



**MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF ROMSLEY PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON TUESDAY 7TH MAY 2024, 7.00PM**

PRESENT: Cllr. Antal, Cllr. Macaulay, Cllr. Powell, Cllr. Strain,
Cllr. Shaw, Cllr. Swift and Cllr. Weston

ALSO PRESENT: Clerk and 4 members of the public

1. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**
- 1.1 The Minutes of the previous meeting were read. It was unanimously **RESOLVED** by those able to vote that they were a true record and signed accordingly.

2. **TO RECEIVE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Address read out from Chair John Weston

Having been elected chair just 1 year ago the past 12 months has been a roller-coaster of highs and lows; In respect to the Parish Council, none more so than the sudden passing in November of our colleague Nigel Williamson.

The year started well with the re-election of the full council following a successful election campaign. However, and disappointingly a number of councillors, including some with extensive Parish Council knowledge and experience, decided to resign leaving what felt like at the time, a huge gap to fill.

It has however, been pleasing to see a more diverse full council membership quickly established. With new personnel brings fresh ideas and enthusiasm and it has been encouraging to see a positive team development in a relatively short period of time.

The Parish Council has a well documented list of responsibilities; none more so than managing the councils' finances in order to maintain the quality of environment we have become used to.

Annually, the main income stream comes by way of the precept, a proportion of the council tax allocated to the Parish Council. Through due diligence including effective and well managed budgeting the

Council has again voted for it not to increase for the 2024/25 financial period.

Championed by our Clerk, Ruth Mullett, the councils' external financial audits and statutory responsibilities continue to be met without issue.

In addition to our statutory duties, the Parish Council has worked hard reviewing our long-term objectives to ensure the parish continues to thrive and be a pleasant and safe place to live.

Priorities and actions have been detailed in a 5-Year plan, a document that we will continually refer to during our time in office.

The re-establishing and setting up of working groups has also enabled the Parish Council to have a focussed approach on selected key issues. Thus far these include the topics of Communication, Events and Finance with benefits already being seen particularly through improved information flow and knowledge development.

A major project embarked on during the year has been the redevelopment of the park starting with the play area. This is a major investment for the Parish Council and was made possible by funding awarded through the development of the Bluebird site in Hunnington. Although delivery has been hindered by poor weather conditions the expected results should be most welcomed.

The Parish Council is keen to work together with other organisations in order to deliver positive results for its residents. Solid relationships, delivering results are already seen with BDC, WCC, Highways, and Severn Trent volunteers' group. It is however, noted that closer contact with other organisations would be beneficial and the Parish Council is committed in playing its part to develop or improve these relationships.

Examples of positive collaboration include the grant approval to instal Vehicle Activated Signs on Bromsgrove Road having worked closely with Highways and Karen May.

Also, the confirmation from Severn Trent to support volunteer days in the coming months. Discussions are planned with the Scout group, St. Kenelms school and the Church to identify suitable projects.

Social events play an important role in pulling communities together and although "change" is never welcomed by everyone it should be noted that the annual music festival, Romstock, has continued to be a success and helps greatly as a revenue stream to fund other activities, including the park redevelopment.

I would like to thank previous Parish Councillors for their involvement in completing the organisation of last years event and whilst this year's event has been a learning curve for many of us, the expectation is that it will be as big and successful as ever.

An event funded in full by the proceeds from Romstock is St. Kenelms Day. It continues to be provided free of charge to residents, their families, and friends and although well received last year lessons have been learnt in not holding it too late in the summer as it was a very cold September evening.

This year it will be held on the 13th July.

The Parish Council recognises the challenges ahead; challenges to improve collaboration in some areas and challenges to generate additional income streams which enable other activities and projects to be funded.

I believe that all Parish Councillors are committed to work with the best interests of the residents in mind, with a positive "can-do" attitude whilst treating others with the respect one would expect.

I would like to thank Councillors Karen May and Simon Nock for the support they have given us and also thank all Parish Councillors and Ruth for the support they have given me personally and look forward to continued success together.

3. TO RECEIVE REPORT OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE

Worcestershire County Council continues to navigate a challenging financial landscape into the financial year 2024/25. Despite sustained efforts to manage costs, we face significant demand and cost pressures in key service areas, children's social care placements, home-to-school transport, and adult social care. These pressures are compounded by the council's fixed cash budget and limited income generation capabilities due to national restrictions on council tax, business rates, and trading income.

The budget for 2024/25 despite an increase in public health-related grants and business rates pool funding (rising by £27.9m), we are not keeping pace with the escalating demand pressures. The budget proposals aim to address these ongoing financial strains, projecting into the 2024/25 fiscal year to manage the structural deficit effectively.

In February 2024, the government acknowledged WCC's financial position, awarding an additional £5m in grants for social care. Additionally, a 2.99% increase in council tax, coupled with a 2% uplift in the adult social care levy, has been approved through full council. These measures, alongside targeted investments in children's and adult social care, enable the council to uphold its capital commitments across critical areas such as the economy, environment, highways, and education.

The council undertook extensive consultations on its draft budget, engaging with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including scrutiny panels, the school's forum, trade unions, business representatives, parish and town councils, and staff. This collaborative approach ensures that our financial strategies align with the broader community needs and expectations.

Our Corporate Plan underscores our dedication to championing business, supporting children and families, protecting the environment, and promoting health and well-being. Despite the financial challenges, we remain committed to these pillars, ensuring that WCC continues to thrive.

