

PENCOMBE GROUP PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Pencombe Group Parish Council
held on
Tuesday 25th May 2021 at 7.10pm in Pencombe & Little Cowarne Parish Hall

Councillors Present;

Cllr. T. Brazier (Chairman)	Cllr. J Barrett
Cllr. C. Hayes (Vice Chair)	Cllr. P. Hope
Cllr. C. Hadley	Cllr. D. Legge

In Attendance: Allan Drew (Parish Clerk)

Members of the Public: 6 residents attended

FIRST BUSINESS

50/21 To elect the Chairman

The Chairman for 2020-21 was Cllr. Brazier. Cllr. Brazier declared he was prepared to stand again for the position of Chairman and was duly proposed and seconded with all members voting in favour. Cllr. Brazier then signed his declaration of office.

51/21 Election of vice-chairman

Cllr. Legge was proposed and seconded as vice chairman. All members were in favour of the appointment. Cllr. Legge was duly elected to the position of vice-chairman for 2021-22

53/21 Apologies for absence

All Councillors were present. Apologies had been received from Ward Councillor Harrington.

54/21 Declarations of interest and written requests for dispensation

None received

55/21 Draft minutes of the previous meeting on 26th January 2021.

The minutes of the meeting of 27th April were accepted as a true record of the meeting and were duly signed by the Chairman.

56/21 Chairman's announcements

The Chairman welcomed all those present at this, the first face to face meeting held by the Council since February 2020. The Chairman further commented that the Parish Council was in a satisfactory position financially.

57/21 Open Session

8 members of the public were present but none wished to make any comment on the business of the meeting.

ANNUAL BUSINESS – PREVIOUS YEAR

58/21 Annual Reports 2020-21

a. To receive a report from the past Chairman

Cllr. Brazier had nothing further to report additional to his earlier comments

b. To receive a report from the Clerk

The Clerk reported that the Council had made progress during the first lockdown on its ability to hold meetings remotely using video technology. Council had purchased a small tablet for each Councillor at a cost of about £1000 and had provided each Councillor with a Council email address. This project would help to improve data security by avoiding the use of personal devices for Council business. However, the project was not an unqualified success, partly because the experience of using video meetings was much poorer than in-person meetings and partly because connectivity was very poor for Cllrs. Barrett and Hope who had great difficulty attending meetings.

The Clerk also commented on the lower than budgeted spending by the Council which because fewer community projects were progressed than expected. Assuming the current year proceeded normally the aim would be correct this situation. As a result of this underspend Council had decided not to raise the precept for this year.

However, as many activities as possible did continue as normal. A grant of £2500 was made to the Parish Hall which, along with the Hall's funding, enabled urgent exterior repair work to be carried out.

The Clerk also noted the excellent work done by the emergency contact volunteers during the first lockdown, where the volunteers had each taken responsibility for a group of residents to ensure any emergency food, medications etc. were delivered.

c. To receive a report from the Parish Hall Trustees.

The Clerk had received a report from the Chairman of the Hall Trustees who was not able to be present at the meeting. The report is-

"The hall year follows the fiscal year so with the first lockdown beginning 23rd March 2020 there have been few users since then. However the trustees put in place all that the Covid regulations required for public halls during the brief periods it has been open and since the school use restarted. The Post Office has continued to function throughout the past year. The trustees have been able to complete a good number of maintenance items helped by a series of Covid Recovery Grants which were negotiated from the central government for village halls across England by ACRE. To date the hall has received about £20,000 which has been a considerable help in view of the fact that income from hirers was less than £850.00 compared to nearly £5000 for the previous year. The fixed costs of just having the hall without using it are between £2500 - £3000 per year. The Government grants will be used to further improve the hall facilities which includes upgrading the bar and replacing the failed fans in the Gents lavatory and Post Office/Bar. The trustees are also exploring the possibility of utilising the super fast GigaClear broadband for a Business Hub facility and installing the appropriate projection and audio equipment to show films. More details of these proposals are in the shortly to be distributed Spring Newsletter and at the Parish Hall AGM, which is to be held on Wednesday 30th June at 7.30pm."

Cllr. Barrett added that one of the Hall's regular users – the Post Office – had been open for much of the lockdown period and is a much needed and appreciated service to residents. Council thanked the postmistress, Celia Barrett, for her commitment to the community during such a difficult time.

d. To receive reports from the Public Rights of Way (PROW) Officers

The Parish PROW Officers are Margaret Simcock (Pencombe) and Rebecca Legge (Little Cowarne). Both officers had provided the Clerk with a report-

Pencombe.

