

Cofton Hackett Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Annual Parish Assembly 2024

Wednesday 15th May 2024 at 7.30pm

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Cllr Mr J Slack (Chair)
Cllr Mr S Chatterley
Cllr Mrs J Fay
Cllr Mr R Deeming

County Cllr Mr A Kriss

Clerk to the Parish Council:

Andrew Billau (AB)

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Mrs J Webb
Cllr Ms A Dale

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were 15 members of the public in attendance/

Agenda Item	Discussion and Decisions	Action
1.	Welcome Cllr Slack welcomed everyone to the annual Parish Assembly, in which the Parish Council gives account of its activities over the previous twelve months.	
2.	Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held May 17th, 2023 The minutes of the Parish Assembly dated 17 th May 2023 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.	
3.	Chairman's Report – Cllr Slack Firstly, I would like to express my thanks the Mike Pattison, Mike was last year's Chairman and I took over from Mike after he resigned in February for personal reasons. Mike was a terrific Chairman and contributed so much time and effort into the role. He has, and still is, doing a terrific job working to integrate the old and New Cofton Hackett. He is sorely missed on the PC. I'd also like to thank Nick Banyard, who resigned in March, for his valuable contribution to the Parish Council, Nick was pivotal in getting the new PC website up and running. I would also like to express my thanks to Andrew Billau, our clerk. Andrew keeps us all on the straight and narrow, regarding what we can and cannot do as Parish Councillors and also does a really good job in getting all the routine jobs, the PC needs to get done. There are currently 2 vacancies on the PC. If anyone is interested in becoming a Parish Councillor, I would encourage them to contact our Clerk, Andrew, for further information. One further general point I would like to make before moving on to specific items is that the PC	

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	<p>is acutely aware of the disparity that exists in the value for money, regarding the precept, that residents of Cofton Fields get compared to residents of the more established areas of Cofton Hackett. Mike Pattison mentioned this last year and we continue to explore ways of utilising PC resources more equitably.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Highways and Environment – Cllr Slack</p> <p>Street lights off the main roads are maintained by the Parish Council. We have an ongoing program for converting these to LED lighting and we are intending to implement a repainting programme for these in the next financial year.</p> <p>3 new Vehicle Activated speed Signs have been purchased and placed on Groveley Lane, Barnt Green Road and Kendal End Road. These collect data from cars going both ways. The signs will be reversed every 3 months and the data published on the PC website.</p> <p>We have undertaken liaison with Anita Dale, Bromsgrove District Council and Adrian Kriss, Worcestershire County Council, regarding road safety and measures that could be taken to reduce traffic speed.</p> <p>Grit bins are also the PC responsibility and the lengthsman ensures that these are refilled.</p> <p>The Myhill field Playground - The Parish Council owns and maintains this popular playground and has also allocated some of its reserves to improve the playground.</p> <p>The Council rents out the Allotments next to the playground. The small plot of land adjacent to the playground and allotments is being developed as a Biodiversity site. Planning for this work is currently underway and will be undertaken by volunteers.</p> <p>An issue that we have not been able to resolve to date involves the land the PC owns behind The Grove, known as the old sewage works site. We have allocated resources to develop this as a site for further allotments. The site is currently landlocked, and currently we can only get access it via the gardens of houses on The Grove or Oakfield Drive. We were negotiating with St Modwen to purchase a small tract of land which would allow us to get access but St Modwen have stalled on this purchase for reasons that we are unable to ascertain. The access issue is currently being followed up.</p> <p>The Council employs a Lengthsman, who provides routine maintenance e.g cleaning signs, grass cutting etc. I would also like to recognize the work undertaken by Steve Bach, the Parish Paths Warden, for his voluntary work in maintaining the parish rural footpaths.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Communications</p> <p>The Parish Council website is the main source of information regarding information and updates.</p> <p>The Council also takes a page in the Village Magazine every 3 months or so, to update residents.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Finance and General Purposes – Cllr Chatterley</p> <p>Income</p> <p>We opened year with £164k and closed with £370k.</p> <p>Significant income over the last 12 months due to the sale of the Mission Hall and the early payment of the 24/25 precept (£29k), which will now come off this year's income.</p> <p>Note – Income from the sale of the Mission Hall must be used for future capital projects.</p> <p>Worcs County Council refund us for a portion of the work carried out by the Lengthsman.</p> <p>Miscellaneous is mainly the VAT recovery and the insurance claim from the damaged bus shelter on Groveley Lane.</p>	

