

Belmont Rural Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12th December 2013 At Belmont Community Centre, Eastholme Avenue, Belmont

Present: Mr. A. Bridges In the Chair
Mr. D. Cook
Mr. B. Hubbard
Mr. R. Loft
Mr. A. Myatt
Ms. D. Parish
Mr. M. Schoffer

In attendance: Mrs. E. Kelso Clerk
Ms. G. Vaughan-Powell Herefordshire Council Ward Councillor
Ms. Rachel Davies Representing Balfour Beatty Living Places
Mr. Keith Lloyd Representing Balfour Beatty Living Places
1 member of the public

154/13 **Apologies, Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensation**

Apologies were noted from Councillor Ken Baynham and Councillor Phil Edwards.

The following Declarations of Interest were received:

Name	Nature of Interest	Agenda item/Minute ref.
Councillor A. Bridges	Non disclosable non pecuniary interest as a trustee and director of Northolme Community Centre Association	8.2 – 161/13(b)
Councillor A. Myatt	Non disclosable non pecuniary interest as Trustee and Treasurer of South Wye Community Association	8.2 – 161/13(b)
Councillor D. Parish	Non disclosable non pecuniary interest as a director of Northolme Community Centre Association	8.2 – 161/13(b)

There were no requests for dispensation.

155/13 Public Participation

There no matters raised by members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

156/13 Management Plan for Abbey View Park and Jubilee Field, Grounds Maintenance and Grass Cutting

Representatives from Balfour Beatty were in attendance for this agenda item and members expressed disappointment that the Management Plan for Abbey View Park and Jubilee Field had not been put into action since agreement in 2011, resulting in no grass cutting on Abbey View Park despite ideal weather conditions this year. Members were advised by Mr. Lloyd from Balfour Beatty that the Management Plan was not part of the contract between Balfour Beatty Living Places and Herefordshire Council so the planned activities such as twice yearly grass cutting were unlikely to be adhered to. It was confirmed however that the land was considered public open space and therefore would continue to be cut as such under the terms of the contract. Any additional or separate requirements would have to be separately negotiated.

157/13 Minutes of the meeting held on 31st October 2013

It was agreed that the Minutes of the meeting held on 31st October 2013 be amended at the request of Councillor Schoffer who asked for two amendments to minute reference 142/13 to remove reference to discussion on the proposal and to reflect his abstention from the vote. Subject to these amendments, it was agreed that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes on behalf of the Parish Council as a true record of proceedings at that meeting.

158/13 Clerk's Report

The Clerk's report, as attached to these Minutes, was noted.

159/13 West Mercia Police/Parish Watch

It was noted that no report had been received from West Mercia Police and with no representative from West Mercia Police, there was nothing to report under this agenda item.

160/13 Information item: Correspondence

The following items of correspondence were noted:

- Notification, through the Mayor of Hereford, Councillor Phil Edwards, of a proposal hold a Spring Open Day at -Belmont Haywood Country Park as a Mayor's Charity Community Day provisionally set for Monday 5th May 2014.
- Notification of a meeting on Tuesday 19th December to discuss a River Carnival planned for 3rd May. The Clerk is unable to attend but will be provided with notes from the meeting.

161/13 Financial Matters

(a) The report from the Finance Working Party, as attached to these Minutes, was noted.

(b) The following payments were authorised:

Dore Community Transport Donation agreed 31.10.2013 ref. 146/13		£200.00
Herefordshire Citizens Advice Bureaux Donation agreed 31.10.2013 ref. 147/13		£400.00
Northolme Community Centre Association Room Hire for October meeting		£25.50
Subscription: SLCC		£147.00
HALC: Training fees – Planning and Community Action Ref. Mrs. E. Kelso	£60.00	
VAT thereon	£12.00	
Total payment		£72.00
South Wye Community Association Room hire for various meetings at Belmont Community Centre:		
6.11.2013 Neighbourhood Planning		
20.11.2013 Neighbourhood Planning		
27.11.2013 Finance Working Party		£40.50
Petty Cash Reimbursement		£89.60

(c) **Balances**

Current account	£500.00
Deposit account:	£74,690.82
Petty Cash:	£35.40

Current commitments (orders placed but not yet delivered/invoiced) amount to £12,484.14.

(d) **Reimbursement of expenses by Parish Councillors**

Members noted the conditions upon which parish councillors might reclaim expenses legitimately incurred as part of their role as a parish councillor, as attached to these Minutes and in particular noted the requirement for any expenditure to be agreed in advance.

