

**Minutes of the Meeting of
LONGHOPE PARISH COUNCIL
held online on Monday 18th January 2021**

PRESENT: Cllrs. S Collins (Chair), G Nicholas, A Toomey and T Beard

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr I Barrett (Clerk), County Cllr. B Robinson and 18 local residents

1. There were no apologies for absence.
2. There were declarations of interest.

3. Public Forum

There was some discussion concerning the flooding in the village which occurred on 23 December 2020 and occasioned by the heavy rainfall. Concern was expressed as to future development plans without adequate drainage. A local resident suggested a village action group to address flooding matters. Some further discussion ensued, to include the apportionment of responsibility for leading on flooding matters. It was emphasised that the lead authority on flood and water management rests with the County Council. A local resident enquired if the Parish Council was aware as to the number of homes that had been flooded. It was reported that no residents had forwarded this information to the Council. A local resident then inferred that due to the lack of collective reporting to the District Council there was no water management plan or associated funding in place. Other authorities were cited as examples but it was noted that there were no water management plans for the Forest of Dean, to include Longhope. It was further considered that the lack of support was due to a shortfall in reporting, being mindful that there had been sufficient flooding events in Longhope to demonstrate a history of such matters. It was noted that after the flooding in 2007 a group had been formed to address flooding issues, but this had seemingly fallen into disuse. It was further suggested that the Parish Council could be proactive in determining the number of properties that had been flooded, however the means of doing this was not articulated. In summation the Chairman stated that the Parish Council was very willing to work with any individual or group to address flooding issues and that this issue would be an agenda item for the next meeting.

A local resident enquired as to whether the points that he had raised in an email to the Clerk could be put on the agenda for the next meeting, one of which was stiles. Councillor Toomey stated that the County Council had been contacted by email on 22 October 2020 and spoken to on 11 January 2020. It was pointed out that the Parish Council had no responsibility for stiles but could only report issues. The condition of the stiles was accepted by the County Council who were currently experiencing budget cuts. It was the responsibility of the land owner to ensure that footpaths and stiles were maintained. Bridges were the responsibility of the County Council.

A local resident also enquired as to another point that he had submitted. The Chairman requested further information and background evidence.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 16 November 2020 were agreed as a true record, with the exception that the change of signatories for the Longhope Emergency Fund had yet to be actioned. The clerk was to amend the minutes which were to be signed when conditions permit.

5. Planning

The planning report had been circulated to Councillors. The clerk also reported receipt of a recent application which had not been included in the report. The discussion concerning the planning applications is summarised below.

- P0001/21/DISCON Stoneleigh, May Hill, Longhope; Discharge of conditions 06 (tree retention and protection measures) and 07 (bio diversity enhancements) of planning permission P0559/20/FUL

It was noted that the Council had previously approved the planning application and that this was a Discharge of Conditions, some of which the Council had suggested. No objections were raised to this application.

- P0119/20/DISCON Longhope Business Park, Richard Read Transport, Monmouth Road, Longhope; Discharge of condition 08 (pedestrian crossing) relating to planning permission P0293/20/FUL (additional information)

Notwithstanding the additional information that had been submitted the Council did not consider that these materially affect the current application and therefore the strong objection that the Council had raised due to safety aspects was to remain.

- P2140/20/LBC Brook Farm, Monmouth Road, Longhope; Retrospective alterations and associated works within the curtilage of a Grade II Listed Farmhouse

The Council objected to this application as it was considered to be planning creep and the establishment of further residential opportunities within a conservation area.

- P2064/20/OUT Highbank Barn, Monmouth Road, Longhope; Outline application for the erection of 2 dwellings with associated parking, landscaping and works

The Council wished to defer a decision on this application until a site visit had been conducted.

- P2148/20/FUL Our Peace, Latchen, Longhope; Erection of a detached dwelling with associated vehicular access and off road parking

The Council objected to this planning application as it ran contrary to the Neighbourhood Development Plan as it was an infill, the development was not in keeping with the other properties in the Latchen in that the majority of properties had fences between the property and the pavement and that granting of the application would set a precedent which could change the face of the village. A further concern was expressed in that the planning notice for the application was displayed on private land, rather than being readily viewable from a public place.

