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Great Comberton Parish Council

Parish Council Meeting - Minutes Monday 8th January 2024, 7.00pm Village Hall

Parish Councillors Present: K Collingwood (Chair), S Inglis, A Lavelle, G Hodgson, D Wilks & S Hickey.

Clerk/RFO: Nicola Harding

In attendance: No parishioners

1. Apologies:

Received from Cllr Hamilton and County Cllr Hardman.

2. Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations made.

3. Parishioner's Comments:

A concern had been received regarding the absence of a footway between Joe's Farm and Back Lane where the road narrows, making it difficult for pedestrians, especially during periods of road diversions through the village. Options were discussed, including:

- a marked, segregated area inside of Brailles Orchard at a minimal cost, however it was noted that the existing ditch would need to be bridged and permission granted from WCC Highways. A concern was also raised about pedestrians stepping out into the lane by the village hall, where visibility is limited. It was also acknowledged that an alternative route for almost all of this section is available by Back Lane and the churchyard.
- Informing WCC Highways in writing to emphasise these concerns.
- District Cllr Hardman raised the potential option of traffic lights or narrowing the road further to create a one-way system near the village hall, with preference to motorists coming up the hill. However, it was recognised that this would involve hard structures which would change the existing rural appearance. It was also confirmed that a 20 mph zone would not be an option, given the absence of streetlights.
- Consider a natural barrier through allowing hedges to grow further into the road to slow down traffic, where visibility is restricted at the bend.

Cllrs were in agreement that the root cause of additional speeding traffic through the village is Eckington Bridge during closures and subsequent road diversions, which was noted by Cllr Hardman. It was proposed to continue to pursue the Community Speed watch option, given that a group of willing volunteers were available, as reported under item 6.

Action: Clerk to update parishioner.

4. Minutes of meeting held on Monday 6th November 2023

Proposed Cllr Wilkes, seconded Cllr Hodgson, all in favour, to approve the minutes as a true record.

5. Progress reports from Parish Activities: brief updates:

- a. Lengthsman: The December work-plan has been received and was shared at the meeting. The Chairman has requested re-cutting the grips on Ashbed's bends, opposite the Rectory.
- b. Highways: It was agreed that the Clerk would make further contact with WCC Highways to request re-setting of further blocks displaced between Quay Lane and the War Memorial using the surplus still available. *Action: Clerk.*
- c. Police: A recent prowling incident was noted and details had been forwarded to Cllrs of the updated contacts received from the local Safer Neighbourhood Team.
- d. Footpaths/PRoW/Trees: The damaged stile and loose handrail at the Church Street public right of way has been reported again by Cllr Hodgson to WCC online. Cllr Hardman confirmed that the overgrown tree opposite Bank Cottage is not registered with the County Council, but this would be confirmed by Barry Barnes. It was agreed that the Parish Council could remove the four overhanging branches near the turnstile. *Action: Chairman.*
- e. Broadband: Miscommunications were noted, as Airband had informed a parishioner that the village scheme was not yet live, however three Parish Cllrs present confirmed they are all now connected to FTTP broadband. Cllr Hardman advised written correspondence with the senior Airband team. *Action: Chairman.*
- f. Brailles fencing: Following previous discussions regarding new stock proof fencing and re-grading of the entrances to Brailles Orchard, the Clerk had liaised with the Chairman ahead of the meeting as Wychavon's Rural Fund is now open for applications. Given the date for expressions of interest was 5 January, the Clerk had completed an interest form to keep the Council's options open, as at this stage it is unclear of eligibility given that the Parish Council are lease holders of the land and permission would need to be granted by the Church, as owners. District Cllr Hardman advised that an invite to the next meeting with the District Council's Community Officer would be beneficial, to advise on the Council's potential application and suitability ahead of committing time to an application, should the expression of interest be successful.

Action: Cllr Hardman to liaise with officer at WDC.

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g. Comberton Quay: Land Registry have confirmed that the Parish Council's application in July 2022 for first registration of land at Comberton Quay has been considered by a senior officer but rejected, as a legal title to the land cannot be demonstrated. Evidence has been provided by the Parish Council that the land has been registered as a village green, with the Parish Council recorded by WCC as owners of the village green under the Commons Registration Act, although this does not demonstrate a legal title to the land. Rules about common land and village greens had been shared with the meeting, and it was agreed that a post/bollard should be reinstated at the top of the slope, leaving a turning area by Quay House to deter vehicles, as a van had recently driven down the lane and became stuck in the ditch.

Action: Cllr B Hardman agreed to discuss this request with Cllr A. Hardman.

h. War Memorial: Following a recent annual condition survey completed by a conservation architect, as per the conditions of the grant received from the War Memorial Trust, some points were raised for consideration by the Council. It was noted that the lower parts of the memorial appear dirty in comparison with the upper parts, the lettering is becoming indistinct and the surrounding crazy paving is open jointed and supporting plants.

A quote was presented from Stonemasons of Worcester and a discussion ensued. It was agreed that Cllrs would be averse to cleaning the memorial due to the presence of lichens, and weeds around the war memorial are poppies, seeded on purpose, but would consider enhancing the lettering in future.

It was also noted that there was a small turnout to this year's remembrance wreath laying ceremony, although services were being conducted elsewhere in Pershore and Elmley Castle. It was agreed to provide a little more notice next year and assess again in November. Cllr Inglis also confirmed that she can continue to circulate village emails during holiday periods.

