

Audlem Parish Council

**Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting
held at the Methodist Church, Shropshire St, Audlem,
on Thursday 13th February 2025 at 7.00pm**

Present:

Councillors:

Phillip Baker,
Charles Cavill,
Carl Dovey,
David Jones,
Ryan Jones (arrived at 19:03)
Paul Smart
David Lambourne,

Absent:

Councillors:

Will Pearson
Tim Brooksbank
David Siddorns

In Attendance:

Lee Jakeman (Locum Clerk)
Sarah Windridge (Deputy Clerk)
17 members of public

24/129 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Brooksbank and Pearson

24/130 Declarations of Interest

None received

24/131 Requests for Dispensation

Not applicable

24/132 Public Session

- a. **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:

1. **A member of the public asked why the Parish Council has not considered talking to members of the Turnpike Field Working Group regarding the ongoing Turnpike Field issue.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council is looking into documented evidence and will base its decisions regarding the Turnpike Field on extracted facts rather than hearsay or gossip.

2. **A member of the public asked why the public is being excluded from discussion regarding Turnpike Field.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that the public have been excluded from this discussion due to exempt contractual and legal matters. The Locum Clerk did confirm that any decisions made will be recorded in the minutes and confirmed that the Parish Council are keen and obliged to be transparent regarding this issue.

3. **A member of the public asked the Parish Council who prepared the report on the Turnpike Field.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that he wrote the report based on documented evidence.

4. **A member of the public asked whether the Parish Council is planning to divest itself of Fields in Trust.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that speculation at this stage was not helpful and also confirmed that the Council, as a corporate body, will be reviewing all available minuted evidence and considering all available options regarding Turnpike Field.

5. **A member of the public asked whether villagers would get a say in the Parish Council decision regarding Turnpike Field.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council is a corporate body formed of democratically elected Parish Councillors. The Locum Clerk will present facts of any issues, give the Council options and ask it to decide. These actions will be made public in the minutes.

6. **A member of the public suggested that the Parish Council is 'going behind closed doors.'**

The Locum Clerk stated that if the Parish Council chooses at the meeting this evening not to be confidential, it will place unnecessary risk on the Council (e. contervention of GDPR regulations and the like.. The Locum Clerk stated that the Parish Council understands the concerns of the public, particularly in the light of previous, minuted actions of the Parish Council, in which confidential agenda items were not reported on. The Locum Clerk confirmed that this Parish Council will ensure that all decisions will be recorded and placed in the public domain.

The reports given to councillors at this meeting contains legally privileged information and personal details and can be requested under a Freedom of Information Request. The Locum Clerk confirmed that nothing will be considered at meetings which the public will not have access to.

7. **A member of the public asked about the police investigation into the missing Parish Council funds.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that there have been no updates since the report at the Parish Council meeting in December 2024 and also confirmed that the Parish Council is taking all reasonable steps to push the issue.

8. **A member of the public stated that he sent an email to the Parish Council regarding the possibility of planting a tree on Turnpike Field as a commemoration and asked for clarification.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that a management plan for Turnpike Field needs to be created which will include a policy regarding tree planting and commemorative trees. Cllr Dovey suggested that a commemoration could be placed on the monument in the village.

9. **A member of the public wished to draw the Parish Council's attention to planning application reference Number 24/4845/TPO which involves two yew trees in the grounds of the Baptist Church. The trees need to be felled or reduced in size and an application has been lodged with Cheshire East due to the trees being situated in a conservation area and also being the subject of a Tree Preservation Order.**

The Locum Clerk confirmed that the application has not been commented on by the Parish Council previously as the Council was not in operation at this time, but did confirm that the applicant has taken all required steps to consult required parties and take action to protect the listed building.

RESOLVED: that Standing Orders are reinstated and the meeting continues with remaining items on the agenda

Several members of the public left.

24/133 Confirmation of Previous Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2025

24/134 Planning Applications

Members considered the following applications:

(APPEAL) Cheshire East | pa.cheshireeast.gov.uk | Application | 151837 - Bradwood Bagley Lane, Audlem, Crewe, Cheshire East, CW3 0DR - New detached house and garage.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the appeal.

