

MUCH BIRCH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting for Much Birch and the Annual Statutory Parish Council Meeting of Much Birch Parish Council held at Much Birch Community Hall on Thursday 14th May 2015 from 7.00pm

Present:

Cllr. Alison Cook (Chair)
Cllr. Andrew Crum
Cllr. Tim Jones
Cllr. Steve Turner (Vice Chair)

In attendance:

Parish Clerk, Alison Wright, the Ward Councillor - David Harlow, Roger Sweetman of "Sweetman Developments" and 68 members of the public

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1.0 Co-option of Councillors, to elect a Chairman and receive Acceptance of Office form(s)

There were no new co-options. Cllr Alison Cook was proposed as Chair by Cllr Turner and seconded by Cllr Crum. There were no further proposals. Cllr Cook was duly elected as Chair and she signed the Acceptance of Office Forms and Declaration of Interest Form.

2.0 To elect a Vice Chairman and receive Acceptance of Office Form

Cllr Stephen Turner was proposed as Vice Chair by Cllr Cook and seconded by Cllr Crum. There were no further proposals. Cllr Turner was duly elected as Vice Chair and he signed the Acceptance of Office Forms and Declaration of Interest Form.

3.0 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies received. At this point the Chair noted that outgoing councillors Norris and James had not stood for re-election. She paid tribute to their work and recorded a vote of thanks for the contributions they had both made to the Parish, and in particular to Tump Lane, as parish councillors.

4.0 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations made.

5.0 Minutes of previous meetings and matters arising

5.1) The Minutes of 2nd April 2015 were signed as a true and correct record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.

6.0 To receive Reports (as appropriate) form or on

6.1) Much Birch Old Charities concerning the Poor Acre – the pre-planning application process was progressing

6.2) P.C.S.O. from West Mercia Police - The PCSO was not present. Bulletins with updates had been received and circulated.

6.3) Ward Councillor Ward Cllr David Harlow introduced himself and thanked those present for electing him to the role. He said that he did not have anything concrete to report but he was currently undergoing an intensive induction to the role and in addition to being shown round the county was also receiving updates on various subject areas including IT matters and children's safeguarding. Contact details were given and he stated that he was there to support

and help wherever possible. He would be doing everything possible to serve the community well over the next four year term.

6.4) Locality Steward Dave Atkinson had sent his apologies

6.5) The “Tump Lane Toppers” (including any update on the Play Space)

A Questionnaire draft, from Herefordshire Housing, had been circulated to the Parish Council for comment and this would now be sent to all local households for them to give feedback.

7.0 To appoint Councillors to the following Working Groups

It was resolved to appoint councillors to the Working Groups as follows:

7.1) Planning Working Group: All councillors

7.2) Finance Working Group: Cllrs Cook and Turner

7.3) Employment Working Group: To be convened as required

7.4) Self Help Winter Gritting Working Group: Councillors Crum and Turner

8.0 Clerk’s Update on Action Items

The updates were noted including items as advised on the Communications Sheet. Work on Barrack Hill had commenced that day. The Little Birch Road resurfacing requirement would be reiterated.

9.0 Financial Report

9.1 To note Bank Balances:

@ 13 th April HSBC Community Account	£8109.22
@ 13 th April HSBC Community Projects Account	£ 14408.00

9.2 To approve the following payments:

Clerks salary	£277.20
Expenses (mileage £42.75)	£42.75
Came & Company (Parish Council Insurance)	£265.00
Much Birch Community Hall (Room Hire)	£52.50
HALC Subscription 2015/2016	£477.34

9.3 To consider requests for support regarding the parish churchyard and the memorial clock: Following discussion, a donation of £100.00 was made for the Churchyard upkeep. It was resolved that the repairs to the clock would be met in full and an invoice would be requested at the appropriate time.

9.4 To confirm appointment of internal auditor

Cllr Cook would be making contact with the auditor and would confirm

Resolved: that the payments were passed for payment (prop Cllr Crum sec. Cllr Turner)

10.0 Planning Matters

There had been on application to consider:

APPLICATION NO & SITE ADDRESS: 151091 - Treberva, Much Birch, Hereford, Herefordshire HR2 8HU

DESCRIPTION: Removal of an existing lean-to structure and installation of a new portal framed structure to provide additional storage for fruit and farm equipment

APPLICANT(S): Mr George Snell

GRID REF: OS 350665, 230132

APPLICATION TYPE: Planning Permission

The Parish Council had no objections to this application.

The Ward Councillor agreed to contact the Planning Department regarding the previous issue that had been raised of the Parish Council seeking to obtain an extension to all applications to allow time for them to be considered within a Parish Council Meeting forum. The Ward Councillor would feed back on this.

