

# Whixall Parish Council

Chairman: Ian Mercer

Minutes of the Parish Council's Monthly Meeting held on 10 March 2021  
on the Zoom Platform starting at 7:30pm

## **Present:**

**Councillors:** I Mercer (Chair); J Spenser; B Harris; A Rawlinson. A Hague joined the meeting late.

**County Councillors:** C Mellings

**Clerk:** A Roberts

**Members of the community:** 0

**Representatives of other bodies/ organisations:** 0

## **23/21 Apologies for Absence**

J Broadhead

## **24/21 Declaration of Pecuniary Interests**

Members were reminded of their obligation to declare any interests/ gifts/ hospitality. None were declared.

## **25/21 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Meeting of Whixall Parish Council held on 10 February 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 Harris and agreed by all present.

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

## **26/21 Planning**

### **b. Planning Decisions Received**

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Decision</b>
21/00032/FUL	External alterations to previously approved scheme in order to increase height of eaves by 500mm. Garden Cottage, Church Lane SY13 2NA	Grant permission
20/05300/FUL	Erection of standalone single storey extension following demolition of existing dilapidated buildings. Whixall CE School SY13 2SB	Grant permission
21/00292/FUL	Installation of ground mounted solar panel array. Park Gate, 5 Hollinwood SY13 2NW	Grant permission

c. The Clerk provided a verbal report relating to recent planning enforcement activity at 6 Hollinwood which resulted in no action being taken.

## **27/21 Clerk's Report**

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

## 28/21 **Financial Matters**

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

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

DATE	ACCOUNT NAME	AMOUNT
28 February 2021	Current Account (Working Budget)	2569.25
	Savings Account (Reserves)	5701.25
	Barclays Account	0.13
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£8,271.15</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 Mercer, seconded by Cllr Harris 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).

### c) Grants and Donations Process

The Clerk tabled draft information to be provided on the Parish Council website along with a proposed grant application form which can be completed online or printed and returned by post. This has been updated following a suggestion from Cllr Harris. The Clerk will now use this information to develop a policy which will be brought to a future meeting for approval by the Council.

**Resolved: The Council approves the formal approach to grants and donations.**

## 29/21 **Governance Review**

The clerk gave an overview of the purpose and logistics of the governance review to be carried out by Shropshire Council and explained that the Council had been asked to contact Shropshire Council should they wish to make representations regarding the current boundary of Whixall Parish. Cllr Mellings explained that these changes are generally requested in cases where there has been development outside the boundary of a town or parish council and that development puts strain on the council budgets but does not generate any council tax income to offset that pressure.

**Resolved: Whixall Parish Council will not make any representations to Shropshire Council in relation to the Governance Review.**

## 30/21 **SALC Survey**

Following a short discussion, Members agreed that it would not be practical to try to complete the survey during an online meeting. It was suggested that, in line with the agreed delegation process, the clerk would ask members to provide their views. A draft form will then be circulated to members prior to submission of the final version. The deadline is 31 March.

**Resolved: Members will communicate their responses to the clerk in line with the agreed scheme of delegation.**

### **31/21 Parish Matters**

a) Marlot Local Nature Reserve

Martin Spenser provided an update on work that has been carried out (Appendix B). Members noted their appreciation of the report and the work that has been carried out by the Marlot Conservation Group.

b) Annual Parish Meeting 2021

The Annual Parish Meeting is due to take place on Wednesday 19 May. This is before the earliest possible date for the end of all current restrictions and it is unclear whether or not it will go ahead. The clerk is attending the North Shropshire Area Committee meeting on 15 March where SALC will provide an update on requirements to hold physical meetings from May onwards.

It was suggested that Airband, and the Marlot LNR could be topics for the meeting.

Following discussion on Airband, Cllr Mellings offered to facilitate the attendance of Chris Taylor and Steve Holford at a future parish council meeting if required.

Following the NSAC meeting, the clerk will provide an update to members and, if necessary, request that they bring ideas for the Annual Parish Meeting to the April Parish Council meeting.

### **32/21 Councillor Reports**

Cllr Harris reported on a recent meeting with the clerk, Cllr Mellings and Nicola Lewis-Smith (Enterprise Manager for the Canals and Rivers Trust in the West Midlands). The Trust has positioned itself as a wellbeing charity and Nicola's aims are to foster partnerships and seek funding. Nicola is looking particularly at increasing use of the canal towpaths and developing them for year-round, rather than seasonal, use. At the meeting potential links with the Marina, Wildlife Trust and Natural England were discussed along with an aspiration to develop walking routes that take-in the canal paths. Nicola had not been aware of the Marlot prior to the meeting and is interested in exploring the potential for including it in the routes that are developed. The trust would like the parish council to be involved in projects. It was stressed that this could be in the form of letters of support as there is no expectation of financial support from the Council.

A site visit has been arranged for 24 June, to be attended by Cllr Harris, Cllr Mellings and the clerk.

