

BETLEY, BALTERLEY AND WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL

27th June 2024

Commenced: 7.30 pm

Terminated: 9.40 pm

Present: Councillor Bettley-Smith (Chair)
Councillors Berrisford, Bullock, Daly, Drakakis-Smith, Head and Owen

There were 7 Members of the Public in attendance

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ecclestone, Hales, Karling and Watkin.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members of the Parish Council on matters to be discussed at the Meeting, at this juncture.

3. STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE

There was no representative of Staffordshire Police at the meeting.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 30th May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Councillor Drakakis-Smith voted against the approval of the Minutes and objected specifically to Minutes 5.1; 8; 9; 11; 12; 13.1; 13.3; 14; 16 and 17.3. She stated that this was due to accuracy and context.

5. URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

The Chair wished to raise an urgent matter at this stage of the meeting, which related to a report published in the 'aboutwrinehill.blogspot.com'.

The Clerk outlined that in the Blog, it was stated that Councillor Bettley-Smith had "expressed sentiments that suggested the issue [investigation into a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Councillor] might have been preventable if the Parish Council had a policy to manage internal disputes". (Please refer to the Appendix to these Minutes for details).

The Chair clarified that he had not made this statement, and the Clerk and other Members of the Parish Council confirmed that they too, had not heard him make this statement.

The Chair added that he had received several complaints from Members of the Public about the aboutwrinehill.blogspot and further confirmed that this Blog was entirely independent from the Parish Council. This confirmation was corroborated by Councillor Drakakis-Smith, the author of the Blog, who confirmed that she wrote the Blog in a personal capacity, and not as a Member of the Parish Council.

A Member of the Parish Council expressed concerns that any comments submitted to the author of the Blog (via the Blog website) which questioned the factual accuracy of the contents of its reports, were ignored and not published.

6. PUBLIC FORUM

The following matters were received by Members of the Public:

(i) Notice Board – Hand and Trumpet

Thanks were expressed to Councillor Hales for repairing the Notice Board at the Hand and Trumpet. Councillor Hales had effected the repair, and the replacement glass had been purchased by a Member of the Public who wished to remain anonymous.

(ii) Broadband

Further to a question on the progress of an improved broadband service, the Chair confirmed that this matter had been raised at the Borough Council meeting and agreed that this would be placed on the agenda for further consideration in September.

Mr Griffiths, former Clerk and former Responsible Financial Officer, raised the following:-

(iii) Independent Auditors Report

Mr Griffiths stated that if any Members of the Parish Council or Members of the Public had queries relating to the accounting period before the new Clerk was employed, then he would be happy to help.

(iv) Accounting Statement 2023-2024

Mr Griffiths referred to the objections recorded by Councillor Drakakis-Smith at the last Meeting in relation to the Accounting Statement, and asked for the reasons for her objections. Councillor Drakakis-Smith was unable to recall the reasons for her objections and was asked to submit a report to the next meeting, to answer Mr Griffiths' questions.

At this juncture, Councillor Bullock left the meeting.

(v) Rural Runabout

Mr Griffiths wished to publicly recognise the importance of the contribution of the Chair, Deputy Chair and residents of the Parish, who played a significant role in ensuring the survival of the Rural Runabout Scheme, during a very difficult period.

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council formally appreciates the measures taken to ensure the survival of the Rural Runabout.

Mr and Mrs Ball referred to the following matters:-

(vi) Accounting Statement 2023-2024

In relation to Minute 6(iv), Mr Ball stated that he too, would be interested to hear of the reasons for Councillor Drakakis-Smith's objections to the Accounting Statement.

(vii) Notice Board at Hand and Trumpet

Mr Ball also thanked Councillor Hales for repairing the Notice Board at the Hand and Trumpet. He added that Councillor Hales had not yet received an apology for personal remarks made by Councillor Drakakis-Smith, which he considered to be insulting.

At this juncture, Councillor Bullock returned to the meeting.

