.6 billion over the next three years. Successor to the EU Structural Funds. This will rise to £1.5 billion a year by 2024-25.

£1.6bn a year new grant funding for English councils in addition to social care funding, there is no information on what this is for or how it will be distributed. There is no guarantee how much or any of it will come to district councils.

Increase of 3% a year in core spending power – there was no separate figure given for district councils.

There is no mention of local government funding reform. There is no confirmation that business rates will be reset or would be delayed beyond 1 April 2022.

The referendum threshold for increases in council tax is expected to remain at 2% per year. In addition, local authorities with social care responsibilities are expected to be able to increase the adult social care precept by up to 1% per year. Police and crime commissioners proposed to have a £10 threshold.

NB the usual “or £5, whichever is the greater” flexibility for district councils was not announced as part of the Chancellor’s speech but hopefully will be confirmed in due course. Also, please note that this policy proposal applies across three years, so no hint of letting councils have genuine freedom on council tax. The County Council will have much tighter criterion for the social care precept. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities “will set out full details of the council tax

referendum principles and proposed approach to allocating grant funding through the Local Government Finance Settlement”.

Business Rates multiplier is frozen for 2022-23. The government has also announced a range of other measures, including a new, one year 50% Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief up to a cap of £100k per business, and support for investment in property improvements and green technology.

More than £300 million has been awarded to implement free, separate food waste collections in every local authority in England from 2025. However, this seems unlikely to cover the full costs. There was no mention of funding for free garden waste collections.

The public sector pay freeze will not continue: ‘fair and affordable’ pay rises over the whole Spending Review period. Local government will make its own decisions on pay and were not bound by the pay freeze in 2021. However, the near 7% increase in the minimum wage and projected CPI of 4% over the coming year will fuel pressure on local government pay in 2022.

The Environmental Enforcement team have launched a new campaign to crackdown on littering and reminding residents about its impact on the environment.

Festive Parking – Shoppers can take advantage of free parking at all of the District Council car parks from Friday 19 November to Sunday 2 January from 3pm till 8am. Please note that the Weavers Wharf car park is privately owned and does not have this offer available.

TG asked for thanks to be passed to team at WFDC for prompt dealing with recent fly tipping.

8. Police Report: *Report previously circulated*

PCSO Nikki Thomas reported - We have now a new Safer Neighbourhood Officer looking after Rushock (and in fact all of Kidderminster East & North) as Derya has moved to another department. The new Police Officer for the area is PC Matt Ling.

There have been no incidents of note in your area, however there was a burglary in nearby Chaddesley.

Burglary - Briar Hill, Chaddesley Corbett Police Ref; 111_I_21102021 Sometime between 04:00hrs and 06:30hrs on 21/10/2021 unknown persons have entered onto a property and gained access to a shed. They have then attempted to gain access to another outbuilding but were unsuccessful.

As always as the darker evenings are upon us, please use light timer switches in your property when going out and stay vigilant!

Policing Priorities were discussed and agreed to remain as Thefts / Wildlife Crime / Speed.

TG/BD reported size and locations for new Smartwater signs have been provided which should be installed very shortly.

9. To discuss further progress with Biodiversity Project:

Thanks were expressed to SD for bulb planting and involvement of local families, photos have been sent to the magazine. Thanks also to Neil Cutler for reflectors on posts.

The three Pear Trees should be available from Walcot Nursery in January.

TG mentioned the budget, spend to date is £1256, £700 has been received in grants and the PC did budget £700 for projects.

Hedge cutting above the Orchard has been undertaken and wood cleared by JN. TG/DC would have liked this to be used to create habitats for wildlife. It was agreed that, in future, any work to be undertaken on public areas in the parish should be discussed with councillors before action is taken. There was a lengthy discussion on maintenance of the various areas with differing views being expressed on whether they should be managed for wildlife or shorn like urban verges. It was agreed that the Parish Council should consult parishioners on their views. BD suggested a short questionnaire which could be delivered to all households. This will be discussed and action agreed in the New Year. Clerk to put on next agenda.

TJ has 500 Crocus Bulbs to donate to projects.

10. Planning:

TG reported on Planning since the last meeting;

21/0910/HOU Foxhayes Farm, New Farm Lane, Rushock:

Removal of existing outbuilding to rear of garden. Construction of single storey one bedroom annexe
PC Recommend Refusal. This appears to be a new build which is not suitable for this location.

21/0922/FUL The Old Dutch Barn, Clattercut Lane, Rushock: Change of use of land to extend domestic garden.

PC Recommend Approval.

21/1082/FUL Lunnon Cottage, Lunnon Lane, Rushock: Erection of agricultural building.

PC Recommend Approval subject to - It only to be used for the activities listed in the Planning Statement and it is not eligible for conversion to residential use in the future.

11. Highways and Verges:

BW was thanked for his work.

TG advised that the road closures that clashed have been changed and the Lunnon Lane works pushed back, new date to be advised.

There was a lengthy discussion on verge cutting with TG referring to the comments made in the County Councillor report. The difficulty is the issue of balancing the quality, state and frequency of cuts to maximise biodiversity benefits whilst ensuring safety with visibility splays and vegetation in narrow lanes cut back.

Paul Green, WCC Highways and MH have met with resident to discuss Lunnon Lane issues and have agreed to seek someone with appropriate sized equipment to undertake the work in future.

Presently cutting is a County Council function so the Parish Council are not able to undertake this work, if however they are approached by County in future to do this, it would be discussed and a decision made by Full Council.

12. Footpaths:

TG advised of damage to waymarks which have been reported to WCC. BD advised claim has been submitted for Parish Paths Grant.

13. Finance:

The financial spreadsheet was duly circulated and it was in accordance with the bank statements. The bank balance as at 31st October was £8682.67.

The following were unanimously approved for payment:-

Already Paid;

Rushock Village Hall £120.00
(Hire of Hall for 2022 Mtgs)

Mrs B J Drew £172.95
(Wildflower Shop/Daffs & Tulips – Paid by Card)

Mr P R Haskell £63.00
(Work in Lunnon Lane)

Mr Chris Oliver £150.00
(Post Installing)

Mr W Waldron £36.00
(Parish Paths Strimming)

To Pay;

Mrs B J Drew £1275.24
(Salary 1st April 2021 - 31st March 2022)

HMRC £318.60
(Tax and NI)

Chemquad Weed Control & Landscaping £108.00
(Parish Paths)

TG advised next meeting will be Budget and Precept setting.

14. Rushock Village Hall:

TG/JN attended the AGM. The Hall is doing well and more activities are being organised. The committee are investigating options for heating and the gas is very expensive. TJ will liaise with Claire to e mail minutes of the meetings to the Clerk.

TG advised that the Land Transfer document has now been signed and will be sent to Thursfield Solicitors. Thanks were expressed to Kevin Jones and Dr. Clare for their help in bringing this to a conclusion.

15. Training:

BD has circulated training from Worcestershire CALC and will advise date of Planning Training once confirmed.

16. Queens Platinum Jubilee:

The Parish Council will plant the Pear Trees to mark the event. The Village Hall will probably organise an event.

17. Correspondence:

The clerk circulated the schedule of correspondence and presented the correspondence to the meeting. Several items had already been discussed and the schedule was noted.

18. Agenda items for future meetings:

19. To note the date of the next meetings:

Dates for 2022 meetings are as follows;

Thursday 20th January 2022

Thursday 19th May 2022

Thursday 8th September 2022

Thursday 24th November 2022

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.45pm

Signed..... (Chairman)

Dated.....