



Bartestree with Lugwardine Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Thursday 3rd April 2025 at 7.00pm in the Bartestree Village Hall.

Minutes

Present:

Councillors: Siobhan Green, Fiona Harris, Wendy Soilleux (Chair), Polly Smith, Ron Williams, David Welton, Jennifer Karayiannis & Paul Hodges.

In Attendance:

Parish Clerk - Richard James.
Public - 48 Member of the Public.
Ward Member – Cllr Ivan Powell.

1. To receive apologies.

To Note – Apologies were received from Cllr Paul Wargent, David Evans and Andrew Thomas.

2. To receive declarations of interest and written requests for dispensations.

To Note – There were no declarations of interest and written requests for dispensations.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 06.03.25.

Resolution – The minutes of the meeting 06.03.25 were approved and duly signed by the chair.

4. Open Session.

Cllr Ivan Powell (Ward Member)

Firstly, may I apologise for my recent absence for a couple of weeks but am starting to get back on my feet so to speak.

Children's services

Children's services continue to make forward progress in line with the refreshed and current improvement plan. Ofsted have recently conducted their sixth monitoring visit and their findings were published on 20th March 2025. The link to the full report here:

<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50272252>

The findings were generally positive which again shows progress and builds on previous momentum. We do understand ourselves well recognise and welcome the findings during the visit of where we need to deliver further improvements.

Ofsted will conduct their 7th and final visit sometime later this year and will be the final visit before the next full inspection of local authority children's services.

To provide some detail of strategic developments:

- Herefordshire are progressing towards 'Child Friendly status, and have visited to Child Friendly Coventry, and have a follow-up meeting with Child Friendly Leeds so we can learn from our peers.*

- *Corporate Parenting Strategy / Education Strategy / SEND Strategy have been completed and published.*
- *Completed a 'Voice of the Child' session through scrutiny which has informed our Council wide approach to hearing children and families across the council not just children's services.*
- *Re-engaged Children and Young People's Partnership*
- *The Council Delivery plan 2025/26 is taking into account the requirements of the Family First implementation plan.*
- *We are commissioning phase 2 residential care and are producing business cases for capital investment in Alternative Provision*
- *Children's Budget position 2024/25 has delivered 'on budget' including delivery of the projected savings for that period, that against the backdrop of service improvement.*
- *Operationally we continue driving our pace of improvement, embedding our culture and commitment and setting the foundations for sustained and continuous improvement.*

Highways

The Council are investing a further £10 million this forthcoming year in highways improvement, resurfacing work has commenced on the A4103 at its junction with the A 465 and junctions at Whitestone.

Regarding the highways work under the section 106 funded allocation, we are likely to have the initial draft designs back in April whereupon officers will be seeking review and approval from Highways, expected to be finalised by the end of April, at which point the designs will be passed to the School Streets Team to combine with their work through Aecom. I am informed the A438 work is on track for a summer delivery at this stage.

I have not had the detail I have asked for from the School Streets team other than to confirm the work is progressing but no exact timescales which I have raised with the Director this week.

Parish Summit

The next parish summit is 8th April 1730 – 2100, when amongst items on the agenda will be the parish charter and PROW scheme, I hope to see members there.

Devolution

I have included in full the Chief Executive's update on devolution for reference.

Devolution – Next Steps for Herefordshire

Introduction

Following on from the Members briefings held in January 2025, this briefing has been circulated to provide an update on English Devolution at both a National and Regional level, and to set out the next steps for Herefordshire whilst we await further announcement.

Activity post publication of the English Devolution White Paper

Post publication of the English Devolution white paper the Leader of the council, the Chief Executive and key Directors have been proactively engaging with Central Government to understand the potential impact on, and opportunities for, Herefordshire.

The Leader and Chief Executive have been in informal, initial discussions with neighbouring authorities to understand their thinking and how this aligns with and shapes our own.

Running concurrently to these conversations, the Transformation Team has also been undertaking research setting the foundations for an options appraisal to support our thinking and decision making in relation to a devolution partnership for Herefordshire.

