

## **ALMELEY PARISH COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of Almeley Parish Council held on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015 at 7.30pm in Almeley Village Hall.

Councillor Skelton was present. Lynda Wilcox, Herefordshire Association of Local Councils was in attendance.

Councillors Present: Mr John Hope (Chair), Martin Skyrme, Allan Payne, James Edwards, Barry Hall, Liz Tucker and Bee Held.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: None were received.
2. MINUTES of a meeting held on 12 August 2015 were reviewed. Mr Hall wished to provide an amendment and agreed to submit this to the Clerk.
3. MATTERS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES.
  - a. Lengths man Scheme. A contract with Balfour Beatty for employment of a lengths man for the parish had been signed by the Chairman and submitted to Balfour Beatty on 6 September 2015. Up to this meeting date there had been no response from James Powell, Balfour Beatty, regarding available funding. Mr Hall said that he had been in communication with Mr Powell, but no further information was provided. Tenders had been invited for the work and three had been submitted to the Parish Council for consideration. Since then, one has been withdrawn. It was proposed and agreed that Mr Hope and Mr Hall should interview applicants. Councillor Skelton informed the Parish Council that available funds in support of a lengths man would dwindle and eventually cease.

LEADER PROJECT UPDATE. Correspondence with Dawn Turner, LEADER Project Manager indicated that a proposal to restore a pond on Meer Common would be viewed favourably. Mr George Thompson, County Land Agent, with Councillors, had inspected the pond and recommended work that needed to be done if the pond was to be restored. Left without attention, the pond will disappear within five years. It is a valuable support for wildlife: fish, newts, amphibians and ducks inhabit the pond, and the Common is accessible to residents. The money available would be sufficient for restoration of the pond. Mrs Tucker proposed alternative use for the money. It was agreed that when more information is available the Parish Council will discuss options to be submitted to LEADER for approval. The money is retained in the bank account of the Parish Council.

4. ELECTION OF PARISH COUNCILLOR. Ms Bee Held had been elected and was welcomed to the meeting. She signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office as Councillor.
5. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN. It was proposed by Liz Tucker, seconded by Bee Held and agreed unanimously that Mr Hall should be elected Vice Chairman.

## 6. CORRESPONDENCE.

- a. AGE UK request for a donation. This item was deferred for consideration at the next meeting of the Parish Council.
- b. Resignation of Parish Clerk. The Clerk informed the Parish Council that she would work until 31 October 2015. It was proposed and agreed that the vacancy should be advertised. Prospective candidates to submit applications to Lynda Wilcox at HALC. ([lynda@halchereford.gov.uk](mailto:lynda@halchereford.gov.uk) Tel: 01432 353492) who agreed to provide a person specification and job specimen. An interview panel will be set up.  
Mr Hope expressed thanks to the Clerk for her work as Parish Clerk and contribution to the village.
- c. Lynda Wilcox agreed to attend a training session for Councillors on 30 September 2015 at 6pm, followed by an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council. The cost will be approximately £200.00

## 7. QUEEN'S 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday and of her reign as the longest serving Monarch in British history.

It was agreed that this should be marked in some way in the Parish. Proposals included a street party, always popular with residents. It was agreed that a public meeting should be held and ideas invited to mark the occasion.

## 8. FINANCIAL MATTERS.

- a. It was proposed by Mr Skyrme, seconded by Mr Hall and agreed unanimously that the following accounts should be paid:
  - i. Refurbishment of Church Clock - £250.00
  - ii. Purchase of material for restoration of seat in Woonton - £46.54.
- b. PRECEPT 2016/7 Lynda Wilcox agreed to provide a formula to support discussion on consideration of the Precept. She recommended that the Parish Council should build up sufficient reserve to accommodate any possible increase in costs.  
Councillor Skelton agreed to obtain details of election costs, likely to be approximately £600.00.  
It was proposed and agreed that Councillor Skelton, Lynda Wilcox, Barry Hall and Bee Held should form a working group to consider Precept requirements. Councillor Skelton said that although he has no authority to decide the Precept, he will provide guidance to Councillors.
- c. REPORT OF EXTERNAL AUDITOR  
The Audit had been completed. The Auditor reported that 'on the basis of their review of the annual return, in their opinion the information in the annual return is in accordance with proper practices, and no matters have come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.'  
Two recommendations were made, which should be introduced in subsequent audits.
  - i. Fixed assets. Future returns should state the insured cost only, and not itemisation of assets, although this had been requested by previous auditors.
  - ii. The District Council Tax Support Grant should be itemised separately from the Precept. The Precept was £7,250 and the District Council Tax Support Grant £562.00.

- iii. It was also recommended that a report from the internal auditor should be reviewed by the Parish Council, even if the auditor is not present at the meeting.
- iv. PAYE It was recommended that a PAYE system should be introduced, but accepted that there are certain circumstances where registration may not be required. The current clerk has a long-standing system in place for paying tax through an accountant.  
Another external auditor, contacted by Mrs Tucker, had sought information from the Clerk on a number of issues raised by Mrs Tucker. These included the number of tenders that should be sought for work supported by the Parish Council. The system already in place was that three tenders should be sought. This was accepted.  
The system of Parish Council accounting was considered to be satisfactory: the Auditor receives details of the Parish Council bank account and a bank Reconciliation is also submitted, which supports information in the Annual Return.  
Comments regarding a PAYE system noted. This will be introduced when the next clerk is appointed.

The Bank mandate for signatories is required. The Clerk will contact the Parish Council's bank for details. Ms Wilcox recommended that four signatures should be authorised.

- 9. PLANNING MATTERS. It was agreed that this should be deferred until the next meeting of the Parish Council on 30 September 2015. Ms Wilcox considered that comments made by the previous Parish Council were submitted unlawfully and that the planners should be informed of this.
- 10. Ms Wilcox recommended that the current system of distributing papers for meetings three weeks before a meeting should be changed to the requirement for three days. The system had been introduced by the previous Parish Council so that diary commitments could be adjusted to meet Parish council demands.

She also recommended that the open session for participation by residents of 10-15 minutes should be at the start of meetings and not as had been in place for the past 20 years on completion of Parish Council business.

A request was made by a resident that a mirror should be placed at the junction of Hells Lane in Woonton. An increase in traffic made this turning very dangerous. Councillor Skelton agreed to investigate the possibility of purchase and installation of a mirror at the site.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.