Cheshire East | pa.cheshireeast.gov.uk | Application | 398650 - Orchard Cottage Wood Orchard Lane, Audlem, Crewe, Cheshire East, CW3 0DU - Conversion of an outbuilding to a residential annex.

It was **RESOLVED** to support the application.

(Clerk's Note Cllr Lambourne abstained from the vote as he had not seen the application, all others present supported the application.)

24/135 Bank Reconciliation

RESOLVED: that the bank reconciliations for and up to 31 January 2025 be confirmed and that the Chair be instructed to sign them.

(Clerk's Note: The Balance of the Lloyds Bank Account as of 31 January 2025 stood at £68,803.12)

24/136 Payments for Approval

RESOLVED: to approve a list of payments totalling £14,131.59 (see Appendix 1)

(Clerk's Note Cllr Lambourne correctly identified that the amount listed in the agenda was £2 more than the payment summary list – the payment summary list was the correct figure. Within the payment summary list the folio 52 payment to SCRIBE showed the incorrect invoice no which should read No 8755)

24/137 Monument in the Square

Cllr Smart reported that he has contacted 3 suppliers regarding quotes for the repair works. One company has declined to quote and the other two quotes range from £3,500 to £12,500.

The aim will be to assess both proposals by the end of February for discussion and/ or decision during the next Full Council meeting in March.

Cllr Cavill asked about the possibility of obtaining a grant and Cllr Smart confirmed that grants are being investigated. The Lottery Grant remains an option but is subject to formal submission including full accounts over last 1-3 years.

24/138 Turnpike Field

The Parish Council has received two applications for the use of Turnpike Fields. One is for the Audlem music festival from 23-27 May and the other is for the ASET transport festival on 27th July. **RESOLVED** to approve both applications.

24/139 Co-option

The Deputy Clerk had created and circulated an updated Co-option policy (Appendix 2).

(Clerk's Note: Cllr Lambourne asked whether the policy it was approved by CHALC and the locum Clerk confirmed that the policy is based on a template by NALC / SLCC.)

RESOLVED to approve and adopt the policy (circulated with the agenda) without amendment and to begin co-option proceedings based on the policy.

24/140 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Members considered in terms of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, that the following item(s) will be likely to disclose exempt information relating to the contractual matters and therefore **RESOLVED: that pursuant to the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded.**

24/141 Clerk Recruitment

RESOLVED to approve the contract (circulated) of Deputy Clerk

RESOLVED to add Deputy Clerk to the bank mandate for the Parish Council's Lloyds Business Account .

RESOLVED to ask officers to review current financial regulations with regard to bank signatories to ensure separation of duties.

RESOLVED to approve expenditure of up to £1000 on recruitment.

RESOLVED to create a Working Group to find a permanent Clerk and approve the draft terms of reference (circulated with the report) .

RESOLVED that the Recruitment Working Group will consist of Cllrs Smart, Baker and Lambourne.

RESOLVED to accept proposed outline recruitment process.

24/142 Turnpike Field

Members considered a report from the Locum Clerk (*which included privileged information and therefore not able to be released into the public domain*). Members were committed to understanding all legal responsibilities and contractual obligations of the ownership of the land. Officers were asked to obtain further advice / seek clarity on matters raised before the Council might consider proceeding with any potential courses of action.

RESOLVED to approve the recommendations 22.1, 22.2 and 22.3. in the confidential report.