(viii) AboutWrinehill.Blogspot

Mr Ball referred to recent comments posted on the Blog which was published 7 days before the Meeting of the Parish Council (20th June 2024), which related to statements made by Members of the Public at the Annual Parish Meeting (please refer to the statements appended to the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting). The Blog reported that the statements were far from accurate or correct. Mr Ball asked Councillor Drakakis-Smith for confirmation on what elements of the statements she considered were inaccurate. Councillor Drakakis-Smith was unable to recall the content of the statements, therefore she was asked to submit a report to the next meeting.

At this juncture, the Chair reaffirmed advice received from the Monitoring Officer, if the majority of the Members of the Parish Council present, voted to say the Minutes were a true and accurate record, then they were a true and accurate record and could be relied upon in a Court of Law.

Mrs Ball continued to refer to the Blog dated 20th June. She requested that Councillor Drakakis-Smith provided evidence to support her allegations that the statements made by the two Betley residents and the former Clerk were inaccurate or incorrect. Mr and Mrs Ball added that if Councillor Drakakis-Smith was unable to provide such evidence then they wished to see a public apology published in the Blog, and the Parish Newsletter.

Finally, Mrs Ball asked Councillor Drakakis-Smith to reconsider her position on the Parish Council. Councillor Drakakis-Smith replied that she had been asked to be a Parish Councillor so she would not reconsider her position and would not be resigning.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Drakakis-Smith to produce a written response to the matters raised by Members of the Public (detailed in the Minutes above), for consideration at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

7. REPORTS

The Parish Council received the following reports:-

(i) The Chair

Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council and Madeley Parish Council had raised objections to the proposed Smoke Control Order. This proposal would be considered by the Licensing Committee on the 11th July 2024.

In relation to Doddlespool Hall Farm, the order submitted, required the waste to be removed by 8th September 2024.

(ii) The Vice Chair

Councillor Daly reported that he had been invited to continue in his role as a School Governor for another 4 years.

(iii) The Clerk

Correspondence had been received from a resident asking about progress relating to the Broadband Service and to the invoice for the Independent Investigation. The Clerk confirmed that as soon as progress was received, it would be reported to the next available Parish Council meeting.

(iv) County Councillor and Borough Councillors

The County Councillor was not in attendance at the meeting due to the pre-election purdah, and the Borough Councillors had resigned.

(v) Representatives on Outside Bodies

Councillor Bullock reported that he had received an email from PCSO Gemma Crank, advising that she had left her Madeley position. Members noted that the PCSO team was currently reduced.

8. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL 2024-2025

RESOLVED

That the schedule of meetings for the Parish Council in 2024-2025 as follows, be approved:

26th September 2024

28th November 2024

27th February 2025

24th April 2025

(All meetings to commence at 7.30 pm)

(Members noted that dates could be amended, if necessary)

The Chair then took Items 9 and 10 simultaneously.

9. FINANCE AND AUDIT, AND PLANNING COMMITTEES

(i) Finance and Audit Committee

RESOLVED

That the following dates for meetings of the Finance and Audit Committee in 2024-2025, be approved (subject to matters needing to be discussed and considered):-

25th July 2024

24th October 2024

23rd January 2025

27th March 2025

(All meetings to commence at 7.30 pm)

(ii) Planning Committee

RESOLVED

That the following dates for meetings of the Finance and Audit Committee in 2024-2025, be approved (subject to matters needing to be discussed and considered):-

25th July 2024

24th October 2024

23rd January 2025

27th March 2025

(All meetings to commence at 7.45 pm)

(iii) Membership of the Planning Committee for 2024-2025 (5 Councillors)

RESOLVED

That Councillors Bettley-Smith, Daly and Berrisford be appointed as Members of the Planning Committee for 2024-2025, with the remaining Members [for Betley Central and Balterley] being selected following contact by the Clerk.

10. MEMBERSHIP OF STAFFORDSHIRE PARISH COUNCILS ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE VACANCIES

Members were asked to consider submitting a nomination for the appointment of a Member of the Parish Council to the vacancy of the SPCA Executive Committee.

RESOLVED

That the Clerk emails all eligible Members of the Parish Council, with the Job Description, and ask them to let her have any nominations. (Following the outcome of the Standards Hearing, Councillor Drakakis-Smith was not eligible)

11. SANDY CROFT

The Chair reported that correspondence had been received regarding the use of Sandy Croft to support private businesses.