- P0047/21/FUL 2 Old Vicarage, Church Road, Longhope; Erection of 3 new dormers to the rear roof and insert roof lights to the rear to create a living space in the lofts

The Council wished to defer a decision on this application until a site visit had been conducted.

6. Members' Reports

Cllr Toomey reported that she had been in correspondence with a May Hill resident who was concerned as to speeding traffic in the May Hill area and who was soliciting support from all the local Councils in the area. The proposal was to reduce the speed limit to 30 miles per hour (where it is currently unrestricted and subject to the national speed limit). There was also a proposal to establish a Gateway at the cross roads of Sterrys Lane and Yartelton Lane which falls within the Parish of Longhope. Some discussion resulted as to who was the owner of the land on which the gate would be erected. In sum the Council had no objections to such an initiative and would provide support as appropriate.

Cllr Toomey also reported that the reservoir had become a meeting place for young adults and damage in the order of £20K had been caused. CCTV installations had been damaged and police cameras have now been installed.

Cllr Toomey further reported that the police and local PCSOs had been inviting out of area visitors to May Hill to return home, given the current Covid 19 strictures.

Cllr Collins reported that action had been taken to clean debris from the brook following the recent flooding. It was emphasised that where water courses flowed through private land it was the responsibility of the land owner to ensure that the water flow was not impeded. The Parish Council was responsible for the stream at Brook End, on the Recreation Ground and at the back of the Latchen Room. It was further stated that the Council does not have the power to enforce land owners to maintain water courses.

Cllr Robinson (County Council) reinforced that the County Council too the ultimate responsibility for preventing flooding and the County Council website allows residents to report instances of flooding and gives the County Council an overview of the totality of the flooding. Cllr Robinson remarked that the County Council had spent some £70M in the last few years on flood alleviation work. A local resident enquired as to how much had been spent for Longhope; Cllr Robinson did not have this figure to hand but would investigate. It was further enquired as to how those who did not have access to the internet could report flooding; this could be done through the Parish Clerk.

Cllr Nicholas noted that the charge for the supply of water to the allotments was a little high and also noted that the Council was being billed for VAT. The Clerk was asked to contact the water supplier to investigate if invoices could be presented without VAT.

7. Committee Reports

(a) Longhope Emergency Fund

An email had been received from a former Councillor stating that it would be necessary to remove her as a signatory from the Longhope Emergency Fund as the support work that she was undertaking did not draw on these monies. It was agreed that the signatories to the fund required reviewing.

8. Annual Governance and Accountability Return

The clerk reported on the account of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The authority has a responsibility for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The parish Council

therefore prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with Proper Practices and which is submitted to an external auditor. The outcome of the audit had been received and publicly displayed as required. Two observations had been made, both of which had been challenged by the Clerk.

First, although directed to write down assets held as a custodian trustee a comment had been made that these should have nonetheless been included in the return for consistency and comparability.

The auditor considered that the explanation of the variance of grant between the prior and current year was not adequate.

9. Longhope Bench Policy

The Clerk had previously presented a Longhope Parish Council Bench Policy. This was accepted and approved by the Council

10. Community Response Group

The Community Emergency Plan for Longhope Parish was outlined and the requirement to replace two members of the Community Response Group was highlighted. It was agreed that this topic required further discussion.

11. Forest of Dean Local Plan

The Council was reminded that comments on the Forest of Dean Local Plan were required by 29 January 2021. It was assessed that there was no perfect solution. Cllr Robinson accepted that the houses had to be built however considered that new build was not necessarily the answer, certainly considering the current climate emergency, and that District Council could possibly consider their existing resources. It was agreed that a response should be submitted which recommended that the District Council should consider its current estate before building on green land.

12. Census

The Council was reminded that Census Day was scheduled for 21 March 2021. Advisory notices had been issued by the Office of National Statistics and these would be displayed on the Parish Council Facebook page nearer the time.

