ALMELEY PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council
Held on Wednesday 11th September 2024
At Almeley Village Hall at 7:00pm

Present: Councillors: Jon Argent (Chair), Andy Cross, Rose Proctor, Colin Powell, Michael Handley and Martin Skyrme
In attendance: Mandy Howard (clerk), Ward Councillor Robert Highfield
Public: 10 members of the public

1. **To receive apologies for absence**
   None

2. **To receive declarations of interest and written requests for dispensation**
   None

3. **To approve the minutes of the previous meeting – 8th May 2024**
   The minutes were approved and signed by the Chair

4. **Open session**
   4.1 **To receive a report on Herefordshire Council matters from Ward Cllr Robert Highfield**
   Cllr Highfield commented on the following:
   The resurfacing of local roads has been completed by Tarmac, and Balfour Beatty has addressed many potholes. While some roads still require attention, a significant amount of work has been done. A total of £8 million will have been spent by the end of the summer, with further spending planned for next year. Cllr Highfield emphasized the importance of the parish identifying its priorities for future road improvements.
   Cllr Highfield commended the Green Group for their efforts over the summer.
   Regarding Public Rights of Way (PROW), Cllr Highfield is involved in developing a project that will ensure all footpaths and byways are open. They are also in the process of recruiting and training Footpath Officers (FPOs) with the assistance of Steve Organ, a coordinator who will be sending out training materials and providing guidance on coordinating volunteers. Cllr Highfield is optimistic about making substantial progress in this area.

   4.2 **To receive views of local residents on parish matters**
   Roads and Flooding: Concerns were raised regarding Lower Road, which frequently floods due to water runoff from the common and inadequate drainage. Residents emphasised the need for drainage improvements and requested that this be prioritised in the road improvement plans. Ward Cllr Robert Highfield will follow up to check if Lower Road is included in the current improvement plans.

   Future Developments: An enquiry was raised about upcoming housing developments over the next 10 years. Herefordshire Council has confirmed that while there will be developments in villages, the majority will take place in Hereford, the possibility of local councils gaining more control over what is built was also mentioned.

Brownfield Sites: The availability of brownfield sites for housing developments was questioned. It was noted that information on suitable land is available in the council's published plan, which can be found on the Herefordshire Council website.

Waste Management: Excessive rubbish in the phone kiosk, which is not being cleared frequently enough is a cause for concern. The kiosk is designated for soft plastic recycling. Volunteers from the Green Group currently empty the bin, but it was suggested that the kiosk may need to be emptied more regularly or a drop off point moved to a different location due to its frequent use.

Village Fete Safety: The insurance coverage for items placed on the common during the Village Fete was queried, specifically enquiring whether the Parish Council insures such items. Concerns were raised about the stability of the marquees, noting the risk of wind damage, and suggested that a safety officer should be appointed to conduct inspections. It was also questioned whether risk assessments are in place for such events.

5 **Finance**

5.1 **To note the August bank balance finance report and sign both**
The report was APPROVED and signed as evidence of budget monitoring and bank reconciliation.

5.2 **To note updated budget/cash book**
Approved and signed

5.3 **To note the following payments made under Clerks Delegated Authority (Finance Regulations item 5.5)**

5.3.1 Clerks salary from May - August
5.3.2 Clear Councils Insurance renewal - £661.08
5.3.3 Monumental Masons (Steve Davies) - £2000.00
5.3.4 HMRC – P32 - £100.80
5.3.5 Almeley Village Hall - £36.00
5.3.6 DC Gardening Services – May & June works - £1008.00
5.3.7 HMRC (Advantis) - £695.94
5.3.8 Clerk's expenses – previously circulated - £93.31
5.3.9 HMRC – P32 - £118.60
5.3.10 Autela Payroll Services - £81.86
5.3.11 Eyelid Productions - £100.00
5.3.12 HALC - £300.00

All payments NOTED

5.4 **To consider the following for payment:**

5.4.1 HALC – Inv H2251 – Hosting and domain name from Feb 23 – Jan 25 £270.00
5.4.2 DC Gardening Services – July - £1287.60
5.4.3 DC Gardening Services – August - £786.00
5.4.4 Almeley Wooton Quaker Meeting - £18.00

The above invoices were APPROVED for payment by BACS

5.5 **To obtain 3 signatories for removal of Emma Thomas from Unity Bank Account**
The form was signed by Jon Argent, Rose Proctor and Michael Handley

5.6 Clerk to organise meeting of Finance Sub-Committee to review 6 month finances

6 **Community Grants**

6.1 To consider grant application from Almeley Green Group for Mere Common and Pond Restoration Project (previously circulated) - £450.00

The Parish Council APPROVED the payment of £450.00 and expressed thanks to the volunteers for their hard work.

7 **Planning**

It was AGREED that an extraordinary meeting will be held to consider planning applications

8 **Lengthsman Scheme – Additional Funding**

8.1 To consider how to allocate additional funding (ditching works, drainage survey, minor drainage scheme and gully clearing and cleansing)

It was AGREED to prioritise ditching works, carried out by D C Gardening Services. The clerk will contact Herefordshire Council. It was AGREED to utilise the Minor Drainage Scheme to address the drainage problem in Lower Road.