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	<p>Expenditure</p> <p>General and Admin - £22k was mainly driven by staff wages and insurance. General Reserves – £7k on Vehicle Activated Signs, £7.5k on the Mission Hall sale fees, and £3.5k on upgrading street lighting. Highways – £16.5k mainly Street light electricity and maintenance, lengthsman costs and damaged railings at Rose Hill Island (which will be reclaimed on insurance). Open Spaces – £2.8k Grass Cutting and planting. Community Grants – £2.6k Cofton Village Hall Coronation and Christmas events plus a donation to St. Michaels Church towards car park improvements. Assets - £1.5m</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cofton Hackett Village Hall land - £68k Cofton Village Hall - £1.3m Playing Field & Allotments £10k Sewage works £3k Lights, Noticeboards, Playground equipment etc. - £125k. <p>Cash - £370k of which £90k is in general reserves and the balance sits in earmarked reserves.</p>	
7.	<p>Planning – Clerk</p> <p>During the previous 12 months the Parish Council has considered and commented on 12 planning applications, Most applications are for minor works such as extensions but Councillors always view plans, consult with neighbours and ensure comments are posted on the Bromsgrove Planning Portal. The Council objected to 1 applications, a decision on this application is awaited, and made comments and observations on a further 4 applications.</p>	
8.	<p>District Councillor Report</p> <p>In Cllr Dale’s absence, Cllr Slack summarised her report, which is included below:</p> <p>BDC Finances - Happy to report that BDC have a healthy reserve of £6M putting us in a strong position compared to many other district councils that are struggling financially around the country.</p> <p>Artrix Theatre - Artrix is continuing to run smoothly in terms of the new leaseholders, BCA, since April 2024. They have had record bookings in comparison to their initial business plan. A revised business plan is being presented to the Artrix Holding Trust and Key District Council officers in June with a view to securing a further 3 year lease agreement.</p> <p>On Street Parking - A Cabinet Advisory Group has been formed to discuss on street parking in Bromsgrove and devise a strategy to address on street parking challenges this includes parking enforcement blackspots and key concerns in our respective areas. Waterman consultants have also been commissioned to help address these issues across the district and will be shaping their view on this and making recommendations in due course to support the scheme and challenges District Councillors face at a local level.</p> <p>Car parking charges across the district will be changing as of June 2024. The motion was carried in February’s full council meeting to review the parking charges and consultation with the public has been taking place. This includes Blue Badge holders who will be able to park free of charge which is a key change to the current regulations. New car parking charges will be displayed in due course.</p> <p>Access to GP appointments out of hours – being investigated via our BDC & O&S representative (Bakul Kumar) at Worcestershire Regulatory Authority hoping to be able to introduce this across the Bromsgrove region.</p> <p>Carbon Reduction – The Carbon Reduction annual review</p> <p>a) Councils pledge is to be operational at net zero by 2040</p>	

