MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

HELD AT 19:30 ON TUESDAY 18TH JULY 2023

**Present:** Councillor Sharpe (Chair)

Cllrs Allen MBE, Bland MBE, Campbell, Farnsworth & Partington

Helen Buckley (Clerk)

Cllr Benson

Fifteen members of the public

**Apologies:** Cheshire Police

Cllr Sharpe opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

**2024/77 Code of Conduct – Declarations of Interest**

None declared.

**2024/78 Minutes of the Meeting held 20th June 2023**

**Resolved**

Minutes approved.

**2024/79 Matters arising from the minutes**

2024/62 Lane Head Bypass: Cllr Allen will update on this at the Borough Council report.

**2024/80 Cheshire Police June Report**

As there was nobody present from Cheshire Police, Cllr Sharpe read this out. The report was noted.

**2024/81 Vandalism to the Toilet Block**

There is no CCTV from local houses.

The council thinks the perpetrators must be local due to previous incidents (including at Croft Community Centre).

Cllr Sharpe has spoken to the police but unless there’s proof, they can’t do anything.

The clerk to ask at the Horse Shoe if its Wi-Fi could reach the toilets, or even if it could network its CCTV to the toilet block.

Cllr Sharpe had received a quote of £1500 to fix the toilets.

If the council were to explore the possibility of paid entry toilets, it would be contactless ones which would also require Wi-Fi.

Cllr Bland informed everybody of the toilet vandalism that took place in Culcheth some years ago. He too thought that CCTV was the best solution.

If the youths were to smash the cameras, then at least they’d be caught doing it.

We should have CCTV installed at Croft Community Centre also and look at funding from either the Police and Crime Commissioner or the Safer Streets Fund.

**Resolved**

That the council arranges to have CCTV installed at both Croft Community Centre and the toilet block at the Playing Field.

**2024/82 Traffic Issues in Croft**

Cllr Sharpe read out the replies from Steve Hunter at Warrington Borough Council. Not the most positive of replies but one suggestion that the parish council would like to pursue is to change the derestricted section of Mill House Lane to a 40 zone.

The parish council will write to Mark Tune to see if he or Steve Hunter could attend the September meeting.

**Resolved**

That the council will invite Mark Tune/Steve Hunter to the September meeting.

One resident commented that there may be no evidence of youths vandalising the toilets or the Community Centre but there’s evidence of motorists speeding on a daily basis.

If anyone had dashcam footage when an incident occurred then this could be used as evidence. Any accidents or speeding incidents are to be reported to the police and to Warrington Borough Council.

Maybe any speed bumps could be sited away from homes so as to reduce noise pollution.

One resident asked if we could request from the police as to when they’ve been out.

Cllr Sharpe read out the reply from Chief Inspector Neil Drum regarding the cardboard cutout police officers.

The parish council would have to accept liability and would have to carry out a risk assessment for their use. We would need to enquire with the insurance company.

Overall, it’s a positive response from Ch Insp Neil Drum. The council will set up a bespoke meeting as per Ch Insp Drum’s suggestion.

**Resolved**

That the council will arrange a one-off meeting with colleagues from Cheshire Police to discuss speeding concerns.

Perhaps the cardboard cutouts could go where the police would go if they had their Trucam.

**2024/83 Clerk's Report: Correspondence**

1. To/From: Chief Inspector Neil Drum re: the use of cardboard cutout police officers. Covered above.
2. To/From: Mark Tune/Highways at Warrington BC re: Traffic Issues in Croft. Covered above.
3. From: local resident re: plaque installation at Croft Unitarian Chapel graveyard. There has been an increase in price so Cllrs will need re-agree to this revised cost.

**Resolved**

That the parish council proceeds with this order.

1. The clerk requested a resolution that she and the chair can have delegated authority to make decisions during recess.

**Resolved**

That the clerk and chair have delegated authority to make decisions during recess and keep members updated with any news via email.

