

# Whixall Parish Council

Chairman: Ian Mercer

Minutes of the Parish Council's Monthly Meeting held on 19 May 2021  
at Whixall Social Centre starting at 7:30pm

**Present:**

**Councillors:** I Mercer (Chair); J Spenser; B Harris; A Rawlinson; M Howard;

**Clerk:** A Roberts

**Members of the community:** 0

**Representatives of other bodies/ organisations:**

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**47/21 Apologies for Absence**

None

**48/21 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

It was proposed by Cllr Rawlinson that the draft minutes, of the meeting of the Council held on 14 April 2021, were an accurate record. This was seconded by Cllr Harris and agreed by all present.

The Chairman signed the minutes.

**49/21 Planning**

**a. To Consider Applications**

Reference	Detail	Stance
21/01623/VAR	Variation of planning conditions no.s. 2 and 4 attached to planning permission 18/03719/FUL for the creation of vehicular access, driveway turning area installation of gates. Higher House, SY13 2NQ	Support – no comment
20/03691/VAR	Reconsultation due to amendment. Variation of condition no 2 (Approved plans) attached to planning permission 19/01768/FUL 6 Hollinwood	No additional comments.
21/02017/FUL	Erection of cattle housing building (phase 1) Church Farm, Church Lane	Support – no comment

**b. To Receive Planning Application Decisions**

Reference	Detail	Decision
21/00203/CPE	The Haven, SY13 2QB Use of outbuilding as a workshop and for storage.	Certificate – lawful
21/01153/FUL	1 Canal Side, SY13 2PQ Erection of detached garage	Grant Permission

**50/21 Financial Matters**

**a) To receive monthly bank balance record.**

The Clerk advised the council of the council's bank balances.

DATE	ACCOUNT NAME	AMOUNT
30 April 2021	Current Account (Working Budget)	11,196.94
	Savings Account (Reserves)	5701.25
	Barclays Account	0.13
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£16,898.32</b>

b) To resolve to approve outstanding accounts

Orders for the payment of outstanding invoices (under "Power to Spend" LGA1972 s.112(2) and 124(1)). As per the financial report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)/ Clerk proposed by Cllr Rawlinson, seconded by Cllr Spenser and agreed by all present.

**Resolved: The outstanding accounts should be paid and the payment transactions authorised by two authorised councillors.**

c) Insurance Renewal

The clerk presented a report (Appendix A) outlining options for insurance renewal and explaining that the annual premium had increased substantially and requesting more time to explore alternative suppliers before the renewal on 1 June 2021. Members discussed the option of reducing risk and making savings by opting for a 3-year insurance policy, paid annually and agreed that the clerk should only purchase alternative insurance if it provided equal cover for less than £344.25 per year.

**Resolved: The Clerk will explore alternative insurance suppliers and will purchase a three-year insurance contract at an annual cost of no more than £344.25.**

d) Balance Remaining in Barclays Bank

The clerk reminded members that 13p in interest had been added to the Barclays Bank account after it was closed in May 2020. Members discussed the options for this funding and agreed that the account should be closed.

**Resolved: Barclays Bank will be asked to close the account and transfer the remaining balance to their charity account.**

e) To review and approve the effectiveness of internal control (Financial Regulations Review) and sign the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1 of Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2020/21)

The clerk explained the AGAR paperwork:

Page 3 – Certificate of exemption for authorities with an annual budget below £25,000 (meaning an external audit is not required) – was approved at the April meeting and is to be signed.

Page 4 – The internal auditor's report on the 2020/21 finances. Signed by the Internal Auditor and accompanied by a short report.

Page 5 – The annual governance statement which confirms the effectiveness of our internal control – to be signed.

Proposed by Cllr Mercer, seconded by Cllr Spenser agreed by all present.

**Resolved: The certificate of exemption is to be signed and the Effectiveness of Internal control (Financial Regulations Review) is approved.**

Both documents were signed by the chairman and the clerk following the meeting

f) To review, consider and approve Accounting Statements (Section 2 of Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20)

Page 5 – Accounting statements showing income, expenditure and balances in 2019/20 and 2020/21 – to be signed

Proposed by Cllr Mercer, seconded by Cllr Harris and agreed by all present.

**Resolved: Accounting Statements for 2020/21 are approved.**

The statements were signed by the chairman and the clerk following the meeting

**51/21 Clerk's Report**

The report was circulated by email prior to the meeting (Appendix B).

## **52/21 Parish Matters**

### **a) The Marlot**

A report provided by Martin Spenser was circulated prior to the meeting (Appendix C).

It was noted that John Broadhead had donated a rotavator to the Parish Council. This will be added to the asset register once more details are available.