The Chair reminded Members that a decision had been taken, when Sandy Croft reopened to the public, that a 'light touch approach' would be adopted and rules only developed to meet specific issues. This had occurred in the early stages when teenagers were using the area after dark and causing a disturbance.

He added that complaints had also been received reporting that dog training was taking place, and this was causing concern for parents with toddler and babies, parking difficulties and access restrictions for users of wheelchairs.

At this juncture, the Deputy Chair declared a potential interest in this matter, as the organisation currently using the Sandy Croft for dog training purposes, could be a client. Councillor Daly therefore took no part in the discussion or voting.

RESOLVED

That commercial activities should not take place on Sandy Croft unless the permission of the Parish Council has first been obtained.

12. WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981 – SCHEDULE 14 S53 APPLICATION TO UPGRADE PUBLIC FOOTPATH 20 BETLEY PARISH TO BRIDLEWAY STATUS

Members considered a letter received from Staffordshire County Council, Legal Services to upgrade public footpath 20 to bridleway status. Any comments were required to be submitted by 18th July 2024.

RESOLVED

That the following comments be submitted to Staffordshire County Council:-

- 1. The Parish Council was of a view in 1992 that the footpath should not be upgraded to a bridleway as, at that time, there was no evidence to support the footpath being a bridleway. Some 32 years later that was still the view of the Parish Council. Further justification for this point of view being that the footpath had not been used as a bridleway since the evidence was submitted in 1992.**
- 2. The Parish Council wishes to rely on the evidence that the Parish Council has already submitted and the Parish Council also wishes to rely on the evidence submitted by others that formed an annex to the original report that supports Footpath 20 not being upgraded to a Bridleway.**
- 3. The Chair moved to the Parish in 1992 and since that time, until the 10th November 2023, the Chair of the Parish Council is not aware of Footpath 20 being used as a Public Bridleway. It is believed that there may be an element of confusion on the part of the Bridleways Association given the number of people that live on Common Lane, have one or more horses, that they ride and exercise regularly.**

13. FOOTPATHS WORKING PARTY

Members received a report from the Footpaths Working Party.

Councillor Daly reported that the competition had been very successfully received with school.

Councillor Drakakis-Smith asked for additional information and agreed to write to the Clerk on this matter.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be received**
- (2) That the Parish Council extends its sincere thanks to Councillor Berrisford for the significant work she has undertaken to secure donations.**

14. BUDGET AND FINANCE 2024-2025

The Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer reported on the following:-

(i) APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

There had been no applications for financial assistance.

(ii) UNITY TRUST BANK

Members were asked to approve the transfer of £2,000 from the Co-op to the Unity Trust Bank.

(iii) TRANSACTIONS SINCE THE LAST MEETING – UNITY TRUST BANK

Members were asked to approve the following transactions from the Unity Trust Bank since the last meeting:-

DATE	DETAILS	RECEIPTS	PAYMENTS
31/05/2024	Invoice 466 - Landscaping		£180.00
31/05/2024	Payroll Fees Invoice SHI-2045		£206.40
31/05/2024	Clerk Pension - May 2024		£155.62
31/05/2024	PAYE for Clerk - May 2024		£111.20
31/05/2024	May 2024 Salary		£420.09
31/05/2024	Petrol Reimbursements November 2023-May 2024		£72.54
31/05/2024	Annual Membership Renewal		£313.45
31/05/2024	Reimbursement for Viking Photocopy Paper		£25.69
04/06/2024	Transfer from Co-op	£2,000.00	
05/06/2024	* Donation received allocated to Footpath Budget	£490.00	
10/06/2024	Room Hire Invoice 4140 (10 hours)		£125.00

(iv) TRANSACTIONS SINCE THE LAST MEETING – CO-OP BANK

Members were asked to approve the following transaction from the Co-op Bank since the last meeting:-

DATE	DETAILS	RECEIPTS	PAYMENTS
04/06/2024	Transfer to Unity Trust Bank		£2,000

(v) PAYMENT OF INVOICES AND REIMBURSEMENTS

Members were asked to approve the following transactions from the Unity Trust Bank:-

