

DRAFT MINUTES OF BITTERLEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON

Monday 15th January 2024

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Present: Mrs. A Holman (Chair), Mr. P Martin, Mr. J Reardon-Smith, Mr. G Dolphin, Mr. R Watkins, Mr. P Martin, Mr. Readon-Smith, and Mr. J Gatehouse.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Michelle Parker (Clerk), John Campion (The West Mercia, Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)), Jemma Towers (Staff Officer to West Mercia PCC), David Meyer (Acting Inspector), Karen Parry, Mrs. S Dolphin, Mr. Richard Huffer

The Meeting commenced at 7.00pm

	ITEM	ACTION
2023/112	Apologies: Cllrs. Mr. R Osbourne, Mr. T Millard & Mr. D Rogers	
2023/113	Public participation: None	
2023/114	Shropshire Councillor Report: Mr. R Huffer reported on flooding issues in Bitterley and potential solutions. Funding availability for preventative measures was noted, with suggestions including environmental schemes and addressing drainage concerns. Concerns were raised about sandbag effectiveness and the need for alternative solutions accessible to all residents. Planning matters were discussed, including affordable housing and decision-making processes within the council. Attendees expressed frustration over complex planning applications and deviations from officer recommendations. The proposed Marks and Spencer's store was discussed, with concerns about viability amid declining local businesses. Plans for a multi-story car park and transport hub prompted a call for community consultation. Boundary and revenue issues were also addressed, emphasising the importance of community input in revenue allocation decisions.	
2023/115	Declarations of Interest: None	
2023/116	Approval of Minutes: It was confirmed that all councillors approved the minutes of the meeting held on November 20th, 2023, with one minor amendment requested by Cllr. Millard. Cllr. A Holman signed.	
2023/117	Police Crime Commission Question & Answer Session:	