Members discussed the costs of repairs required for the rotavator and agreed that it was prudent to set aside some funding specifically for repairs and maintenance of council-owned machinery and equipment. The clerk was asked to speak with Martin Spenser and ask for an indication of ongoing servicing and maintenance costs so that the earmarked reserve contributions can be adjusted in future years and members agreed that some funding should be made available immediately. The clerk advised that, under the financial regulations, she is permitted to make decisions relating to spending on emergency repairs.

**Resolved: A £200 equipment maintenance budget will be created.**

Cllr Mercer recorded his thanks to Martin Spenser and all the volunteers working at the Marlot.

## **53/21 Councillor Reports**

The Clerk explained that, as Covid restrictions are still in place and there was a limit on numbers, the newly elected Unitary Councillors (Cllr Edward Towers and Cllr Peter Broomhall) had not been invited to attend the meeting. Cllr Broomhall had contacted the clerk offering support and assistance to the Parish Council. Cllr Towers sent a message to the meeting (Appendix D)

Scheduled date of next meeting: **8 September 2021**

The meeting closed at 8.05pm

## Whixall Parish Council Insurance Renewal 2021

### Background

In recent years the Council's insurance has been arranged through Came & Co, a specialist insurance broker. Last year's renewal cost was £218. The minimum total renewal cost for 2021/22 is £359. The current budget is only £256. Although costs have increased, insurance must be purchased as it is a legal requirement for the Parish Council. It is also good husbandry.

### Insurance Premiums (2021/22)

	Insurer Premium	Administration Fee	Total Premium
Pen Underwriting Limited	£497.49	£50.00	£547.49
Hiscox	£309.72	£50.00	£359.72
Ecclesiastical	£590.99	£50.00	£640.99

The Clerk has contacted BHIB, another specialist broker in order to receive alternative quotations and to confirm that those shown above are reasonable. At the time of writing BHIB have not provided quotations.

### Three Year Agreements

Hiscox will offer a discounted long-term arrangement which gives an annual saving, but ties the Parish Council into a three-year agreement. The savings are shown below.

	Insurer Premium	Administration Fee	Total Annual Premium
<b>Annual</b> Policy with Hiscox	£309.72	£50.00	£359.72
<b>3 Year</b> Long Term Agreement Option with Hiscox	£294.23	£50.00	£344.23

Advantage: The Council can manage the risk of annual price increases.

Disadvantage: This arrangement removes the ability to seek out better prices.

There are certain circumstances in which the price will change, these being:

- When the PC makes changes to the material facts
- Policy changes, where the sums insured are increased or decreased
- The inflationary increase (index linking) applied to sums insured
- Increases in the rate of Insurance Premium Tax

### Recommendation

Members should approve a maximum one-year premium of £359.72 (including fees). If BHIB are able to provide identical insurance cover at a lower cost, this should be accepted, otherwise the Hiscox quotation should be accepted.

Members should agree the approach to be taken should the Hiscox quotation be the lowest. It is impossible to predict future changes in the insurance premium, but Members should consider the pros and cons of entering into a long-term agreement, bearing in mind that the saving for 21-22 is just £15 but this saving could increase (or decrease) in future.



## Clerks Report (April 2021)

## Correspondence

1. **Marlot LNR**

In response to an enquiry from the Clerk, Shaun Burkey has confirmed that all relevant paper work has been submitted to Shropshire Council Cabinet for their meeting on 7 June. He expects a decision to be made at this meeting and that the outcome will be favourable.

2. **Police update re changes**

PCSO Hannah Lister emailed on behalf of the SNT at Whitchurch with an update on staffing and an undertaking to attend future meetings or provide a written report. The Clerk has requested a written report for the May meeting in order to keep numbers down because of Covid-19 regulations.

3. **Grant Schemes**

SALC has provided information relating to a number of grant schemes including one for highway improvements. The Clerk will summarise the information and send it to members in the near future.

4. **The Queen's Green Canopy**

Anna Turner, The Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, has written to all town and parish councils inviting them to take part in a major tree planning initiative to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. The Clerk has requested additional information which will be circulated to members.

## Other Matters

1. **End of Year Finances**

Much of the Clerk's time over the last month has been spent finalising the end of year accounts which are on the agenda for approval. Once authorised, the information will be put on the website and the accounts will be available for any member of the public who wants to view them between 14 June and 23 July 2021.

2. **Elections**Parish Council

A notice of uncontested election has now been posted on noticeboards and the website. The Council now has three vacant seats that can be filled by co-option. These are not 'casual vacancies' and with agreement of the Council they can be filled at any time without needing to advertise.

Members are reminded to return their election expenses forms if they have not already done so – this is a legal requirement. The Clerk has some spare copies if required.

Unitary Council

The new Unitary Councillors are Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers. The Clerk has contacted both with a meeting schedule for the Parish Council. Due to the need to keep numbers to a minimum they were not invited to the May meeting, but the Clerk has offered to circulate any messages they wish to send to Members.

