

# H C P C

For And On Behalf Of  
Hill Croome Parish Council  
Clerk - Michael Brooks  
Vine Cottage Baughton Earls Croome WR8 9DQ

Minutes for the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at Earls Croome Village Hall

1. **Apologies** – No apologies received
2. **Declaration of Interests** - No new Declarations of Interest reported.
3. **Minutes for the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2024** – approved as a true record.
4. **Policies and Procedures** –
  - a) Finance Regulations 2024 (update) – it was noted that the Clerk had omitted the new Regulations from the pre-meeting package. The matter was postponed until the January meeting.
  - b) Civility and Respect Pledge – discussion postponed to the January meeting.
5. **Finance** – full disclosure of the bank balances provided to Council. The Clerk provided details of expenditure and receipts since the last meeting as follows:
  - i. **Expenses** (a-d) since last meeting, (e-g) for prior approval;
    - a) New binder for the minutes
    - b) Remembrance Day Wreaths
    - c) Lengthsman September
    - d) Lengthsman October
    - e) Lengthsman November
    - f) Lengthsman December
    - g) Mower fuelItems e-g proposed by the Chair, seconded by the V/Chair – all agreed.
  - ii) **Receipts** since last meeting;
    - a) Deposit interest
    - b) Lengthsman refund – August
    - c) Lengthsman Refund – September
    - d) Precept 2<sup>nd</sup> Tranche

Authority and confirmation of these transactions signed off by the Chair and Cllr. Wall.

Chairman - Phillippe Smith    Clerk - Michael Brooks  
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## iii. Annual Budget

The Clerk provided an updated budget forecast for the coming year. The total precept proposed for 2025/2026 is in the sum of £4280, being a rise of £193 on the current year. This represents an average increase per household (not allowing for the Banding imbalance) of £3.01 per annum.

Significant analysis has been undertaken to establish the 'real' requirement for the precept value to ensure the Council can maintain a stable income and to fulfil its obligations. These calculations have revealed that our current level is significantly underfunded.

For the last seven years the Clerk's position has been filled by Cllr Brooks, unpaid, whilst a nominal annual sum has been included in the Precept. This provision has allowed for a build up of reserves in line with accepted practice in the Council sector. However, in the event that the current situation was to change the Council would likely have to employ a professional Clerk at a significantly higher value than the sum currently collected.

The proposed budget for 2025/26 includes the provision of £2480 to cover routine annual expenses along with the Clerk's salary provision in the sum of £1800. It should be noted that there is no specific element for contingency spending, which in turn, if unspent, would improve and maintain the reserves necessary to ensure the future ability to provide additional services if required.

It is identified that the requirement for a contingency element and the shortfall in the Clerk's valuation needs to be addressed next year. There is a shortfall of at least £1000 with regard to the Clerk's salary and this would then be subject to annual pay rises in line with national policy.

Any suggestion that the precept can remain static is wholly unrealistic.

The budget forecast for 2025/26 was proposed by the Chair, seconded by the V/Chair and agreed by all. The precept in the sum of £4280 will be requested when the Clerk receives the application.

## iv. Earmarked reserves

Cllr.Brooks put forward a suggestion that reserves held by the Council should be earmarked to provide for the replacement of the electronic speed signs. The current signs are now ageing and their lifespan is unknown. They provide the major reminder to motorists as to their obligation to adhere to the 30mph limit. It has been established that replacements could be in the region of £5000 each.

The Chair proposed that £10,000 should be earmarked for this purpose, seconded by the V/Chair. All in agreement.

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## v. New website and Gov.uk emails

It has still not been confirmed that the provision of free website access with the County Council is to be withdrawn. Clearly, any free element is to be maintained if it satisfies our needs. The proposal to enrol with a website provider along with new email addresses cannot proceed until we have the full details.

Research with three providers has indicated that should we need to take this route the cost could be between £350-500 per annum.

This item to be addressed again at the January meeting.

