

**Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting
held at the Methodist Church, Shropshire St, Audlem,
on Thursday 20th March 2025 at 7.00pm**

Present:

Councillors:

Phillip Baker

Tim Brooksbank

Charles Cavill

Carl Dovey

David Jones

Ryan Jones (arrived 19:02)

Will Pearson

Paul Smart

David Lambourne

Absent:

In Attendance:

Lee Jakeman (Locum Clerk)

Sarah Windridge (Deputy Clerk)

19 members of the public

24/143 Apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

24/144 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Brooksbank declared an interest in the planning application at **Orchard Cottage, reference: 25/0314/HOUS**

24/145 Requests for Dispensation

None received.

24/146 a) Public Session

It was RESOLVED that Standing Orders of the Council be suspended, to allow public participation in accordance with Standing Orders 3e-j.

A number of members of the public asked questions which are summarised below along with responses:

Question 1: Please could the Parish Council provide an update on the progress of the police investigation into the loss of money from the Parish Council.

Response: Cllr Dovey read out the following statement, received from investigating officer PC Jackson:

Unfortunately, I am going off duty now and have not had an update from Legal Services. As soon as I have one, I shall update you immediately. I have spent the entirety of my shift today working through material I have gathered during this investigation. I don't like to put timescales on things as a new piece of information or discovery of relevant or material which can undermine the case can change the course of the investigation in an instant. This has occurred during this investigation hence the length of time it is taking, I also feel personally the responsibility to the communities of Audlem to ensure the work I am completing can stand up to the scrutiny it would face in the crown court. I appreciate the length of time is a frustration as is the not knowing what's going on, however both of these factors are in the best interests of the integrity of the investigation.

Cllr Baker also confirmed that the Parish Council has been talking to the police commissioner to express the frustration of the village and ask for updates. The Police Commissioner has promised to find out more for the Parish Council. Cllr Cavill confirmed that he and Cllr Baker attended the meeting and spoke to the Police Commissioner face to face about these issues.

Question 2: Is a memorial proposed in the village for Doctor Thornton?

Response: Cllr Dovey confirmed that this item will be discussed as part of the agenda. Cllr Smart suggested that an appropriate memorial might be the proposal by Cllr R Jones of a wildflower meadow. Cllr R Jones confirmed that a memorial tree for Doctor Thornton could be a possibility, but this will form part of the wildflower meadow plan which is being created in conjunction with the Wildlife Trust.

Question 3: A tea dance is being arranged by ASSET to celebrate VE Day – can the Parish Council contribute to the cost?

Response: Cllr Dovey arranged to speak to ASSET directly to obtain further details.

Question 4: Regarding the police investigation – has an individual been charged? Have the police produced evidence for the Crown Prosecution Service to consider?

Response: Cllr Dovey confirmed he did not know the answer. Cllr Lambourne stated that the previous statement from the Police in February did confirm that individuals had been arrested and released, although not necessarily charged. The Crown Prosecution Service will determine whether there is a case to answer, and the CPS need enough evidence to meet the burden of proof.

Question 5: Regarding the increase in the Parish Council precept – this has been raised to 13% which is considerably more than the 5% increase for police, fire services etc. Please can the Parish Council explain this.

Response: Cllr Dovey stated that this Parish Council is under a lot of pressure. Turnpike Field requires a lot of management. The field was purchased for £238,000 and at the time the Parish Council took out a business loan from central government for £250,000 to be paid over 40 years. The cost is approximately £11,000 per year. As well as this, the Parish Council also has to pay for essential maintenance to keep the field safe, which costs an additional £8000 -£9000 per year. Turnpike Field costs the community in the region of £18,000-£20,000 per year. This is just one asset that the PC has to manage. Some things have been ignored such as the monument in the village, which is grade II listed and which the Parish Council has a responsibility to maintain. The Parish Council has to manage assets, and re-start projects which have been ignored and abandoned over the last few years. If the Parish Council can apply for grants and subsidise some of these costs, hopefully the precept will be lowered in the future.

Question 6: A 10% increase in precept was discussed but this has gone up to 13%- why?

Response: Lee Jakeman, Locum Clerk, confirmed that although a 10% rise was discussed at the meeting, Councillors felt that the general reserve should be higher due to possible unexpected costs. It was resolved at the Full Parish Council meeting in January, and included in the minutes, to increase the precept by 12.52% which is an increase of £9.52 per year for a Band D property. Cllr Dovey stated that the Parish Council would like to lower the precept, but this would be irresponsible. The Parish Council was not left in a good position after events of last year and Cllr Dovey is amazed and grateful that the village that actually has a parish council at all. The increase in the precept is simply something the Parish Council has had to do and is a prudent decision at this moment in time.