1. The clerk also requested a resolution that the chair plus one other councillor can sign cheques for payroll and suppliers during recess.

**Resolved**

That the chair plus one other councillor sign cheques during recess.

1. The Chair will work on the risk assessment for the Christmas Tree lighting event which needs to be submitted over the summer. He will have input from the clerk where necessary.

**2024/84 Clerk's Report: Car Park Tarmacking**

The clerk has invited a second person to come to quote for these works. She will be meeting him on site on Tuesday 25th at 16:00.

**2024/85 Clerk's Report: Security at Croft Community Centre and the Toilet Block**

The clerk received a quote from the Warrington Borough Council’s contact for three cameras at the Community Centre.

He has also quoted for two CCTV cameras at the toilet block.

**Resolved**

That the Cllrs go ahead and purchase CCTV for Croft Community Centre and the Playing Field toilet block, as covered above,.

The clerk submitted an application for funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner for this but was unsuccessful. The funding will reopen on 1st September so she will reapply. There is also the option of Safer Streets Funding. The clerk will also look into this.

**2024/86 Clerk's Report: Annual Internal Audit Report**

The internal auditor, had completed its examination of the parish council’s records. The following recommendations from this year’s audit were discussed:

Recommendation 1.

“The total value of fixed assets recorded in the draft AGAR did not agree to the fixed asset register. The clerk revised the fixed asset register; however, the following further issues were identified:

Additions for 2023 were grouped with similar assets in some cases (e.g., speed signs, noticeboards) so it is impossible to identify the individual valuations and locations of each of the individual assets.

The clerk has noted that some assets have not been included as there is uncertainty regarding ownership e.g., benches, defibrillators.”

The clerk updated the noticeboards section so they are listed separately, but had the Cllrs advise as to which speed signs were which as they had been there a few years. Also, there was one speed sign not currently listed as the parish council owns eight of these, not seven as originally listed.

The Cllrs advised the clerk that the defibrillators and benches should be included in the asset register.

**Resolved**

That the clerk updates the asset register to itemise assets and to include benches and defibrillators.

Recommendation 2.

“The council did not comply with Regulation 15 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as it failed to make proper provision for the exercise of public rights for the 2021/22 accounts as the public notice was not published on the council website.”

The clerk accepted that this was her oversight as she had posted the AGAR on the noticeboards but not the website.

**Resolved**

That the clerk will publish the AGAR on the website as well as the noticeboards.

Recommendation 3.

“Publication Requirements:

The Notice of Conclusion of Audit and Audit Certificate were not published on the council website by the deadline of September 30th 2022. The 2021/22 AGAR is not published on the council website.

Therefore, we have concluded in the AGAR internal audit certificate that the council did not comply with the publication requirements for the 2021/22 AGAR audit as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.”

This was the clerk’s oversight as this had been published on the noticeboards, but not the website.

**Resolved**

That the clerk will publish the AGAR on the website as well as the noticeboards.

Recommendation 4.

“There is no audit trail to evidence that overtime claimed is authorised by council.

Staff costs per the cashbook spreadsheet are £27,827, however, £27,902 is disclosed in the AGAR accounts page for staff costs.”

The clerk updated the council that overtime approval requests are sent by email to the chair and hard copies of payroll submissions are signed by two Cllrs each month. The clerk suggested to include the vice-chair as well as the chair in the email overtime requests going forward, and that two other Cllrs will sign the hard copy, therefore four Cllrs will have approved the overtime. This suggestion was accepted by the Cllrs.

The clerk updated the Cllrs that she had amended the cost centre of an expense reimbursement but had omitted to amend the AGAR to reflect this. She had since rectified this.

**Resolved**

That the clerk will email any overtime requests to the chair and vice-chair going forward, and will ensure the hard copy is signed by two other Cllrs.

Recommendation 5.

“The Nationwide bank account is not included in the year-end bank reconciliation.”

The clerk will figure out how to include this. It’s always included in the quarterly statement provided to the council.