13. Allotments

It was necessary to determine the allotment charges for 2021. Although monies had been spent on fencing, and the water charges were higher than anticipated, it was agreed that the current charging rate should be maintained. It was further considered that a site visit to the allotments was required and in particular to determine the management of the bank area. This particular area, bordering the Latchen, had been cultivated by certain allotment holders after a previous informal agreement with the Council.

14. Grant to GP Surgery

A sum of £1000 had been allocated within the Parish budget as a grant for the Mitcheldean Surgery in memory of the late Mr Stanley Stephens. The original intention to utilise the money to purchase a certain item of equipment had stalled when the surgery had abandoned its intention to offer a certain type of treatment. A recent re-engagement with the surgery administrator had indicated that the grant would be useful in supplementing the cost of a particular ECG machine. It was therefore considered that providing the grant was overdue and should be actioned as soon as possible, with a letter being sent to the family of Mr Stephens.

15. Contribution to Latchen Room Insurance

Traditionally the Parish Council has contributed half the cost of the Latchen Room Insurance as a good will gesture. A request had been received from the Latchen Room Committee for an amount of £571.27. After some discussion it was concluded that this contribution was no longer viable, particularly as the Latchen Room fund had a healthy balance. It was therefore decided that the Parish Council would not pay the amount that had been requested.

16. Development and enhancement of Land Behind the Latchen Room

A proposal had been received from a local ecologist to develop and enhance the area behind the Latchen Room by designing a tree planting scheme which incorporated and enhanced the grassland on the bank with suitable wildflowers for that particular habitat. This would be seen as a community project. Although the design would be at no cost, the Council would be required to pay for any trees or plants. Although very grateful to the proposer after some consideration the Council considered that it was not the right time for such a scheme as the future of this area was under consideration for other projects, such as, for example, further allotments. Furthermore, the limited number of Councillors would restrict full involvement.

17. Ash Dieback Project

The clerk presented a scheme proposed by Gloucester County Council Highways whereby the Parish Council could identify areas for tree planting, which would be at no cost, or alternatively apply for young trees or whips, again at no cost, for the Council to plant themselves. It was felt that for the time being that there were sufficient trees in the Parish.

Cllr Toomey took the opportunity to remind the meeting that the felling of any tree in a conservation area required planning approval.

18. Dog Waste Disposal

Cllr Nicholas noted that the contract for the removal of dog waste was a significant amount within the Council Budget. It was observed that there was not obligatory to use specific dog waste bins and that many councils had adopted a dual waste bin approach, whereby dog waste was deposited in the same bin as general litter. By going to this system considerable savings could be made. A check with the Waste Management contractor indicated that there was no issue with putting dog waste along with general waste in the large collecting bin provided for this purpose. To initiate the new scheme it would be necessary to purchase the new litter bins and to commence an educative process such that villagers were aware that dog waste could be put in the litter bins. The proposal

gained general consent whilst noting that suitable notice should be afforded to the current dog waste contractor. It was agreed that a site survey should take place to determine the most appropriate sites for the bins.

19. Clerk's Report and Correspondence

- **Latchen Room Car Parking.** Following a comment at the previous meeting concerning the parking encroachment in Nupend Gardens of visitors to the Latchen Room the clerk had written to the Latchen room committee and received the following response: Thank you for bringing this to our attention. We do take on board the concerns of local residents especially those of Nupend Gardens. We will ensure that the parking privacy is highlighted both in writing and verbally. Additionally we will put a notice on our notice board to reinforce the point. The way things are going re Covid, it may be some time before we have a large gathering. The Chairman of the Latchen Room Committee will produce a note handed over when the booking form is signed so that hirers become fully aware of the parking situation.
- **Hobbs Lane.** The clerk had received some correspondence from a resident of Hobbs Lane concerned by the state of the lane and the deposit of debris left after the recent rain. It was noted that two contractors had presented tenders for the work need to rectify the water which flows down the lane however a site survey was awaited from a Gloucestershire County Council representative to advise on the engineering work required. This survey had been postponed due to Covid 19, however the clerk was re-engaging with the County Council to progress the survey. It was noted that both the quotes received were expensive, however there was the possibility of County Council financial assistance.
- **Licensing – Pepper's Perfect Pizzas.** The clerk reported that the proprietor of Pepper's Perfect Pizzas reported that the first trading session had gone very smoothly and that the evening of 19 December 2020 had been sold out.
- **Waste Maintenance.** The clerk reported that a waste maintenance contract had been agreed with Smiths (Gloucester) Limited for the provision and regular emptying of a 1100 litre wheelie bin, situated at the Pavilion.
- **Affordable Housing.** A note had been received concerning the provision of affordable housing in Longhope as follows:

