

Whixall Parish Council

Chairman: Ian Mercer

Minutes of the Parish Council's Monthly Meeting held on 14 April 2021 on the Zoom Platform starting at 7:30pm

Present:

Councillors: J Spenser; B Harris (Chair); A Rawlinson; A Hague; M Howard; J Broadhead;
I Mercer joined the meeting at item 37/21.

County Councillors: P Dee

Clerk: A Roberts

Members of the community: 0

Representatives of other bodies/ organisations: 1

Due to technical difficulties, the Meeting was Chaired by Cllr Harris.

33/21 Apologies for Absence

C Mellings (Shropshire Council)

34/21 Public Participation

Mike Crawshaw (role) provided an update to Members (Appendix A) and answered questions relating to planning application 21/01140/FUL.

35/21 Declaration of Pecuniary Interests

Members were reminded of their obligation to declare any interests/ gifts/ hospitality. Cllr Broadhead declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 37/21a (21/01140/FUL and 21/01398/CPL). He opted not to take part in discussions relating to these items.

36/21 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Meeting of Whixall Parish Council held on 10 March 2021:

It was proposed by Cllr Rawlinson that the draft minutes, of the meeting detailed above, were an accurate record. This was seconded by Cllr Spenser and agreed by all present.

(As the meeting was online, the Clerk signed the minutes on behalf of the Chairman).

37/21 Planning

a. To Consider Applications

Reference	Detail	Stance
21/01140/FUL	Engineering operations to enable improved water level management for the land, to include the construction of clay bunds, ditches and water control measures. Land at Moss Lane, SY13 2QE	Support
21/01188/FUL	Conversion of integral garage into additional living accommodation and erection of detached garage Grasmillees, Alders Lane, SY13 2PZ	Support
21/01091/FUL	Formation of a new vehicular access Development Land North of Hollinwood	Object with comments as set out below.
21/01398/CPL	(For information Only) Application for a Lawful Development Certificate for the proposed erection of domestic garaging with some ancillary storage Moss Lane Farm SY13 2QE	Noted

Comments: 21/01091/FUL

The Parish Council is unable to support this application in its current format, without knowing more detail about the proposed use of this site which is currently agricultural land. Without additional detail they cannot comment on the application.

b. To Receive Planning Applications

Reference	Detail	Decision
20/03690/FUL	Erection of Animal Rescue Centre to provide a 20-unit kennel building and a 8 unit cattery; to include all associated works. Greenfields, Ossage Lane, SY13 2QB	Withdrawn

c. Pre-Application Consultation

Members discussed pre-application information provided in support of a proposed telecoms installation in a grass verge off Chapel Street.

Following discussions members were of the view that although the location was suitable, the size of the mast would cause visual intrusion for local residents and people using the canal. They also discussed the current lack of good mobile phone signals across the Parish and saw this as the ideal opportunity for mobile phone providers to share infrastructure and provide Whixall with high quality signals utilising the latest technology. Cllr Hague stressed that local residents should get some value from the installation of this mast including, the use of 5G technology. Cllr Rawlinson agreed and pointed out that whilst Smart Metering isn't desirable to everyone, good mobile phone signals are, as broadband coverage is patchy and smart phones are used by most local residents.

Resolved. The clerk will request an extension to allow members to agree the response by email.

(Note: The following response was agreed and sent by email on 20 April 2021:

'The Parish Council notes that the purpose of the provision of the mast is to enable the rollout of smart metering across the parish. Having reviewed the documentation, members accept that the location is suitable, but are of the view that it will cause visual intrusion for many. Therefore, they would like to see some additional benefits from the installation of such a mast. As the mast has the capability to bring high quality mobile signals to the Parish, the Council would look for it to do so, and for local residents to benefit from the latest technology (including 5g) to support the use of smart devices i.e. phones, on all networks, not simply to enable smart metering.')