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Payments Approved by Council 13th February 2025

Invoice Date	Folio	Payee	Service	Net	VAT	Gross	Payment date	Payment Type	Approved by Council
21/12/25	41	EDF	Toilets electric 1 -31 Dec 24	63.33	3.17	66.50	17/01/25	D/D	
11/12/25	42	Scribe	INV 8125 - SCRIBE Accts Subscription 1-31 January 2025	55.00	11.00	66.00	02/01/25	D/D	
11/12/25	43	Then Media	TMS-17516 website and emails January 2025	43.00	8.60	51.60	20/01/25	BP	
9/12/25	44	Audlem Methodist Church	Inv 131 - Hall hire Council mtg 9 Jan 25	40.00		40.00	20/01/25	BP	
12/12/24	45	DR Jones Construction	Inv-000023 - Turnpike Field Flail Mowing August 2024	150.00		150.00	20/01/25	BP	
11/12/25	46	3 Counties Cleaning	Invoice 776 - Public Toilet Cleaning December 2024 - 27 cleans	405.00		405.00	20/01/25	BP	
7/12/25	47	Water Plus	wp-INV07939873 - Public Toilets Water/Waste 5 Dec 24 - 4 Jan 25	100.92		105.21	20/01/25	BP	
18/12/25	48	ChaLC	Inv 2024/111 - recharge of invoices paid on Council behalf - during period of non-access to bank account	5,727.66		5,727.66		BP	
8/12/25	49	UK Debt Management Office	PWLB loan Repayment	5,231.83		5,231.83		BP	
28/12/25	50	Legthsman	Salary Jan 2025	531.67		531.67	29/01/25	BP	
20/12/25	51	Lloyds	Bank Charges Jan 25	8.50		8.50	20/01/25	BP	
12/12/25	52	Scribe/Go Cardless	INV 8755 - SCRIBE Accts Subscription 1-28 Feb 2025	55.00	11.00	66.00	03/02/25	BP	
12/12/25	53	Then Media	Inv - TMS-17747 - website and emails Feb 25	45.00	9.00	54.00		BP	
6/12/25	54	ChaLC	Inv 2024/117 - Induction Trg Cllr Cavill	25.00		25.00		BP	
18/12/25	55	ChaLC	Inv 2024/132 - Induction Trg Cllr Jones	25.00		25.00		BP	
3/12/25	56	EDF	Inv- KI-447658B2-0008 Electric - Toilets 1- 31 Jan 25	93.45	4.67	98.12		D/D	
6/12/25	57	Lee Jakeman	Locum Clerk Services and expenses Jan 25	1,479.50		1,479.50		BP	
			Sub Total			£14,131.59			



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Co-option policy

Document Control

Approved on behalf of the Parish Council	
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Change history.

Version:	Date:	Reason for Change
V1 06.02.2025	06.02.2025	First Version

1 Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out the procedure to ensure there is compliance with legislation and continuity of procedures in the co-option of members to Audlem Parish Council.

1.2 The co-option procedure is entirely managed by the Council, and this policy will ensure that a fair and equitable process is carried out.

1.3 The co-option of a parish councillor occurs in two instances:

1. When an ordinary vacancy has arisen on a Parish/Town Council after the ordinary elections held every four years,
2. When a casual vacancy has arisen on a Parish/Town Council and no poll (by-election) has been called.

1.4 Any councillor seeks to represent the whole community. There are 11 councillor seats of office on Audlem Parish Council.

2 Ordinary vacancy

2.1 An ordinary vacancy occurs when there are insufficient candidates to fill all the seats on a Parish/Town Council at the ordinary elections held every four years. Any candidates who were nominated are automatically elected to the Parish/Town Council and any remaining vacancies are known as “ordinary vacancies”. Provided there are enough parish councillors to constitute a quorum, the Parish/Town Council is usually able to co-opt a volunteer to fill the vacancies.

3 Casual vacancy

3.1 A casual vacancy occurs when:

- A councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time,
- A councillor resigns,
- A councillor dies,
- A councillor becomes disqualified,

- A councillor fails for six (6) months to attend meetings of a council committee or sub-committee or to attend as a representative of the council a meeting of an outside body.

3.2 A Parish/Town Council has to notify the Borough/District Council of a casual vacancy and then advertise the vacancy and give electors for the area the opportunity to request an election. This occurs when ten (10) electors write to the Borough/District Council stating that an election is requested.

3.3 If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by Cheshire East Council and the people of the parish will be asked to go to the polls to vote for candidates who will have put themselves forward by way of a nomination paper. Audlem Parish Council will pay the costs of the election. The people of the parish have fourteen days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days), to claim the by-election, but the Electoral Services Office of Cheshire East Council will advise the Clerk of the closing date.