3. **Assets**

This was updated as part of the end of year accounts process. John Broadhead has since donated a rotovator for use at the Marlot. Once details are available this will be added to the register. Earmarked funding for the Marlot will need to be adjusted in future years so that the Council is able to replace the rotovator once it reaches the end of its life. Funding for ongoing maintenance of equipment also

needs to be considered. Proposals will be brought forward by the clerk when the 22/23 budget is discussed.

Martin Spenser has asked that the Council considers purchasing a picnic table for Hollinwood Green at some point in the future. This will also be brought forward when considering next year's budget.

4. **Remote Council Meetings**

The regulations allowing Council meetings to be held remotely ended on 6 May 2021. The Government is holding a consultation to establish the benefit of allowing meetings to be held remotely – a draft response completed by the Clerk has been circulated by email and Members have been asked to provide their comments.

5. **Regular Clerks Meetings enabled by SALC (remote)**

SALC is facilitating weekly online meetings for Town and Parish Clerks. These are proving a useful source of information and advice and, because the meetings are held online, attendance is good.

**Marlot Conservation Group****Work Report to Whixall Parish Council (19 May 2021)**

The MCG has now completed the task of cutting back the overgrowth in the meadow areas. A good spell of dry weather allowed the arisings to be burnt on site, and no further fires are planned for this season, so the fire sheets have been lifted and stored.

The team welcomed a new member, John Piper, who is residing temporarily in Hollinwood, but is hoping to find somewhere to live in the locality.

Graham Turnbull, assisted by the team, has continued his efforts to prepare patches of ground to make beds for wildflower seeds. These are showing the first flush of new growth in places; it is hoped that more beds can be prepared, to use up the seeds purchased earlier in the year. Graham felt that the use of a rotavator would ease the task of ground preparation and, luckily, John Broadhead was happy to donate his machine to the Parish Council. It has been necessary to carry out repairs to get the mechanical parts working, but, at the time of writing, other work is needed before the machine can be brought into use. The MCG has been most fortunate in having a neighbour, Niall Heywood, who has overseen the servicing, assisted by Martin Spenser.

Graham has also been busy making and installing signage from discs of natural wood retrieved from site. These are an attractive addition to the visitor experience. After the first newt survey, it was necessary to put the trapping on hold, because of the continuous run of cold nights. The next trapping session is planned for Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> May, when Martin and Jen Spenser will assist Nicky and Tim Hunter. As previously mentioned, it is hoped that the sessions can be opened up to more participants in the future; these are usually drawn from Natural England volunteers and student placements.

Sian Mercer is in charge of monitoring the bird nest boxes on site. Ian has been driving her to The Marlot after school on a weekly basis, with Martin Spenser in attendance. The next site visit is planned for early evening on 13<sup>th</sup> May. 12 boxes are examined, more than half of which have been occupied in some way. It has been fascinating to observe the various stages of development of the nests. Unfortunately, some nests containing eggs have been abandoned, caused by human interference.

Recent high winds caused damage to a Rowan tree in the woodland area, which was partly hung up on an adjacent tree and therefore a potential threat to safety. The team attended on 11<sup>th</sup> May and felled one section, leaving the other trunk laying on the ground as an experiment to attract fungal growth.

Groundworks will continue throughout the year; it is disappointing to note the ongoing abuse of the site by children on bikes and dog owners who fail to clean up.

Martin Spenser



## Message from Cllr Towers

To All in Whixall Parish,

I feel very humbled by the size of the mandate you have helped give me in coming out top of the poll on May 6<sup>th</sup>, as well as the trust you have, as electors of Whixall and Wem Division, placed in me. I do feel it is a great honour and will do my best to represent you well over this electoral term. I am very much aware that there were those from Whixall who have been out and about actively distributing my election flyers across the Wem area. To them a very special thank you for all your hard work and efforts in representing me over what was a focussed and intense election period. The result is that you now have another Independent Councillor representing Whixall and the Wem Division! My thanks to everyone for making it possible and giving me this role in our community.

To do this properly I would value your continued support, goodwill and advice as Cllr Peter Broomhall and I pick up matters from our two excellent and committed predecessors, former Councillors Mrs Pauline Dee and Mr Chris Mellings. Their length of Community service, of 40 and 32 years respectively, is impressive by any standards. I hope we may find a way of the entire Wem Division being able to show our appreciation to them as our 'lockdown restrictions' come to an end. You may have ideas as to how we might go about this, if so please get in touch. They have set a high bar for us as we now pick up where they have left off and rise to the challenge!

To this end I can be contacted using my Shropshire Council email address.... [edward.towers@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:edward.towers@shropshire.gov.uk) . My Shropshire Council mobile number is 07890056081. I also hope to be able to sit in on your Parish Council meetings and meet residents informally at community events as my diary permits; so I should be pleased to hear about them and support you where I am able.

In the meantime my thanks to you all for the support you have shown me. I send you all my best wishes and hope I shall soon get to be able to meet with you.

Kindest regards,

Councillor Edward Towers