24/146 b) Cheshire East Ward Councillor

This item was deferred due to the late arrival of Cheshire East Councillor, Councillor Rachael Bailey.

It was RESOLVED to reinstate Standing Orders at 19:19pm.

24/147 Confirmation of Previous Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13th February 2025. Cllr Cavill pointed out that recommendations 22.1, 22.2 and 22.3 referred to in the confidential report were misnumbered. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the amendment.

24/148 Planning Applications

The following planning applications were considered:
(Cllr Brooksbank left the meeting for the first application)

Reference: 25/0314/HOUS Householder

Site address: Orchard Cottage Churchfields, Audlem, Crewe, Cheshire East, CW3 0AN

Development Proposal: Replacement of existing pitched roof over garden room with new flat roof and parapet walls. It was **RESOLVED** that the Parish Council would **SUPPORT** the application.

Reference: 25/0763/CLPUD Certificate of Lawful Use / Development – Proposed

Site address: Bath Farm Bath Lane, Audlem, Crewe, Cheshire East, CW3 0BN

Development Proposal: Certificate of proposed lawful use for single-storey rear and side extensions to existing house. It was **RESOLVED** that the Parish Council would **SUPPORT** the application.

Reference: 25/0557/HOUS Householder

Site address: 33 Cheshire Street, Audlem, Crewe, Cheshire East, CW3 0AL

Development Proposal: Demolition of 1960's extension replaced with new extension with lantern roof and bay window and green house cover to external steps.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Parish Council would **SUPPORT** the application.

Reference: 25/0449/EIAEIA

Screening request in relation to outline planning application for the erection of 133 dwellings.

Development Proposal: Land To the west of Moorsfield Avenue

It was **RESOLVED** that the Parish Council submits that the proposed development should be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Cllr Baker asked if a Neighbourhood Plan could be an agenda item for the meeting April. It was also suggested that Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Plan would need to be created and agreed.

(6 members of the public left)

RE: 25/0168/OUT Outline Planning

Site address: 13 Daisy Bank Crescent, Audlem, Crewe, Cheshire East, CW3 0HD

Development Proposal: Outline application for the division of 13 Daisy Bank into two parts with independent vehicular and pedestrian accesses to allow the siting of an additional dwelling with independent driveway and garden land for the proposed additional dwelling and a parking forecourt for two cars and an independent pedestrian gated access and gated yard for the existing house.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Parish Council would **OBJECT** to the application for the following reasons:

The development has allowed for limited parking which places a burden on the highway, it can be considered as being too close to existing buildings, and the development sets a precedent of a large building with a small garden.

24/149 Bank Reconciliation

Members reviewed the bank reconciliation as of 28th February. Copies of the corresponding bank statement and hard copies of invoices/receipts were inspected by members prior to the meeting.

Members noted that as of 28th February 2025 that the bank account balance stood at **£53,821.95**.

It was **RESOLVED** that the bank reconciliations for February 2025 be confirmed and that the Chair be instructed to sign.

Cllr Smart asked whether there would be a monthly budget monitoring report going forward, and the Locum Clerk confirmed that he has completed a brief monitoring of the budget ahead of the meeting and is pleased to report that the Parish Council has spent approximately £10,000 less than predicted in the budget. The Locum Clerk also confirmed that once the finances close at the end of the year, on 31st March, there will be a monthly budget monitoring report produced so spending can be monitored at each meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that a small working group will be formed, consisting of the Locum Clerk, Cllr Brooksbank and the Deputy Clerk, in order to monitor finances each month. Terms of reference will be created by the Deputy Clerk and approved at the next Parish Council meeting.

24/149 Payments for Approval

- a) It was **RESOLVED** to approve a list of payments totaling £7,751.15
Cllr Lambourne asked whether the folio numbers could be assigned to the invoices and the Locum Clerk confirmed that the Scribe reference is the number attached to invoices on the accounts system.
- b) It was **RESOLVED** to purchase 68 Union Flags plus 10 broom handles required by ADAS for the Village, up to a total cost of £550 including VAT for ADAS. This will come out of the general reserve.

24/151 To confirm payroll service and charges for 2025-2026

It was **RESOLVED** to sign the letter of engagement and approve payroll charges for 2025-26: £13 plus VAT per month per staff member, £34 plus VAT for P35. One-off services including £60 plus VAT for pension enrolment, backpay calculations £17.50 plus VAT. This amounts to an increase of £1.50 per year. The supplier is Shire Accounts.

24/152 Internal Audit

To consider comments in response to the internal audit report for Financial Year 2023/24.