M Clough	June 2024 Salary	Approx. £420.09
HMRC	June 2024 PAYE	Approx. £111.20
Staffordshire Pension	June 2024 Pension	Approx. £155.62
Luke Rimmer	Maintenance; removal of old plants; planting bedding plants at Memorial Garden Invoice 476	£880.00

(vi) BUDGET EXPENDITURE TO 19th JUNE 2024 – UNITY TRUST BANK

Members were asked to note the following Budget Head expenditure to 19th June 2024

Budget Head	Total	Budget Allocated	£ Difference
Salary	£1,593.87	£7,200.00	£5,606.13
Pension	£472.42	£1,660.00	£1,187.58
Admin - Insurance	£0.00	£850.00	£850.00
Admin - Audit Fees	£250.00	£40.00	-£210.00
Admin - Venue Hire	£125.00	£450.00	£325.00
Admin - Subscriptions	£313.45	£330.00	£16.55
Admin - Website	£0.00	£135.00	£135.00
Admin - Other	£470.92	£500.00	£29.08
Highways	£0.00	£1,500.00	£1,500.00
Footpaths	£0.00	£1,490.00	£1,490.00
Grants	£0.00	£1,200.00	£1,200.00
Miscellaneous	£135.98	£270.00	£134.02
Sandy Croft	£0.00	£1,100.00	£1,100.00
Memorial Garden	£310.00	£4,000.00	£3,690.00

Neighbourhood Plan	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Chair's Expenses	£0.00	£250.00	£250.00
	£3,671.64	£20,975.00	£17,303.36

(vii) EXPLANATION OF VARIANCES

The Clerk reported that the Footpaths Budget Head expenditure in (vi) above, had been adjusted and increased (from £1,000 to £1,490) to reflect the donation received in the sum of £490.00.

Councillor Drakakis-Smith referred to the inspection of invoices, and the Clerk confirmed that all invoices were inspected by the signatories to the bank accounts, prior to release of the payments. She added that for transparency, all payments were listed in the Budget and Finance Report, and the bank statements were also circulated with the report.

(viii) BANK RECONCILIATION AS AT 19TH JUNE 2024

Members were asked to approve the following Bank Reconciliation for Royal Bank of Scotland and Unity Trust Bank as at 19th June 2024:-

Bank Reconciliation 19th June 2024	
Financial year ending 31 March 2025	
Prepared by: Muna Clough, Parish Clerk & RFO	
Balance per bank statements as at	£
Current Account UNITY (20500409) - 31st May 2024	£312.97
Reserve Account CO-OP (49148300) - 4th June 2024	£39,965.25
Less: any unpresented cheques	
Current Account UNITY (20500409)	£125.00
Reserve Account CO-OP (49148300)	
Add: any unbanked cash - Unity	£2,490.00
Net bank balances as at 19th June 2024	£42,643.22
The net balances reconcile to the Cash Book (receipts and payments account) for the year, as follows	
CASH BOOK	
Opening Balance	
Unity Trust Bank @ 1st April 2024	£420.69
Co-op Bank @ 1st April 2024	£23,099.25
Add: Receipts in the year	
Unity Trust Bank	£1,928.92
Co-op Bank	£20,866.00
Less: Payments in the year	
Unity Trust Bank	£3,671.64
Co-op Bank	

Closing balance per cash book [receipts and payments book] must equal net bank balances above	£42,643.22

RESOLVED

- (a) That the transfer of £2,000 from the Co-op Bank to the Unity Trust Bank (Minute 14(ii) above refers), be unanimously approved;
- (b) That the transactions listed in the Unity Trust Bank since the last meeting (Minute 14(iii) above refers), be unanimously approved;
- (c) That the transaction listed in the Co-op Bank since the last meeting (Minute 14(iv) above refers), be unanimously approved;
- (d) That the payment of invoices and reimbursements from the Unity Trust Bank listed in Minute 14(v) above, be unanimously approved;
- (e) That the Budget Expenditure to 19th June 2024 for the Unity Trust Bank, detailed in Minute 14(vi) above, be noted;
- (f) That the Explanation of Variances, as detailed in Minute 14(vii) above, be unanimously approved;
- (g) That the Bank Reconciliation as at 19th June 2024 for the Royal Bank of Scotland and Unity Trust Bank, detailed in Minute 14(vii) above, be unanimously approved;
- (h) That the Unity Trust Bank Statement dated 31st May 2024, submitted with the report circulated, be received;
- (i) That the Co-op Bank Statement dated 4th June 2024, submitted with the report circulated, be received.

