

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY 21ST APRIL 2022**

Councillors Present: Cllr J Thomas, Cllr F Bates, Cllr J Salter, Cllr J Hoare, Cllr A Molyneux, Cllr J Harwood
Members of Public: 25 present

1/22 Apologies for absence and Declarations of Personal, Pecuniary or Prejudicial Interest

- 1.1 Cllr M Eccles-Williams
- 1.2 No declarations of interest

2/22 Minutes:

- 2.1 Minutes of meeting 14th March were accepted & signed with one amendment. Minutes of 29th March were accepted & signed.
- 2.2 No matters arising

3/22 Open Forum:

- Have the electrics in Burditch Hall been checked: Cllr Salter stated he is chasing an electrician to check and furnish a safety certificate.
- Anna Appleford: Wootton Flower Show 10th September using hall & field. Needs reassurance on public safety ie water & electrics. Toilets working – will hall be accessible from Thursday to end of Sunday. Will the Hall be insured. Confirmation needed by mid-May so printing can be done otherwise new location will need to be sought.
New lease should be in process by 13th May – hall will be safe – water tested and electrical certificate in place in time for events. Council wants to ensure flower show stays in the village. Council will investigate where the crockery is if it is in storage, it will be retrieved.
- RoSPA inspection is carried out by Playground Committee – this will be confirmed.
- Jubilee Celebrations – are due to take place in the Hall. Currently the bar is not licenced and no glasses available. New lease takers will do inventory. £250 has been allocated by Council towards Jubilee, money is also coming from OCC and Duke of Marlborough. Council will cover costs of cleaning.
- Windows in changing rooms have been broken. They are currently boarded over. There are new window frames in shed ready to be fitted. Council will follow up.
- Money for rent has been set aside by Football Club.
- Decision of new lease holder will be made in mid-May. If more than one group apply there will be a selection process- then Solicitor will draw up lease. Deadline for applications will be decided after the meeting.
- Playing field needs registering.
- Signage needs to be changed and access to defibrillator needs to be clear.
- Village verges need cutting – contract is about to be awarded for grass cutting – Village work party on 7th May and drains need cleaning. Clerk will contact Highways and ask to clear the drains on Milford Lane.
- Wooden signpost needs repairing also signs on island needs attention.

4/22 Grass cutting Contract:

- 4.1 Progress- Cllr Bates reported a quote has been received from Countrywide for £240 per cut – we usually have 5 per annum. McCracken & Son have also been asked to quote and are awaiting. If this is

Signed

J. Thomas

Date

16.5.2022

not received Clerk will instruct Countrywide to start with 5 cuts per year. Proposed: Cllr Bates, seconded Cllr Harwood.

5/22 Finance:

5.1 Banking arrangements have not been updated since the old Clerk & Chairman left. Clerk will start the process immediately. Resolution was passed that Clerk will be added to NatWest mandate as soon as possible – Cllr Thomas is a signatory and Cllr Loftus, and old Clerk will be removed. If we gain access to the bank account, then all monies will be transferred to one account. New account will be opened with Unity Bank which allows RFO to set up payments and 2 Councillors to sign – all transactions will be done online. Cllrs Molyneux & Salter will be new signatories. Resolution was signed to this affect. It would seem the old Clerk had changed the account to only one signatory and was making the payments himself. This cannot continue therefore no cheques will be issued or payments made until the new account is set up according to regulations.

5.2 Audit – We have a copy of the 20/21 audit which was given to Internal Auditor but his report pointed out many problems and it was never completed. There is nothing posted on the website – it is understood the Certificate of Exemption was sent to Moores but a copy was not kept. This needs to be rectified immediately. Clerk will complete.

The Internal Auditor report will be posted on the website and the Clerk ran through the items highlighted. From 2022/23 all procedures will be put in place by new Clerk – they are all very basic bookkeeping requirements.

The Clerk raised concern about some payments made and will try and investigate these and obtain invoices. Wootton web payment was dated 23rd November but it would seem wrong documentation is with payment. Also, payments have been mad to HMRC but the amounts seem very high. Clerk will contact them and try and resolve both issues.

There seems to be very little work in the budget process to set the Precept. This must be well documented to allow transparency.

21/22 Audit is due by 30th June 2022 – Certificate of Exemption can be completed as income/expenditure is below £25k. Then Clerk will as far as possible complete the audit. It will be qualified again by Internal Auditor as correct procedures are not in place and no financial controls were in place. Clerk will meet with Internal Auditor at a convenient time and complete both audits.

It was agreed that Philip Parker will be asked to carry out the Internal Audit again. Budget was put in place in March 2022, but Precept was submitted in December. Organisations seem to apply for money from the Council but these amounts are not included in the budget – therefore each year the Council runs at a loss. Precept must be set so the budget breaks even or has a small surplus. The budget this year seems to run at £4k loss which will be taken from reserves. This must be rectified for 2023/24.