162/13 Planning Matters

(a) **Applications dealt with under delegated powers**

Ref: 132728/FH
Site: 8 Broadholme Road, Belmont
Development: 2m high boundary fencing moved from original location to boundary limits

Comment: Clerk has responded under delegated powers. Three issues were identified in accordance with previously stated policies:

- That trees/shrubs removed in connection with this development should be replaced with additional trees/shrubs
- That the removal of the open area is to the visual detriment of the immediate vicinity, and
- Identified hazard from the visual barrier created by the new fencing now being immediately adjacent to the pathway.

(b) Application submitted under permitted development rights

Ref: 133111/HN
Site: 25 Grantham Close, Belmont
Development: to extend 4.m beyond the rear wall of the garage
Comment: This application has been submitted under permitted development rights. Members noted some inconsistency between the application form and the plans provided with regard to the nature of the roof and asked that this be passed to the planning authority.

(c) Update on Neighbourhood Plan progress

Councillor Bridges provided a verbal report on the meeting of the provisional Neighbourhood Plan steering group meeting that had taken place on 11th December noting roles and responsibilities as discussed at the meeting, draft terms of reference which will be put to the Parish Council at the next meeting, the schedule of meeting dates and a proposed project launch event for next year.

It was also noted that planning consultants Kirkwells are to hold an information event in January and as several parishes had expressed positive feedback regarding Kirkwells, it was proposed that members of the steering group attend the event with a view to possibly engaging with Kirkwells or another planning consultant to facilitate the preparation of the Belmont Rural Neighbourhood Plan. It was suggested that those members with access to the internet might research Kirkwells website for further information.

The possible link with consultants meant that the draft budget and timetable for preparing the Neighbourhood Development Plan had not been completed but it was hoped that these and the terms of reference for the Steering group would be presented to the next Parish Council meeting.

163/13 Training

- (a) The Clerk gave a verbal report on the Planning and Community Action training attended on 23rd November at the HALC offices, noting the feedback from other Clerks on their experiences with planning consultants Kirkwells
- (b) Councillor Bridges gave a brief verbal report on the Finance and Procedures training attended on 30th November at HALC and agreed to provide a more detailed report to cover the very many issues discussed at the training session.

- (c) The Clerk provided a verbal report on a Balfour Beatty presentation held on 26th November at Brockington, noting that much of the presentation had been concerned with potholes and maintenance. It was noted that one method employed to fill potholes resulted in a mound of material which was felt to be hazardous to cyclists in particular.

The Clerk had noted that Balfour Beatty's requirement for suppliers to be on their "preferred supplier" list – even those who had previously supplied Amey/Herefordshire Council – had delayed the start of some projects such as the replacement of the Bus Shelter outside Brook Farm Court whilst the formalities were being completed.

- (d) The Clerk provided a verbal report on Herefordshire Council's presentation to parishes on budget constraints during which the impact of reduced funding levels from central government had been highlighted. It was clear that many services would be reduced or cut and parishes were urged by Herefordshire Council to consider the impact of these cuts on their residents when setting the precept for the forthcoming year and to consider, where appropriate, budgeting to support those services. Several parishes were already actively supporting residents where services had been reduced or cut by providing additional funding to maintain those services such as by the provision of funding towards the library service or by providing funding in support of rural bus services.
- (e) It was noted that the Code of Conduct training had to be cancelled as several members were unable to attend at the last minute. The training will be rescheduled for the New Year
- (f) Noting the recommendation of the Finance Working Party in its report, it was agreed that the Clerk arrange a training session on the implications of the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act in the New Year.

164/13 Frequency of Meetings

Members noted that current HALC advice is for parishes to hold monthly meetings with the aim of ensuring matters are dealt with within the recommended maximum of two hours and that matters requiring urgent attention are considered within an appropriate timescale. After a brief discussion during which it was noted that increasing the number of meetings each year from 9 to 12 would result in increased costs, it was resolved by 6 votes in favour to one against, that henceforth meetings be held on the first Thursday of each month, alternating between each community centre as before. It was further agreed that no meeting be held in January 2014. Meeting frequency would be reviewed in the usual manner at the Annual Parish Council meeting in May.