38/21 Clerk's Report

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

- Cllr Harris had provided comments to the draft response for the SALC survey; and
- An email received from SALC indicated that the Council would receive neighbourhood funding for the current financial year. This will be confirmed at the next meeting.

39/21 Parish Matters

a) To Agree Parish Council Meeting Dates

The Clerk presented a report (Appendix C) explaining the legal requirement for returning to physical meetings and proposing a gradual return to the normal meeting schedule from May 2021 onwards.

Resolved: The Parish Council will meet in May 2021 for the conclusion of essential business. There will be no other scheduled meetings until September 2021.

b) To Agree the Parish Meeting

The Clerk reported to Members that the Parish Meeting was a legal requirement. It has to take place between 1 March and 1 June, but after 6 May it has to be a physical meeting. SALC are recommending that physical meetings are minimised and the clerk recommended that the Parish Meeting should be held on 28 April using the Zoom platform and that it should comprise the Chairman's presentation, approval of the minutes from the last Parish Meeting and a Question-and-Answer session for members of the public.

Resolved: The Parish Meeting will take place on 28 April using the Zoom Platform.

c) Asset Management – Marlot Update

A report provided by Martin Spenser was circulated prior to the meeting (Appendix D). Cllr Harris noted that the barn owl box will be monitored by a certified ringer, rather than a professionally qualified ornithologist.

Cllr Mercer had visited the site recently and wanted to thank the volunteers. He was aware that a rotovator was needed and the Clerk was asked to put a request on the local Facebook Pages.

40/21 Financial Matters

a) To receive monthly bank balance record.

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

DATE	ACCOUNT NAME	AMOUNT
31 March 2021	Current Account (Working Budget)	2072.30
	Savings Account (Reserves)	5701.25
	Barclays Account	0.13
TOTAL		£7,773.68

b) To receive the end of year expenditure report

The clerk gave a verbal report (Appendix E).

c) 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 Mercer, 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. In addition, payments authorised by email are approved.

(Due to Covid-19 the Clerk signed the paperwork on behalf of Cllr Mercer).

d) To resolve to appoint Internal Auditor

The Clerk reported to Members that Graham Murphy was once again willing to act as Internal Auditor and had indicated his willingness to complete the work required in time for the May Parish Council meeting.

Decision: Graham Murphy will be formally asked to act as Internal Auditor

e) To resolve exemption from Limited Assurance Review

The Clerk reported to Members that the Parish Council met the criteria for exemption from the review and recommended that this course of action was followed (Appendix F)

Resolved: The Exemption Certificate will be signed by the Chairman and the Clerk.

Cllr Mercer thanked Cllr Hague for the work he has done in assisting the Clerk in the management of the Council's finances.

41/21 Councillor Reports

On behalf of the Council, Cllr Mercer thanked Cllr Pauline Dee and Cllr Chris Mellings (Shropshire Councillors) for the work they have done and their wonderful service to the people of the parish. He also thanked them for their commitment and for attending meetings and giving help and advice.

He also thanked Cllr Hague and Cllr Broadhead for their work as councillors and for their skills and enthusiasm. He wished them the best as they were not standing for re-election. He thanked all Members for their work over what had been a difficult year.

Cllr Harris expressed gratitude for the support given by Cllr Dee and Cllr Mellings and for pushing on the Council's behalf across a range of issues.

Cllr Hague thanked the other members for their assistance.

Cllr Dee will remain as a governor for the Primary School and will retain an interest in what is happening in Whixall.

Cllr Mellings (Shropshire Council) circulated his report by email prior to the meeting (Appendix G).

Scheduled date of next meeting:

19 May 2021
7pm: Annual Council Meeting
7.30pm Full Council Meeting

The meeting closed at 8.57pm

Report to Whixall Parish Council**Mike Crawshaw, Shropshire Wildlife Trust****World's End Fields**

Planning application is live –. Application number is 21/01140/FUL – **Engineering operations to enable an improved water level management for the land to include the construction of clay bunds, ditches, and water control measures – Land at Moss Lane Whixall Whitchurch Shropshire SY13 2QE.** If the World's End Fields scheme is approved, we will go out to tender for the works in the Spring. We will be liaising with those residents involved about individual arrangements.

