Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group Parish Council

Ordinary Meeting of the Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group Parish Council held at Welsh Newton Village Hall, Welsh Newton, Herefordshire, HR2 8QL on Thursday 16 April 2026

Minutes

Present: Cllrs Ed Walker (Chair), Sue Parkinson and Lissy Tomlinson.

Absent: Cllr Julie Francis and Cllr Ben Wall.

In attendance: Andrée Mitchell (Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer).

Also present: Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst, Ward Councillor for Llangarron.

Members of the public: none.

The meeting opened at 7.45pm.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Francis. Cllr Ben Wall was absent; no apology had been received.

2. Declarations of interest and written applications for dispensation

Cllr Tomlinson declared a standing Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any items relating to the Clerk's salary and expenses. There were no other declarations.

3. Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Group Parish Council, 12 March 2026

The minutes of the 12 March 2026 meeting were not yet ready for approval and signature. It was agreed that they would be deferred to the May 2026 meeting.

4. Public Question Time

4.1 Representations from members of the public

There were no members of the public present.

4.2 Ward Councillor's report

Cllr Swinglehurst gave a verbal report.

The Ward Member reported that progress on the Hereford bypass is positive and strategically significant for the county's planning position: Herefordshire Council must demonstrate a Local Plan capable of accommodating a mandatory (non-discretionary) government target of approximately 30,000 new dwellings, and without the bypass unlocking the most sustainable location for large-scale development, this cannot be achieved — leaving rural areas, including this parish, more exposed to speculative development. Welsh Newton Common retains RA2 status in the absence of a valid Local Plan but is increasingly vulnerable, with a requirement for 11 additional dwellings allocated specifically to the Common. The Ward Member explained that, given the mandatory housing target, large, planned increments of housing around urban centres and market towns — rather than piecemeal development, which yields no infrastructure gain — represented the only viable strategy for meeting it, and noted that previously refused

DRAFT

applications are being resubmitted locally and that a new settlement remains under discussion, though limited by the Government's preference for rail-accessible locations.

A number of planning enforcement concerns were also raised, spanning both parishes — including matters on and near Welsh Newton Common, and the access track near Lower Cwm Farm, Llanrothal Parish. It was agreed that the Clerk would follow up on the status of these matters with Herefordshire Council.

5. Casual vacancies and councillor training

Llanrothal casual vacancies

The Clerk reported that the two Llanrothal casual vacancies had been advertised on all three noticeboards across the group parish (the two on Welsh Newton Common and the Nunnery noticeboard, Llanrothal), and on fingerposts at several locations, including Tregate Bridge, in Llanrothal, and on Manson Lane. No election had been called.

The Clerk confirmed she would advertise both Llanrothal casual vacancies formally for co-option, with a view to co-option to both vacancies taking place at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council on 14 May 2026.

Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) training schedule April–June 2026

The Clerk drew the council's attention to the HALC training schedule. The council's HALC subscription includes two places at any of HALC's evening councillor training sessions; for the 'In the Hot Seat' Chair Training session on 29 April 2026 (7.00pm–9.00pm at HALC offices, £60 per person), the Chair confirmed he would attend. Cllr Parkinson has requested further information from the Open Spaces Society on its two-day training course on protecting common land and village greens (October 2026) and will report back. It was noted that in-house training for the council as a whole, including new councillors, would be arranged once co-options are complete.

6. Planning

6.1 Planning applications for determination

No planning applications had been received for comment.

6.2 Update on recent planning applications

The Clerk reported that no substantive update had been received in relation to outstanding planning applications.

Planning enforcement matters were also raised during this item (see item 4.2 above).