3.4 If more than one (1) candidate is then nominated, a by-election takes place but if only one (1) candidate is put forward they are duly elected without a ballot.

3.5 If ten (10) residents do not request a ballot within fourteen (14) days of the vacancy notice being posted, as advised by the Electoral Services Office, the Parish Council is able to co-opt a volunteer.

4 Confirmation of Co-Option

4.1 On receipt of written confirmation from the Electoral Services Office that no by-election has been claimed, the casual vacancy can be filled by means of co-option.

4.2 The Clerk (as Proper Officer) will:

- Advertise the vacancy for four weeks or such other period as the Proper Officer deems appropriately in line with current events or dates of meetings, this vacancy may go onto the parish council website, social media, notice boards and local newspaper.
- Advise Cheshire East Council that the co-option policy has been instigated.

4.3 This procedure will also apply in the case of an ordinary vacancy where the Electoral Services Office has confirmed that there were insufficient nominations to fill all the seats but there are sufficient parish councillors elected to constitute a quorum.

5 Eligibility of Candidates

5.1 The Parish Council is able to consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that:

- He/she is 18 or over,
- He/she is a British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union;

and at least one of the following apply:

- He/she is an elector for the Parish and continues to be an elector,
- Or has resided in the Parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land in the Parish,
- Or has had his/her principal or only place of work in the Parish for the past twelve months,
- Or has lived within three miles of the Parish for the past twelve months.

5.2 There are certain disqualifications for being a parish councillor, of which the main are (see s80 of the Local Government Act 1972):

- Holding a paid office or employment under the Parish Council,
- Bankruptcy,
- Having been sentenced to a term of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) of not less than three months, without the option of a fine during the preceding five years,
- Being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal electoral practices.

6 Applications

6.1 Candidates will be requested to:

- Submit information about themselves, by way of completing a short application form,
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of parish councillor within the statutory rules.

6.2 Following receipt of applications, the next suitable Full Council meeting will have an agenda item 'To receive written applications for the office of Parish Councillor and to co-opt a candidate to fill the existing vacancy'.

6.3 Eligible candidates will be invited to attend the meeting.

6.4 Copies of the eligible candidates' applications will be circulated to all parish councillors by the Clerk at least 3 clear days prior to the meeting of the Full Council, when the co-option will be considered.

6.5 All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and all parish councillors as strictly private and confidential.

7 Co-Option

7.1 At the Full Council meeting, candidates will be given five minutes maximum to introduce themselves to the parish councillors (members), give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a member of the Parish Council. The process will be carried out as an extended public session and there will be no private discussions between members prior to a vote being taken. However, where the Parish Council is discussing the merits of candidates and inevitably their personal attributes, this could be prejudicial, and the Parish Council should resolve to exclude the members of the press and public.

7.2 Following the candidate presentations/addresses, Councillors (members) will proceed to a vote in the form of an anonymous ballot which will be solely managed by the Proper Officer. Ballots will be destroyed following the close of the meeting.

7.3 In order for a candidate to be co-opted to the Parish Council, it will be necessary for them to obtain an absolute majority of votes cast (50% + 1 of the votes available at the meeting). If there are more than two candidates and there is no candidate with an overall majority in the first round of voting the candidate with the least number of votes will drop out of the process.

7.4 Further rounds of voting will then take place with the process repeated until a candidate has an absolute majority. In the event of a tied ballot, the Chair of the Parish Council has the casting vote.

7.5 The ballot(s) will be counted by the Clerk (Proper Officer), being observed by one parish councillor nominated during that meeting.

7.6 If present, a candidate who is co-opted will sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office, including an undertaking to abide by the Parish Council's Code of Conduct, and may take office thereafter. If not present, a

co-opted candidate will sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office either before or at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

7.7 The Clerk will notify Cheshire East Council Electoral Services Office of the co-option of the new parish councillor.

7.8 The co-opted councillor will complete a Register of Interests form.

7.9 If insufficient candidates are co-opted, the process should continue, whereby the vacancies are again advertised.

Annex 1: Co-opted Councillor Person Specification

This table suggests essential and desirable skills for candidates of the casual vacancy.