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	<p>b) A move to agile working for council officers has reduced staff mileage by 41%</p> <p>c) A review of using HVO (Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil) on fleet vehicles and for conversion of large fleet vehicles in future years</p> <p>d) Since the agreed Carbon Reduction strategy was agreed in 2022 BDHT is to apply for funding to improve efficiency in housing stock within the District. There has already been a successful bid made and the delivery of the resulting work is underway. Further bids would be made when the next wave of funding becomes available end of 2025</p> <p>e) To improve on energy efficiencies in council buildings solar panels have been fitted and are operational at Parkside along with LED lighting upgrades in Bromsgrove Library and Aston Fields depot.</p> <p>f) Bids are also being submitted for Bromsgrove Sports & Leisure centre to enable energy efficiency upgrades in this building</p> <p>g) A reduction to the councils paper waste by offering papers electronically to Members and officers</p> <p>h) An energy audit of server rooms was due to take place in 2024 Commercial partners being sought in respect of the Bromsgrove District Heat Network partnership.</p> <p>The Councils refuse fleet refurbishment is in dire need of replacement vehicles which will exceed £2M. O&S will be reviewing their operation before any monies are to be spent (which I am part of).</p> <p>Heatwaves - A working task group has been assembled to assess the Impact on Heatwaves on our Bromsgrove residents and an action plan to be developed and agreed should we find ourselves in a heatwave.</p> <p>Cost of Living Crisis – Two surveys were carried out with WCC and BDHT to better understand the specific needs of local communities. The findings from the survey highlighted that the crisis was affecting a broad range of residents, not just those on benefits or a lower income. An earmarked reserve of £150k for Community Hubs initiative (currently not used) is now to be used to support the above initiative for 14 month trial bid by introducing a Citizens Advice Specialist Housing Advisor £62k; a Voluntary Sector Money Advisor £38k; and enhancing the support of the Council’s Financial Including £50k for that period.</p> <p>Food Banks - Council had been awarded £106,570k from the Household Support fund Round 5 for a 6 month period. £29.5k will be spent on supporting food banks in the district.</p>	
9.	<p>County Councillor Report</p> <p>County Cllr Adrian Kriss presented his report on work he had been doing over the previous 12 months:</p> <p>It is my pleasure to present this annual Report for 2024.</p> <p>Whilst, I present this report it should be noted that I seek to work in partnership with those responsible for service delivery and, with that in mind, would like to formally thank all those officers that have helped me address issues that residents have brought to my attention.</p> <p>It has been a rather challenging year for Worcestershire County Council (WCC), not only in budgetary restraints but also in terms of our building. The top floor of the County Hall was confirmed as having RAAC, and as such is the only public building in Worcestershire to be affected. However, the Council and the partners have adapted, and for those that had occasion to attend, all our functions have continued albeit on the ground floor and basement. Thankfully no school or hospital had to close as a result of the government’s implementation of the HSE advice.</p> <p>This financial year, unfortunately has seen overspends in areas of Adult Social Care, Home to School Transport and Special Education Needs provision. This had to be addressed through an</p>	