6.3 Access across Welsh Newton Common (CL54)

The Clerk gave a verbal update re access across Welsh Newton Common (CL54) including: a historical document from a member of the public regarding the Residents' Association and the access dispute, now scanned for circulation; research into the s38 Commons Act 2006 position, including contact with the Planning Inspectorate; an inconsistency in Herefordshire Council's own advice on s38 consent, whereby the Commons Registration Officer reversed, without giving reasons, earlier advice from the Commons Officer that s38 consent was

DRAFT

required; and a briefing document would be prepared for the Open Spaces Society, whose view will be sought before any decision on legal advice.

6.4 Planning Committee Reform consultation

Cllr Parkinson outlined the substance of the consultation: the proposal would raise the threshold for planning applications to be referred to committee for determination, with a larger proportion of decisions being made by planning officers under delegated powers. Concern was expressed that this would erode democratic accountability, since elected councillors are the mechanism by which residents can have their views represented in the planning process.

Cllr Parkinson volunteered to draft a response to the consultation and forward to the Clerk, who would submit it on the council's behalf given the imminent closing date of 23 April 2026.

6.5 Neighbourhood Development Plan review

It was noted that the Clerk and Cllr Parkinson, joined by the Chair for part of the meeting, had met with Herefordshire Council's Strategic Planning Officer regarding the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) review. Clarity on the direction of the new National Planning Policy Framework is expected around July 2026, and further progress on the NDP review is best deferred until that point. A possible joint approach with neighbouring parishes (Llangarron and Garway were mentioned), to share the cost of the Habitats Regulations Assessment, was discussed but was not considered worthwhile pursuing further at this stage.

7. Welsh Newton Common

7.1 National Grid electricity pole replacement

The Clerk gave an update: contact between Networkplus (Will Shaw, acting for National Grid) and the relevant Herefordshire Council officer appeared to be progressing, with an indication from Mr Shaw that National Grid was aware the land is common land and would need to address a s38 issue as part of the works, though the Clerk had not fully confirmed the exact process. The Clerk will document the process once complete, for the council's records and possibly for publication.

It was NOTED that the matter is in hand and no further action is required from the council at this stage.

7.2 BT Openreach works on U71222

The Clerk reported that on 18 March 2026, BT Openreach closed the main access road to Welsh Newton Common (U71222, at Gwenherrion) without prior notice or a permit; Herefordshire Council's helpdesk confirmed no permit had been issued. Openreach subsequently submitted a retrospective 'emergency' permit application, but the Clerk holds photographic evidence of the closure and has passed this to Herefordshire Council Streetworks. A formal complaint has not yet been submitted. A further short-notice closure (Reeves Park Cottage/Llancloudy to Buckholt) occurred on 16 April 2026, the day of this meeting itself, raising concern about a possible pattern of non-compliant closures in the

DRAFT

area. It was AGREED that the Clerk raise a formal complaint with Herefordshire Council Streetworks.

7.3 Traffic management on the Common access road

The Clerk introduced this item, raised partly in response to resident concerns about vehicle speed at the time of the March road closure. Discussion covered: a statutory 20mph limit was considered unlikely to be achievable on this road, given the low number of houses along it; the council holds two 'Slow Down' advisory signs, though suitable locations are limited by verge ownership. It was noted that the council had previously considered 'white gates' schemes for Welsh Newton, which have had some success elsewhere in Herefordshire and do not require a statutory speed limit. No formal decision was taken; it was suggested that the wider question of traffic management on the Common and the A466 be brought to a future meeting.

8. Footpaths, Lengthsman, Local Drainage Fund and Highways

8.1 Lengthsman procurement pack 2026/27

The Clerk introduced the amended procurement pack, noting that the original procurement had to be re-run within a revised timetable. Four expressions of interest had been received to date.

