



**AUDLEM**  
PARISH COUNCIL

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**Clerk: Carol Bell**

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### **Minutes of meeting of Audlem Parish Council held in the Methodist Church, Shropshire St. Audlem on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April at 7.00pm.**

Present: Councillors Geoff Seddon (GS) (Chair), Stephen Hopkins (SH), Steve Elliott (SE), Kate Down (KD)  
George McLaren-Brown (GMB), Keith Nord (KN)

In attendance: Carol Bell (Clerk to APC) Rachel Bailey (Ward Councillor)

#### **Part A**

GS opened the meeting at 7 pm and advised that the meeting was being recorded.

Members of public in attendance: 15

#### **23/182 Apologies for absence**

Cllr Lynette Hopkins

#### **23/183 Public participation**

A member of the public asked why there had been an increase of 93% on the precept between 2022/23 and 2024/25 and asked where is the money going, why it is not published in the minutes or on the agenda how much is in the parish bank account also why are items for discussion put into Section B?

GS responded – I accept that the precept increased by 130% in 2023/24, however it's not a 93% increase overall. The balance of the bank account is read out at every meeting. Going forward we will record the bank balance in the minutes. The budget forecast is published on the parish council website and gives details of where funds have been allocated to. In terms of Section B and the police investigation, the Clerk gives an update in every parish meeting but is restricted in what she can say.

A MOP asked why are actions for Turnpike Field blocked each time they are raised?

GS responded – The reason requests have been blocked is due to waiting for a response to the retrospective planning application and also awaiting a response from the solicitor in relation to legal advice we have sought on the contract document. The legal report has been received today. Once we have read through and discussed it, we can begin to get things moving again on Turnpike Field.

A MOP asked if there are no charges allowed on Turnpike Field, or if charges are made 30% needs to go to the previous owners, does that mean that any stall holders who take money in the Summer Fete on the field also have to give up 30% of their takings?

GS responded – That is included in the legal advice we have sought, which once read, we will respond.

A MOP asked why is Fields in Trust not on the agenda?

GS responded – I have been advised that another MOP wishes to raise a question about Fields in Trust so I will save the answer and respond to both questions at the same time.

A MOP asked what is happening with the Fields in Trust document that was signed a year ago but has never been submitted?

GS responded – The reason for the delay is to do with waiting for the retrospective planning permission and also to obtain legal advice. Once we have read through the legal advice in relation to the Fields in Trust documentation, we will then be in a position to move forward.

A MOP asked for an update on the police investigation into the missing parish funds.

The Clerk responded – I have been in contact with the police this week and they have advised that they are investigating a new line of enquiry and the investigation is ongoing.

A MOP asked if a police update could be put on AOL every month?

Cllr Bailey responded – As AOL also have an associated Facebook page, we have to be careful that we do not undermine or contradict the police investigation. Cllr Bailey stated this was based on her past experience.'

A MOP asked how many applications have been received so far for the Councillor vacancies?

GS responded – We have received 3 applications. We have 5 vacancies available.

A MOP asked if the electricity and water for the public toilets were on a meter as the charges seemed very high?  
GS responded – We are on water meter and are charged business rates for both utilities.

**23/184 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest

**23/185 Requests for Dispensation**

No requests for dispensation

**23/186 Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023 were **AGREED** as a correct record.  
Proposed SE. Seconded SH.

**23/187 Planning Matters**

23/187 (i) Cllr Kate Down advised that planning application **24/1239N** – Pheasants Rise, Damson Lane, Cox Bank CW3 0EU – proposed bungalow had recently been received for comments by the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024 and would be discussed by the planning committee.

Councillors considered the following planning application

- **24/1012N** - The Cottage, Hardys Lane, Cox Bank - Proposal Demolition of existing front porch; general repairs to existing timber frame & roof; proposed pitched dormers to replace catslide dormers and erection of two storey rear extension – Council had no Objection

23/187 (ii) Councillors **NOTED** the following decisions.

- **23/4305T** : Maybridge, School Lane, Audlem, CW3 0BA - Proposal T44 Cypress. Removal of low level side branch growing out toward Stafford Street. I propose removing this side branch. Removal of branch growing from about 10 feet high and growing vertically downwards to about 3 feet from the ground, where it then grows horizontally about 5 feet towards garden and removal of area of dead small branches.  
CE - Consent for works to TPO with conditions.

**23/2717N** - Turnpike Field, Green Lane, Audlem - Planning permission to continue to use Turnpike Field for community and recreational purposes including siting of outdoor seating/benches; retrospective consent to retain amended vehicular entrance from Green Lane, including relocated metal gate and 3m high ranch style fencing; 3 no. community notice boards, and wooden boardwalk  
CE – approved with conditions.

**23/188 Financial Matters**

23/188 (i) Councillors **NOTED** the income and expenditure statement as of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. The closing balance on the 31<sup>st</sup> March was £37,115.22

23/188 (ii) The Clerk advised that the new accounting software was now in use and the income and expenditure for 2023/24 had been added.

