

English Bicknor Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting they held on 2nd April 2024 at English Bicknor Village Hall.

Those present were as follows:

Councillor Mr D. Gunter (Chair)
 Councillor Mr K. Braithwaite (Deputy Chair)
 Councillor Mrs P. Drinkall
 Councillor Mr P. Gwilliam
 Councillor Mrs A. Bowen
 Councillor Mr H. Cole
 Councillor Mr P. Warden (entered at 7:06 pm)
 County Councillor Mr T. Hale.

312. Apologies and welcome.

No apologies were received from, District Councillors Tim Gwilliam and Jamie Elmore.

313. Public Forum.

Mrs D Gwilliam, a representative of English Bicknor Village Hall committee was present. She proposed that the Parish Council buy play equipment with Village Hall money. The Parish would claim VAT back. This property would remain with the Parish Council, but its use would be licensed to the Hall.

The Chairman responded that his research into this had shown this to be a potentially hazardous issue. Cllr Drinkall stated that a previous proposal, very similar to this, had been considered and declined a few years ago, on the basis of potential VAT fraud. The Clerk cited his research and correspondence with GAPTC, and they, too, confirmed that the scheme would be illegal for tax evasion. Cllr Braithwaite then suggested that if this to be discussed further, this needs to be part of a strategic plan of which there is currently none.

Councillor Warden arrived at 7:06 pm and was welcomed in. He apologised for being late.

Cllr Hale suggested that the Village Hall committee might benefit from setting up a separate 'Trust Committee' to reclaim the VAT.

It was agreed that expert opinions and a clear plan description would need to be consulted. The Clerk will codify this proposal and present it to GAPTC for review.

314. Reading and confirmation of the minutes of the last bi-monthly meeting.

Resolved.

315. Matters arising from the minutes of the last bi-monthly meeting.

Cllr Gwilliam reiterated that regarding the minute 311 on the proposed orchard at the playing fields, the parish council had given its permission.

Minor changes to the minutes included correcting D Owen to include the prefix Mrs D Owen and changing 'Hiller's land' to a one-word name: Hillersland.

Proposed: Cllr Braithwaite.

Seconded: Cllr Warden.

Resolved.

296. Meeting with Hereford-based parish councils over shared road issues.

Cllr Hale reported that meetings have yet to take place on this matter. However, now that Easter has passed, this will likely take place.

186.1 Warning sign on the footbridge at Symonds Yat Rock.

Cllr Braithwaite stated that a lorry got stuck there recently, causing significant disruption and requiring great effort to move. The Chairman cited another blocked lorry incident that happened recently.

It was stressed that a pictorial sign is needed as many drivers do not speak or read English. Moreover, the sign that is there is in the wrong place. Cllr Hale added there had been several more reported issues about the road. Police say that the lorry drivers ignore the signs.

It was suggested installing chicanes; however, the previous picture signs proved to have worked. Chicanes have been deemed impractical for the locale. The footbridge with the sign is Forestry property. However, signs leading up to and before this should be a highway matter. Cllr Drinkall confirmed that Forestry England had given their permission to install a new sign on the bridge. The previous sign had to be taken down as its wood was rotten. The Clerk will investigate as to who paid for the last sign.

The Chairman proposed that the Parish Council ask West Dean Parish for assistance, as the problem is technically within their jurisdiction. They may get highways to act, as the lorries which ignore the signs constitute a road safety issue.

Cllr Hale also suggested that the new sign on the bridge should be reflective.

951.3 Community speed watch camera.

Cllr Braithwaite gave his report. This is the first instance of the scheme being in operation. The camera can only cover one direction or side of the road at a time. Moreover, around three-quarters of the images of speeding cars failed to capture a viable image of a number plate. However, 468 offences have been caught, where drivers exceeded the trigger speed of 47 mph. Peak times for these offences were around eight am and between two to five pm, with a lull between eleven and twelve am. Many of those caught were going much faster than 48 mph, some as fast as 60mph or over, with persistent offenders becoming apparent. The vehicles being captured were of many differing types as well. These results will be sent to the police.

Cllr Braithwaite asked about the policy regarding posting warning letters to speeders. The parish council would cover the postage cost, and it is unlikely to be able to afford to message all of them. The suggestion is that only the worst speeders be contacted. This seemed the only practical option.

Cllr Drinkall asked if the report would prompt the police to set up speed watch cameras. Also, would it be more effective if the police wrote to the offenders and imposed punitive fines? The Clerk will write to the police to ask how this data will be used to improve road safety.

Cllr Braithwaite added that many of the drivers caught had no insurance, valid MOT, or road tax. Cllr Hale then proposed that Cllr Braithwaite attend the next Gloucestershire County Council road safety meeting. He said he would be happy to represent the Parish here.