**Resolved**

That the clerk will incorporate the Nationwide figure into the year-end bank reconciliation going forward.

The following recommendations remained outstanding from 2021/22:

“Staff costs in the AGAR annual return accounts are incorrect as the following have been included:

* payments to employees for expenses and mileage
* Chairman’s allowance

The payments to employees for mileage and other expenses are paid with the salary and are therefore not approved by council.

The notification of changes to salary are made by the clerk to the payroll agent.”

The clerk had since split expense refunds into the appropriate cost centre. The clerk was unsure as to where the chair’s allowance should be allocated and sought advice from the council. When she prepares the budget, it is included in the ‘Employees’ section as it is subject to tax and National Insurance. The Cllrs advised that it should be kept as it is.

Two Cllrs always sign a hard copy of the mileage and expense claims. The clerk suggested that maybe it should be signed by three Cllrs instead going forward. The council decided to leave as two.

As the Chair doesn’t liaise directly with the payroll agent, perhaps the clerk should copy in the Chair when notifying the payroll company of any salary increases in future. In addition to this, a hard copy of the payroll submission is always signed by two Cllrs. The council agreed to this suggestion.

**Resolved**

That the chairman’s allowance remains under ‘employees’ as it subject to tax and NI; that two Cllrs continue to sign hard copies of mileage and expense claims; and that the clerk copies in the chair when emailing the payroll company about any salary increases.

The following recommendations remained outstanding from 2020/21:

“The risk assessment does not address the risks of supplier fraud. Most standard local council policies do not cover supplier fraud. The supplier fraud risks can be managed via appropriately robust policies and procedures.”

The clerk had since updated the parish council’s risk assessment to reflect this. The Cllrs accepted this update.

**Resolved**

That the Cllrs agreed to the amendment made to the risk assessment.

**2024/87** **Clerk's Report: Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2022/23 – Annual Governance Statement**

Members considered statements 1 to 9 of the Annual Governance Statement and made an assessment of the financial safeguards that were in place to protect the council’s finances and assets.

Before responding to the statements Members were reminded that:

**A/** in May 2022, the Parish Council approved:

Standing Orders – minute 2023/32.

Safeguarding Public Money – minute 2023/34.

Financial Regulations – minute 2023/33.

Risk Assessment – minute 2023/35.

Asset Register – minute 2023/39.

Members have revisited and approved these documents and procedures in May 2023.

**B/** The Parish Council receives regular budget monitoring statements.

**C/** The Parish Council’s rules and procedures were followed in 2022/23 and adherence to them has been reviewed by the internal auditor.

**Resolved**

That questions 1-8 of the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be answered in the affirmative; that question 9 be marked ‘not applicable’; and that the Chair and Responsible Financial Officer be authorised to sign the document.

**2024/88 Clerk's Report: Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2022/23 – Accounting Statements**

The figures show the Parish Council’s expenditure and income for 2022/23 alongside the equivalent 2021/22 values.

Members were reminded that the Parish Council had seen the 2022/23 figures develop over the year in the budget monitoring statements. In accordance with requirements, the reasons for any significant increases or decreases in year-on-year values were explained.

Members noted that the financial values on the AGAR had been inspected and agreed by the internal auditor.

Members were asked to approve the financial statement in Section 2, page 5 of the AGAR 2022/23.

**Resolved**

That the Accounting Statements 2022/23 are approved for signature by the Chair.

**2022/89 Clerk's Report: Publication of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2022/23**

Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the AGAR will be posted online and on the two noticeboards together with the inspection rights of interested parties.

**2024/90 Clerk's Report: Banking**

The clerk phoned NatWest on Wednesday 12th. She is now able to access the parish council accounts from her own NatWest accounts. The clerk said to the Cllrs that if they already bank with NatWest it’s worth logging on to check if they are also able to do this. Although, could this be a security concern? The Cllrs wondered if it’s possible to have a separate password. The clerk will contact NatWest again to see if this is possible.