WCC is at a challenging point, facing significant financial pressures yet bolstered by strategic planning and external support. As we move further into 2024/25 financial year, our focus will remain on delivering essential services, managing resources effectively, and advocating for additional government funding to mitigate these pressures further.

The promotion of health and wellbeing remains a key priority of WCC. As part of my cabinet role as the member with overall responsibility for health and well-being; I chair the Health and Wellbeing Board. Your health and well-being are of paramount importance. WCC are working closely with healthcare providers and community organisations to ensure access to healthcare services and promote healthy lifestyles for all our residents with prevention being at the heart of all we do.

In closing, I would just like to leave you with one key statistic: 72.5% of the budget at WCC is currently spent on 2.5% of the population and these are the most vulnerable in society. It is important that we continue to protect this cohort of our population. These are the most vulnerable, and the county council are committed to ensuring these members of our community are supported and protected.

Cllr. Karen May
Clent Hills Division – Worcestershire County Council

4. **TO RECEIVE REPORT OF THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPRESENTATIVES**

Introduction

Following the elections in May 2023, Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) transitioned to a state of no overall control. This report outlines the subsequent governance changes, the current financial status, and key initiatives including the strategic use of levelling up funds and reviews on car parking and car parking enforcement.

Governance Changes

In response to the recent electoral outcome, BDC collaborated with the Local Government Association (LGA) and various political parties to establish a hybrid governance structure. This new system combines a traditional cabinet with Cabinet Advisory Groups (CAGs), which include representatives from all political parties. These groups are tasked with forming policies that will guide the council's operations and strategic decisions.

Financial Overview

BDC has achieved a balanced budget for the current fiscal year without resorting to the use of financial reserves. This places the council in a strong position compared to other local authorities, which often rely on reserve funds to balance their budgets.

Strategic Initiatives

Car Parking and Enforcement Review

Timeline – commencing in May 2024, this three-month review will conclude with a final report in September 2024.

Objective – assess the current and future needs for car parking, aligning with Worcestershire's broader transport strategy. This includes considerations for town centre regeneration to enhance footfall and support local traders, as well as evaluating the implications for leisure centre usage and the shop mobility service. Concerns around parking have been raised with us on many occasions. Part of this review will look at parking enforcement requirements in the rural parts of the district, not just focused on the town centre.

Leveling Up Fund Allocation

Funding – BDC has been allocated £14.5m for projects focused on town brownfield sites in Bromsgrove.

Old Market Hall Site – this site has received planning permission for development into a community hub and office space.

Windsor Street Development – plans include the cleanup and demolition of the old fire station, library, and council building.

Construction is scheduled to begin in late summer.

Conclusion

BDC is embracing a period of significant change and opportunity. Through innovative governance, responsible financial management and strategic investment in infrastructure, BDC is poised to enhance community facilities, support economic growth, and improve the quality of life for its residents.

Outlook

The council remains committed to transparency and inclusivity in its decision-making processes. Continued engagement with the community and stakeholders will be crucial as these projects progress and new challenges emerge.

Cllr. Karen May and Cllr. Simon Nock
Belbroughton and Romsley Ward Members

5. TO RECEIVE REPORT OF FOOTPATH OFFICER – STUART SMITH

This winter has been awful as far as the parish footpaths have been concerned. I have been involved with the parish paths for 14 years now and have not known them to be so muddy for so long. Speaking to landowners who have been in the parish a lot longer they too have not known it as bad. Speaking to the landowners who have been in the parish a lot longer they to have not known it so bad a perfect combination of wet weather, good old Worcestershire clay and greatly increased usage since COVID seems to be the cause.

The second walk of the year took place a couple of weeks ago when 22 enthusiast walkers joined me and Nina for a walk too Frankley and Waseley. Because of the poor condition of the parish paths the New Years walk was again held at the Clent Hills where some of the paths are better drained and are less muddy. 19 people attended. During 2023 six parish walks took place. These walks are well received by those who take part, and it is a pleasure to lead them and walk with such friendly and enthusiastic local residents and their friends.

As far as work on the paths goes the opportunities for improvements are decreasing. Thanks to the agreement of some of the local community minded landowners over the years quite a few stiles in the parish have now been replaced with gates making use of the paths easier. I would really like to have been able to replace more of the stiles with gates but unfortunately that is unlikely to happen. I was really disappointed and disheartened when a gate installed by the County Council as part of path improvements by the scout centre had to be removed and replaced by a stile at the insistence of the landowner Mr Hodgetts. Unfortunately, many of the parish paths pass over land either owned or used by Mr Hodgetts and it is unlikely that any stiles will be replaced by gates on those paths. In view of the difficulties encountered with this landowner any problems with stiles or paths on land used by him are passed directly to the County Council for them to deal with, the most recent being complaints about a stile in Newtown Lane being difficult to use.

Another member of the County Council's Countryside Team has left recently which has no doubt put the team under even more pressure and which will do nothing to improve their support to me and the problems reported with the parish paths.

I plan to continue strimming where I can when I can but would welcome any help from the parish maintenance in clearing approaches to paths from the highway. I can supply locations if required. I also hope to walk the paths clearing where possible although it may be at a slightly slower pace now with the big 80 rapidly getting closer.

6. TO REVIEW ANY ITEMS OF PAROCIAL INTEREST

Nothing to report.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – to be agreed