Slacks' drain

Section through the Sinker fields has been cleaned out recently.

Turf Fields

Subject to favourable weather 80,000 sphagnum moss plugs will be planted on the moss on the turfed stripped fields and elsewhere.

Tree planting

Volunteers planted 1000 oak trees.

Old Scrap yard

The rolled-up turf will be rolled out this month or early May – depending on the weather.

Sinkers Fields: Amendment to approved plans**Why making changes?**

Financial: The costs of providing stoned access track to bird hide in proposed location proved prohibitively high when put out to tender. We have revised the scheme to bring construction costs within budget and still provide a fully accessible facility and minimised disturbance to wildlife.

How have the plans changed?

Plans have been changed for field 1 and field 3. Principally to remove the stoned access track around field 3 to field 1 and move the hide from field 1 to field 3. The stoned area around the crossing over slacks drain has also been reduced in size.

The hide has been moved as, without the stoned trackway in field 3, pedestrian access without causing disturbance would have proven difficult and too costly. The new hide position has caused some slight alternations to the screen on the left-hand side and the screen on the right is no longer needed. One window has been reduced in height but otherwise the hide remains the same.

The amended drawings also show the bund along the canal in field 1 which was agreed with CRT during the approval process.

During the process we have consulted local neighbours and Shropshire Ornithological Society.

The changes represent an attempt to reduce costs but still achieve the overarching aim of the scheme which is to re-wet the peat (as well as providing good wildlife viewing opportunities which are accessible to all).

Attached drawings which show the main changes (full set available if requested) –

003 – original masterplan 003A – revised masterplan

100A – revised field 1 plan 300A – revised field 3 plan

306E – revised hide and pathway details

Revised Hide drawings awaited.

Timescale

We expect to submit the application during the next week and have been advised 8 weeks for a decision. Our supervising engineer will start the tender process for the engineering works in May with a view to having a contractor appointed when we receive the decision. This will mean we can commence works during August / Sept 21 when conditions are (hopefully) driest.

The timescale for the construction of the hide is still being determined with the supplier.

Clerks Report (April 2021)**Correspondence**

1. **Marlot LNR**
Shropshire Council has been asked to provide an update on progress. Nothing has been received to date.
2. **Volunteer House**
Martin Spenser has provided a report of volunteer hours spent at the Marlot and Hollinwood Green.
3. **Precept**
Shropshire Council has written to the Council to confirm payment of the 2021/22 precept.
4. **Local Policing and Community Charter**
The charter has been launched and we are being consulted. At this initial stage West Mercia Police are looking for each town and parish council to identify their top three local concerns. At stage 2 they will need to gain an understanding of the amount of time the Council feels the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) should spend in the area.
As consultations are covered by the scheme of delegation, the clerk will send the information to members and ask them to give their views. The response will be agreed before it is sent.
5. **Shropshire's Outstanding Community**
The Community Foundation and High Sheriff of Shropshire have announced a new community initiative 'Shropshire's Outstanding Community', which is essentially a best kept village competition. Information will be circulated to members who may wish to discuss this at a future meeting.
6. **Shropshire's Roads**
The Chair of Childs Ercall Council has written to all North Shropshire Councils asking them to support a campaign to improve local road conditions. This has gone against the normal protocol in which clerks communicate on behalf of their councils and has caused some debate amongst clerks. As the Council is in the pre-election period it is not appropriate for members to consider supporting this campaign at this time and therefore the information will not be shared until after the election, at which point it is hoped that the communication protocol issues may have been resolved.