We have been clear in our messaging to Central Government from the outset and our position remains that any devolution deal must be in line with our vision of 'Deliver the best for Herefordshire in everything we do.' Any devolution deal must also support and enable us to retain our identity and integrity as a council. We will not be held back by the extended timescales to which we were originally working as a result of Local Government Reorganization, and we will work with the government to get the investment decisions Herefordshire needs in order to deliver against our vision.

The Devolution Priority Programme

As we have been engaging, listening, researching and learning about what devolution means for Herefordshire, the Government's focus has been on appointing councils to its devolution priority programme (DPP) having welcomed applications from those who are ready and willing to move towards devolution at a faster pace.

The DPP has two tracks to it. One of which is for groups of local authorities who have already established (or are on the way to establishing) outlines plans in relation to Strategic Mayoral Authorities. The other track is for unitary councils who need to undergo a programme of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to enable further devolution opportunities to become available to them. Both Worcestershire County Council and Gloucestershire County Council applied to expedite the process of LGR, but neither application was successful.

Impact of DPP announcements

Both Worcestershire County Council and Gloucestershire County Council will have received a statutory invitation and will need to set out their high-level, interim plans for LGR to Central Government by 21 March.

Whilst no statutory decisions will be made on the basis of the interim plans submitted in March, the impact on our neighbours will also be felt by Herefordshire specifically in relation to the pace at which we move into deeper devolution discussions and research, and in relation to progressing against our strategic ambitions as the Government's attention is on the DPP.

Full proposals for LGR will need to be submitted in the Autumn (2025.)

Next Steps for Herefordshire

We are awaiting further announcements to help shape and inform our planning; however, in the meantime we will continue to proactively engage with key government departments to ensure that we make our position as a council clear.

We will not let external influencing factors inhibit our ability to progress with our ambitions and commitments to deliver the best for Herefordshire in everything that we do. We will set out the funding and strategic support we need to deliver against our growth and wellbeing priorities and will use this time to build our presence and identity at National and Regional levels to ensure we are in the strongest possible position once the opportunity for further discussion and planning with our neighbours opens up.

We will continue to participate in Regional and National working groups and networks to ensure that Herefordshire remains ahead and will continue to share information and developments as we receive them.

Summary

- *Devolution presents no immediate urgency for Herefordshire.*
- *We await further announcements and will continue to proactively engage with Central Government and Devolution Networks.*
- *We will join further discussions around shaping a Strategic Mayoral Authority when the opportunity opens up to us.*
- *We will continue to build our relationships with neighbouring authorities.*
- *We will keep Members updated as things progress.*

To Note – The Ward members written report was noted by Council.

Public session.

The Chair opened up the session to public questions Below is a precis of the questions asked.

- Has the planning permission been obtained?
 - **t at the moment.**
- Why did the ballot papers not go out before the precept was set?

- The whole timing was very difficult, the Parish Council must set a draft budget in November for final approval in January.
- The Public want the scheme but just cannot afford to pay for it via the precept.
 - This has been noted.
- Why were questions on social media not answered?
- It is the Parish Council policy not to answer questions on social media
- How come this is the first time people are hearing about the scheme?
 - The scheme has been under consideration for more than five years and this was the third consultation that has taken place.
- Why is the loan so much?
- The quotations received were between £390k and £410k.
- Why was the precept increased 56%?
 - The precept was increased to cover the cost of any interest on a loan. The increase in the precept was 56% of a relatively small amount whereas the increase of 5% on the remainder of the Council Tax was applied to a much larger figure. The increase in the precept for a Band D property is £34 per year.
- Why was only Band D used in the information?
 - Band D is the Property Banding that the Government tells Local Authorities to use when discussing precepts as this is the middle band.
- Can the Banding be changed?
 - No, Government set the Banding of a property. It is nothing to do with the Parish Council.
- Will the equipment last 25 years?
 - Any equipment purchased will be properly maintained in order to last as long as possible. It is difficult to predict its longevity.
- Why can it not remain a field?
 - Following the first consultation, to remain just as a field was just one of the options. The majority wanted to have equipment on it.
- Can our precept money be returned and paid back as this is theft?
 - Sadly not, there is no mechanism to do this. However, if the vote comes back as a NO, then the precept will be reduced next year.
- Who was consulted about the scheme?
- Every household in the two parishes were sent a ballot slip
- Were the teenagers consulted?
 - Yes, teenagers were consulted as they are an important part of the community, for whom the equipment is geared.
- Who is going to pay for the maintenance of the equipment?
 - The Parish Council would do this as it already pays for the other play areas within the Parishes.
- Who is going to open the ballot box and count the papers?
 - The opening of the ballot box will be done by the Clerk, who is totally impartial in this scheme, a Parish Councillor and a member of the public. The Vice Chair will be present as an observer but will not touch the ballot slips.
- How can the Parish Council increase the precept when the Herefordshire Council cannot?
 - One of the benefits of Parish Councils, is that they can raise the precept by an unlimited amount, whereas the County/District Councils are capped by Government.
- Has the loan been taken out?
 - No, a loan has not been taken out and will not be unless the ballot comes back as a YES.
- Is the Scheme a sealed deal?
 - No, most definitely not.
- Why can the scheme not be done a bit at a time?