9 **Parish Maintenance**

9.1 To consider any lengthsman issues that need reporting

It was AGREED to contact the lengthsman to repair the broken sign at Oak House

9.2 To consider refurbishment of parish notice boards

It was AGREED that councillors would review the notice boards. Mr Steve Wragg AGREED to carry out any maintenance required and will inform the Parish Council how much said maintenance will cost. Item will be added to next agenda for discussion.

9.3 To consider request from Mark and Yasmin Seddon for 50% of cost for new AA sign. Approximate cost in total would be £195.00

It was AGREED that the Parish Council would not be able to assist with this request. The Clerk will contact Mr and Mrs Seddon.

9.4 To consider request from Julie Hurds to place commemorative bench in memory of Robin Hughes near the cricket pavilion – no financial contribution require.

It was AGREED to approve this request.

9.5 To consider blocked drain at Almeley Village Hall

Cllr Andy Cross will obtain a quotation for work required to rectify problem

9.6 To consider maintenance/upkeep of Best Kept Village sign

Cllr Andy Cross will obtain a quotation for a new post for sign

10 **Community Plan**

10.1 To receive report with recommendations from Cllr Vanessa Faulkner

Cllr Faulkner kindly presented a draft list of potential projects and requested approval for the working group to proceed with five options, assessing their viability and associated costs. Some projects will not require funding, while others, such as the children's play area, will require substantial grant funding. The Parish Council expressed support for the proposals, and an update will be provided at the November meeting.

Cllr Robert Highfield also reminded the Council to ensure that any requests for Section 106 or infrastructure levy funds are recorded on the wish list maintained by Herefordshire Council.

11 **Environment**

11.1 To receive a report from the Environmental Working Group with recommendations on village hall solar panels and sandbags for parishioners

- **Sandbags:** The EWG has prioritised a deployable flood response project for the village. Volunteers have already come forward. The plan is to identify properties at risk of flooding and offer sandbags to those residents or assistance in deploying them. The Parish Council committed up to £300 to support this initiative.
- **Village Hall Solar Panels:** Cllr Faulkner, along with other EWG members, conducted a feasibility study on the installation of solar panels for the village hall. Four contractor quotes were obtained. The project is expected to benefit the community by reducing electricity costs (currently £700 per year) and generating additional income by exporting surplus energy, with a potential net benefit of up to £1,100 annually.
  The project requires an upfront cost of £2,000, which will be recovered over 3-4 years. A grant will be sought to cover the installation. However, before proceeding, a roof survey is needed to ensure the roof is suitable for the solar panels. Additionally, the village hall lease with Herefordshire Council, which expires in three years, may need to be renewed to secure some grant options (many require a minimum of five years remaining on the lease).
  The Parish Council approved moving forward with the next stage of the project, including selecting a supplier and conducting a roof survey. The EWG will continue to pursue grant funding.

12 **Highways and Footpaths**

12.1 To consider any highways or footpaths issues that need reporting

Footpath to Eardisley: It was reported that the footbridge on the path to Eardisley is collapsing, but ownership of the bridge is unclear. Further investigation is required to determine responsibility for repairs.

Bus Stop Relocation: Concerns were raised about the location of the current bus stop, which is in a problematic position where the road is too narrow to accommodate both buses and tractors simultaneously. This creates a bottleneck, and it was suggested that the bus stop should be moved to a more suitable location. The matter, identified as a highways issue, will be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Gate Awareness: Cllr Skyrme highlighted the need for the public to be more mindful of keeping gates closed. Cllr Faulkner suggested installing kissing gates for walkers to use rather than large gates as a potential solution.

12.2 To consider available PROW funding

The Parish Council discussed the need to recruit an official Footpath Officer (FPO) and arrange for their training, as courses are being held soon. It was agreed that the Clerk will contact Laurie Barnett to see if he would be interested in the position and to express thanks for his contributions over the years. The Clerk will forward list of PROW works to Cllr Highfield for follow-up.

13 **Community Group Updates**

13.1 It was noted that water testing results are showing high nitrate levels

14 **To note any Urgent Decisions made between meetings**

None

15 **Correspondence**

Police report kindly sent by PC Emma Turberfield was read out by Chair

16 **To consider agenda items for next meeting**

Update on commons
Community Plan
Footpath Officer

17 **To note the date of the next scheduled meeting at 7pm on Wednesday 20th November at Almeley Village Hall**

NOTED

The meeting closed at 21:47

Signed Jonathan D Argyle Date 20/11/24

LIST OF ACTIONS

- Ward Cllr Robert Highfield will follow up to check if Lower Road is included in the current improvement plans
- Clerk to organise meeting of Finance Sub-Committee to review 6 month finances
- Clerk to organise meeting of Planning Group to review current applications
- Clerk to contact the lengthsman to repair the broken sign at Oak House
- Clerk to make the following payments by BACS

  HALC – Inv II2251 – Hosting and domain name from Feb 23 – Jan 25 £270.00

  DC Gardening Services – July - £1287.60

  DC Gardening Services – August - £786.00

  Almeley Wootton Quaker Meeting - £18.00
- Clerk to forward list of PROW works to Cllr Highfield for follow-up