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

Scheduled date of next meeting: **14 April 2021**

The meeting closed at 8.10pm

## Clerks Report (March 2021)

**Correspondence**

1. **Marlot LNR**  
The letter regarding delegated powers has been sent to, and acknowledged by, Shropshire Council.
2. **Return to Online Meetings**  
The clerk has asked SALC for guidance regarding meetings from May onwards as the situation is not clear. The response indicates that clarification will be provided at the Area Committee Meeting on Monday 15 March. The clerk will attend the meeting.
3. **Old Burial Ground**  
The clerk has written, by email, to the Chair of the Social Centre Committee inviting the committee to put forward two members to join the task and finish group. This request has been acknowledged.
4. **St Mary's Church**  
Following last month's meeting a letter was sent to St Mary's Church in response to their request for grant funding. The letter explained why the Parish Council was unable to contribute towards maintaining the graveyard as this is a statutory responsibility of the church.
5. **Bowling Club Lease**  
Hatchers, who carried out the legal work on the lease, emailed the Clerk asking for payment of a £360 invoice that was issued early last year but only received in December. Following discussion with the new treasurer of the bowling club, the Clerk has asked Hatchers to provide a breakdown of the work behind this invoice. Members will be briefed once this information has been provided.
6. **Information Commissioner**  
The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has confirmed receipt of the Parish Council's declaration and direct debit form. The declaration will be published online by the ICO.

**Actions**

1. **Elections (6 May 2021)**  
The clerk has requested an election nomination pack for each of the sitting councillors and will hand deliver these once they arrive. Candidates should note that the deadline for submitting their nomination form to Shirehall is 4pm on Thursday 8 April.  
  
Shropshire Council has set up a website for candidates which can be found [here](#). The Notice of Election will be displayed on noticeboards next week (w/c 15 March).
2. **VAT Claim**  
A VAT claim for £419.62, covering the period January 2018 to December 2020, was submitted to HMRC. This has now been paid to the Council.
3. **Grants**  
The grants to North Salop Wheelers and the URC Graveyard Trust have been paid.
4. **Website Domain Name**  
The direct debit has now been set up and payment will be taken bi-annually. However, the website went offline briefly and the Clerk was advised that payment would not be taken by direct debit until the next payment cycle (2023). Therefore, the payment was made by card. This is shown for reimbursement on the March Payments spreadsheet.
5. **Make a Change Event**  
SALC has organised a 'Become a Councillor' to encourage people to join their local councils. This has been posted on the Parish Council website in the 'announcements' section so that anyone who has signed up for alerts will receive it.
6. **Meetings and Training**  
The Clerk has attended the following, all online:
  - Elections Process Training (SALC)/ Councils Engagement Elections Training (SALC)
  - Canals and Rivers Trust Meeting (with Cllr Mellings and Cllr Harris)

## **Marlot work report to Whixall Parish Council 10 March 2021**

Tim Lamb has joined the Marlot Conservation Group and has proved to be a most useful addition to the team, with a strong work ethic and willingness to get involved.

The pond area has been cleared of regenerated willow and the recent wet weather filled the ponds to bursting, but they have now returned to normal levels. A viewing terrace has been created, looking out over the ponds, and seating and a table have been installed there, fashioned from felled wood. The terrace has a protective back-drop of dead hedging.

A substantial amount of cut wood and brash has been harvested and shredded on site; the shredded material has been used to back-fill muddy sections of the pathways.

The steps from the pond area up into the woodland area have been restored, again using mainly reclaimed timber.

Newt surveys are to be commenced later this month, although current lockdown restrictions will prevent this from being a team effort.

The wet conditions in early winter prevented the introduction of cattle into the meadow areas. With the site now drying out, the grazier was invited to put his animals on, but declined to do so in view of the short window of opportunity left before Easter. This means that the MCG now has the task of tackling the regenerated willow growth in the meadow areas, and this work has now commenced.

The team is also attempting to reclaim patches of ground to create small wildflower beds.

Some visitors to the site are leaving litter, including dog mess. Also, two members of the team spent unnecessary time clearing other historic waste materials, including broken glass and scrap metal, which was uncovered whilst working on other projects.

**Martin Spenser**

## Report from Councillor Mellings (Shropshire Council)

### Covid-19

Activity across the county council has continued to focus around the Covid issue. At the start of the year, a third lockdown was announced and the position was reviewed in late February.

For the last seven days, the number of confirmed Covid cases in the area including Whixall were fewer than 3, below both the national and county average. Following the peak in January, the numbers have fortunately reduced but even with the roll out of the vaccine and return of schools we need to remain vigilant. For Shropshire as a whole there are 162 cases which equates to a rate of 50 per 100000 – which represents a halving of cases since my February report. For Wem and Whitchurch, the latest figures are 5 (79 per 100000) and 7 (67 per 100000) respectively.

The Council continues to promote public health messages and give support to people, businesses and communities to ensure people stay safe. The mobile testing unit was available in Wem until the end of January. The number of tests carried out during its time here was 1540, though the number of positive tests is not available by testing location. The number of positive had started to drift back up. I raised the issue with the Director of Public Health to establish at what point a mobile test unit may be re-opened in Wem. There were no immediate plans but the position would be kept under review. Fortunately, the number of cases remain lower than they were but we need to squeeze them out completely.