Permission to send the report to the police was reiterated.

84.5 Red House Lane.

The Clerk stated that he had requested the MP, Mark Harper, to assist in updating the Sat Nav. So far, there has been no reply, but he will try again.

The Chairman forwarded that the flooding issue was the landowner's responsibility, and neither the Parish nor Highways should continue to be involved for liability reasons. It was suggested that this item be removed from future agendas.

297. Warning sign on the footbridge at Symonds Yat Rock.

This was covered in item 186.1.

207. AONB Grants for kissing gates.

Cllr Drinkall cited that the landowners she has corresponded with were still considering membership in the scheme. The issue of VAT would be entirely their business. However, the Parish Council could assist in filling in applications and advertising the scheme.

219.2 Pavement weed spraying.

Cllr Hale said that this is still in limbo. The foam method is still being tested elsewhere. He would follow up on this with the county council.

219.4 Lorries travelling to Stowfield Industrial site.

Cllr Hale reported a meeting with estate management. The Lorries cannot be stopped outside the bay. However, lorries with fuel do not park as thieves have taken fuel. The site management would not ask lorry firms to reduce nuisance.

277. Scrambler bikes.

Signs advertising the event were put up beforehand, but rain nearly caused its cancellation. Further advertising was also done at the last minute to inform residents of the potential

disruption. The noise on the Sunday was reported as being low and unintrusive, however on the Saturday this was not the case.

262. Payments.

Resolved.

The Clerk reported that he had yet to receive a reply to the request for the new payment scale for the Village Hall for the new financial year. This would need to be pursued.

Dispute remained that a booking for a very brief slot of time should not be charged at the same three hour rate. However, Cllr Gwilliam stated that there was no concession for bookings of less than an hour, and an hour represented the minimum booking slot available.

Cllr Drinkall then read from a pricing schedule that demonstrated some flexibility in the system.

299. Planning Matters.

There were no new planning matters to discuss.

287. Proposed budget for the next financial year of 2024/25.

The relevant precept application forms have been submitted, and the Clerk will report when the Council receives this payment.

288. Resolve on the course of action regarding the repair of the Flagpole.

The Chairman confirmed that insurance money had been received. Enough quotes had been gathered, meaning that the organisation of work should be able to begin. The Chair stated, as a limitation, that no significant changes can be made to the baseplate, however. Cllr Braithwaite then suggested that Forestry put up a camera if they were worried about damage. The Clerk will pass this suggestion along to this organisation.

249. Highways matters.

Cllr Hale reported that the sign into the village had been looked into and the drains cleaned.

300. Bank issues.

The Clerk stated that access to the online accounts had been achieved. However, he has yet to test the online payment methods.

313. Report of the County Council.

County Councillor Hale's report is included in the items above.

314. Report of the District Councillor.

None.

315. Planning Matters.

None

316. Financial report and accounts for payment.

Mr Jonathan Martin – Clerk's wages, office allowance and expenses - £334.94
HMRC – income tax on Clerk's wages - £83.74

Resolved.

317. Highway Matters.

None

318. Footpaths in the Parish.

None

319. Wildlife and pest matters.

None

320. Correspondence received since the last meeting.

See above.

321. Any other matters affecting the Parish Council.

The Council was reported as having two active websites. One of which might be an old, defunct site. The Clerk will contact the website manager to investigate this.

Cllr Gwilliam clarified that permission was unnecessary to prune trees on the Village Hall estate. Cllr Braithwaite also stated that the intended help for this work was too busy. It was suggest that the Village Hall committee might approach David Maxfield to do this work for them.

Cllr Gwilliam reported that the post box will be replaced despite its disappearance. Mr Martin Shipley conveyed this information to him. The Clerk will investigate how he obtained this information to pursue the Council's inquiries on the missing post box.

Cllr Drinkall also reported that the heritage footpath noticeboard at The Glebe had been repaired.

County Councillor Hale said that the Potholes at Chapel Hill, on the approach, have been circled in preparation for repair. At Junction Hill, logging operations were underway, and highways have put markers on this and can be moved. At Plum Tree Cottage, a new pump has been installed.

The Wye Valley walk celebrates 50 years in 2025. Cllr Drinkall had been asked by National Landscapes, formally the AOMB, to survey that part of the path through the Parish, which she had agreed to do subject to the Parish council's agreement. This was then given.

The Clerk confirmed from the last meeting that the new speed camera had been added to the insurance cover.

Lastly, Cllr Hale provided information on the new County diagnosis centre, which is now open. A new ambulance task force was also established and put into action.

The date of the next Bi-monthly meeting was confirmed as 4th June.

End 20.50 pm