- This was looked at by the Parish Council, but it was felt that doing a bit at a time, would end up costing more and could take up to 5+ years.
- What other funding has been looked at?
 - The working group has looked at many avenues for funding but currently the Parish Council is excluded from many funding opportunities, because it is not a registered charity, which limits its access to just 2 or 3 small funders.
- I don't think the whole process has been carried out correctly.
 - The whole scheme was carried out in accordance with The Procurement Act 2024.
- Why did it take so long for the Parish Council to consult after setting it had set the Precept in January?
 - Some of the important additional information was still being obtained and it takes time to draw up, agree, print and send out the letters and ballot papers.
- Why has the Parish Council got a large reserve of money?
 - The current reserve is allocated for things like, entrance improvement to the Village Hall, Environmental projects, plus the Parish Council has to keep an operational reserve of the running cost for around 9 months.

The Chair acknowledged that the emotions were running high within the meeting and that the timing could have been better. The Chair apologised on behalf of the Parish Council for this bad timing but said that everything the Parish Council ~~did~~ had done had been done in good faith.

The views of the residents at the meeting came across loud and clear, and the Parish Council fully understands that with the current economic state of the Country any rise in the precept would be difficult.

To Note – The Council noted everything that had been said by the parishioners at the meeting and agreed that it would be taken into account when making any future decisions.

The meeting was adjourned for five minutes to allow all but five members of the public to leave the hall.

5. Financial Matters.

The clerk explained that this was one of the months when the Parish Council meeting falls very early in the month, not giving the Clerk enough time to produce the end of month accounts.

To Note – This was noted by the Council.

6. Payments.

	Payment	Net	Vat	Total
6.1	Clerk Salary – Tax & NI – April 25	As per Contract		
6.2	Lambe Corner – Solicitor	1340.00	268.00	1608.00
6.3	RoSPA Play Safety -	180.00	36.00	216.00

Resolution – The Council approved and agreed for all the payments to be made.

	Payment made under Clerk Powers	Net	Vat	Total
6.4	D Squire	1800.00	360.00	2160.00

To Note – The Council noted that this payment had been made.

7. Working Groups.

7.1 - Christopher Gibbon Field.

a) Consultation Outcome

Cllr S Green reported that the working group would meet after the ballot count.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council.*

b) Ecology Survey

c) Planning Consultant

Cllr S Green reported that both an Ecologist and a Planning Consultant would be required to produce reports before a planning application could be submitted.

Resolution – *Council agreed for the working group to spend up to £10,000.00 for this work, BUT ONLY IF THE BALLOT VOTE CAME BACK AS A YES.*

d) Way Forward

It was decided to put this on hold, until the results of the ballot were known.

To Note – *This was agreed by the Council.*

7.2 - Highways & Infrastructure.

Cllr F Harris reported that there had not been any meetings, so there was nothing new to report at this stage. It was reassuring to see that the Bromyard Road junction was being re-tarmacked.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council.*

7.3 - Environment.

Cllr P Hodges reported that there had not been a meeting of the working group but is hoping to come back to Council with a planting plan for the Parish.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council.*

7.4 - Play Areas.

The Chair gave the following report

The Play Area Working Group (BLPAWG):

Cllr Hodges has pruned three of the six cider apple trees and the other three will be pruned in the near future.

