

BETLEY, BALTERLEY AND WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL

27th February 2025

Commenced: 7.30 pm

Terminated: 9.50 pm

Present: **Councillor Bettley-Smith (Chair)**
Councillors Berrisford, Bullock, Daly, Ecclestone, Hales, Head, Karling, Owen, Speed and Watkin.

Staffordshire County Councillor Paul Northcott

There were 13 Members of the Public in attendance

1. MINUTE SILENCE IN MEMORY OF THE LATE MAYOR, COUNCILLOR BARRY PANTER

The Parish Council paused for a minute silence in respect of the recent passing of the Mayor of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Councillor Barry Panter.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Clerk reported that she had received no apologies for absence for this meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bettley-Smith declared his interest in Item 12(v) as he was the recipient of a reimbursement. He did not take part in the discussion or voting thereon.

Councillors Head and Daly declared their interests in matters relating to the Village Hall, which were to be considered under Minute 12, S106 Agreement. Councillor Head was the Chair of the Village Hall, and Councillor Daly's spouse was a Trustee of the Village Hall. Councillor Bettley-Smith noted his wife was involved in the Village Hall.

Councillors Hales, Ecclestone and Speed declared their interests in Minute 8 as they resided on Common Lane. Councillor Northcott declared his interest in this matter as he was the Chair of the Planning Committee. Dispensations were granted to all Councillors with interests in the matters relating to Common Lane, to enable them to remain in the room during the discussions, and also to participate in the discussions, as the public were also allowed to speak at the meeting (Code of Conduct, Appendix B Paragraph 6).

4. STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE

There was no representative from Staffordshire Police at the meeting.

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 28th November 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the Parish Council, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Daly on the list of Councillors present at the meeting.

In relation to the Apologies for Absence, the Chair referred to the recent accident involving Councillor Drakakis-Smith and her subsequent hospitalisation for which he had presented apologies on her behalf, to the meeting. He reported that there had since been correspondence with Councillor Drakakis-Smith, in which she had brought to the Chair's attention, that she did not tender her apologies and therefore objected to the submission of her apologies, as the Chair had not been given her authority to submit them. The Chair had apologised for his action, stating that he believed it to be appropriate to submit her apologies.

The Chair therefore moved an amendment to the Minutes, and in doing so, apologised again to Councillor Drakakis-Smith for submitting apologies on her behalf, without her agreement.

Councillor Daly referred to a point of order. The Parish Council, at its last meeting, had explicitly authorised the apologies for absence, tendered by the Chair on behalf of Councillor Drakakis-Smith. Councillor Daly questioned that if Councillor Drakakis-Smith had not submitted her apologies for absence to the meeting, and subsequently objected to the submission of her apologies for absence, then the Parish Council could not possibly authorise her absence. The chair accepted the point of order as being valid.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the decision of the Parish Council to authorise Councillor Drakakis-Smith's absence, was an error, given the subsequent events where she had said she was not apologising, for not being present.**
- (ii) That the absence for Councillor Drakakis-Smith is no longer accepted and the authorisation be withdrawn.**

(For the purpose of the Minutes, the Chair abstained from the vote to maintain the neutrality of the Chair in the matter).

6. MINUTES – FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee held on 23rd January 2025 were received.

7. MINUTES – PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning Committee held on 23rd January 2025 were received.

8. PUBLIC FORUM

The Chair welcomed a number of residents of Common Lane to the meeting, who were in attendance due to their strong concerns regarding the upgrading of public footpath 20 to bridleway status.

The Chair explained the history to the application to upgrade the footpath to a bridleway, which was initiated in 1992, but was not considered until 2023. He reported that in 1992, the Parish Council had objected to the proposal, and again in 2023, the Parish Council objected on the same grounds, but with the additionality that Common Lane had not been used as a bridleway between 1992–2023, and that the use of the lane by horses, of people who lived on the lane, should not be confused with a bridleway. Following an appeal (the original proposal was refused) a decision was made that the lane had been a bridleway, and should return to a bridleway. The recent Order therefore, was pursuant to the appeal decision.

Residents of Common Lane, referred to a failure of the procedures to implement the Order, as Staffordshire County Council had forgotten to communicate with the residents prior to the application being referred to the Secretary of State. Furthermore, vital information had not been included in the document packs and had therefore not been considered during the decision making process. The Chair advised the residents to register their objections, on the basis that the correct procedure had not been followed.

Finally, a resident explained that he had measured the width of Common Lane, and it failed in many places, to meet the legal parameters required for a bridleway. The Chair advised the resident to submit his evidence to Staffordshire County Council, explaining that the evidence suggested that the Order was defective.

The Parish Council was sympathetic to the residents who presented qualified rationale as to why the procedure and Order was defective, and suggested that the reasons stated should be grounds for objection by the householders.