23/188 (iii) Councillors resolved to **APPROVE** the following payments.

| Invoice Date | Supplier                | Goods/Service  | Amount (£)  |
|--------------|-------------------------|--|-------------|
| 04.03.2023   | Audlem Methodist Church | Room hire.<br>TFWG mtg 26.02.24.<br>Finance mtg 27.02.24<br>APC mtg 04.03.24 | 90.00       |
| 18.03.2024   | GiffGaff                | Clerk Mobile Phone   | 10.00       |
| 25.03.2024   | HP ink                  | Black cartridges for Clerk printer   | 21.66 + VAT |
| 01.04.2024   | ChALC                   | Annual Subscription  | 684.76      |
| 01.04.2024   | ThenMedia               | Website hosting and domain names   | 39.00 + VAT |

Proposed KH. Seconded KN. All in favour

23/188 (iv) Councillors resolved to **APPROVE** the retrospective payments below.

| Invoice Date | Supplier                     | Goods/Service   | Amount (£)    |
|--------------|------------------------------|---|---------------|
| 01.07.2023   | ChALC                        | Induction training S Elliott                                    | 25.00         |
| 01.11.2023   | ChALC                        | Roles & Responsibilities C Bell                                 | 25.00         |
| 01.03.2024   | ThenMedia                    | Website and domain names  | 39.00 + VAT   |
| 08.03.2024   | 3 Counties Cleaning          | Cleaning of toilet block  | 390.00        |
| 19.03.2024   | EDF Energy                   | Electricity to toilet block                                     | 191.40        |
| 19.03.2024   | Lloyds Bank                  | Bank charges  | 8.69          |
| 20.03.2024   | Scribe                       | New accounting package set up fee                               | 479.00 + VAT  |
| 21.03.2024   | WaterPlus                    | Water supply to toilet block                                    | 94.98         |
| 26.03.2024   | RB & Sons Plumbing & Heating | Toilet Block - Plumbing repairs and supply & fit new hand dryer | 595.00        |
| 31.03.2023   | Parish Clerk/RFO             | Parish Clerk duties (inc 12.5 hrs)                              | 1298.73 gross |
| 31.03.2023   | Lengthsman                   | Lengthsman duties   | 521.40        |

SH advised that the quarterly payment to HMRC had also been made for the sum of or £1504.04 for NI and Tax contributions.

Proposed GS. Seconded SE, all in favour.

Councillors **NOTED** that the reimbursement payment of £56 had been received from Audlem Methodist Church for the green bin collection.

A MOP raised the question that it had been agreed in previous APC minutes that in light of past events the Finance Committee would meet monthly to discuss parish finances but this had not been maintained, and is something that would be happening in the future?

GMB responded stating that he would like the finance committee to start to meet on a monthly basis.

#### **23/189 Correspondence**

Clerk advised no correspondence to note.

#### **23/190 Turnpike Field**

23/190 (i) SE gave an update from the Turnpike Field Working Group meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024. SE advised that Cheshire East had done some work on securing the boardwalk in Turnpike Field. SE also advised that a tree report had been carried out on the trees in Turnpike Field. This had proved useful as it assisted with questions raised on the retrospective planning application by Cheshire East in relation to the Oak tree at the entrance to the field off Green Lane. The tree survey advised that the Oak tree be taken down and replaced due to the extent of deadwood in the tree. The removal is also subject to a planning application that is currently ongoing. GS advised the reason for the planning application on the trees was due to some of the trees having TPOs on them and some trees being in a conservation area.

23/190 (iii) Councillors **APPROVED** safety improvements to the bridge at a cost of £630 + VAT, 6 bags of MOT (hardcore) for muddy path improvements at a cost of £200 + VAT and machinery and labour at £200 subject to contacting the Canal and River Trust to establish who is responsible for maintenance of the bridge and also a risk and method statement from a competent contractor for driving heavy machinery over the bridge. GS proposed, KD seconded, all in favour.

23/190 (iv) Councillors **APPROVED** parking on the field for the Festival of Transport and Party on the Park. KN proposed, SH seconded, all in favour.

23/190 (v) Councillors **APPROVED** a resident's request for parking and overnight camping for a family celebration subject to confirmation of the date of the event and adherence to the booking form terms and conditions.

Councillors also **APPROVED** a late request for parking on the field for mourners attending the funeral of the late Dr Michael Thornton

SH proposed, SE seconded, all in favour.

23/190 (vi) Councillors **APPROVED** the installation of a pond dipping platform subject to a risk assessment and health and safety assessment.

GS advised that the cost of the platform was being funded by donations.

KH proposed, seconded KN, all in favour.

23/190 (vii) Councillors **APPROVED** the deletion of the Turnpike Field e-mail address and **NOTED** the clerk's e-mail address [parishcouncil@audlempc.co.uk](mailto:parishcouncil@audlempc.co.uk) was to be used for all future correspondence.  
Proposed SE, seconded SJ, all in favour.