Key features of the revised pack and timetable were presented:

- The contract is for one year plus one year (one-year initial term with option to extend by one year, subject to satisfactory performance). The Clerk noted that the council has historically done the minimum in terms of routine maintenance, with grant funding used to address major projects; the new contract seeks to rebalance this by ensuring routine maintenance is adequate to prevent the need for major remediation.
- Updated grant application requirements from Herefordshire Council (for 2026/27) were noted: these now require (where applicable) three quotes (preferred but not essential), a description of works including pipe/ditch sizes and lengths, locations with co-ordinates, and maps, plans or sketches (hand drawings or screenshots are acceptable).
- Procurement timetable: re-advertisement from 20 April 2026; closing date for applications – Tuesday 5 May 2026 at 5.00pm; award recommendation to council – Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, Thursday 14 May 2026; Herefordshire Council (HC) Lengthsman Agreement to be signed and forwarded to Herefordshire Council by Sunday 17 May 2026.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that the council approves the revised Information Pack and Application Form; authorises the Clerk to issue the pack to all parties who have expressed interest and to re-advertise from 20 April 2026; confirms the closing date as Tuesday 5 May 2026 at 5.00pm; and brings the contract award decision to the meeting of 14 May 2026.

DRAFT

8.2 Public Rights of Way (PRoW) update

Kissing gates

The Clerk reported that nine kissing gates (eight of which are of the metal arch/clip type) are believed to be held at Terry Griffiths' contractor's premises, though this had not been confirmed. Options were discussed for storage and collection of the gates. The Clerk will also investigate the whereabouts of rocks previously noted as stored at the contractor's premises, which may be council property.

PRoW grant applications for kissing gate installation will be re-submitted by the Clerk on a rolling basis. The deadline for the current grant round is 30 September 2026. It was agreed that councillors and residents with geolocated photographs of broken stiles or footpath issues should send them to the Clerk for collation and reporting.

Joint path walk with HC PRoW officer

For information, the Clerk noted that Herefordshire Council's PRoW officer for the area is Cerri Belli, with whom a joint path walk will be arranged in due course.

8.3 Highway issues

It was NOTED that repair works have been carried out on the Broad Oak road but that the worst section (described as 'wrecking tyres') has not yet been addressed.

Nature reserve verges

Cllr Parkinson raised a concern regarding the two designated nature reserve verges in the parish: (1) from Tregate Bridge to approximately two-thirds of the way up the hill, left-hand side; and (2) approximately 100 metres on Pembridge Castle Pitch. Both are designated as wildlife-friendly verges. Cllr Parkinson reported that the council's wildlife verge signs at the Pembridge Castle Pitch location had been removed and the verge cut contrary to its designation. It was noted that the verge is highway land.

Cllr Parkinson asked that both designated nature reserve verges continue to be flagged with the locality steward to ensure they are excluded from the HC mowing schedule. Whether to write to the adjacent landowner was raised; no decision was reached.

8.4 Grant claims 2025/26

The Clerk reported that all grant claims for 2025/26 were submitted by the 10 April 2026 deadline. The submission process encountered one complication: of the three photographs provided by the contractor, two were incorrectly assigned to the wrong works items. The Clerk visited the relevant site and took replacement photographs, for submission to Herefordshire Council.

It was NOTED that:

- £7,200 from the drainage minor projects has already been received into the council's current account.
- It was noted that not all of the lengthsman match funding grant was claimable this year, as the match funding requirement could not be fully demonstrated from available records. The Clerk noted this as an ongoing difficulty under the previous

DRAFT

working arrangement with the incumbent contractor and an area where the new procurement and contract documentation should deliver significant improvement.

- The remaining grant claims (ditching and lengthsman) will be received in due course once processed.

8.5 Grant applications 2026/27

Drainage grants 2026/27

The Clerk noted that the 17 May 2026 deadline for drainage grant applications is very tight given the ongoing lengthsman procurement (with the contract not expected to be awarded until 14 May 2026). It was noted that for 2026/27, up to £4,000 per council is available for maintenance of existing drainage assets and up to £4,000 for creation of new drainage assets. Jetting is specifically excluded from grant-eligible works. Discussion of known drainage issues:

- Tremahaid remains an ongoing drainage issue and should be included in any application.
- Puddles on the A466: the A466 is a classified road; HC Highways are responsible for any remedial works. The Clerk noted that jetting of drains on the A466 would not be eligible for the Lengthsman drainage grant and will write to HC Highways to request jetting of drainage features on the A466. The Clerk will also raise drainage on the Welsh Newton Common access road with the locality steward.
- Councillors are asked to identify any known drainage issues in the parish – particularly locations where the recent programme of works has not yet reached – and send details to the Clerk ahead of the grant application deadline.