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	<p>increase in the council tax and also through central government help.As this looks like it is going to be the year on year overspend, we are implementing measures to mitigate this for the long term.</p> <p>WCC are increasing their efforts on promoting the benefits of foster care across the County, and we would like to see this being taken up across Worcestershire to help young children in their progression to adulthood. I have heard first hand from both Foster carers and their children of the overwhelming benefit it is in comparison to those children who end up in residential care, outreach provision or even moved out of County.</p> <p>Subsidies to our bus services, as well as increasing access to the successful, “on demand,” bus service have been looked at in response to the needs of residents. This will continue, as proper, accessible public services are a major focus for our Cabinet Member Responsible.</p> <p>Worcestershire is in the top quartile for the quality of roads, according to the Department for Transport, and have secured an additional grant of £6m for roads and £4m for pavements, on top of our usual spend.You only have to drive across the border to Birmingham, to see the difference in quality of the road surfaces.The condition of our roads and potholes are one of the main complaints from Worcestershire residents.</p> <p>Worcestershire has seen exceptional rainfall in the last few months, and therefore our lengthsmen and WCC workers have had a lot of difficulty keeping up with the constant maintenance during this time. Hopefully, during the summer, this will also be fully addressed.</p> <p>In terms of broadband connectivity, you may be aware that there is a Corporate Plan for shaping Worcestershire’s future priorities for investment in digital infrastructure and to provide gigabyte capable broadband.We do however, need to work together as Parishes, Councils, private sector, and local communities to engage in this critical conversation. Mobile phone masts can be controversial, but our future digital connectivity is vital. So the first step, is discussing local potential locations with providers so a favourable balance can be agreed.</p> <p>Vaccinations rank second only to clean water, as the most effective public intervention to prevent disease.Worcestershire has one of the highest uptakes of MMR vaccinations in the West Midlands, with over 90% of children being vaccinated with 2 doses by the time they are 5 years old. However, we still have a little way to go for “herd immunity”, which is said to occur at 95%. WCC are offering any one who has not taken up their vaccinations the opportunity to through their doctors, local pharmacies and mobile centres. We have to be aware that only across the border, in Birmingham, there are reported cases of measles.</p> <p>In terms of Covid 19 vaccination take-up, across all the eligible cohorts, Hereford and Worcester and indeed Worcestershire have the highest rate of vaccination take up, when compared to both the Midlands and the national averages.The flu vaccination uptake is also higher than the Midlands average.</p> <p>Locally, I have been utilising both divisional and Highways funds for the benefit of Cofton Hackett. I am still pushing for a crossing in Groveley Lane and will continue to do so but the topography of the area makes it a very costly proposition when compared to other crossings.</p> <p>I have been interacting with both the Civil enforcement Officers(CEO) in Bromsgrove to highlight the issues of parking on Lickey Road, and with the local businesses to try to educate those that insist on stopping on the Zigzags of the crossing and blocking the view for those exiting the New care home.</p> <p>I am awaiting the instigation of a “Police vehicle/bus stop,” sharing area on Barnt Green road to allow for speed enforcement to take place regularly.</p> <p>Cofton Hackett is a wonderful place for active walkers, so I am pleased to report that the siding out of Kendal End Road has been completed, although there is still a little area that needs finalising by Severn Trent, together with the Stocken .</p> <p>These pathways are regularly used by walkers to Barnt Green so I will ensure that they are maintained to good order.</p>	

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	<p>There has been ongoing issues with floodwater pouring into Cofton Church Lane and flooding the low point under the bridge. This water is not the collection of water from the highway but from the new estate and as such should not drain onto the highway. Meetings have been undertaken and measures to alleviate this have now been agreed.</p> <p>I have just been appointed Vice chair of Environment Overview and Scrutiny and have already highlighted my concerns for the silting up of the balancing ponds within the confines of the St. Modwen development. I would welcome a meeting with a small working group comprising of active residents from the area to take this forward.</p> <p>Speeding and parking continues to fill my inbox, and I really do think that, should Cofton Hackett manage to get a fully trained Street Watch team of at least 6 volunteers, this issue would be minimised.</p> <p>Looking forward, I would like to see engagement throughout the Cofton Community towards implementing active travel alternatives through agreed suggestions. Parking remains an issue around the local schools and short journeys are still undertaken by cars rather than other modes. I have observed Birmingham electric bikes and scooters outside this building which inevitably require collection as we do not currently have charging points. Therefore, I would welcome any input for suggestions for cycle routes</p> <p>As always, please feel free to get in touch to discuss any of the above updates in more detail or indeed about any other issues.</p>	
10.	<p>Yasmina Ashcroft – Worcestershire Wildlife Trust</p> <p>Yasmina gave a very informative talk about her work with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and how people at home can encourage wildlife into their gardens.</p> <p>She also introduced a project within Cofton Hackett to encourage Swifts to return to their nesting sites in the Parish, she asked if residents would like to join a pool of volunteers on this initiative.</p>	
11.	<p>Close</p> <p>Cllr Slack thanked everyone for attending.</p> <p>The meeting ended at 8.45pm</p>	