It was noted in May 2024 that the internal audit report contained advice and recommendations which have not been actioned.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Locum Clerk would respond to the internal auditor to address the lack of action, to explain the current conditions of the accounts, and confirm that due to the change in personnel, the police investigation, and other extenuating circumstances, the advised changes and recommendations have not been completed. The terms of reference for the finance sub-group will encompass the ability to liaise with the internal auditor and ensure that processes are put in place to meet internal audit requirements.

24/153 Turnpike Field

An application to use Turnpike Fields for a Party in the Park for 28-29th June was circulated to Councillors ahead of the meeting. The application involves the use of the car park. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the application subject to receipt of a risk assessment.

Action: The deputy Clerk to review the Terms and Conditions of booking the field and ensure receipt of risk assessment and public liability insurance before bookings are processed.

24/154 Co-option Procedure

The Deputy Clerk confirmed that the Elections Officer had confirmed that an election has not been called, and the Council can co-opt a new Councillor. There are two vacancies on the Parish Council and the Clerk will place an advert on the notice board and website to advertise the vacancy. Applications will be circulated to Councillors and candidates will be co-opted on the Council at the April meeting.

24/155 Parish Matters

(Item a was adjourned due to the arrival of Cllr Bailey.)

Report from Cheshire East Councillor Bailey

1. Cheshire and Warrington Devolution consultation. Cllr Bailey expressed her concern regarding mayoral powers should devolution occur. Strategic planning powers would be given to the Mayor, and decisions regarding the allocations of sites for housing and alternative uses would sit with Mayor for the whole of Cheshire and Warrington. Cllr Bailey suggested that if a mayor for Cheshire and Warrington was not elected, the area could be subsumed by neighbouring mayoral areas. Cllr Bailey also confirmed that rurality is not mentioned in the consultation paperwork. Cllr Baker suggested that when responding to the consultation, it was important to stress the unique rural location of Audlem.
2. Cllr Bailey learned yesterday that there is a proposal from Cheshire East to roll out mobile waste recycling service, Audlem is listed on this which is good news.
3. The road by the Old railway bridge will be closed next week with traffic management in place involving two way lights. This is allegedly to complete an assessment of the bridge structure and safety.
4. Sarah Hammings, the new lead on flooding for Cheshire East has met with some residents and Cllr Bailey in an effort to bring forward a multi-faceted approach to encourage a responsible approach to rural issues. Cllr Bailey is pleased to confirm that gully emptying is rostered for Woodhouse Lane.
5. Bus services are due to start on 1st April. There are no services for areas surrounding Audlem and there is not yet a timetable in place. Cllr Bailey is not sure how long the GO-TO bus will be available but at least there is a bus service in Audlem.

Parish Councillors thanked Cllr Bailey for her report.

Item 24/155 Parish Matters was re-started.

- a) It was **RESOLVED** that Councillors Baker and Lambourne would draft and circulate a proposed response to the Cheshire and Warrington Devolution consultation for approval at the next meeting ready for submission on 10th April.
- b) It was **RESOLVED** that Councillors Cavill and Pearson would draft and circulate a proposed response to the Local Transport Plan for approval at the next meeting ready for submission on 21st April.
- c) Councillors received a report from Cllr Dovey regarding the Churchfields Conservation Area. Cllr Dovey proposed that the 'phase 2' of proposed works to the conservation area would be completed by ADAS and funded by the Parish Council. The cost is estimated at £1200 for phase 2 which will be for work completed by tree surgeons. It was **RESOLVED** that the Parish Council would ask ADAS to conduct a survey of the Churchfields Conservation Area, to ascertain the maintenance works required and the costs involved to undertake appropriate tree works in line with phase 2. Risk assessment and access arrangement information is also required. This information will be reviewed at the next Parish Council meeting.
- d) Arrangements for tree trimming in public area to the rear of 10 Sycamore Close will form part of the Churchfields Conservation Area works as discussed in item 155c.
- e) Quotations for Monument Repairs were considered by Councillors. It was **RESOLVED** that the Parish Council would continue to research the possibility of grant funding. In the meantime, the Parish Council, in conjunction with the Finance Sub Committee, would try to identify how the cost could be met through the existing budget.
- f) A proposed memorial plaque on the Monument was discussed earlier in the meeting and it was confirmed that an alternative memorial location would be selected.
- g) Cllr Dovey has circulated a report regarding the Longhill Moss Lease. The land is owned by the Parish Council and a tenant currently pays the Parish Council. The Locum Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council needs to ensure it is

obtaining value for money for residents. Cllrs Dovey and R Jones will circulate paperwork to Councillors and Clerks for review. The item was deferred to the next meeting.

- h) Members considered concerns to raise with the PCSO ahead of the Cluster meeting on 15th April. Councillors Baker and Cavill will attend the meeting and raise the following concerns: drug abuse, speeding through village, parking and antisocial behaviour. A police report was received which is attached as appendix A to the minutes.