165/13 Information item: Parish Matters

- (a) Councillor Bridges presented a verbal report of his activities as Ward Councillor since the last meeting.
- (b) Members noted with sadness the death of former parish councillor Beryl Brown on Saturday 7th December. Beryl had served as a parish councillor from 2000 to 2011 having previously been an active member of Belmont Residents Association and had arranged many activities within the parish such as the children's parties, community events and had been a founding member of the Scrabble Club. Her funeral will take place at the Crematorium on Friday 20th December at 1.30pm.

166/13 Code of Conduct Complaint

Members noted the conclusion of the Code of Conduct complaint.

167/13 Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 6th February at Northolme Community Centre, Northolme Road, Belmont, starting at 7pm.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 20.20.

Appendix 1
Belmont Rural Parish Council
Meeting held on Thursday 12th December 2013
Clerk's Report

1. Litter Bins

The litter bin in Gratham Close has been replaced but had not been emptied despite several reminders to Herefordshire Council. However, the Clerk has now received a call from Herefordshire Council that the lock on the bin has been damaged and will not open. The Parish handyman has now drilled out the lock and it is hoped the bin can now be emptied quickly.

Confirmation from Herefordshire Council regarding the revised location of the bin at the top of Abbey View Park is still awaited.

2. Replacement Bus Shelter

The Clerk has now received confirmation that the bus shelter on the Tesco side of the Belmont Road is to be upgraded with sides at no additional cost, courtesy of Balfour Beatty. The supplier of the shelter is not yet on Balfour Beatty's preferred supplier list, which is delaying matters but the work will be scheduled to take place as soon as this is resolved.

Herefordshire Council has also confirmed that the same supplier will provide the new shelter we have agreed to fund outside Brook Farm Court. Again, gaining preferred supplier for Balfour Beatty is delaying the start of this work.

3. Grant to South Wye Drug and Alcohol Forum

The date for the alcohol awareness event at Tesco by the South Wye Drug and Alcohol Forum took place as planned on Friday 22nd November.

4. Abbey View Park/Jubilee Field Culvert Work

The Clerk has discussed this work with representatives from Balfour Beatty but is awaiting revised quotations for the work.

5. Belmont Library

Following the last meeting, the Clerk has had several discussions with Herefordshire Council regarding the offer of support for Belmont Library, which has been gratefully accepted. A question was raised as to whether the offer of funding was contingent upon Herefordshire Council seeking further funding from other parishes or whether further funding had to be agreed before our funding was available? Herefordshire Council has also asked if the funding could be paid directly to South Wye Community Centre to offset the rental payment due for the library room.

Other libraries within Herefordshire have either had opening hours drastically cut or library services have been handed over to the community to be run by the local community with some support from the Library Service. It has been suggested that Herefordshire Council

might be looking at Belmont Library becoming a fully community led library in future rather than the partnership library model envisaged for the next year. Finally it has been confirmed that library opening hours at Belmont are likely to be cut by 20%.

6. **Additional Trees**

This item was deferred from the last meeting pending additional information on the cost of additional trees, a site visit to consider the location in Wheatridge Road and community consultation. It has now been confirmed that the dead trees will be replaced under Balfour Beatty's contract for grounds maintenance with Herefordshire Council and therefore at no cost to Belmont Rural. Councillor Hubbard has provided BB with the list of dead trees from his audit and requested replacement. The additional trees originally proposed by Councillor Hubbard will be reconsidered at a later date.

7. **Salt Bins**

Balfour Beatty has indicated that although an additional 200 salt bins have been purchased for this year, it has been agreed that these will be used to replace existing damaged bins and therefore few are likely to be available to meet demand from parishes for additional salt bins this winter. BB has indicated that parishes may request a bin be moved from another location, if appropriate, or may purchase a bin through Balfour Beatty.

Appendix 2

BELMONT RURAL PARISH COUNCIL

Notes from the Financial Working Party Meeting
held on Wednesday 27th November, 2013

Present: Mr. A. Myatt
Mr. D. Cook

Apologies: Mr. K. Baynham

In attendance: Mrs. E. Kelso Clerk

1. Review of cash book, petty cash records, VAT and PAYE recording

The financial records were reviewed by those present and found to be in order.

2. Review draft budget for 2014-2015, and precept recommendation

This item will not be presented at the December parish council meeting in line with current advice from HALC relating to the Council Tax Support Scheme.

It was noted that to date no capital projects had been put forward to the Clerk for inclusion in the budget for 2014-2015. The working party discussed the draft budget to date, noting that some expenditure currently anticipated for this financial year is likely to be delayed following the changeover from Amey Wye Valley to Balfour Beatty Living Places.