Obviously the vaccination programme is well underway and a number of additional sites have been opened to assist in the process. A number of residents have asked whether Wem may have its own vaccination centre. NHS information originally indicated further Shropshire sites would be opened and I suggested that Wem be considered. The Director of Public Health advises me, it is not likely that further centres will be opening in the immediate future in Shropshire. This is a combination of the increased provision through GPs and sites being determined as not viable. The transport offer and GP led hubs will help ensure locally there is good access to those sites that are open and available locally but the Council continues to push for increased access in the north and are monitoring the current uptake.

As you know a lateral flow test centre is now available in Wem, operating out of the Stanier Hall and it is hoped this facility will help drive down and keep down the number of positive cases across our area.

The Government's recent roadmap announcement has been well publicised but below are links to the Council's response and the full Government document for info:

<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2021/02/council-welcomes-governments-plan-lockdown/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

### Highways & flooding

The poor state of the roads is a constant issue at the moment and there have been some flooding problems. I have reported a number of issues across the parish (whilst not our patch in Tilstock, the A49 at Preston Brockhurst and at Albrighton towards Shrewsbury) but 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.

### Winter Maintenance

Place Committee considered an item on winter maintenance – a copy of the report is attached for information. As per my email on Tuesday, a review is being carried out and feedback is welcome to contribute to that review.

### Broadband

Further to previous reports, the Airband service has continued to experience some problems. I have met twice 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. I have a further meeting planned in early April with Airband and would be happy to raise any issues or experiences residents have had with them. Thanks for the feedback I received to date from Parish Councillors but please feel to feedback any further issues as they arise.

### **Planning**

Further to the discussion at the last meeting of the Parish Council, the application for Garden Cottage has been approved.

### **Canals & Rivers Trust**

Further to my February report, on Tuesday we met with CRT to discuss its work and the opportunities to work together on mutual issues in Whixall. Bob and Mandy will report back on the meeting tonight. We have arranged to meet onsite in June to take this further.

### **Swimming Pools**

Whixall is served by two swimming pools – Wem & Whitchurch. Subject to the roadmap, it is hoped Wem pool & gym will re-open to users in April. Booking will be required and strict Covid protocols will be in place. Whitchurch has remained closed and has some issues. It cannot operate social distancing requirements and there is a problem with an unidentified leak. Work is ongoing to identify and repair the leak and other issues. A review of alternative facilities is also going to be carried out. It is likely that Whitchurch will be closed for some time.

### **Local Plan**

Following the regulation 19 consultation, the Council has updated the timetable for the final adoption of the plan. Please see below report going to Cabinet on Thursday:

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/documents/s26981/Local%20Plan%20Update%20to%20Preparation%20Timetable.pdf>

Council will approve the final draft in July. This will go to a public inquiry and it is expected the final plan will be adopted in July 2022.

### **Council Budget**

The Council approved its budget for the coming year at the meeting two weeks ago. The County element of the Council Tax will rise by 3.99%. 1.99% of this is the capped rise allowed by the Government plus a 2% rise which is ring fenced to spend on adult social care.

A copy of the Council Tax resolution (the new figures payable by Whixall residents are included) is attached together with a copy of the budget papers. Significant amounts of one off funding are propping up the budget in what is an election year. The Council also has an inability to deliver planned savings. Though local government finance is due to be reviewed over the next year, there are significant financial risks facing the Council.

The Council is also proposing an ambitious £150 million capital programme in 2021/22.

### **Civic Centre**

Further to my report last month, I received no feedback. Council last Thursday agreed to progress the project with a view to relocating from Shirehall into Pride Hill. There is also an intention to improve the presence of the Council in the market towns across the County.

### **North West Relief Road (NWRR)**

The Planning application for the Shrewsbury NWRR has been submitted – below is the planning statement for info:

[https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/files/7112B69389205C37A7567DF2EE89A63F/pdf/21\\_00924\\_EIA-PLANNING STATEMENT\\_-4170289.pdf](https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/files/7112B69389205C37A7567DF2EE89A63F/pdf/21_00924_EIA-PLANNING STATEMENT_-4170289.pdf)



## **Committees**

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.

## **Overviews**

Place Overview is meeting today. The issues being considered are an update on the Highways Improvement Plan, Highways Winter Maintenance and an analysis of people killed or seriously injured in RTCs – please see link below to agenda and reports:

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=739&MId=4164&Ver=4>

Communities Overview – no meeting

People Overview – no meeting

Health and Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny - no meeting

Health and Wellbeing Board – no meeting

Performance Management – no meeting

**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 special Guardianship allowance policy, school admission arrangements 2022, budget/financial items, direct payments policy & schools funding formula, Riverside (Shrewsbury) re-development, budget monitoring 2020/21 – please see links below to agenda and reports:

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=4148&Ver=4>

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

## **Full Council**

Last met on 25<sup>th</sup> February, the main focus of which was the Council budget for 2021. Please see below link to the agenda and reports:

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=4138&x=1>

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

If there is any particular issue you would like me to cover in future editions or there are issues I can assist with between meetings of the Parish Council, please feel free to get in touch. If you need any further information on any of the issues covered in this report, likewise, please don't hesitate to come back to me.