

Welsh Newton Parish

Annual Parish Meeting

held at Welsh Newton Village Hall on Thursday 30th May 2024 at 7:00pm

Minutes

Present: Cllr Craig Bligh (Chairman of the Parish Council)

In attendance: Andrée Mitchell (Clerk to the Parish Council), Ward Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst (arrived at 7:07pm)

Members of the public: 5

The meeting commenced at 7:01pm

1. To receive apologies for absence

There were none.

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held 30th May 2024

The minutes were APPROVED and duly signed by the Chair.

3. To receive the Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report

The following report was RECEIVED from Cllr Craig Bligh, Chair of the Group Parish Council:

Dear residents of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, I reviewed the last couple of years' reports and noted that I mentioned challenging times and that budgets are still in decline and it's still the case.

It's been an active and challenging year for the four-year parish council. This year we've lost the services of our longstanding parish clerk, Emma Thomas. Emma is one of the most experienced clerks and we've been fortunate to have her guiding hand over our proceedings. She's greatly assisted in the development of the individual parish councillors and her support has been greatly appreciated.

The recruitment process takes time; however, we've been very fortunate to gain the services of Andrée Mitchell. Andrée has a wealth of experience in administration and

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project management roles and offers an understanding of the legal, procedural and community aspects of local council work.

We have also lost the services of two fine councillors, Elissa Swinglehurst and Rhiannon Marks. Elissa was also the cabinet member for environment and the deputy leader of the Herefordshire Council, roles which are very time consuming. Whilst continuing with the PC was unsustainable, we're very grateful for Elissa's support of the community and the PC over the last 10 years. Rhiannon made a very positive impact in her two and a half years on the parish council and showed a commitment to fairness and a willingness to fully understand the technical essentials of the role of parish councillor. We thank both Elissa and Rhiannon for their excellent service and support.

Planning continues to be a key focus. The new Herefordshire Council Plan 2024 to 2028, previously known as the County Plan, sets out how the Council will make its contribution to the ongoing success of Herefordshire. Importantly, this creates the opportunity to reclassify Welsh Newton Common, correcting its misclassification as a housing development growth zone. We will be required to modify our NDP which will take time and community commitment, but this effort will ensure that our best interests are achieved.

An area of concern is that some planning applications are bypassing our parish council. The numbers are small, but we must be vigilant. If we are not consulted, then our community voice is not heard.

We're very conscious of the financial pressures on every resident and so for the second year in succession we have shown caution with expenditure and agree that the annual precept will remain unchanged for 2024-25.

Our parish lengthsman has continued to offer excellent service. We gained further balance of government grants this year for drainage and repair work and this work has been completed. We've committed to increase our level of direct funding to take up some of the gap created by the reduced county support to ensure that this vital work continues.

I also wish to record our gratitude to Terry Griffiths and his team who generously offered their time free of charge to carry out the improvement work on the War Memorial. We were also able to obtain a grant for the materials so this much-needed improvement was free of charge to our community.

Our third parish defibrillator has been installed and registered on the National Database, ensuring that emergency services know of their location. We now have good coverage

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across our entire parish footprint for these life-saving devices. However, a crucial element is to ensure that as many parishioners as possible are familiar with CPR, use of defibrillators and general first aid. We've held our first public training session and will continue to roll these out in 2024-25.

Our roads continue to be a frustration but as funds are channelled through Balfour Beatty and are limited, we must focus on recording, reporting and pushing to ensure that we receive our fair share of repair funds from the county.

A commitment to creating an emergency plan is vital but one significant area that we committed to improving is our communication with the community at large. Whilst we have a website, 55% of households have signed up to emails plus newsletters, etc. We need to do more, and we are undertaking a review of what and how we communicate to ensure that we are able to connect with everyone and importantly that parishioners can provide rapid feedback on matters that they strongly support or disagree. In the meantime, please continue to notify any council members of issues or areas of concern and we will always assist where we can.

And finally, I would like to thank our parish councillors who bring incredible commitment and a cross-section of skills. Their contribution of time, knowledge and experience ensures that we continue to have a highly competent team.

4. To receive the Ward Councillor's Report

The following report was RECEIVED from Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst, Ward Cllr for Llangarron Ward:

You'll be aware of the A40 landslip, that initially caused a lot of disruption, they're still figuring out how to put in contraflows at some point. But I go to briefings every Friday afternoon, when I haven't got any other meetings on, so that I'm up to speed, but one message that they're getting out of here is do not divert traffic through the local road network. It can't take it, don't do it. They do know this. It won't stop people rat-running, but it means that their diversion signs won't push people out that way.

It is no news to anyone that there's been a lot of potholes, but we are investing more money in fixing them. We must wait for the weather to improve, because it's very difficult for pothole repair when it is going to be wet. So hopefully we'll start to see some of the back stuff go down, there already has been a bit of work in this area, there's still a lot to do. But we are putting more money into it, and we should see the results of that money.

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The River Wye DEFRA Plan initial draft of that plan is not great. They didn't consult before they wrote it, so they are getting a great deal of consultation after! So happily, it's still a little bit flexible, so I'm in meetings with the New River Champion, who is local and lives in Walford, to try to frame a better use of the up to 35 million that the government's put in the pot to help the river. It was an interesting meeting yesterday with all the big producers, all the big suppliers, all in the same room, finally. We're talking about how we look at the nutrient balance of the catchments and get that right, and then today I've been in meetings with the farmers, talking about how we work with them, and what do they need. So, while the initial response to the plan was not great there are some good things in it, and we're working on it, so I think overall it's a good thing.

I've gone to the Conservative Environment Network meeting in London, which was interesting looking at urban wetlands, which is something that I'm trying to do in Hereford.

This concludes with the local plan which was up for consultation. I hope you all responded as that consultation is now finished. I'm just preparing my next report for you, because we're at the one-year anniversary, it'll be interesting to look back.

5. Open discussion of parish matters

There were no matters raised.

The meeting closed at 7:16

Signed by the Chair: _____

Dated: _____