I am writing to inform Longhope Parish Council that using delegated powers the Head of Paid Service in consultation with Councillor Claire Vaughan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Councillor Richard Leppington Cabinet Member for Finance, approved a grant allocation of £27,266 to help enable the delivery of a wholly affordable housing scheme, to help meet affordable housing need in the parish of Longhope. It is planned that the money will be used to help fund the proposed exception site being explored by Longhope Community Land Trust and Aster.

The funding will come from the commuted sums budget the Council holds. A commuted sum (or payment in lieu) is an amount of money paid by a developer to the Council where the size or scale of a development triggers a requirement for affordable housing, but it is not possible to achieve appropriate affordable housing on site. The money is held in trust for the sole purpose of providing affordable housing within the district.

Cllr Nicholas advised the meeting that he had resigned from his position with the Longhope Community Land Trust.

- **Handyman.** The clerk detailed the current duties of the Longhope Handyman and noted that he had been contacted by a local resident concerning these. The roles of the handyman are as follows: Checking the bins at the Pavilion; picking up litter on the playing fields; checking the play area to ensure safety of the equipment; patrolling the village and picking up litter and noting where work is required, such as hanging brambles or hedging that requires to be cut; noting where paths need sweeping or scraping to remove foliage; picking up waste and placing it in a disposable bag. The Handyman does not stay in the centre of the village but goes around the housing estates and outer parts of the village. However, certain tasks cannot be undertaken due to a lack of vehicle and suitable tools.

It was observed that an employer appraisal should be delivered to both the Handyman and the Clerk.

- **Vehicle Activated Sign.** The clerk noted that he had received correspondence from a local resident concerned that the Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) was still not working. After rectification work undertaken by Cllr Nicholas supported by a local resident the VAS is now in full working order. The clerk confirmed that it was now functioning and that he had personally tested its operation. It was noted that the local Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) wishes to obtain some of the readings from the sign; it is anticipated that the location will be changed from time to time. It was agreed that responsibility for management of the VAS would be transferred from Cllr Collins to the portfolio of Cllr Nicholas who would, in his position as police liaison for the Council, provide data from the VAS to the PCSO.
- **May Hill Roads.** Although received as correspondence this topic had already been covered by the report given by Cllr Toomey.
- **Flooding Clean Up.** After an inspection of the village by the Chairman a contractor had been engaged to undertake clean-up work to the following schedule:

Main blockage to the brook just off the right hand side at the back of the allotments (The Latchen). This appears to have been a dumping ground for allotment rubbish.

Mid way down Brook End is the start of another potential blockage. There is a large diameter pipe crossing the brook and this caught some foliage.

Adjacent to the school entrance where the brook goes under the road there is a build-up of planks/decking at the side of the bank.

Accumulations of stone/dirt/gravel on Church Road between the recreation ground requires clearing as it is presenting a hazard.

A large tree has fallen on the ground behind the Latchen Room and will need removing

The Chairman noted that the work had been completed to an acceptable standard.

A local resident advised that the storm drains in the village were still silted up. Gloucestershire County Council would be contacted for assistance in clearance being mindful of the forecast of heavy rain. Cllr Robinson agreed to contact Highways advising of the issue.

A local resident advised that the village of Lea was expanding and that major flood alleviation works were being undertaken. The resident volunteered to discuss the issue with Lea Parish Council and to report back to Longhope Parish Council.

Cllr Toomey proposed the creation of a Village Society which would provide a forum for a discussion by villagers on matters of interest with a spokesperson reporting back to the Council.