6. Safer Roads Fund & Community Speed Watch: Grants are now available from West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner towards road safety initiatives. The application period is open until noon on 2nd February and full guidance and details were forwarded to the Council in December for information. In view of the potential speed monitoring options discussed under item 1, it was agreed that given the lack of progress regarding the Community Speed watch scheme, despite several recent communications, this should now be escalated with the new safer neighbourhood police contacts in the first instance, prior to potential consideration of pursuing the Safer Roads Fund.

Action: Cllr Inglis to follow through and copy in the Clerk & District Cllr Hardman for updates.

7. District and County Councillor's reports:

County Council

The District Cllr provided a summary on behalf of County Cllr Hardman due to his attendance at another meeting:

- Speeding: Options for engineering the road near the village hall were noted, as discussed and reported under item 1.
- Footpaths: Repairs remain on schedule in the next financial year for the footway between Joe's Farm and Quay Lane – the Council's preference of a 1m width without removing the verge was reiterated.
- WCC budget: There will be a significant over spend in this year's budget due to escalating costs, particularly sustained in children's care.

District Council

The following summary was provided:

- Design Code: The District Council is currently consulting on their draft design codes, which have been created with the support of a design consultancy and will play 'a critical role in ensuring beautiful new homes and places are created in the district to support the economic success of Wychavon and sustainable and neighbourly living.' Four separate codes have been produced, covering different regions within the district, and it was noted by the Chairman and Cllr Hardman that the Combertons should be included within the Cotswold Edge code, not Wychavon's, as villages around Bredon Hill should ideally be combined. Feedback is important, therefore views are encouraged via www.wychavon.gov.uk/design-codes ahead of the close of consultation at 11.59pm on 5 February 2024.
- Village Show: Cllr Hardman requested a discussion regarding details of the 2024 event.

Action: Cllr Hardman to liaise with Cllr Hamilton.

8. Planning

W/23/02366/CLE Mill Croft: A Lawful Development Certificate has been received to confirm that a meaningful start has been made to secure the present planning permission for demolition of the garage and erection of a new detached garage and extended drive, ref; 20/02678/HP. Cllrs had looked at the application and it was agreed there were no comments to make. A decision remains pending from the District Council.

9. Finance

a) Current Balances at 1st January 2024

Current Account:	£6,100.85
Savings account:	£1,782.83
TOTAL:	£7,883.68

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b) Payments to report:

Lengthsman: November work-plan	£172.50
ICO: Annual data protection fee	£40.00
Salary: December 2023	£302.25
Salary: January 2024	£302.25
Clerk's expenses: Nov & Dec 2023 + postage	£26.25
Back-pay 1/4/22-1/1/23: LGA salary award 2023	£195.03
<i>*proposal to amend monthly salary S/O to £323.92</i>	
Lengthsman: December work-plan	£180.00

TOTAL £1,218.28

*Income received: Land Registry refund	£30.00
WCC Lengthsman November work-plan	£172.50

c) Bank reconciliation (iii): 30 December 2023: The Clerk confirmed that documents had been completed and forwarded to Cllr Hamilton for checks and verification.

d) Nalc pay award increase 2022/23: Details of the National Salary Award 2022/23, agreed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services in November, were circulated in advance and noted by the meeting.

e) Proposal to approve 2024/25 budget & resultant precept request: total budget requirement to be approved and forwarded to WDC by Friday 26 January 2024:

Prior to the meeting, the Clerk & Cllr Hamilton had reviewed current and predicted balances for the year ending 2023/24 and completed potential budget headings for 2024/25 for consideration by Cllrs. A summary of expenditure to date and implications for future reserves and spending in the next financial year, was also provided. In summary, the Council has underspent on their 2023/24 budget, resulting in a predicted £552 increase in maintenance reserve for the next financial year. The legal reserve and ring-fenced monies for a new gate at Brailles Orchard and the village bio-diversity group were also noted.

Tax base figures and potential precept options had been circulated for consideration, with the resultant % decrease/increase and Band D levy. There had been two significant increases applied in 2022/23 and 2023/24 to keep the precept on a par with expenditure and to ensure adequate legal/maintenance reserves. The increase in this year's maintenance reserve was raised as an important point for consideration when agreeing the precept, however Cllrs were also mindful of current, higher inflation rates which will continue to affect expenditure such as salary, insurance and subscriptions in 2024/25:

Cllrs voted on the following three precept options proposed:

- 8% increase – 1 Cllr in favour
- 1% increase – 1 Cllr in favour
- 5% increase – 5 Cllrs in favour

A 5% increase was therefore supported by the majority, resulting in a precept @ £5300 for 2024/25 and a band D levy increase of £1.47. Actions: Clerk to forward request to WDC. Cllr Wilks agreed to review the reserves box on the finance spreadsheet & update if required.

10. Correspondence

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| Wychavon DC | Wychavon Rural Fund – grants of between £2,500 and £25,000 are available, although organisations will need to fund at least 30% of the total project cost from other sources, as reported under item 5f. |
| Police SNT | New contact details have been received for the local Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) and forwarded to Cllrs. It was agreed that Cllr Inglis would make further contact regarding the Community Speedwatch initiative. |

11. Councillor's reports and items for future agenda:

There was no additional business to report, although Cllrs considered the number of meetings scheduled for the coming year, to be confirmed at the next meeting.

12. Date of Next Meeting: Monday 4th March 2024 at 7.00 pm.

Signed

Date.....

Chairman