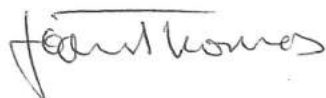
6/22 Report from Julia Sharp –

Clerk thanked Julia for her works in the weeks before she took over – much of the groundwork has been carried out. Her report was very concise. It would seem records minutes/agendas bank statements/audits/budgets/precepts for the years 2018-2021 have been mislaid between the old Clerk and Mr Loftus. Clerk will work through the list and see how much can be rectified. Proposal was made that the Council will report these shortcomings to the Monitoring Officer and External Auditor. There are no current Standing Orders or Financial Regulations so Clerk will draft these for circulation.

7/22 GDPR – Legal requirements:

7.1 All Councillors must have a dedicated email address for Council work and must NOT use their own private address. After the meeting all Councillors will set up an email in the form of firstname.surname.wpc@gmail.com and then email the Clerk to confirm this has been done. Clerk has an

Signed



Date

16. 5 2022

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email which is associated with the website, but all correspondence seems to be directed direct to Mr Loftus. This will be rectified.

7.2 GDPR laws were passed in 2015 – the Council should have then purchased a laptop/printer and storage for the Clerk. If this had happened no records would have been lost. It was moved that the Clerk purchase a laptop & printer for the Council use.

7.3 No evidence is available that a payroll was being run only a payslip for the old Clerk is evident – but payments have been made to HMRC. Clerk has suggested that this is outsourced to Eslip who will run everything in accordance with legal requirements and reporting online. This was agreed. Clerk will arrange this as soon as the Bank account is in place.

8/22 Website:

Clerk has gained access to the Wix website which seems to have been initiated by Mr Loftus. We need a website that we can update ourselves, so Clerk has started to build this. The costs so far have been paid by Mr Loftus so the amount of £164.65 will need to be paid to him as soon as the bank is in place. Clerk understands there was a village website set up by Dominic Knight according to Parish Council instructions, but this is not what is required. We must comply with the Transparency Code 2014. All minutes must be posted within 30 days of the meeting in draft form, agendas need to be available, all financial information, and legal requirements. Clerk will contact Mr Knight and explain the situation – she will check the website is paid to date and explain we have had to set up our own. No GDPR Policies are in place or FOI instructions. Council needs to be registered with ICO.

9/22 Road closure notice has been received by Clerk for Jubilee celebrations. There were no objections.

10/22 Next Meeting will be on 12th May to discuss the Burditch Hall lease at 7.15 and 16th May at 7.30pm for Annual Parish Meeting followed by Annual Parish Council Meeting. All meetings to be held in Burditch Hall.

Signed

Joan Thomas

Date

16.5.2022

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Wootton Parish Council – missing files

I write formally to record and confirm that I have inspected all the papers currently in the possession of the Chairman of the Parish Council.

I have identified that the following information is missing:

- Declaration of Acceptance forms from Mr Mark Eccles- Williams and Mr John Salter
- All papers relating to 2018/19 – agendas/minutes/accounts/invoices/bank statements/VAT Claim/Internal Audit forms and the Annual Governance Annual Return forms.
- All papers relating to 2019/20 – as above
- All papers relating to 2020/21 – as above
- Some papers relating to 2021/22 – all extant papers are held in the Pink Folder but is incomplete
- 2022/23 Budget forecast and Precept request
- Parish Council Insurance – except for the tractor and Burditch Hall
- Financial Regulations
- Recent and complete Standing Orders
- Risk Assessment
- Recent Asset Register
- Complaints Procedure
- Publication Scheme
- HMRC/PAYE payments system

I have also been unable to obtain access to either of the Parish Council Websites – *woottonbywoodstock.wordpress.com* or *woottonparishcouncil.com* - or to access a working email address for the Parish Clerk. [This latter access has now been achieved.]

I have made enquiries with all of the relevant parties as to where these papers might be and I attach correspondence with:

- 1 Bobs Damerell confirming that he passed all of the papers in his possession to Mr Loftus. (Annex A)
- 2 Mr Loftus confirming that he passed all of the papers in his possession to Joan Thomas. Annex B
- 3 John Salter confirming that he passed his completed Declaration of Acceptance to Mr Loftus. Annex C.
- 4 Mark Eccles- Williams confirming that he passed his completed Declaration of Acceptance to Mr Loftus. Annex D.

From the enquiries that I've made I now must conclude that it is now impossible to locate the missing files and that they therefore, regrettably have to be regarded as lost.

In my opinion an Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council must be held at the earliest convenience for this matter to be formally reported to the full Parish Council and then reported to the Monitoring Officer and External Auditor in order for a decision to be made as to how to proceed.