**2024/91 Financial Reports**

The financial reports were up to the end of April and May.

The bank reconciliations were in balance.

The April creditor list amounts to £4,330.98 and the May creditor list amounts to £6,738.63. There are no issues regarding the budget.

A list of July's cheque payments was distributed to the councillors. This list amounted to £4,585.86.

**Resolved**

That the creditors' cheque payment list for July totalling £4,585.86 be approved.

**2024/92 Planning Applications**

Planning Applications for consideration at this meeting:

**2024/93 Application 2023/00643/FUL – Oven Back Cottage, Winwick Lane, WA3 7EW**

Proposal: Proposed Conversion of Barn to Dwelling.

**Resolved**

No objection

**2024/94** **Application 2023/00868/ADJA – Former Parkside Colliery, Winwick Road, Newton Le Willows, St Helens**

Proposal: P/2023/0403/FUL Full application for enabling works to excavate site materials from Parkside former Colliery site (Phase 2 area) and movement of material onto Parkside phase 1 land to enable development to be constructed to agreed platform levels and landforms.

**Resolved**

No objection

**2024/95 Application 2023/00167/FULH – 32 Browmere Drive, WA3 7HR**

Proposal: Two storey extension to side of dwelling and addition of rear dormer extension.

**Resolved**

No objection

**2024/96 Application** **2023/00852/TPO – Chestnut Cottage, Warrington Road, WA3 6BG**

Proposal: Remedial pruning to 2no. trees and felling to 2no. trees.

**Resolved**

No objection

The following needed a response before this meeting:

**2024/97 Application** **2023/00757/ADJA – Land Adjacent to Pocket Nook Farm, Pocket Nook Lane, Lowton, WA3 1AX**

Proposal: A/23/95513/MAJOR Residential development of 236 dwellings with associated parking, landscaping, open-space, footpaths, SUDS and vehicle access from A579 (Atherleigh Way).

**Resolved**

Objection on the following grounds:

This is a major new development of 236 new properties off Atherleigh Way.  You only have to look at the welter of objections to it already to see what the local residents think of it. It includes a new access road being built on to Atherleigh Way which would be a huge traffic disruption. The consequences for ourselves in terms of substantial extra volumes of traffic would be considerable.  There is of course no additional infrastructure proposed to support this. As regards green belt, once again green space is being destroyed.

Being as we are at the Northern extremity of the Warrington area this will affect us so much more than other Warrington parishes, so we should ensure that WBC submits an objection to this. We only have to see the way that Wigan is treating us with regard to the Lowton bypass proposal and the reopening of Kenyon junction to see how they are hoping to offload their congestion on to us.

**2024/98 Application** **2023/00719/FULH – 33 Smithy Brow, WA3 7DA**

Proposal: Double storey side extension and single storey rear extension.

**Resolved**

No objection

**2024/99 Borough Councillor's Update**

1. There was a full council meeting in June – a couple of motions were passed: one for better insulation and another where parish councils should have a better say in where 106 monies should go.
2. Warrington Hospital has not been approved for funding.

Cllr Farnsworth queried this.

1. There was a letter from Jim Turton which contained a proposal for road and footpath improvements in Culcheth, Glazebury and Croft.

There is a choice of works to be carried out, marked in magenta or blue. The deadline to decide is the 25th, this has since been extended to 9th August. Cllrs Allen and Bland declared an interest in this as decisions will affect both Croft and Culcheth and Glazebury and they are members of both parishes. Cllr Allen will act without favour to either and her suggestions will be based purely on which roads or footpaths are in most need of repair.

1. Spring Lane and the noise from the motorway – Cllr Allen is chasing this. She has asked for a noise survey to be carried out. She passed a hard copy of the email to the clerk.

Cllr Sharpe mentioned that he had recently met with Chris Burrows from Highways. He has offered to come and speak to us if we want.