11.0 Much Birch School Parking and Road Issues Update

The Highways Agency had made contact with the Clerk and a Meeting was to be arranged for June to discuss the A49 Trunk Road and possible lights, crossing etc. There was an ongoing issue with the yellow lines near to the school and a letter, and photograph, from the resident of Fairview had demonstrated that the yellow lines were being disregarded by people parking outside the school and close to the property known as Fairview. The School would be contacted to ask for a reminder re the yellow lines to be sent to parents and to enquire how the “one way round” drop-off initiative was working out.

12.0 Parish Roads and Footpaths including appointment of Footpath Officer

Cllr Jones was re-elected as Footpath Officer. Proposed by Cllr Turner and seconded by Cllr. Crum. No further defects were reported by the Footpath Officer however the stile at the end of Path MB26, at Bigglestone Farm, was broken. The Locality Steward would be asked to check this.

The Lengthsman would be asked to commence the annual strimming of verges etc. The plans for Balfour Beatty grass cuts on the splays etc. to be checked with the Locality Steward. These were a priority for visibility and safety.

13.0 Correspondence

13.1) Items were noted as per the information and correspondence sheet and included updates from HALC and Herefordshire Council with reminders regarding completion of electoral expenses forms and other matters relating to the elections.

13.2) To consider a timetable to review all relevant policies - this would be an ongoing process with a timetable to be drawn up by the Chair and Clerk.

14.0 Parishes' Newsletter and Much Birch Website

14.1) Clerk to supply a précis for the next edition of the newsletter.

15.0 Matters to be raised on the Agenda for the next meeting

To include all of the usual updates and items, and also auditor, policy reviews, review of Parish Plan and task list plus consideration of any impact of the Core Strategy.

16.0 Confirmation of the date of the next Ordinary Meeting

Next meeting – Thursday 4th June 2015 at 7.30pm in The Much Birch Community Hall

The Annual Statutory Meeting closed at 7.30pm

The Open Session then commenced at 7.30pm

The Chair introduced Mr Roger Sweetman, of Sweetman Developments, who had come to present some ideas for the development of the Wormelow Stores site and to hear suggestions from those present.

Mr Sweetman has supplied a copy of his speech and this is replicated here and is as delivered on the evening:

“Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Roger Sweetman, I run a small Hereford based residential property development company called Sweetman Developments.

We have built a number of small developments in Herefordshire, details of which are available on my website - sweetmandevelopments.com if you would like to see more about them and there is a small section on there about me. Whilst we are on the subject of me, I am the Managing Director and owner of Sweetman Developments - I am the company - so the buck stops with me. The contact number on my card - which is here if you would like to take one - is my personal direct number - not a head office or switch board. I will do my best answer to answer any questions you may have for me this evening but going forward, if you have any further queries please feel free to call me directly. So - I am here this evening to briefly talk to you about a proposed new shop development in Wormelow.

As you may know the old Wormelow shop went into liquidation almost one year ago - last May.

I purchased the site in October and instructed Cross & James Commercial to start marketing the existing shop immediately. By the end of October I had applied, and received approval for, the change of use of the garages at the rear of the shop into two bungalows. After several months of no significant interest in the shop as it now stands, I decided to prepare the plans that you are looking at this evening.

BUT.... Before I instructed Cross & James Commercial to parallel market this scheme alongside the existing building, I met with two representatives from the Community Shop Group. During this meeting it was made it clear to me that they were not interested in this new scheme. About a week later, I did a presentation of this scheme at the first meeting of the Community Shop Steering Committee. During this meeting I offered them first refusal to either buy or rent either the existing or new shop. The committee declined my offer and agreed and confirmed that the existing site was unsuitable and of no interest to them. However, when talking with the newly elected Chairman the following day, she requested that I hold off with my plans as they didn't want to 'rule the old shop out' and would like to explore 'further options'. I agreed to hold off with my application for a further seven weeks - until the 23rd of April when a closed meeting of the Community shop Committee was to be held to discuss 'new matters'. I spoke with Valerie Harvey the day after that closed meeting and was asked to further delay my application for another three weeks at which point a business plan would have been prepared and they may be in a position to make an offer for the shop. Which takes us up to tomorrow. I still don't have that offer but I understand that it will be with me tomorrow.

I will give their proposal serious consideration when it receive it but in the mean time, to keep my options open and depending on your feedback tonight, it is likely that I will submit this new scheme as a formal planning application on Monday.

So - as you will see from the plans that I have distributed, the new scheme includes a new village shop with a two bedroom apartment above it. There are also two new two bedroom terrace houses. I would like to draw these to your attention, they are not three or four bedroom executive homes, these are starter homes that may help someone get onto the housing ladder. This is a much needed contribution to the parish's target of 71 for new houses as set out in the draft core strategy. What is more, I would be willing and delighted to give initial priority to local people if anyone wishes to talk to me about buying them. Although they don't form part of this application but are never the less part of the overall scheme, the garage and offices that I mentioned earlier, that were to the rear of the shop, are in the process of being converted into two two bedroom bungalows that are currently being marketed by Stooke Hill & Walsh. You can talk directly with me about these and I'd be very happy to meet you and show you around or alternatively you could contact the agents whose cards are here. The sales particulars will be available on their website soon.