A resident extended thanks to the Footpath Working Party for their considerable work which was well received in the Parish.

He enquired about the substantial invoice following the formal complaint regarding a Parish Councillor and his discussions with the Monitoring Officer, over this matter.

A question was raised regarding the repayment of monies relating to the Rural Runabout. The Chair reported that he was unable to provide any updates at the moment, but the Trustees were taking this matter very seriously.

Finally, thanks were extended again for the hard work undertaken by Councillors Berrisford, Bullock and Owen and the volunteers, to enhance the footpaths in the Parish.

9. APPLICATION FOR UPGRADING OF PUBLIC FOOTPATH 20 TO BRIDLEWAY STATUS

The Parish Council agreed to take this item at this stage of the meeting, to enable the Members of the Public to listen to the debate.

The Chair referred to the supporting documents, and discussions ensued regarding the Parish Council's status as a landowner, of Common Lane.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the Parish Council authorises the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair, to submit an objection as a landowner, as the correct procedure was not followed during the decision-making process of upholding the appeal, resulting in the Order [The Parish Council had not been consulted as a landowner].**
- (ii) That the Parish Council in noting the concerns of residents, makes a representation on their behalf bringing those concerns to the attention of the relevant authorities.**
- (iii) That a copy of the letter be sent to the MP.**

At this juncture:-

Councillor Daly left the meeting at 20:39 and returned at 20:41

Councillor Owen left the meeting at 20:40 and returned at 20:42

Councillor Head left the meeting at 20:42 and returned at 20:45

10. COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND BOROUGH COUNCILLORS

The Chair agreed to consider these items at this stage of the meeting:-

(i) Staffordshire County Councillor's Report

Councillor P Northcott, reported on the following matters:-

- He would be stepping down as a County Councillor from May;
- Andrew Thurlock was introduced as a potential candidate for Councillor Northcott's position;
- The Elections would be held on the 1st May, and purdah would take place from mid March;
- Staffordshire County Council had recently been subject to a Care Quality Commission Inspection, and early indications were that the report was positive
- The Full Council Meeting was held on 13th February 2025, where highway matters were a featured discussion;
- Councillor Northcott had used some of his Ward Funding monies to jet some drains in Balterley;
- National Apprentice Day was held on 12th February 2025. Staffordshire County Council employed 220 apprentices and aimed to increase this in the future;
- There was a Joint Vision for Transport priorities across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent;
- The Council Tax increase had been set at 4.99%;
- Staffordshire County Council had made a firm stance against HS2;
- Substantial investments were being made to resolve potholes. 30,000 had been filled since last April.

- Dignity in Care Awards, Staffordshire County Council continued to recognise healthcare professionals with its Dignity in Care Awards. Over the last 11 years, more than 100 people had been crowned Dignity Champions
- The County Council was continuing to support the 43 libraries across Staffordshire.
- A brief explanation of Devolution and Reorganisation proposals was presented and further meetings were being held;

Finally, the Chair gave an update on Walley's Quarry and thanked Cllr Northcott for his service to the Parish and Mr Thurlock for attending the meeting.

(ii) Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Councillor's Report

Councillor Berrisford reported on a campaign to "Save our Borough" which strongly opposed a merger with Stoke-on-Trent.

She had donated the ticket price for the Mayor's Ball, to the late Mayor's Charity.

Finally Councillor Berrisford thanked Councillor Bullock for his work concerning the road drains near the Broughton and Councillor Northcott for his cohesive work with the Parish Council, over the years.

11. PARISH COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

The Parish Council considered updated Standing Orders.

RESOLVED

That from the April 2025 meeting the 2024-2025 Standing Orders, as circulated, be accepted.

12. SECTION 106 AGREEMENT – 17/00968 Wrinehill

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council authorises the Finance and Audit Committee to agree a scheme with the Village Hall Trustees and report back to the Parish Council with a view to putting the scheme forward to the Borough Council.

10. PLANNING MATTERS

(i) New Planning Application

Councillor Watkin declared his interest in this item as he was the applicant of the planning application under discussion, and he left the meeting for the duration of the discussion and decision making.

Councillor Daly reported that this application had not yet been validated by the Borough Council, but as the applicant was a Parish Councillor, it was appropriate for the application to be considered at a meeting of the full Parish Council, rather than at a meeting of the Planning Committee. He clarified that if the application was not validated, there would not be a planning application.

Location: 1 Ravenshall Barns, Main Road, Betley. CW3 9BJ

Proposal: Demolition of existing timber frame garage building and construction of replacement masonry garage building

Councillor Daly reported that he had inspected the application documents and the site. The proposals were on the same footprint of the existing garage, with a slight increase in roof height. The materials would match existing buildings, and were identical to neighbouring garages. The new garage would be located slightly away from an existing retaining wall, as recommended by professionals, to enable the materials to breathe. He suggested that the proposed building would be a considerable improvement.