PRoW grants 2026/27

PRoW grant applications (kissing gate installation and footpath structure repairs) will be submitted by the Clerk on a rolling basis up to the deadline of 30 September 2026. Grant applications submitted previously which were unsuccessful, and any new issues identified, will be included.

9. Annual Parish Meetings and Community Engagement

9.1 Annual Parish Meetings 2026

The Clerk presented a paper setting out options for the format and timing of the Annual Parish Meetings (APMs), noting that the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council (AMPC) is already set for Thursday 14 May 2026 and that the APMs must be held before the end of May.

Discussion noted:

- Option A (combined evening with the AMPC) was used last year. While the benefit is a single evening and venue, the AMPC agenda for May 2026 is substantively longer than usual (Chair and Vice Chair elections, co-option of up to two new Llanrothal councillors, lengthsman contract award), and combining the two meetings would result in an unacceptably long evening with insufficient time for meaningful APM engagement.

DRAFT

- Option B (separate APM evening) allows both meetings to be given appropriate time and ensures a more welcoming public forum. The Clerk strongly recommended this option. It was noted that the bar at Welsh Newton Village Hall cannot be open during a formal council meeting, whereas a separate APM evening – which is a public meeting rather than a formal council meeting – may allow more flexibility.
- Format: last year's format (the Welsh Newton and Llanrothal APMs run in parallel, sharing a Chair's report and presentations) was considered positive. The Chair presented his report, and representatives of the village hall and the church were invited to make short presentations about their activities and future hopes. One member of the public attended, along with a representative of Buckholt Bryngaer community interest company (CIC). This format will be repeated and built upon.

It was AGREED that:

- The Annual Parish Meetings for Welsh Newton and Llanrothal will be run in parallel, each formally opened and closed separately with separate minutes kept for each parish's electors, on a separate evening from the AMPC.
- The APMs are provisionally set for Thursday 21 May 2026 at 7.30pm at Welsh Newton Village Hall, subject to venue confirmation. The Clerk will check availability and confirm.

As in previous years, the Chair will give a report to the APMs on the council's activities during the year.

9.2 Community engagement

Cllr Tomlinson proposed a one-year trial of a quarterly community newsletter, produced jointly by the parish council and community organisations (village hall, church), with contributions from others as appropriate. Key features of the proposal:

- Quarterly publication (four issues over the trial year); straightforward and low-cost production; electronic distribution via WhatsApp groups and email, supplemented by paper delivery to all households initially (with an option for residents to opt out of paper copies going forward); copies also to be placed at the village hall, church and on noticeboards.
- Contributors (parish council, village hall, church and potentially others) to be given a word count and a submission date for each issue. The newsletter will not carry advertising or contentious material.
- The newsletter would include an invitation to sign up for email notifications from the council and could promote the APM and other parish events.
- If time permits, the first issue would be timed to promote the APM on 21 May 2026 where possible. Cllr Tomlinson offered to coordinate the newsletter and approach the village hall and church about participation.

It was AGREED to approve a one-year trial of a quarterly community newsletter on the basis described.