The RoSPA annual check on both play areas has been carried out and highlighted the following issues, which are outlined in the letter sent to the supplier and installer, Creative Play:
PLAY@CREATIVEPLAYUK.COM

Bartestree Village Hall Play Area:

Item: Basket Swing: (page 12) the upper horizontal timber is rotted and needs to be replaced.

Frome Park Play Area:

Item: Basket Swing: (page 3) the upper horizontal timber is decaying.

Item: See Saw: (page 4) the horizontal timber is rotted and needs to be replaced, bolt needs tightening.

Item: Multiply: (page 6) the fixtures loose or missing, the bolts are loose, fittings are rusty and need to be replaced.

Item: Agility Balance: (pages 10-11) incorrectly installed so pivot end is not centrally placed. Needs to be installed correctly.

Item: Climber: (page 14) timber rotted and needs to be replaced.

These items were supplied and installed by you in 2020. The metal fixings have been replaced once already. We are extremely disappointed that the lifespan of these wooden and metal materials is so short and are looking for you to take action to restore our confidence in your products.

To Note – *This written report was noted by Council.*

7.5 - Finance & Admin.

Cllr P Smith reported that the working group would be meeting on the 31.04.25 to go through the end of year accounts. This is so the government AGAR forms can be filled out and sent to the internal auditor. The Clerk asked if it would be possible to change the current internal auditor, who still works with pen and paper to a new internal auditor (Mr T Robshaw) who is happy to work with digital. It would save the Clerk several hours of work and no printing off and posting out of papers. The new auditor would receive everything by email.

Resolution – *Council agreed to use Mr T Robshaw as the new internal auditor and the rest of the report was noted.*

7.6 - Communications.

Cllr D Welton reported that the Communications working group had met and gave the following report.

- a) Cllr D Welton welcomed the members of the Communication Working Group and noted the purpose of the Group was to:
 - Expedite and maintain effective and efficient communications across the community on behalf of the Parish Council and to assist other Parish Council working Group's and committees with external communications.
 - Identify effective means of Communications within the community.
- b) There followed a discussion on the different forms of communications which centred upon two main areas:
 - Effective online internet presence.
 - Physical presence in the community through circulars, magazines and newsletters.
- c) The Clerk noted the current ineffective Parish Council website, which appears dated and is proving not to be user friendly and significant updating and work which the current provider seems reluctant to undertake.
- d) It was suggested that rather than continue with the current provider the Parish Council should look at a more dynamic approach to include more functionality within an updated picture-based Word Press format to include:
 - Self (internal) administration options.
 - More interactive links to user sites at Hereford Council.
 - Profile pages.
 - Simplified archive.
- e) The Clerk undertook to investigate other providers and costs to report back for presentation to the full Parish Council. (Agreed)
- f) PS noted that more use of local physical communication platforms would be useful and effective, this includes magazines, journals and flyers etc. Cllr F Harris suggested that the Parish Council establish a newsletter to be published biannually (Christmas and Summer editions) with forthcoming events, Projects and activities. (Agreed).

Cllr D Welton suggested that once a Web site was established that the Parish Council provide funding for a banner to be displayed at the Village Hall Road entrance displaying the site WWW address. (Agreed)

AOB

None.

Next meeting will take place in the Village Hall at 14:00hr on 16 April 2025

To Note – *This written report was noted by Council.*

Planning Report.

The Chair gave the following report on planning.

Recent Decisions:

- P250234/FH** Clifford Coach House, Rhystone Lane, Lugwardine HR1 4AP.
Proposed extension. Approved with conditions.
- P250383/V** Bridge Cottage, Bartestree HR1 3SE
Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed conversion of outbuilding into an annex. Application approved.
- P210565/F & P241645/L** Lugwardine Court, Lugwardine Court Orchard, Lugwardine HR1 4AE.
Proposed change of use of former coach house into a single dwelling, with extensions to side and rear.
Approved with conditions.
- P242895/FH & P242896/L** Wilcroft House, Bartestree HR1 4BB.
Conversion of former Coach House into annex accommodation ancillary to Wilcroft House.
Application withdrawn.
- P250399/V** 25 Traherne Close, Lugwardine. HR1 4AF.
Application for lawful development certificate for proposed conversion of attached garage into additional accommodation for bedroom and kitchen.
Application approved.
- P250961/PA7** Tidnor Farm, Lugwardine, HR1 4AS.
Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed agricultural building for secure storage of implements and machinery and fodder. Comments not being accepted.
Application approved with conditions.