During the last year the footpaths have been used more than ever both by locals and those coming to Pencombe to walk especially during the summer months. This has helped to keep the paths clear and open. There are difficulties in some areas but these are quickly resolved. The bridge has been repaired over the stream just beyond the Cemetery corner which is an excellent piece of work. The bridge between Durstone and Hawkhurst needs repairing to the same standard.

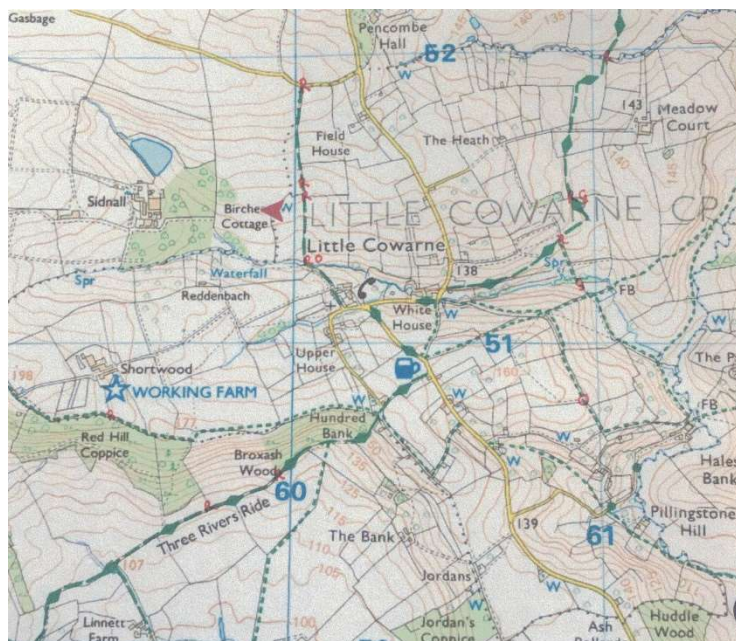
I have not received any reports of blocked paths so assume that all is well. The project to ensure that all paths are walked, leading to them being reinstated where necessary, is gaining support so we may have more walkers wishing to access these.

As to the coming year. I had the idea of joining with RofW officers in adjoining parishes to compile details of walks across the areas which may bring trade to the pubs and be of interest to locals and to visitors alike. At the moment, just an idea to be researched.

Apart from this, to just encourage everyone to walk, keep the paths open and to enjoy the countryside respectfully.

And also from Little Cowarne-

Little Cowarne Public Rights of Way report 2020-2021 This is a brief summary of the condition of the RoW. The map below shows the places where work by council or landowner needs to be carried out so the paths can be enjoyed as they should be



O – overgrown

G - problem gate

R - rider friendly catch needed

Signage isn't too bad but equally I might not have noticed as have used these paths most of my life. Some of the 'Rider friendly catch needed' marks are in Ullingswick and may well have been flagged but sure this can filter through to the right person if not.

Riders & Cyclists using the bridleways find access difficult in places. Another wet winter meant drainage became increasingly bad at the bottom of the field on the bridleway from the Top Road past the cherries. We are going to try to help by putting a drainage pipe down our land (near Birches Cottage) which will drain into the old holloway but the problem starts further up. Dog friendly stiles with lifting sections would mean more people could access the footpaths rather than walking on the road. Having spoken to people when out and about it seems either they or the dog or both of them are getting too old to jump/lift dogs over or there isn't somewhere the dog can squeeze underneath.

Cllr. Hadley reported a footpath problem between Richard Abell and Sally Godsall where the gate is being left open causing cattle to stray. The problem would be checked to enable remedial action to be taken.

59/21

Statement of Accounts and Annual Return for 2020-21

a. To receive a report from the Responsible Financial Officer.

The RFO reported that the surplus for the year was just over £3000. He noted the excellent work done by the emergency contact volunteers in supporting the community during COVID and the progress made with virtual Council meetings. Banking arrangements had also changed during the year with the move away from HSBC to Unity Trust Bank. Unity Trust were much more in tune with the needs of public sector bodies such as Councils where the tiered authorisation of financial spending was always a necessity.

In summary the RFO concluded that during the year the Council had transitioned from a traditional Parish Council to one that is, at least in part, e-enabled.

b. To approve the statement of accounts for year ended 31 March 2021

The RFO reported that the income received was higher than budget by about £2220 due partly to higher than budget receipts from the cemetery and also because the Parish Hall contributed £1200 towards the costs of the exterior repair work. Expenditure was slightly higher than budget by £650 mainly due to the Council paying the full repair bill on the Hall (£3700) but receiving the Hall's contribution of £1200 mentioned above. Council had no questions on the statement which was duly approved.

c. Bank Statements and Reconciliations for 2020-21.