15. PLANNING MATTERS

Members noted that there were no planning matters for consideration at this meeting.

16. AREA MATTERS

Members of the Parish Council raised the following matters relating to the individual areas of Balterley, Betley and Wrinehill.

- (i) Flooding on Checkley Lane – Councillor Drakakis-Smith reported that there was still flooding at the bend on Checkley Lane. The Chair clarified that there were three separate issues, two of which had been solved, but one remained outstanding;
- (ii) Notice Board at the Hand and Trumpet – Councillor Drakakis-Smith thanked Councillor Hales for repairing the Notice Board in Wrinehill;
- (iii) Overgrown verges and footpath – Councillor Drakakis-Smith reported that the Footpath 17 and the grass verge at Checkley Lane were overgrown. Councillor Berrisford advised her to report these matters on the County Council portal. The Clerk added that she had added a ‘Report It’ tab onto the Parish Council website, which included links to report concerns;
- (iv) Speeding Vehicles - Councillor Head reported that a Member of the Public had reported that a speeding car had caused her horse to spook. Councillor Bullock agreed to report this matter to the police, and this concern would be placed in the Newsletter.

RESOLVED

That the reports be received.

17. REMEMBRANCE ARRANGEMENTS (FIGURES AND POPPIES) FOR 2024

Councillor Owen reported that anonymous donors had offered to pay for the statues and poppies. He had also received positive comments about the statues purchased for the D-Day celebrations.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

18. ANNUAL APPRAISAL OF PARISH CLERK

Members were asked to consider the recommendations of the Chair and Deputy Chair on the outcome of the Annual Appraisal of the Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.

The Clerk and Members of the Press and Public withdrew during consideration of this item as this matter contained Exempt Information as defined in the Local Government Act, relating to the Clerk of the Parish Council. During this time, and after the decision had been agreed with Members of the Parish Council, Councillor Daly asked to be excused from the meeting, because of the approach being taken by Councillor Drakakis-Smith, who questioned his integrity. Councillor Daly did not return to the meeting.

The Clerk and Members of the Press and Public returned to the meeting to hear the following resolution:-

RESOLVED

Members noted that the performance of the Clerk is considered satisfactory in all aspects and meets our requirements. Further, the Members noted that the Clerk had given us a very good service in difficult circumstances over the last 12 months, and the Members agreed with the recommendation of the Chair and Deputy Chair that the Clerk moves from Point 11 to Point 12, to £13.73 per hour.

19. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no further items for consideration as a matter of urgency.

recognize that the Clerk and the Chair play crucial roles in overseeing procedures at meetings to ensure that the Council and members operate within the bounds of the law and maintain the integrity of the institution. Effective adherence to Council policy and rules is essential to prevent any potential issues and to uphold the Council's reputation and legal compliance. Thus residents might wonder how events had reached the level of toxicity which ended in a formal hearing.

On this occasion, the Chair, Councillor Bettley-Smith, expressed sentiments that suggested the issue might have been preventable if the Parish Council had a policy in place to manage internal disputes. The absence of such a policy raises questions about the Council's approach to handling conflicts. It is important for the Parish Council to account for its decisions and actions to foster transparency and accountability. Members of the Council might benefit from considering how their actions impact their wellbeing and the wellbeing of the community. Upholding honesty and truthfulness is essential for building trust and ensuring effective governance. The concept of perception as reality, as frequently stated by the Chair, is only valid when that perception accurately reflects the truth; otherwise, it risks becoming self-deception.

Given the numerous challenges and events at both national and local levels over the past five years, it is understandable that many people have experienced angst, anxiety, mental trauma, and stress. Determining the specific cause of these feelings can be complex. It raises the question of whether these emotions are solely due to recent events within the council occasioned, we