## vi. Lloyds Bank – monthly fee

The Clerk reported being in receipt from the bank a notification that the account is to be subject to a monthly charge of £4.25. Research indicates that most banks have already taken this route or are planning similar charges.

## vii. Defibrillator battery

The battery is being monitored and a replacement will be ordered when it drops to 1/3 on the scale.

## viii. Noticeboard refurbishment

The Chair confirmed that the work is in hand subject to the replacement lettering being made.

## 6. Planning

1) Solar farm proposals – it was noted that Government policy would suggest a successful application regardless of local opposition. There is a suggestion that the three neighbouring councils take a joined up approach to the issue and a meeting has been proposed, albeit no date yet arranged. Another suggestion was that the developer might be invited to provide an insight into their plans whereby the local Councils could ask what was available to us.

2) 4, Meadow Close – application still subject to decision

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## 7. Memorial Path /Dropped Kerb

The meeting in September 2024 agreed that the dropped kerb in Ash Lea providing access onto the green for the less able would be created and the work was scheduled for early October. The cost of the scheme was to be borne by existing reserves. Between the meeting and the construction date the Council was in receipt of a number of emails and written correspondence about the matter, and after consultation it was decided that the Council should halt the construction, pending an agenda item to revisit the issue at the next meeting, being the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The recent newsletter reminded parishioners as to the meeting date and the agenda item.

All correspondence was presented to the Councillors for consideration in advance of the meeting to ensure each was fully aware of the objections and other observations.

Each element of the correspondence was examined and given full consideration, including contributions from members of the public who chose to attend, before the Chair made two proposals to be put to the vote. The V/Chair seconded the proposals.

1. *Should the dropped kerb be created, confirming the decision taken in September?*
2. *If yes, should the kerb be created on Ash Lea or at the turning area?*

There was unanimous agreement that the kerb should be created and the location in Ash Lea was selected by all Councillors.

A letter is to be sent to all the correspondents to outline the decision by the Council, a copy of the text being included with the minutes, as Appendix1.

**8. District and County Councillor reports** – Cllr Allen provided a verbal account along with a written copy for the records. Matters arising included the County Councillor pay rise, delays in legal-matter time scales, SWDP plan issues and the potential for changes at the District Council.

**9. Councillor Training** - No new training reported.

**10. Correspondence** – six items relating to roadside frontage, Highways issues and the dropped kerb for the memorial.

**12. Meeting dates for 2024/25** – dates are to be 27/January, 7/April, 12/May, 21/July, 22/September and 17/November.

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**13. Other matters** – Email to be sent to Highways with regard to the issues raised for Stanks Lane. Request to seek signage and bollards for Stanks Lane, improvement to the view at the junction of Stanks lane/A4104 and an update to the home-made warning sign for Meadow Close.

..... Date.....

**P. Smith – Chairman**

Minutes prepared by M. Brooks – Clerk

## Appendix 1

22<sup>nd</sup> November 2024

Dear ,

### VILLAGE MEMORIAL – PROPOSED PATH AND DROPPED KERB

I write on behalf of the Parish Council to update you regarding your correspondence relating to the Village Memorial and the proposal to provide a path and dropped kerb for the less able.

The Council received observations from six parishioners – four households, each element being subject to full discussion in open forum at our meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> November. Members of the public were present and each was allowed time to express their thoughts on the matter.

You should note that at the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> September the Council agreed to the construction of a dropped kerb along Ash Lea, but the path linking to the memorial was put on hold.

The observations and key points raised in the correspondence were examined individually, the results being as follows:

*A proposal without merit* – the thinking of the Council was to ensure that access and enjoyment of the Memorial is open to all, without exception. A suggestion that the scheme is without merit fails to address the element of fairness that is required to embrace the less able by making adjustments where feasible, and reasonable.

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*Will benefit no one* – this fails to address the needs of the less able and ignores the Council's responsibility to make suitable adjustment.