- **Settlement Scheme.** The Council had received a reminder of the EU Settlement Scheme which is open for applications for all EU, EEA (European Economic Area) and Swiss citizens (including any non-EU family members) who live in the UK, and want to continue to have the right to live, work and study in the UK following Brexit. The deadline for applying to the EU Settlement Scheme is 30 June 2021. Although there was no immediate knowledge of any possible applicants, and the notice had previously been posted on the Parish Council Facebook page, it would be reposted to give every opportunity for possible applicants to engage with the Scheme.

20. Finance

The following invoice had already been approved for payment but was presented for record purposes:

Cobalt Health	Fund Raising	£200.00
PKF Littlejohn	Audit Fees	£240.00
Covid 19 Volunteer Group	Donation to Christmas Purchases	£47.26
PATA	Payroll Services Costs	£38.65
Merlin Waste	Dog waste collection – December 2020	£124.80
Ian Barrett	Salary - December	£467.60
Paul Sims	Salary - December	£290.00
HMRC	PAYE Q3	£950.95
Toolite	Purchase of maintenance equipment	£192.66
Premier Play Solutions Gloucestershire	Purchase of sports equipment	£7852.80
Playing Fields Association	Annual Subscription	£50.00

The following invoices were approved for payment:

Ian Barrett	Salary – January 2021	£373.84
Paul Sims	Salary – January 2021	£200.00
Ian Barrett	Refund of maintenance equipment purchase	£90.90
Ian Barrett	Refund of stationary purchase	£3.50
Merlin Waste	Dog Waste Collection, January	£124.80

The monthly financial report was received and approved. The clerk pointed out to the Council that the projected year-end balance was based on the budget for the year and that there were two notable overspends. The salary of the clerk had been exceeded. This was as a result of the extra work and consequent payment undertaken by the previous clerk. The purchase of the goal units had resulted in an overspend for the Youth Fund, albeit this was partially compensated by the roll over from previous years.

The clerk requested that an audit of the accounts be undertaken. As the previous internal auditor was now the Chair of the Council it was considered appropriate therefore that an external auditor was employed. This was approved by the Council.

21. Budget 2021/2022

The draft budget and proposals for 2021/2022 had been previously circulated to the Council. It was agreed that the precept should be maintained at £24,000 which would result in a reduction of approximately £0.02 to the Parish Council element of the Council tax levied on a D band ratepayer.

Comments by County Councillor Robinson

Cllr Robinson reported on a Health scrutiny in the County, held in the preceding week. There were some 220 Covid-19 patients in hospital with around 225 being treated at home. Currently a third of the County's hospital bed spaces are being occupied by Covid-19 patients. Although the number of infections is settling the Forest of Dean has been second to Gloucester in the cases reported. The vaccination programme is going well with the ability to deliver 30,000 vaccinations each week.

The County Council tax rise for 2020/2021 is anticipated to be 1.99% which is within the governmental cap of 2%. The County Council is also allowed to impose a 3% increase for children's and adult services and intends to use 2.76% of this. The rise in Council Tax will therefore be 4.75%. Cllr Robinson observed that children's services were declared inadequate in 2017 and although there has been some progress the Ofsted view is that it is as not as good as it should be. It was also noted that more adult care was being provided in people's homes, rather than in care homes.

At the previous meeting Cllr Nicholas had asked Cllr Robinson if there was any central funding available for the Longhope play area. Although a request had been made this exceeded Cllr Robinson's budget and therefore it was necessary to seek some way or reducing this.

The advantages and disadvantages of the Parish Council managing the Play Park project as a local authority, rather than trustees, was discussed. Cllr Toomey noted that there had been certain accusations that the Parish Council was acting beyond their remit for the Recreation Ground and that this, in turn, could generate objections to the refurbishment of the Play Park. However, being mindful of the outcome of the last Play Area safety inspection, coupled with the urgency of many outstanding Health and Safety issues, the Council agreed that it would manage the Play Park Project. As a consequence, it was also agreed that the grant application should be resubmitted to the County Council in the name of the Parish Council,

22. Next Meeting – Monday 15 February 2021 at 7pm

Signed:.....Chairman. Date:.....