Other

7. **Death of the Duke of Edinburgh**
Members should be aware of the following:
 - The landing page of the Parish Council website has been updated and will be a memorial page until the funeral takes place.
 - A commemoration service is to be held at Prees Church on Friday 16 April at 6pm. Members are invited to attend.
 - Guidance for Town and Parish Councils has been released. There are no specific actions that the Parish Council is required to take, but if residents enquire they should be directed to www.royal.co.uk where they will find a book of condolence. Physical books of condolence are being discouraged.
8. **Elections (6 May 2021)**
Work related to the elections has taken up a proportion of the Clerk's time since the last meeting.

Notices of candidates for the Parish Council election are now displayed on the notice board and have been emailed to members along with those for the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner and Shropshire Council (Wem Ward).

9. **Bowling Club Lease**

Hatchers have not provided a breakdown of their invoice, so no further action has been taken by the Clerk.

10. **Return to Physical Meetings**

The current legislation allowing online meetings, will end on 6 May and after this only physical meetings can be held. The guidance from SALC is that, initially, local councils should limit the number of physical meetings and, where possible, delegated powers should be used.

They also advise that the Annual Parish Meeting should be held online prior to 7 May 2021.

NALC is still taking action to attempt to reverse the decision to cease all online meetings.

11. **SALC Consultation**

The response drafted by the Clerk was sent to members following the last meeting, but no responses have been received. As members have not indicated that the draft response doesn't represent their views, the Clerk will submit it as it is.

12. **Grants Policy**

There has been insufficient time to complete this work. It will be brought to a future meeting for discussion and approval.

13. **Code of Conduct Training**

SALC has organised online training on 6 September (5-7pm). Members should let the Clerk know if they wish to take part.

Meeting Dates 2021/22

Background

It is a legal requirement for Parish Councils to meet at least three times in the Municipal Year (May – April). The Parish Council currently schedules ten meetings each year, but due to the Coronavirus pandemic, in the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Council will have met seven times, as follows:

Physical Meetings (Full Council): 1
 Physical Meetings (Planning Only): 1
 Online Meetings: 5

During the year, schemes of delegation were put in place by the Council to enable it to meet its statutory duty in relation to planning applications and consultations, even if it is unable to meet physically. Under the agreed protocol, planning decisions can be delegated to the Clerk, following consultation and agreement with Members, and any Member can request that a meeting is called to discuss contentious applications.

Return to Physical Meetings

The online meetings were enabled by specific legislation which is due to expire on 6 May 2021 and at this point physical meetings will resume. SALC have advised that the number of physical meetings should be reduced, at least initially and that schemes of delegation should continue to be used.

Essential Meetings

During the Municipal Year there are only a few meetings that have to take place, because timely decisions are to be made. These are as follows:

- Annual Council Meeting (Election of Officers etc.) **May**
- Approve the Annual Financial Return **No later than June**
- Approve the budget and precept **January**

In addition, there are decisions that need to be taken (eg grants, appointment of internal auditor etc.), but these can be made at times to suit the meeting schedule.

It is planned that this year's Financial return will be ready for approval by May.

Recommendation

The Council should schedule 8 meetings in the 2021/22 Municipal Year:

Before September, the Council should schedule a meeting for May only - on the understanding that Members have the flexibility to request a planning meeting.

After September the normal schedule should resume.

Marlot Conservation (MCG)**Work report to Whixall Parish Council 14 April 2021**

In the last report to Council, it was mentioned that no conservation grazing had taken place this winter. This has entailed additional work by the MCG in cutting back the overgrowth in the meadow areas. A considerable amount of time and effort has been spent on this, as will be shown in a separate schedule of voluntary hours worked, and the work is ongoing.

The site had many casual visitors during the Easter period and the recent warm spell of weather. Some favourable comments were made, but there continues to be issues with litter and dog fouling. The vehicle access gates remain padlocked as a fly-tipping precaution.

The first newt survey of the season was conducted on 19/20th March by Nicky Hunter, assisted by her husband. 30 traps were set and 14 newts were collected in the morning, which was felt to be a fair result, considering the lower temperatures prevailing at the time. It is hoped that the easing of lockdown restrictions will enable others to take part in this interesting project. A prolonged dry spell of weather since that survey has caused a considerable reduction of water volumes, which may have an impact upon the pond wildlife.