1. Cllrs Allen and Benson attended Lane Head Residents’ Group last night.

A resident from Kenyon Lane mentioned Whites Farm (Waste Wave Ltd [asbestos recycling]), Diggle Green Farm and Opus in terms of traffic, namely lorries during the night.

The resident said it’s difficult to challenge the weight restriction that’s in place as you can’t prove or disprove where the lorries are going.

Cllr Allen said she would find out when and how they are allowed to operate.

The next meeting will be on 24th July but this is only for the officers of each of the three local authorities.

Cllr Allen said they were talking about a route last night.

This next meeting on the 24th will be a ‘blank canvas’ meeting in terms of route.

Cllr Sharpe mentioned a couple of residents had been asked by Wigan BC what their preferred routes would be.

Various route options were discussed.

Croft Parish Council has a preferred route in mind.

1. Cllr Benson provided an update on the Police and Crime Commissioner meeting earlier today.

Chief Inspector Rob McLoughlin was in attendance.

A query was raised about when the police officers provide their reports to the parish councils, they just say what has happened rather than what has been solved.

The waiting time for 101 calls has been reduced.

At Orford Hub there are new clubs, such as boxing, that have helped reduce incidences of ASB.

Cllr Benson also updated on Lowton Community Hub that has two dojos with spring floors. There is also a dementia café.

1. Cllr Allen said that Livewire is being taken back in-house by WBC.

**2024/100 Recess**

1. A resident said there’s a problem on Gerard Road in that you can’t get past with a pram or in a wheelchair on a particular section of the road due to parking. One of the vehicles (a commercial one) has been there for at least three months. The other is almost double parked and the bin lorry could only just get through this morning.

Cllr Partington commented that this was a police matter.

\* Cllr Sharpe later updated that this problem was on Birchall Street, not Gerard Road.

1. A resident commented on the piece of land next to the General Elliot. The trees are getting out of hand and could do with lopping. The lady had even been to WBC’s offices but couldn’t get an answer. Some telephone wires are being pushed. Henry (Coakley, the pub landlord) said last time that he’d look after the hedge, which he did cut before the carnival. It either belongs to the General Elliot (as in the brewery) or the landlord of the General Elliot – Henry was going to look into this.
2. A resident mentioned some laurels at a house on Orchard Court that are getting overgrown and difficult to get past and see if there’s traffic. The clerk will write to the owner to ask them to cut them back.
3. A resident mentioned that there is no dog poo bin near the Plough.

The clerk will email Ian Brackenbury at WBC to request a general waste bin to be installed by the Plough.

1. A resident raised the issue of the trench on Heath Lane. The clerk confirmed that she had reported this to Nik Iddon at WBC and she read out his reply.

**2024/101 Members' Referrals**

1. Cllr Partington raised the issue of the dropped kerb on Mustard Lane. The clerk confirmed that she had chased up Ryan Dyson at WBC regarding this matter and she forwarded his reply to Cllr Partington.
2. The local bus service was raised. The clerk confirmed that she had invited David Boyer at WBC to discuss this at tonight’s meeting but that he was unable to attend. She had also invited him to September’s meeting but he will be unable to attend due to a prior engagement. She read out the email from his PA. It is hopeful that he will be able to send a delegate to September’s meeting instead.
3. Cllr Campbell declared an interest as the chairman of the Village Club. He was enquiring as to the availability of the football pitch. The clerk and Cllr Sharpe updated him that the drainage on the pitch needs addressing prior to the football pitch being used. The clerk also commented that she had already received multiple enquiries as to the availability of the football pitch and that this would be dealt with on a first come first served basis.
4. Cllr Campbell updated that wreaths now have to be ordered online or from the poppy shop in Warrington. The clerk will look into this.

Cllr Allen suggested a more environmentally friendly alternative.

1. Cllr Sharpe mentioned that it was Clerk’s Week last week so the clerk was thanked.

**2024/102 Date of next Parish Council meeting – 19th September 2023 at 19:30**