23/190 (viii) Councillors **APPROVED** the updated terms and conditions subject to the removal of the words '**that much**' in the last sentence of point 2, the addition of wording to the end of point 3 (4) to read '**In an emergency situation, for the interests of safety, the Clerk can authorise payment of up to £500 without TFWG needing to seek approval from the Parish Council**', and also to meet the conditions of Point 4 (7) that the TFWG meetings are moved to 2 weeks before the parish council meetings.  
Proposed KH, seconded SE, all in favour.

A MOP asked what the council's position is on installing a hard standing car park on Turnpike Field - why was it taking so long and why had planning permission not been put in for it?  
SE advised that a planning application would require a consultation to back up the application at a cost of £20,000 which is money the parish council did not have. SE advised that there was a long standing item on the Turnpike Field's agenda to set up a Go fund account to help cover the cost of the consultation.

23/190 (ix) Councillors **APPROVED** the maintenance plan for Turnpike Field subject to a risk assessment and method statement for the spraying of weedkiller.  
Proposed SE, seconded KH, all in favour.

23/190 (x) Councillors **APPROVED** the application for the Village Fete subject to providing more information on overage after reading the legal advice received.  
Proposed KD, seconded KN, all in favour.

### **23/191 Village Management Group (VMG)**

23/191 (i) SH advised that a meeting had been arranged with Richard Hibbert from Cheshire East on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> April for further discussions and negotiations on the car parking charges.

23/191 (ii) SH advised that CE had submitted a proposal for the devolution of car parks to town and parish councils and were currently asking for expressions of interest from councils who were considering this proposal.

23/191 (iii) SH advised that Cheshire East had advised they were no longer offering the facility of 4 free parking days for car parks where charges apply and have provided an option for councils to pay for the 4 days if they wanted to continue to offer this benefit to the public.

23/191 (iv) Councillors **APPROVED** the new terms of reference for the Village Management Committee.  
Proposed SH, seconded SE, all in favour

23/191 (v) Councillors **APPROVED** for the Clerk to write to residents either side of Longhill Moss to gain access to their land for inspection of outlet pipe.  
Proposed SH, seconded GS, all in favour.

23/191 (vi) Councillors **APPROVED** for funding to be spent on posters advertising the Village Meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May to aid further promotion. KD asked the Clerk if the event could be readvertised on AOL.  
Proposed KH, seconded SH, all in favour

23/191 (vii) Councillors **DISCUSSED** a memorial tribute for Dr Michael Thornton. Councillors **AGREED** that they would seek the views of the village on how they wished to proceed.

23/191 (viii) Councillors **APPROVED** to replace the remaining two hand dryers in the toilet block which were not working efficiently.

SH proposed, KH seconded, all in favour,

### **23/192 Report by Ward councillor**

Cllr Bailey advised that before Christmas she had put forward a notice of motion to Cheshire East Council to urgently seek a Local Government Association corporate peer review to gain an understanding on what has gone wrong with Cheshire East finances. Cllr Bailey advised that her request was accepted by the new Chief Executive of Cheshire East and a peer challenge meeting was held at the end of March. Cllr Bailey read out part of an interim summary she had received as a result of the meeting and advised that the peer team would now go away and commission a full report which would be available by the end of June at the latest. Cllr Bailey also advised that at the same time Cheshire East will need to submit a report on how they are going to mitigate their own spend and debt. Cllr Bailey advised on the impact the lack of finances was having on local services and noticeable the repairs of the highways and advised that other local parish councils had wrote to the new Chief Executive of Cheshire East to point out the impact that lack of funding was having on maintenance of the highways.

Cllr Bailey advised that Cheshire East had just started the process for its next Local Plan which will be coming through to local parish councils soon for consultation, on what councils would like the local environment to look like.

Cllr Bailey asked why the planning application 24/1255N was not on the agenda. KD advised that this application was discussed in the March meeting.

### **23/193 Office Matters**

23/193 (i) GS advised that Audlem Parish Council would be arranging an Annual Parish Meeting before the 1<sup>st</sup> June and would let the members of the public know of the date arranged.

23/193 (ii) GS asked the communications group if they would review the 3 quotes received for a new parish website and then feedback their thoughts in the next Parish Council meeting

23/193 (iii) Councillors **APPROVED** the Recording of Meetings policy.  
Proposed KN, seconded SE, all in favour

23/193 (iv) Councillors **APPROVED** the Public Participation policy  
Proposed KH, seconded SH, all in favour

23/193 (v) Councillors **APPROVED** for the Clerk to undertake the ILCA to CILCA course at a cost of £120.  
Proposed GS, seconded SH, all in favour

### **23/194 Date of Next Meeting and Items for Future Agenda**

The next meeting will take place on **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2024** at 7.00 pm in the **Methodist Church, Shropshire Street, Audlem, CW3 0AE**.

#### **Exclusion of Public**

At this point the Chair asked that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an item pursuant to Section 100 (A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

The Chair closed the meeting at 20.48 pm, thanking everyone for their attendance.

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### **PART B**

**23/195** Council **NOTED** update from Clerk regarding ongoing police investigation.

**23/196** Councillors **APPROVED** a new tenancy contract be issued to the tenant of Longhill Moss and that an invoice for this year's rent would be sent to the tenant.