Applications to be considered by the PC

- P250704/FH** 29 Quarry Field, Lugwardine, HR1 4BS.
Proposed new hobby workshop in the garden.
- P250650/FH** The white House, Whitestone, **Withington** HR1 3NE.
Proposed erection of a polytunnel on agricultural land.

To Note – *This written report was noted by Council.*

Lengthsman Report.

Cllr P Smith reported that the lengthsman was still working on the drainage plan.

To Note – *This verbal report was noted by Council.*

Parish Matters.

10.1 - Community Speed Watch.

Cllr F Harris reported that another person had been signed up for the speed watch scheme, they were still awaiting **for** the West Mercia Police to move forward.

To Note – *This verbal report was noted by Council.*

10.2 - Blister Pack Recycling Scheme Update.

Cllr P Smith reported that the scheme seems to be a great success and additional recycling bags will be required.

To Note – *This verbal report was noted by Council and Council agreed to purchase more recycling bags.*

10.3 - 80th Anniversary of VE day. – Thursday 8th May

Cllr J Karayiannis reported that the Anniversary was coming along well and there ~~was~~ were some great raffle prizes promised by local businesses:

Beefy Boys £40.00 voucher, 2 x £25 beauty vouchers, 2 x meal vouchers from a both the local pubs, a wheelbarrow of drink and many others.

‘Street 1984’ food truck will be attending plus an ice cream van. There will be music, teas and cakes and much more. The flags and bunting have ~~been ordered~~ arrived and the beacon will be lit at 8pm.

To Note – *This verbal report was noted by Council.*

10.4 - Footpath Officer/s

There was no report on this occasion.

To Note – *This was noted by Council.*

10.5 - Locality Steward

The Clerk reported that he was in regular contact with the new Locality Steward who has overseen the cutting back of the hedge at the entrance to Wilcroft Park to improve visibility and the removal of the illegal swing from the large tree in the same estate.

To Note – *This was noted by Council.*

10.6 - Illegal Swing – Hopton Close

Reported above.

To Note – *This verbal report was noted by Council.*

10.7 - Wilcroft Park

The Clerk reported that, in addition to the hedge being cut back, the potholes at the junction had now been filled in very slipshod way and we are asking for the work to be redone to a much higher standard.

To Note – *This verbal report was noted by Council.*

11. Flood Protection.

The Chair attended an online meeting and produced the following report:

Herefordshire Flood Response Programme has a Budget of £2 million over two years to pay salaries of 3 posts: 2 principals +1 assistant.

Roles: investigations into flood risk management and drainage.

Pilot Scheme: To look at up to date equipment:

Sandbags – new type that are easier to store because can be filled with water.

Hydrosnake – longer barrier also filled with water.

Resilience stores: sheds or containers to house torches, shovels, hi-vis clothing.

Mary Long-Dhonau OBE:

Presentation by renowned flooding advisor Mary Long-Dhonau OBE (often known as ‘Flood Mary’), of Ledbury. Website: floodmary.com.

Ensure SIMA code of practice and vetting of standards for flood defences.

A Flood Pod containing recommended flood equipment is available to visit market towns.

Owners of properties that are flooded should adopt attitude to ‘build back better’, preferably using one installer and installing self-closing airbricks.

Vital equipment:

Head torches; aluminium tape 4" wide to seal doors & windows; rolled up flood sack to prevent toilet from overflowing.

Next meeting: will take place in May and will be in person.

Parishes: should send in all flood risk sites to Steve Hodges floodrisk@herefordshire.gov.uk

To Note – *This written report was noted by Council.*

12. Armed Forces Covenant.

The Chair reported that she had sent off the application and was awaiting a reply.

To Note – *This was noted by Council.*

The meeting closed at 9.45pm.

James Wetmore

Signed:

Chair of the Parish Council

Dated: 1st May 2025