Notwithstanding this, expenditure in recent years had reduced reserves and in order to maintain reserves at the recommended level, a reduction in capital project expenditure and expenditure on grants and donations would be recommended if precept levels remain as in previous years. Some further refinement of the budget might be necessary if the parish council agreed projects for 2014-2015 that had not been currently considered.

The working party noted that within the operating budget, no provision was yet being made for the Clerk's pension. At present, the Clerk's contract, being based upon a now superseded NALC model contract, did not provide for any pension. However, regulations had been introduced requiring all businesses to provide a pension for employees and for BRPC, the last date upon which a pension could be introduced was set at 2017. The working party recognised that budgeting for this would have to take place within the next few years and as current employer contribution rates to the Local Government Pension Scheme are running at 20% for the employer, this could represent a significant increase in staff costs for the parish council. It was agreed that a recommendation be made that this be investigated further sooner rather than later.

3. Update on grants awarded

- It was noted that cheques would be presented for payment at the next parish council meeting for grants/donations agreed at the last parish council meeting.
- The alcohol awareness day had taken place at Tesco. Councillor Cook had attended.
- The Clerk reported that she had received an email from Newton Farm Information Centre asking for previous emails to be resent as they had no record of receiving them. The email address used for this request was different from the one on the grant application form for the Santas Grotto request (which had been used by the clerk to request further information from NFIC to which no response had been received).

4. Expenses for Parish Councillors

It was agreed that the circumstances whereby parish councillors could claim expenses relating to their role as a parish councillor should be explained to all members. The clerk explained that only expenses necessarily incurred as a direct result of a members role as a parish councillor could be claimed and any such claim must be approved by the parish council in advance of the expenditure being incurred.

5. Any other business

The Clerk reported on a HALC training session she had attended but noted that during conversations with other clerks, was advised of another parish that had suffered financial penalties as a result of several separate Freedom of Information requests linked to a planning matter. During the FOI investigation, councillors had been found to retain data on their computer containing personal information and, having no separate/individual data protection licence, had been fined by the Information Commissioner. HALC strongly advised that parish councillors should read emails sent to them but then delete them and not print them, leaving the Clerk to hold any records which would then be covered by the Parish Council licence.

The same incident also highlighted discussions amongst parish councillors about the planning matter and the applicant alleged that planning procedures had not been followed and had taken the council to court. Again, expenses had been incurred and again the HALC advice had been that parish councillors should not comment via email on matters that should be discussed and agreed at meetings.

As a potential risk management issue, it was agreed that a recommendation be made to the parish council for training in data protection matters and the use of emails for parish council business.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed.

Appendix 3

BELMONT RURAL PARISH COUNCIL

Meeting to be held on 12th December 2013

Parish Councillor Expenses Supplementary Information

A request has been made to clarify the current position with regard to the reimbursement of expenses incurred by parish councillors in carrying out their parish council duties. This paper aims to set out the conditions that must be met for expenses to be reimbursed.

Expenses vs Allowances

It is possible for Councillors to be paid an allowance for carrying out their duties as Councillors. Generally, allowances are only paid to County Councillors or Unitary Authority Councillors but it is possible for this to be extended to parish councillors. An appropriate rate for an allowance must be consistent with recommendations of the Remuneration Committee of Herefordshire Council, and any allowance is paid through the precept (and subject to PAYE regulations) and therefore budgeted by the parish council. No parish council within Herefordshire is currently paying their parish councillors an allowance and Belmont Rural elected not to pay an allowance in December 2012.

Parish Councillors can claim reimbursement of expenses legitimately incurred in carrying out parish council business provided that:

- The business for which an expense has been incurred has received prior approval of the full council and
- An appropriate receipt/invoice has been provided.

In practice, this usually applies to travel and subsistence expenses when travelling to meetings or approved training sessions held outside the parish. The Remuneration Committee at Herefordshire Council has confirmed that parish councillors can receive the same mileage rate for travel on parish council business as is paid to Ward Councillors, i.e 45p per mile, when a councillor's private vehicle is used. Parking, taxi, train and other expenses can also be claimed provided a valid receipt is obtained.

A form is attached for use when reclaiming travel expenses.

Other (non travel) expenses

Legitimate expenses incurred as a direct result of your role as parish councillor can also be reimbursed **provided the reimbursement is approved by the parish council in advance of the expenditure being incurred, and a receipt is obtained for the expenditure.**