On 28th March, Bob Harris, Graham Turnbull and Martin Spenser installed a new barn owl box and it will be interesting to see whether any birds take up occupation of it. The box will be monitored by a professionally qualified ornithologist, who lives locally.

There are other nest boxes on site and these are monitored by arrangement with Natural England. Sian Mercer is in charge of this, assisted by Martin Spenser. A basic training session was conducted on site by Bob Harris on 8th April, when activity was noted in some of the 12 boxes, including one occupied by mice. A further survey is planned for early evening on 14th April.

Earlier this year, Council approved the purchase of some wildflower seed. Graham Turnbull has been busy attempting to reclaim patches of ground to create small wildflower beds. Sam Keene has given some assistance with this, and the work is ongoing, meanwhile some seed has already been sewn. It is anticipated that larger seed beds will be created, if the current experiment proves successful.

Harking back to the effects of wet weather, it was noted that some parts of the pathways can become clogged. The MCG is looking into means by which access may be improved still further.

Martin Spenser

End of Year Expenditure Report

Opening Balance: £5152.89

Income: £9589.07

Expenditure: £6968.28

Transferred to Reserves £793.00

End of Year Balance: £7773.68 (of which £5701.25 is in Reserves)

Budget Area	Allocated Budget (£)	Actual Spend (£)	Variance (£)	Over / Underspend
Staff costs	4,600.00	4,487.00	113.00	Under
Administration	897.00	487.80	409.20	Under
Subscriptions	350.00	405.40	55.40	Over
Grounds Maintenance	1,750.00	1,108.08	641.92	Under
Training	200.00	30.00	170.00	Under
Events	350.00	-	350.00	Under
Chairman's Fund	300.00	450.00	150.00	Over
Earmarked Reserves	793.00	793.00	-	-
Neighbourhood Fund*	110.89	-	110.89	Under
Total	9,150.89	7,731.28	1,419.61	Under

*Neighbourhood funding to be carried forward to 21/22 budget

Exemption from Limited Assurance ReviewBackground

Smaller local authorities with income/expenditure that does not exceed £25k are able to certify themselves as exempt from a limited assurance review under Section 9 of the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015. This must be done after 31 March 2021 and before 30 June 2021.

The benefits of exemption are that there will be no requirement for an external audit.

In order to declare exemption, the following criteria have to be met:

- The authority was in existence on 1 April 2017
- In relation to the previous financial year, the external auditor has not
 - Issued a public interest report in respect of the authority
 - Made a statutory recommendation to the authority relating to the authority or any entity connected with it
 - Issued an advisory notice under paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 8 to the Local Audit and Accountability Act and has not withdrawn the notice
 - Commenced judicial review proceedings under section 31(1) of the Act
 - Made an application under section 28(1) of the Act for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful
- The court has not declared an item of account unlawful

The Parish Council's Position

Whixall Parish Council has income / expenditure of less than £25k. It was in existence before 2017 and no action has been taken by either the external auditor or the courts in relation to the Council's accounts.

Recommendation

The Council fulfils the criteria and should certify itself as exempt from external audit.

A Roberts
Parish Clerk

April 2021

Report from Councillor Mellings (Shropshire Council)

Activity across the county council has continued to focus around the Covid issue.

For the last seven days to 8th April, the number of confirmed Covid cases in the area including Whixall were fewer than 3, below both the national and county average. For Shropshire as a whole, there were 32 cases over this period which equates to a rate of 10 per 100000. The Council continues to promote public health messages and give support to people, businesses and communities to ensure people stay safe. For the last seven days, the number of confirmed Covid cases in the area including Whixall were less than 3. This is encouraging but we need to stay vigilant to ensure the numbers stay low – especially as lockdown restrictions are eased.