But back to the shop - A local man, Josh Evans, who lives in Tump Lane, with his business partner, Gareth Bythell, has agreed heads of terms to a lease for the new shop. They are very keen to start trading as soon as possible - maybe - subject to planning - from a Portacabin during the construction phase. The previous shop keeper and postmistress Steve and Tina Gilbert have offered their assistance in re-establishing the Post Office. The shop itself would be around 700 square feet excluding a small yard area to the rear for bulky items - bags of logs, coal, gas or potatoes perhaps? I accept that it is smaller than the old shop but I have visited numerous other village shops in Herefordshire and I and the proposed new tenants believe that it is large enough to be a very well stocked shop that is fit for purpose. This scheme is a realistic, sustainable, viable and most importantly proceed-able option to return this vital, much missed and needed asset to your community. With this in mind I am hoping you will give it your support.

Please take a good look at it and I'd be happy to do my best to answer any questions you may have today or if any of you would like to meet me on site to discuss things on the ground I would also be happy to do that.

Please take my card and give me a call to arrange that if you wish. I would like to point out a few points that I feel are relevant at this point. But I would like to make it very clear that these are not veiled threats, they are simply facts that you all need to know. The site currently has A1 approval. Which in simple terms means 'Retail'. You could 'sell' anything that falls under the category of retail, from canoes, fancy dress or whatever other widgets you wish. So, in law, it does not need to be a 'village shop'.

I have chosen to redevelop the area to retain a building that would happen to suit a village shop as I, like you, would like to see a shop return to the village. Secondly, Cross & James have been marketing the premises for about seven months. After twelve months - If there has been no realistic proposal put forward - I would be perfectly within my rights to apply for change of use to have the A1 removed and fill the site with all residential. That means no shop of course. I have chosen not to do that as, as I said I would like a shop to return to the village. I repeat, these are facts and I do not want them to be seen as veiled threats - they are not they are relevant points that have a real affect this debate. Although I would like to, I understand that it is not acceptable to ask you to vote on this proposal during this meeting. However, details of all of the plans on display this evening are available on my website sweetmandevelopments.com under the Wormelow Shop tab. Whatever decision the community steers me towards will affect YOU. So, please cast your vote or pass any comments on via the link on my website: sweetmandevelopments.com Please vote, your opinion matters and is important to me. You may be interested to know that the last time I looked the vote stood at over 90 fors and 2 againsts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Madam Chairman, if you have any questions or suggestions that you would like to make I'd be happy to try and answer them for you now.

At this point, there was a question and answer session and comments were received from the floor. There was some feedback from the Community Group Steering Committee and the meeting held at the Pilgrim Hotel. Valerie Harvey explained that there had been no intention of renting the existing shop premises due to the condition it was in. There was also a question regarding the number of required parking spaces and the number of "20 safe (parking) spaces" was mentioned, as being required, at one point in the conversation. The Committee were concerned to get the best shop possible and did not want a "shop shoe-horned into a housing development". The Chair explained that the role of the Parish Council was not that of a decision maker. The question was posed as to parking spaces for a shop and it was stated that three minimum were required under planning regulations in relation to the shop area. A shop was desirable but they could not direct what, if or how this would be achieved. The Steering Committee had reached a mutual decision at the Pilgrim Meeting not to pursue the idea of renting the existing building due to the factors as presented in terms of condition, parking spaces and cost. There was some discussion regarding "heads of terms" and post office provision and it was commented that a post office was "wanted more than a shop".

At the close of the question and answer session, Mr Sweetman handed back the meeting to the Chair: *"Thank you very much for your time and I'd now like to hand the meeting back to your Chairman"*

Following Mr Sweetman's presentation, the majority of those present left the Hall and a further short open session followed with those parishioners remaining present. During this session Mr Padden from Fairview made further representation about the yellow lines adjacent to his property and the school. Mr Padden spoke about Eric Pickles and initiatives to try to simplify yellow line regulations. Mr Padden had received a reply to his letter regarding the traffic regulation orders (TRO) outside his property. The letter suggested that the Local Authority should be putting forward a request for the revision of the TRO. The current situation was attributed, by Mr Padden, to a lack of consultation and the instigation of a flawed TRO application by the then Ward Councillor, Russell Hamilton. The Parish Council were trying to make amends to the situation but any further application would need to be right this time around and the TRO could take some time to be implemented even once requested. Cllr Paul Rone may have the ability to accelerate the progress if deemed necessary to do so. The TRO

would be on the next agenda. An update from the school was that the Head teacher had resigned and would be replaced from September 2015.

There was a comment that the road signs on the A49 at the junction with Hollybush Lane are still broken. This has been reported and they are on the list for replacement/repair. This would be chased up.

Mike Morley commented that the Birches Newsletter had had a different editor for one month but that the task would be back with him, going forward, until another new editor could be found.

The Open Session and Annual Parish Meeting Closed at 8.24pm

Signed:

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Chairman

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Date