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council has no objections to the proposal, and as there will be an improvement to the visual amenity the Parish Council supports the application, contingent on it being validated in its present form.

(ii) Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (2020-2040) - Regulation 22 - Submission to Secretary of State

Members noted that the Parish Council's comments were submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 29th January 2025

At this juncture, Councillor Watkin returned to the meeting.

11. REPORTS

(i) The Chair

The Chair reported that the receipt of correspondence from Councillor Drakakis-Smith which was sent to all Parish Councillors and the Clerk, was noted. The matter could not be discussed further as Councillor Drakakis-Smith was not present at the meeting. He notified Members that the Clerk had reported to him that the current content of correspondence was causing distress and that the Clerk had felt the repetitive nature was also causing harassment and he stated that he did not feel it was unreasonable for the Clerk to feel that she was being harassed. Councillor Drakakis-Smith had been found to be in breach of elements of the Code of Conduct and the repetitive content of her emails could now be considered to be vexatious correspondence.

RESOLVED

That the Parish Council notes receipt of various emails from Councillor Drakakis-Smith and the matter is not considered any further.

(For the purpose of the Minutes, this decision was unanimous).

(ii) The Vice Chair

Councillor Daly did not have any additional reports to present to this meeting.

(iii) The Clerk

- The Clerk reported that a request had been received for a Memorial Bench to be installed at Sandy Croft. Councillor Hales offered to install the bench as he knew the gentleman for whom the Memorial Bench was requested.

RESOLVED

That this request be approved in principle, and the Sandy Croft Working Party to liaise with the family.

- An invoice had been received in the sum of £23,865.00 for the investigation into breaches to the Code of Conduct. The Clerk reported that the Parish Council has been forwarded a letter from the Borough Council's Debt Recovery Department, for an unpaid invoice in the sum of £23,865 for investigations into breaches to the Code of Conduct by a Parish Councillor. The Clerk was currently seeking the legal base for this invoice, bearing in mind, the Parish Council did not commission, nor request the investigation.

(iv) Representatives on Outside Bodies

In the absence of a representative from Staffordshire Police, Councillor Bullock updated the Parish Council on the latest police report.

12. BUDGET AND FINANCE 2024-2025

Members considered a report of the Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer on the following matters:-

(i) Applications for Financial Assistance

Members were advised that there were no applications for financial assistance

(ii) Co-op Bank Transfer to Unity Trust Bank

Members were not requested to make any transfers at this meeting.

(iii) Transactions – Unity Trust Bank

PAYEE/PAYER	DETAILS	RECEIPTS	PAYMENTS
HugoFox	Annual Website Subscription		£143.86
Shires Accountants	Backpay adjustment fee		£18.00
M Clough	January Salary		£446.73
HMRC	January PAYE		£118.40
Staffordshire Pensions	January Pension		£165.54
	Transfer from Co-op (£4,000.00)		
	Transfer to Unity (£4,000.00)		
Unity Trust Bank	Monthly Service Charge		£6.00
Clerk	Reimbursement for Microsoft 365		£59.99

(iv) Transactions – Co-op Bank

Members noted that the sum of £4,000.00 was transferred from the Co-op Bank to the Unity Trust Bank on 31st January 2025, as approved by the Finance and Audit Committee on 23rd January 2025.

(v) Payment of Invoices and Reimbursements

Lumalite	Reimbursement for Festoon Bulbs	£188.40
R Bettley-Smith	Reimbursement for waterproof connector	£14.92
M Clough	February 2025 Salary	£446.93
HMRC	February 2025 PAYE	£118.20
Staffordshire Pension	February 2025 Pension	£165.54
Shires Payroll	Training for Staffordshire Pensions Portal (inc VAT)	£72.00
Lumalite	10 x cold white bulbs	£35.88

(vi) Budget Expenditure to 17th February 2025 – Unity Trust Bank

Budget Head	Total	Budget Allocated	£ Difference
Salary	£6,156.61	£7,200.00	£1,043.39
Pension	£1,805.91	£1,660.00	-£145.91
Admin - Insurance	£898.92	£900.00	£1.08
Admin - Audit Fees	£502.00	£625.00	£123.00
Admin - Venue Hire	£366.50	£450.00	£83.50
Admin - Subscriptions	£313.45	£330.00	£16.55
Admin - Website	£203.85	£135.00	-£68.85
Admin - Other	£973.38	£950.00	-£23.38
Highways	£600.00	£999.00	£399.00
Footpaths	£3,445.85	£3,446.00	£0.15
Grants	£750.00	£1,200.00	£450.00
Miscellaneous	£320.31	£321.00	£0.69
Sandy Croft	£0.00	£102.00	£102.00
Memorial Garden	£2,575.20	£4,000.00	£1,424.80

Neighbourhood Plan	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Chair's Expenses	£0.00	£250.00	£250.00
	£18,911.98	£22,568.00	£3,656.02

(vii) Explanation of Variances

Members were asked to approve the following virement of funds:-

(a) Highways Budget to the Admin (Website) Budget – £70.00

(The Clerk listed the expenditure from the Admin Website Budget to date)

(b) Highways Budget to Admin (Other) Budget - £24.00

(The Clerk listed the expenditure from the Admin (Other) Budget to date)

(c) Memorial Garden Budget to Pensions Budget - £480.00

The Clerk reported that was the first year of paying a pension subscription, and the projected expenditure had unfortunately, been under-budgeted.