- i) To review parking concerns in Cheshire Street.

Members considered correspondence received from a resident regarding parking. A response was received from Cheshire East Council to confirm that Highways will be monitoring and determining whether any mitigation is required no sooner than June 2025.

- j) It was **RESOLVED** to approve a request from a resident to metal detect on Turnpike Field.

The Parish Council would like to confirm with the resident that he will need to notify the Parish Council when visiting the site, take all reasonable precautions to keep himself safe, and leave the land as it is found.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

It was **RESOLVED** that pursuant to the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded for the proceeding agenda items

24/ 157 Turnpike Field Update

The Clerk shared correspondence with the Council regarding Fields In Trust and members **RESOLVED** to supply the information requested.

24/158 Permanent Clerk Recruitment

The Working Group are preparing a recruitment proposal for considering at the next meeting, regarding recruitment for a permanent Clerk.

24 /159 Locum Clerk Temporary Contract

The temporary contract of the Locum Clerk was reviewed. It was **RESOLVED** that the Locum Clerk would reduce hours to 5 per week and operate as a consultant to the Parish Council in an advisory capacity. It was **RESOLVED** that the Deputy Clerk role would be changed to the role of temporary Clerk to the Parish Council and hours increased to 20 per week.

The Deputy Clerk left the room whilst remuneration for the change in role was discussed.

It was **RESOLVED** that the new Clerk role would be based on the Society of Local Council's National Rate of SCP 21, commensurate with the work required as Clerk to the Parish Council.

Meeting closed at 22:23 pm

Appendix A

Police report:

Officers have been clamping down on drink driving and driving when under the influence of drugs. A number of arrests have taken place, and it is usually from intelligence from members of the public.

After the recent high value burglary in Audlem we have been going door to door with security advice around properties. We continue to do surveys with members of the public relating to Residents Voice, most surveys taken recently raise concerns about parking around the village after the car parking charges. I have issued 7 Advisory Notices recently relating to vehicles parked dangerously, we will start to issue Fixed Penalty Notices from now on.

Payments approved at Meeting - 20th March 2025 - (Updated following issuing of agenda)

Invoice Date	Payee	Service	Net	VAT	Gross	Payment date	Payment Type	Aooroved by Council	Scribe code
18/2/25	Lloyds	Bank Charges Feb 25	8.50	-	8.50	18/02/25	D/D		132
19/2/25	Water Plus	wp-INV08234759 - Public Toilets Water/Waste 5 Jan 25 4 Feb 25	1,180.74	-	1,189.74	19/02/25	D/D		125
26/2/25	Lengthsman	Salary Feb 2025	531.87	-	531.87	26/02/25	BP		131
26/2/25	Deputy Clerk	Salary Feb 25	543.95		543.95	26/02/25	BP		133
20/1/25	Cheshire East	2 x 240L bins -subscription- 20/1225 to 31 Dec 2025 - Methodist Church	118.00	-	118.00		BP		130
20/2/25	ChALC	Inv 2024/151 - recharge of invoices paid on Council behalf - during period of non-access to bank account	2,532.10		2,532.10		BP		126
6/3/25	Water Plus	5 Feb-4 Mar 25 25 Water Charges - toilets	359.05		359.05		D/D		127
5/3/25	3 Counties Cleaning	Feb 25 Toilet cleaning - 24 days	360.00		360.00		BP		128
1/3/25	Scribe	INV 9263 - SCRIBE Accts Subscription 1-31 Mar 2025	55.00	11.00	66.00	03/03/25	D/D		134
19/2/25	Cllr Cavill	PCC meeting - Travel expenses (48 miles at 45ppm)	21.60		21.60		BP		129
13/3/25	ChALC	Cllr Dovey - Indcution Training - 19 Sep 2024	25.00	-	25.00		BP		135
13/3/25	L Jakeman	Locum Services and expenses Feb 2025	1,431.30		1,431.30		BP		136
18/2/25	ICO	GDPR Data protection registration fee	47.00		47.00		D/D		137
3/3/25	EDF	Electric - Toilets 1-28 Feb 25	66.40	3.32	69.72		BP		138
1/3/25	Then Media	Website doamin / emails	52.50	10.50	63.00		BP		139
21/11/24	Tony Seabridge Grounds Maintenance	August - October 2024 Mowing paths and strimming tables - 2 cuts / Inv 1652	200.00	40.00	40.00		BP		140
19/3/24	ChALC	Inv 2024/192 - Cllr Training Cses x 3 Jones/Cavill/Baker	75.00	-	75.00		BP		141
16/3/24	PHS Group	Toilet supplies Apr- Jul 25	224.43	44.89	269.32		BP		142
Sub Total					£7,751.15				