	<p>Pre-prepared questions were submitted to the PCC in advance for their consideration. John Campion led their response, supported by Jemma Towers, and David Meyer.</p> <p>John explained his role, which includes appointing the chief constable, setting the budget, and holding the police accountable for their actions and plans.</p> <p>Police Resources: Efforts have been made to increase the number of police officers in West Mercia, ensuring effective deployment across all communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One inspector, one sergeant, six constables, and nine PCSOs are allocated for the area. <p>Recruitment of Chief Constable: Steps are being taken to recruit a new chief constable to ensure that the benefits of additional police officers are felt across all communities.</p> <p>Policing, Safer Neighbourhoods Teams (SNT) and Crime Statistics: The discussion highlighted that West Mercia, includes areas like Shropshire that has rural characteristics with generally low crime rates, necessitating appropriate police presence.</p> <p>Emphasis was placed on the importance of community policing, with officers based within communities addressing local concerns effectively.</p> <p>Despite challenges, there have been improvements in holding offenders accountable, particularly for crimes such as burglary and shoplifting.</p> <p>The parish council expressed concerns about rural crime, speeding, and antisocial behaviours in the area.</p> <p>Confusion from the Cllrs. was noted regarding which SNT covers Bitterley Parish, Ludlow East, indicating discrepancies in communication, website information and understanding around statistics. There was a discussion about the relevance of crime statistics to specific geographic areas and the need for localised analysis. The challenges posed by geography, particularly regarding road safety and accidents resulting in fatalities or serious injuries, were acknowledged.</p> <p>John Campion outlined the coverage area of West Mercia, which includes Worcester, Shropshire, Herefordshire, and smaller communities. Concerning the SNT model of policing, it was noted that local police officers may not currently be appropriately resourced. One central focus of the SNT is bringing offenders to justice, requiring good reporting and accountability.</p> <p>John Campion acknowledged challenges with crime statistics due to geography and emphasised the need for changes to ensure accurate reporting. Despite changes in crime volume and reporting methods, overall crime levels were consistent with expectations. Questions from the Cllrs. arose about the accuracy and availability of crime statistics and the identification of local officers.</p> <p>Concerns were raised about response times, particularly in rural areas, and the resourcing of the policing model. John Campion admitted challenges with response times in rural areas and efforts to improve resource allocation.</p>	
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	<p>Under-reported rural crime was discussed, with emphasis placed on building community confidence to report crimes.</p> <p>Concerns were expressed about public confidence in the police and the need for improved communication and visibility. Suggestions were made to improve accessibility and provide regular updates to the community regarding communication with the SNT. Concerns were raised about substance misuse and drug-related issues in Ludlow, prompting a discussion on intelligence-led policing and the importance of accurate reporting.</p> <p>In conclusion, there were calls for improved communication, transparency, and accountability within the SNT model to address community concerns effectively.</p> <p>The parish council has long requested crime statistics to gain a better understanding of the situation in their area. It was noted that overall crime in Ludlow has seen a slight increase, with 152 crimes reported in September 2023 compared to 145 in the previous year. Additionally, crime statistics were discussed, revealing a slight overall decrease in crime in Shropshire. However, there was an increase in crime specifically in Ludlow East. In Shropshire, crime has dropped by roughly two percent overall. In Ludlow, there has been a slight increase in crime, with 152 crimes reported in September 2023 compared to 145 in the previous year.</p> <p>Local police teams are tasked with understanding crime trends in their communities, despite potential limitations in accessing statistical data. Emphasis was placed on the importance of community perception and priorities. Local police officers are expected to address community concerns confidently and provide updates on crime trends, even in the absence of comprehensive statistical data.</p> <p>There is a commitment to ensuring each community has identifiable local police officers, despite challenges in clearly identifying coverage areas. Two PCSOs Beth Francis and Susan Cooke and a police sergeant Jenni Price were named as part of the local policing team.</p> <p>There is a call from the Council for clearer communication and streamlined reporting methods to facilitate easier reporting of crimes and issues to the police. John Campion tasked Jemma Towers to provide clarification on SNT area.</p>	
2023/118	<p>Clerk's Report:</p> <p>A letter had been sent to Brown Clee Medical Centre regarding not upholding their grant request, and their response has been received and acknowledged.</p> <p>Updates on defibrillator maintenance were provided, with a focus on addressing obstruction issues in Bedlam caused by mud. Efforts to clear it and the need for periodic maintenance, potentially by residents were discussed. Cllr A Holman to 'rally' support from local residents.</p> <p>An apology was issued for a misunderstanding from the Clerk regarding the change in availability of meeting minutes on the website/notice boards. Clarifications were provided, draft minutes and parish meeting agenda will be</p>	A Holman

	<p>displayed on the notice boards and the agreed minutes will be displayed on the website only each month, copies will always be provided by request for those with accessibility needs.</p> <p>No responses were received following email enquiries about Bridge wall and the road, or complaints about furniture on Furnace Road.</p> <p>Payment for the grant to St. Mary's Church will be processed w/c 15/01/24, and research on potential website providers is ongoing and report to follow.</p> <p>Correspondence from Shropshire Council regarding the register of electors was discussed, but no further action is required as the service is not accessed by the Cllrs.</p>	Clerk to follow up
2023/119	<p>Precept Requirement 2024/2025:</p> <p>Councillors confirmed receipt and review of the budget, Responses via email from Cllrs R Osbourne, T Millard, and D Rogers indicated their satisfaction with the budget, with no additional comments provided. Councillors present agreed with the circulated budget, and no further questions were raised. Proposed: Cllr. A Holman to pass the budget as presented, seconded: Cllr. J Gatehouse; unanimous agreement was reached.</p> <p>Discussion clarified the calculation of the total precept, its calculation based on the number of houses in the D band. Proposed: Cllr. A Holman to accept the total precept amount of £8367.72, seconded: Cllr. J Readon-Smith; unanimous agreement was reached.</p> <p>Further review of interest earned on the bank account was deferred to the next meeting due to current access limitations. Clerk to provide report.</p>	<p>Clerk to follow up</p> <p>Clerk</p>
2023/120	<p>Planning Inspectorate Correspondence:</p> <p>Ref. Ticket No. 38885 Appeal by Ledwyche Solar Limited - The Cllrs. discussed the email response from the Planning Inspectorate regarding a previous query. It was noted that the Inspectorate's decision, indicated no changes to their initial decision. Discussion highlighted concerns about the inability to alter the decision Queries were raised regarding the delineation of two areas, red and blue, within the decision, particularly regarding the inclusion of a wildflower site. The council expressed frustration over the lack of clarity and the potential impact on wildlife, the planning conditions refer only to the blue area, maintain the red area was part of the justification for building the solar site.</p>	
2023/121	<p>Councillor Vacancies Update:</p> <p>The Cllrs. discussed the two vacancies within the council and the process of filling them. It was noted that no candidates came forward following the posting of the vacancy notices and there was no call for an election. Recently, Karen Parry expressed an interest in a vacancy.</p> <p>Best practices for advertising vacancies were reviewed, emphasising setting a deadline for prospective candidates to express interest. The importance of geographic representation was highlighted, with a focus on areas like Bedlam. Plans to promptly post notices on notice boards and distribute them in the community. The format of the notices would include details of the vacancy, application deadline, and contact information for expressing interest.</p>	