(viii) Bank Reconciliation as at 17th February 2025

Bank Reconciliation 17th February 2025	
BETLEY BALTERLEY AND WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL	
Financial year ending 31 March 2025	
Prepared by: Muna Clough, Parish Clerk & RFO	
Balance per bank statements as at	
Current Account UNITY (20500409) - 31st January 2025	£4,216.39
Reserve Account CO-OP (49148300) - 4th February 2025	£23,965.25
Less: any unrepresented cheques/payments	
Current Account UNITY (20500409)	£59.99
Reserve Account CO-OP (49148300)	
Add: any unbanked cash - Unity	
Net bank balances as at 17th February 2025	
£28,121.65	
The net balances reconcile to the Cash Book (receipts and payments account) for the year, as follows	
<u>CASH BOOK</u>	
Opening Balance	
Unity Trust Bank @ 1st April 2024	£420.69
Co-op Bank @ 1st April 2024	£23,099.25
Add: Receipts in the year	
Unity Trust Bank	£2,647.69
Co-op Bank	£20,866.00
Less: Payments in the year	
Unity Trust Bank	£18,911.98

Co-op Bank	
Closing balance per cash book [receipts and payments book] must equal net bank balances above	£28,121.65

(ix) Unity Trust Bank Statement – 31st January 2025

(x) Co-op Bank Statement – 4th February 2025

RESOLVED

- (i) That the transactions in the Unity Trust Bank, detailed in (iii) above, be approved;
- (ii) That the payments, detailed in (v) above, be approved;
- (iii) That the Budget Head expenditure to 17th February 2025, detailed in (vi) above, be approved;
- (iv) That the virement of funds, as detailed in (vii) above, be approved;
- (v) That the Bank Reconciliation for Co-op Bank and Unity Trust Bank as at 17th February 2025, detailed in (viii) above, be approved;
- (vi) That the Unity Trust Bank Statement dated 31st January 2025, as submitted in (ix) above, be approved;
- (vii) That the Co-op Bank Statement dated 4th February 2025, as submitted in (x) above, be approved.

13. BROADBAND

The Chair reported that he had no updates on this matter.

14. FOOTPATHS WORKING PARTY

Councillor Berrisford presented the report from the Members of the Footpaths Working Party.

She highlighted huge thanks to recent gate donors, who had been pivotal in the project.

The Working Party wanted to launch a new project and would be meeting to brainstorm ideas.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

15. PLAY, BORROW, RETURN

The Clerk reported that the insurance company had now confirmed that public liability was in place for this initiative.

Councillor Daly added that the Risk Assessment had already been considered by the Finance and Audit Committee and had now been referred to the Parish Council for approval.

The Parish Council thanked Councillor Owen for his work on this project.

RESOLVED

That the Risk Assessment for the Play, Borrow, Return initiative, as submitted with the Agenda, be approved.

16. ELECTRICAL FIRE SAFETY WEEK

RESOLVED

That a narrative on this initiative be presented in the Parish News

17. VE DAY – 8th MAY 2025

The Parish Council considered some proposals for the celebrations. Consideration would be given to a short prayer service on 7 May 2025. A red, white and blue festoon would be displayed on the Memorial Garden in the rear trees and the military silhouettes would also be displayed. A beacon would be lit on 8 May, which was being arranged by Councillor Speed.

RESOLVED

That Councillors Speed and Daly progress the arrangements and report back to the Parish Council at the April meeting.

24 CIVIC PRIDE EVENT 2025

The Chair reported that although this event would take place over various days, in relation to Betley and Madeley, the 25th September 2025, was the crucial date.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

25 AREA MATTERS

RESOLVED

That this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Parish Council.

26 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Members noted the following dates:-

- Finance and Audit Committee – Thursday, 20th March 2025 at 2.00 pm
- Planning Committee – Thursday, 20th March 2025 at 2.15 pm or at the rise of the Finance and Audit Committee (whichever is earlier)
- Annual Parish Meeting – Wednesday, 7th May 2025 at 7.30 pm
- Annual Meeting of the Parish Council – Tuesday, 13th May 2025 at 7.30 pm

27 URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no items that required consideration as a matter of urgency.