The Council continues to promote public health messages and give support to people, businesses and communities to ensure people stay safe. The lateral flow test centre continues to be available in Wem, now operating out from the Stage Door Theatre in Aston Street.

Please see below link to the Council's website with covid information:

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

Highways & flooding – clearly there are still some major issues with the state of the roads locally and further afield which is a huge source of frustration for Councillors and members of the public. The Council really does need to get a grip of the contract and ensures that repairs are actually carried out to a high standard! Many of those I have reported are still to be repaired with no indication as to when they might! The B5476 from Wem to Whitchurch is still in a bad state and I (quite rightly too!) receive frequent complaints about it!! Any other feedback is always welcome!! If you are aware of any particular areas or problems within Whixall that need attention, please feel free to let me know and I will report them to the Highways Team for attention or you can report them direct via the below link:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/roads-and-highways/highways-maintenance/pothole-maintenance-and-repair/>

Despite the best efforts of Highways staff, there seems little or no evidence that the contractor is dealing with any issues that affect our residents. Please be assured I continue to press but highways have to do better and to ensure an improvement on the quality of repairs carried out!!!

Broadband – further to previous reports, the Airband service has continued to experience some problems. I have met three times now with Steve Holford (Airband) and Connecting Shropshire to discuss the issues and press for improvements. It appears the service has improved a little but may not be totally reliable. We have agreed to feed back any issues or concerns there may be with either the quality or reliability of the service. If you have any issues, please feel free to let me know and I'll gladly raise them with Airband.

Wem Library – Communities Committee recently considered a libraries strategy for the county. Discussions continue about the future location of Wem library once the current lease expires. However, to give more time, the landlord has been approached to extend the lease by a year. I recently attended a meeting to discuss the issue further on the basis of creating a community hub of which a library would be the central focus. It would also give opportunities to provide further community services. A follow up meeting is to be held in May following the Council elections.

Local Plan – the adoption process has been delayed by the election and Cabinet has agreed a revised timetable – please see attached report for info. Council will meet in July to consider the regulation 19 consultation and agree a final draft to be considered by the Planning Inspectorate. It is expected that the final plan will be adopted in July 2022.

As a result of the lockdown, the Council's Scrutiny Committees were suspended. However, the Performance Management and Health Committees have continued to meet to deal in particular

with any Covid issues. Scrutiny though is now starting to pick up its work. All Council meetings have taken place virtually and can be accessed by members of the public.

Place Overview – the Committee met last Thursday and will be considering a report from the Highways Winter Service Working Group, WSP Annual report, Fireworks & Kier's Highways Maintenance Annual report – please see link below to agenda:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=739&MId=4226&Ver=4>

Communities Overview – the Committee has met and considered the following issues – public rights of way, rural transport, libraries strategy & community & rural strategy – please see link below to agenda:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=738&MId=4086&Ver=4>

People Overview – the Committee has met and considered the following issues – Young people's substance misuse services & respite care breaks – please see link below to agenda:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=740&MId=4105&Ver=4>

Health and Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny – no meeting

Health and Wellbeing Board - the Committee has met and considered the following issues – system update, joint strategic needs assessment, armed forces legislation, warm homes, Covid & flu immunisation update – please see link below to agenda:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=217&MId=4090&Ver=4>

Performance Management – the Committee has met and considered the following issues – budget monitoring and performance report – please see link below to agenda:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=469&MId=4078&Ver=4>

Joint Health Scrutiny with Telford & Wrekin– interestingly in the current climate this has not met since last November !!!

Cabinet has twice since the last meeting. Issues considered were affordable housing allocation policy, strategic development framework, budget monitoring, taxi fares, performance report & local plan timetable update – please see link below to agenda and reports:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=4149&Ver=4>

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=4307&Ver=4>

Full Council next meets in May following the local elections taking place on 6th May.

I have continued to send / forward emails on various issues but for the sake of brevity, I won't repeat them in this report.

Hope this helps and thank you for all the work you do on behalf of the community – the community is much stronger for it!