	<p>Applications will be reviewed /candidates met at the meeting in March. Clerk to create & post Co-option Notices.</p> <p>Proposed: Cllr. A Holman to put the vacancies up for Co-option.</p> <p>Seconded: John Gatehouse. All agreed.</p>	Clerk
2023/122	<p>Grant Policy:</p> <p>The Cllrs.discussed revising the grant policy to improve efficiency. It was proposed to implement a fixed window for grant applications, starting from April for three to four months. This would allow simultaneous review of all applications. Considerations were raised regarding financial limits and clear communication about the application process. Despite the lack of a current formal deadline, funds were available for potential applicants. The need for a structured application form and evidence presentation was emphasised, with flexibility for exceptional cases.</p> <p>The council agreed to revisit the policy and requested members to review the proposed changes for further discussions and refinements.</p> <p>Clerk to circulate Grant policy</p>	Clerk
2023/123	<p>Guest Speaker for March AGM:</p> <p>The council discussed arrangements for the March AGM and Parish Meeting. The AGM will include a guest speaker, with a suggestion to invite a representative from the RSVP project, focused on improving verges in Shropshire. The project aims to engage local volunteers in maintaining verges to enhance aesthetics and biodiversity. Members expressed interest in learning more about local projects and potential community involvement. It was agreed that Cllr. A Holman proceed with contacting RSVP representatives and determining a suitable meeting date based on their availability.</p> <p>Proposal not required, all agreed.</p>	A Holman
2023/124	<p>Snowball Community App:</p> <p>The council discussed the Snowball Community app and its potential relevance to the local community. The app could serve as a useful resource for individuals seeking accessible facilities or services. The decision was made to proceed with adding information about the app to the website to increase awareness among community members.</p>	Clerk
2023/125	<p>Safer Roads Grant:</p> <p>The Safer Roads grant was discussed and the potential for parish or town councils to apply for funding to improve road safety. Ideas were sought for projects that could be proposed for the grant, but no specific suggestions were put forward during the discussion. It was mentioned that previous actions were already in progress to address road safety concerns in the area, such as speeding measures and signage. The council acknowledged the importance of road safety but did not identify any new projects for the grant application at this time.</p>	
2023/126	<p>Financial Matters:</p> <p>No payments were made since the last meeting.</p> <p>Payments to be made:</p> <p>SALC training – Fundamentals for Cllrs. = £30.00</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sue Jones back pay = £109.78 • HMRC = £27.40 • Grant payment to St. Mary's Church = £500.00 • Website fees YTD, Rocking Horse Media = £320.00 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reimbursement for Remembrance Day wreath, T Millard = £23.98 • Shropshire Council joint energy costs = £217.36 • Michelle Parker salary = £500.00 excl. HMRC <p>Cllrs. approved monthly payments of standard hours for the Clerk, Michelle Parker.</p> <p>Proposed: Cllr. A Holman to approve payment. Seconded: Cllr. R Watkins. The proposed payments were approved by the council.</p>	
2023/127	Action List: Not discussed	
2023/128	Items for the next Agenda: Not discussed	
	Meeting closed at 21:10	

Mrs. A. Holman Chair to Bitterley Parish Council