DRAFT

Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group Parish Council

10. Finance

10.1 Finance report

Bank balances as at 16 April 2026:

Current account	£17,061.80
Reserve account	£7,098.90

Total £24,160.70

It was NOTED that:

- The bank reconciliation circulated in March 2026 contained a typographical error resulting in the total appearing £10,000 lower than the actual position. This was caused by the £10,000 transfer from the reserve account to the current account not being correctly reflected in the report. The underlying account balances were not affected. The Clerk confirmed the error and reported it for transparency.
- The quarterly budget monitoring for 2025/26 and the year-end position will be presented at the May 2026 meeting. The year-end income and expenditure will include £7,200 already received from drainage minor projects.
- The first tranche of the 2026/27 precept from Herefordshire Council is expected imminently. Following receipt, the Clerk will seek council approval to transfer surplus funds from the current account to the reserve account to maximise interest income. This will be discussed at the Annual Meeting on 14 May 2026.

10.2 Payments to be made

10.2.1 Terry Griffiths Contracts – Routine Maintenance, Welsh Newton Parish, March 2026, Invoice TGC3773 – £587.16 (incl. £97.86 VAT)

10.2.2 Terry Griffiths Contracts – Local Drainage Grant, Welsh Newton Parish, WNLPC 25/26 008, The Quab Area: clear silt and debris from ditch and drainage features, Invoice TGC3776 – £960.00 (incl. £160.00 VAT)

10.2.3 Terry Griffiths Contracts – Local Drainage Grant, Welsh Newton Parish, WNLPC 25/26 007, Newton Lodge Pitch Area: clear grips, reform leads and harden grip bases, Invoice TGC3777 – £2,160.00 (incl. £360.00 VAT)

10.2.4 Autela Payroll Services Limited – payroll processing December 2025 to March 2026 and HMRC end-of-year submission, Invoice 16974 – £102.00 (incl. £17.00 VAT)

10.2.5 Open Spaces Society – annual membership renewal 2026/27, membership no. 78989 – £45.00

Items 10.2.1 to 10.2.5 were APPROVED unanimously. The Clerk noted that the change of bank account details for the Open Spaces Society had been verified with the payee prior to payment.

10.2.6 Clerk's salary according to agreed contract for March 2026

10.2.7 HMRC – PAYE for Clerk's salary for March 2026

Signed by the Chair _____ Dated _____

DRAFT

10.2.8 Clerk's mileage and expenses

Items 10.2.6 and 10.2.7 were not determined: with Cllr Tomlinson withdrawn under her declared interest, the two remaining Members were below the quorum of three. The payments will be made as regular contractual payments under Financial Regulations 5.5(2) and 5.6 and noted at the next meeting. Item 10.2.8 (Clerk's mileage and expenses) had not yet been submitted.

10.3 Payments made between meetings

10.3.1 Lloyds Bank – service charges for March 2026 – £4.25 (0% VAT)

Payment noted.

10.4 Monies received

10.4.1 Lloyds Bank – interest on reserve account – March 2026 – £6.55

10.4.2 Lloyds Bank – interest on reserve account – April 2026 – £4.93

Monies received were noted.

11. Correspondence between meetings

The Clerk reported that a summary of correspondence received between meetings had been circulated to councillors. Councillors noted no items of substantive concern beyond those already discussed under the relevant agenda items. A Parish Summit report had been received and circulated; discussion noted that there was little of direct relevance to this parish beyond general observations regarding reduced HC funding available to parish and town councils.

The Clerk noted that an email regarding HC's 2026/27 highway verge mowing policy had been received; the Clerk will check the details and ensure that the two designated nature reserve verges in the parish are flagged with the locality steward should that be needed (see also item 8.3).

12. Items for the next meeting — no discussion

The Clerk noted for information that the order of business at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council requires the election of Chair and Vice Chair to take place before co-option of new councillors.

13. Date of next scheduled meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted: Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, Thursday 14 May 2026 at Welsh Newton Village Hall. The Annual Parish Meetings for Welsh Newton and Llanrothal parishes are provisionally scheduled for Thursday 21 May 2026 at 7.30pm (subject to venue confirmation).

The meeting closed at 9.35pm.

Signed by the Chair _____ Dated _____

DRAFT