Two bank reconciliations were carried out during the year – one at the end of September 2020 and the second on 31st March 2021. The aim of these reconciliations is to check that the independent records of income and expenditure kept by the RFO reconcile back to the statement of funds held in the bank. For both the September and March reconciliations the difference between the Council records and the bank statements was zero.

d. Internal Audit and checklist.

Mr Ian Pardoe, the Council's external auditor had completed his audit of the Council's financial records and had found nothing to comment upon. His report dated 14th May required no further comment.

e. To approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2020-21

The RFO stated that the period for public scrutiny of the accounting records would be from 1st July -11th August 2021. The RFO explained the purpose behind the Annual Governance Statement and that both he and the Auditor had looked at the questions and decided that the Council was compliant with all aspects contained within the Governance Statement. Council had no queries on the statement which was duly approved.

f. To approve the Accounting Statements for 31st March 2021

Council approved the Accounting Statements and the Chairman and RFO signed the Statements.

g. Certificate of Exemption 2020-21

Having considered all the above and agreed the various financial statements and reports the Council was satisfied that it could legally exempt itself from external audit for year 2020-21. The Chairman and RFO signed the Certificate of Exemption which would be forwarded to the external Auditors, PKF Littlejohn.

ANNUAL BUSINESS – REVIEW OF CURRENT REGULATIONS & POLICIES

60/21 Review of Council procedures and policies.

The Clerk had reviewed Council policies procedures-

Review of Standing Orders. Last adopted in July 2018, no amendments proposed

Review of Financial Regulations – Last reviewed in November 2020 and no further updates proposed.

Review of other policies – no changes proposed.

ANNUAL BUSINESS – FORTHCOMING YEAR

61/21 Review of fixed assets and insurance.

The only change to the asset register was the change to the Pencombe noticeboard which had been replaced during 2020. The old noticeboard was scrapped and the new board was placed in the asset register at full value of £1452. Currently the value of Council assets is £8280. Cllr. Hayes asked about the condition of a bench in the Churchyard and the Clerk agreed that the benches needed attention to bring them back into use.

Council considered the level of insurance cover against the risks and the Clerk recommended that Council accept the level of cover quoted in the Aviva renewal offer due for 1st June. Council agreed that the insurance cover proposed was satisfactory.

62/21 Dates for future meetings.

The Clerk had proposed dates through to May 2022 for future meetings and these dates followed the normal practice of the fourth Tuesday of every month except December. Council agreed the dates for these future meetings as follows-

Tuesday 22nd June 2021, Tuesday 27th July 2021, Tuesday 24th August 2021, Tuesday 28th September 2021, Tuesday 26th October 2021, Tuesday 23rd November 2021, Tuesday 25th January 2022, Tuesday 22nd February 2022, Tuesday 22nd March 2022, Tuesday 26 April 2022, Tuesday 24th May 2022 all at 7.30pm.

All meetings will be held in Pencombe & Little Cowarne Parish Hall unless otherwise advised.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

63/21 Clerk's Report

The Clerk had nothing to add to the reports received so far during the meeting

64/21 To receive a report from the Ward Councillor

Cllr. Harrington was not present at the meeting

65/21 Planning Applications & Updates

To comment on applications to be determined by Herefordshire Council

211403 Proposed two storey side extension and replacement porch at 17 Springfield, Pencombe.

Council considered the proposal and saw no difficulties with the proposal. The Clerk would submit comments supporting the proposal.

To note: 210212 Council noted that the retention of the mobile classroom had been approved with conditions.

66/21 General Financial Matters

The Clerk reported that the Parish Hall now wished to settle the balance on their loan. The current balance was £187.50 and payment had been received

Payment requiring authorisation

Item	Payment	Comments
Clerk's salary April 21	£300.83	
Clerk's salary May 21	£300.63	
Annual insurance renewal	£210.33	Due 1 st June
Replacement pads for Pencombe defibrillator	Approx £80	Clerk to determine exact price and place order

Council agreed the above payments and authorised the Clerk to order the replacement pads for the defibrillator.

67/21 Parish Hall car park

It had been clear for some time that without proper car parking facilities the potential to hold large events in the Parish Hall was somewhat limited. If land was available for a car park Council had now received advice on whether planning consent would be required. That advice had confirmed that for anything other than the most basic car parking on agricultural land (up to 28 days/year but with no development of the site) planning consent would indeed be required.

The land involved for a possible car park is currently owned by Cllr. and Mrs Hope and there was some concerns about future liabilities should the land be available. The Chairman stated that the only fair way to progress would be to buy the necessary land if Cllr. and Mrs Hope were agreeable to sell it. It was agreed that Council would await the outcome of discussion within the Hope family.

The date of the next meeting is 22 June 2021

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.25pm.

Signed  Chairman of the Parish Council

Dated 22nd June 2021