*The same two persons can easily negotiate the kerb* – this suggests that those pushing a wheelchair are themselves fully physically able. The recent Remembrance Day brought home to us the near impossibility of lifting a chair up and over the kerb, without significant threat to the well being of both chair user and helper.

*A small portable ramp* – during the Council's deliberations the possibility of a portable ramp was considered. Clearly a less costly option but other issues come to the fore. Such an item must comply with Health and Safety, including non-slip surfaces, handrail and high visibility provision. If the Council were to find such an item it must then be stored safely and the Council would be responsible for its usage. If anyone was to injure themselves they may have a claim against the Council and the item would not be available 24/7. It would not fulfil our needs.

*Non-practical advantage and poor financial grounds* – the purpose of providing the dropped kerb is to ensure maximum access to all. The Council determined that it was a cost worth paying.

*Very questionable use of public funds* – the use of public funds is subject to scrutiny and everyone will have differing views on what is appropriate or necessary. The Council thought through the whole Memorial scheme with due diligence and openness and at every stage we were open to input from members of the Parish. It is regrettable that more did not choose to engage during the process. It should be noted that the Council exercises tight financial constraint and seeks to get best use for the funding available.

*Move the dropped kerb to the turning area* – this location was considered as an option. However, the parking of vehicles could obstruct the entrance and as most visitors approach along Ash Lea the dropped kerb would not be clearly visible rendering it obsolete.

*Money could be better used for topping out the trees on the green* – the responsibility for the trees is the Highways Department at the County Council. Having recently made a recent request for the trees to be pollarded the reply is that they will be tended to once the new shoots emanating from the latest pollard points start to decay and fall off. It is apparent we are some years from that point.

*Absence of planning permission for the path* – the proposed path is on hold so no permission has been sought other than in principle from Highways who have expressed no concerns.

*Path not fully costed* – the path has been fully costed and as a result put on hold. Less expensive alternatives may be available but are not being considered at this time.

*May be used once a year and not being of benefit to the village either now or in the future* – the Council takes the view that access to the Memorial is for all, including parishioners and anyone else who may wish to visit. The number of visits is not the deciding factor, but the opportunity to do so without constraint.

*Alternative use for the funds* – it is apparent that spending available funds is acceptable but only on certain projects. We continue to press the authorities to try to help with our speed issues, albeit with insignificant results. Please note that Highways have made it clear there is neither the money nor the will to provide additional signage or solutions in our area and we are dependant upon the occasional visits from the Police. The minutes will show that we have now earmarked reserves to cover the replacement speed signs when the current ones expire. The use of solar panels on the existing machines has been ruled out by the manufacturer – the units being too old for their update – and they do not recommend a home-made update for fear of destroying the electronics.

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*Will the precept remain the same if the Council has excess funds to spend* – the money for the dropped kerb is coming from existing reserves. Unfortunately, it has been identified that were our circumstances to change and a paid Clerk be employed we would have a significant shortfall in annual income. The only way to address this is through the precept. Annual rises are both necessary and inevitable. For the record, the agreed precept for 2025/26 will see an average uplift for households of £3.01 per annum. In the future, the overall precept value will continue to rise, firstly to address the shortfall and thereafter to cover the Clerk's annual pay award and other regular costs including fuel and insurance premiums all of which only go one way.

It must be noted that the Council sought advice regarding its original decision bearing in mind the provisions of the *Disability and Discrimination Act 1995*. The Act ensures that provision should be made for the less able where possible if 'reasonable'. In this case, the Council decided that a path costing £10,000 was 'unreasonable' due to budget constraint, but the lesser sum for the dropped kerb is 'reasonable'.

In summary, the decision for the Council having addressed the concerns raised was to decide on the need for the dropped kerb, and if 'Yes', on its location. Two proposals were put to Council.

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Is a dropped kerb considered reasonable and necessary?      | All Councillors agreed 'YES'        |
| 2. If agreed, then at which location, Ash Lea or turning area? | All Councillors agreed with Ash Lea |

Highways will be notified of the decision and the work rescheduled.

Yours,

P. Smith - Chair