Julia Sharpe
29 March 2022

ANNEX A B Damerell

Fringford Parish Clerk <[REDACTED]>
Fri 25/03/2022 14:11

To: Julia Sharpe

Hi Julia,

Yes that is correct

Many thanks

Bobs

On Fri, 25 Mar 2022 at 14:10, Julia Sharpe <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Dear Bobs

I am having to conclude my investigations into the missing files and will need to report this to the Parish Council, Monitoring Officer and the External Audit Authority.

Please could you formally confirm the following:

- (i) that to your belief you have passed to Mr Loftus, the then Chair of Wootton Parish Council all the papers that came into your possession during your time as Clerk/RFO for that Council;
- (ii) and in particular that in addition to a white box of files you passed over three ring-binders containing the papers for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21, the 2020/21 Annual Governance and Accountability Return and a memory stick,

Many thanks

Julia

Bobs Damerell
Fringford Parish Clerk
4 Brae Hill
Brill
Bucks
HP18 9TF
tel 01844 237766

Hi Julia,

I have given Joan all the files I received from Bobs. From the dark recesses of my mind I think that 21/22 is a pink lever arch file.

I have nothing here.

Hope this helps your search.

Peter

On Fri, 25 Mar 2022 at 09:43, Julia Sharpe [REDACTED] wrote:

Good morning Peter

I have now been through the white box of files that you passed on to Joan with a fine toothcomb. All of the files in the box relate to pre 2018.

Yesterday in my quest to track down the more recent files and paper work I had a long conversation with Bobs Damerell.

In addition to the white box he claims that he handed you three lever arch files labelled 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 each containing minutes/agendas/invoices/bank statements etc, together with a memory stick and all of the papers relating to the 2020-21 external audit.

John Salter and Mark Eccles-Williams also claim that they gave you their signed and completed Office of Acceptance forms.

As you will appreciate it is now vital that I have access to all of this information. I would be grateful if you could pass all of the Wootton Parish Council files, papers and documents that you have to either Joan or myself – I am happy to arrange collection from your home.

In your previous email you kindly agreed to allow access to update the website – woottonparishcouncil.com. I would therefore be grateful if you could supply me with the necessary login and password information to enable me to upload minutes, agendas and financial information and to update the Parish Councillor's details.

Kind regards

Julia

ANNEX B P Loftus

[REDACTED]
Fri 25/03/2022 19:13

To: Julia Sharpe [REDACTED]

Hi Julia,

To the best of my knowledge, I can confirm all your points.

Best wishes
Peter

On Fri, 25 Mar 2022 at 14:05, Julia Sharpe [REDACTED] wrote:

Dear Peter

I am having to conclude my investigations into the missing files and will need to report this to the Parish Council, Monitoring Officer and the External Audit Authority.

Please could you formally confirm the following:

- (i) that to your belief you have passed to the parish council all the papers that came into your possession during your time as chair;
- (ii) in addition to a white box of files whether or not you can recall Bobs Damerell passing you three ring-binders containing the papers for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21, the 2020/21 Annual Governance and Accountability Return and a memory stick, and
- (iii) whether or not you can confirm that John Salter and Mark Eccles-Williams delivered their signed acceptance of office declarations to you.

Many thanks

Julia

From: D.M.P. Loftus [REDACTED]
Sent: 25 March 2022 11:05
To: Julia Sharpe [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: More WPC Queries

ANNEX C John Salter

[REDACTED]
Mon 28/03/2022 12:01

To: Julia Sharpe

Ok, thanks.

On Mon, 28 Mar 2022, 11:36 Julia Sharpe, [REDACTED] wrote:

Thanks John – Witney have your Declaration of Interest forms and I'm guessing that you would both have signed the Acceptance of Office forms at the same time. Witney would have returned them to Mr Loftus – and there the trail ends

Regards

Julia

From: john salter [REDACTED]
Sent: 28 March 2022 11:28
To: Julia Sharpe [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Declaration of Acceptance

I most certainly did as did Mark at the same time .Peter sent them to Witney. I believe Witney said they had sent them back.we signed at our first meeting. John

From: Julia Sharpe [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 28, 2022 10:33:38 AM
To: 'john salter' [REDACTED]
Subject: Declaration of Acceptance

Hi John

I have almost exhausted every avenue to track down the missing files/forms.

Please could you confirm the following:

To the best of your knowledge you returned the signed Declaration of Acceptance form to Mr Loftus.

Many thanks

Julia

ANNEX D Mark Eccles-Williams

Re: Wootton Parish Council -Missing Forms

Mark Eccles-Williams [REDACTED]

Mon 28/03/2022 14:52

To: Julia Sharpe [REDACTED]

Dear Julia,
I am quite certain I did as I took it round to his house.
Many thanks,
Mark.

On Mon, Mar 28, 2022 at 10:35 AM Julia Sharpe [REDACTED] wrote:

Dear Mark

I have almost exhausted every avenue to track down the missing files/forms.

Please could you confirm the following:

To the best of your knowledge you returned the signed Declaration of Acceptance form to Mr Loftus.

Many thanks

Julia