Competency	Essential	Desirable
Personal Attributes	▪ Sound knowledge and understanding of local affairs and the local community. ▪ Forward thinking.	Can bring a new skill, expertise or key local knowledge to the Council.
Experience, Skills, Knowledge and Ability	▪ Ability to listen constructively. ▪ A good team player. ▪ Ability to pick up and run with a variety of projects. ▪ Solid interest in local matters. ▪ Ability and willingness to represent the Council and their community. ▪ Good interpersonal skills and able to contribute opinions at meetings whilst willing to see others' views and accept majority decisions. ▪ Ability to communicate succinctly and clearly. ▪ Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and staff. ▪ Ability and willingness to work with the Council's partners (e.g. voluntary groups, other parish Councils, principal authority, charities) ▪ Ability and willingness to undertake induction training and other relevant training.	▪ Experience of working or being a member in a local authority or other public body ▪ Experience of working with voluntary and or local community / interest groups ▪ Basic knowledge of legal issues relating to town and parish Councils or local authorities ▪ Experience of delivering presentations
Circumstances	Ability and willingness to attend meetings of the Council (or meetings of other local authorities)	

	and local bodies) at any time and events in the evening and at weekends.	
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Annex 2: Attendance following an application

All candidates will be sent a copy of the agenda.

Voting to Co-opt a Councillor

In the event of a candidate being unable to attend, their application will still be considered by members. In the event of a candidate being related to a councillor, then the councillor would be expected to declare an interest and request a dispensation to speak and vote.

Voting will be by ballot. The Clerk will collect the ballots, record the voting numbers on the ballot record sheet (for each round of voting). The decision must be made by a majority of members who are present and voting. Where there are more than two candidates for the vacancy, it may be necessary to run a series of votes, each time removing the candidate who has the least number of votes until one candidate secures an absolute majority. If there is more than one vacancy, then each vacancy must be filled by a separate vote or series of votes.

The Chair (or person presiding over the meeting) may vote, and if there is an equality of votes, they may exercise their casting vote. The council's debate and vote on the co-option must be conducted in the public section of its meeting. It follows that the candidates, as members of the public, will be entitled to be present during the proceedings.

The successful candidate(s) are asked to start as a councillor immediately after completing their declarations of acceptance of office. The new member should have received an agenda however the fact that they have not received a summons does not make their attendance as a councillor illegal. (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12, para 10(3)). Where appropriate they will also be appointed to any council committee. If an absent candidate is successful, members must agree to the signing the declaration of acceptance of office before or at the very start of the next meeting. New councillors will also be made aware of the fact that Interests Forms will need to be completed within 28 days of co-option.

Annex 3: Casual Vacancy Form

We aim to encourage applications from anyone in the parish who is eligible to stand.

Councillors or parishioners can approach individuals to suggest that they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option.

As a minimum, co-option vacancies will be advertised on the website and on the noticeboard. The advertisement for the co-option will include:

1. Method by which applications can be made, this will be in writing to the Clerk
2. The closing date for applications
3. Contact point for potential candidates to obtain more information – the Clerk
4. Advice that further information is available on request
5. A form to complete which includes asking the candidate why they would like to be a councillor; name; address and other contact details. When applications are received, the Clerk will confirm eligibility.

Any candidate found to be offering incentives will be disqualified

Co-option application form



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About you

Forename:

Surname:

Address:

Postcode:

Electoral no (if
known:

Date of
birth:

Further information

Summarise a little about yourself, this could include your work experience, voluntary experience, your hobbies, and anything about your personal life that you'd like to share:

Please explain why you would like to be a parish councillor

Please explain what your understanding of what a parish council is

Have you read the eligibility criteria to be a Parish Councillor as outlined in Section 5 of the Co-Option Policy of Audlem Parish Council? YES / NO

Do you qualify with the eligibility criteria to be a Parish Councillor as outlined in Section 5 of the Co-Option Policy of Audlem Parish Council? YES / NO

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