

English Bicknor Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 3rd June 2025 at English Bicknor Village Hall.

Those present were as follows:

Cllr Kevin Braithwaite.

Cllr Peter Warden.

Cllr Harry Cole.

Cllr Pat Drinkall.

Cllr David Gunter.

Cllr Avril Bowen.

County Councillor Piers Camp.

District Councillor Jamie Elsmore

Clerk Jonathan Martin.

403. Apologies and welcome.

Cllr Tim Gwilliam gave his apologies.

404. Public Forum.

There were no members of the public present.

405. First review and discussion of the Annual Meeting of 2025.

Cllrs said that they were happy to review the current standing orders over the coming year, with an emphasis on examining and adapting template Standing Orders from GAPTC.

406. The reading and confirmation of the minutes of the previous bi-monthly meeting.

Proposed by Cllr P. Drinkall.

Seconded by Cllr H. Cole.

Resolved and signed by the Chairman as correct.

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

186.1 Warning sign on the footbridge at Symonds Yat Rock.

The Chair updated ~~the new~~ County Councillor Camp on the progress of the vehicle warning sign at Symonds Yat, explaining that the purpose of the sign was to replace a previous one, which had warned drivers of the risk of becoming stuck on a narrow road. The original sign had deteriorated beyond the point where it was safe and was removed. Highways had stipulated that any new sign they supply must be of a formal, recognised design, and therefore the Parish Council had been left to fund and organise this replacement.

The Clerk will check with Forestry England to confirm the formalities of attaching the sign to their property. The Parish Council will also write a letter of thanks to Mr Steve Jones for his assistance in installing the new sign.

This sign will likely reduce the cost to the local community and local institutions by preventing the disruption caused by the blocked lorries and other vehicles.

Cllr Gunter asked County Councillor Camp to note the problem that many local signs in the area are becoming obstructed by plant growth and that there is also the problem that foreign goods drivers are not familiar with UK road signs and rely on a misleading SatNav guide. The Forest of Dean MP had been made aware of the local SatNav inaccuracies at the recent AGM.

951.3 Community speed watch camera.

The Chair reiterated the previous success achieved by using the camera in other Parishes based on data shared by the Road Safety Liaison Group participants. However, this had all ended with the destruction of the camera.

Regarding the replacement camera, the community speedwatch team had attempted to acquire a second machine; however, there was no further news on this.

The Clerk explained that the reason the first camera could not be claimed back on the insurance was that it had been gifted to the Council for free. Thus, the Council had not incurred any loss.

District Councillor Elsmore stated that English Bicknor Parish Council is high up in the queue for a replacement camera. The delay is due to funding issues. For the Council to fund its own 'face camera', the Chair reported that the lowest price for this would be in the one-thousand-pound region. The Clerk will verify if any grant funds are available for this purpose.

Cllr Drinkall asked about the notion of reducing the speed in Hilersland to a new limit of 30mph. Both the County and District Councillors stated that this would be subject to a TRO and likely cost £ 15,000 in administration fees to achieve, if the relevant authority even agreed to it. Cllr Gunter said that this might be achievable if the Parish Council were to combine its efforts and funds with neighbouring councils. However, Cllr JE cited the problems with these cross-Council projects as there was no-one who looks across this.

84.5 Redhouse Lane.

Cllr Drinkall reported that generally, the road in question had been poorly maintained over the years. However for access to property silt was cleared from the junction of Murrels Rd to the redhouse and the ditches cleared however silt was positioned above the ditches.

Further along the lane there is a bend that has not been cleared at any stage and continues to be unattended. Cllr Drinkall suggested that English Bicknor invest in signs warning drivers

that the lane is a 'no through road' or similar warnings. County Cllr Piers Camp stated that a no through road sign is part of highways standard portfolio. Clerk to follow up.

219.2 Pavement weed spraying.

The County Councillor was asked to investigate the current Highways strategy for removing weeds, now that the Council has banned spraying.

Cllr Piers Camp suggested that Councillors make their complaints directly to Gloucestershire Highways via the 'fixmystreet' app regarding problems with weeds, ideally attaching photos to the application.

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

The Chair gave the background on this issue to the visiting Councillors. The previously reported problem of a loose baseplate had been repaired. The new flag is up, and Cllr Cole holds the second key to access the flag's mechanics. This item should be removed from future agendas as the matter is now solved.

330. Potholed Eastbach Road.

The potholes on this road were reported as being partially repaired, as some damaged areas remained. Cllr Piers Camp reiterated that Fix My Street is now the most direct means of informing Gloucestershire Highways of continued problems. There were also concerns that the type of tarmac used may not set securely enough to repair the problem.

360. A. Sinkhole. Redhouse Lane.

There are no further updates on this matter. The Clerk will request new information from the various local authorities, particularly Gloucestershire Highways.

360. B. Lime Kilns.

This item will be removed from the next Agenda.

383. Water Leak. Hillersland/Symonds Yat Rock Road.

The unclear drains are continuing to cause overflow. Fix My Street remains the best option for reporting complaints on this matter.

387. Regarding the complaint of excessive traffic at the school, to the PCSO.

The Clerk reported that there has been no progress or communication from the PCSO on this matter. The Clerk will continue to pursue this as an effort to discourage parents from congesting the school.

388. Pavement Castle House.

Remains outstanding.

389. Hedgerow and pavement weeds opposite Cowmeadow Farm.

Cllr Gunter had reported that he had cut back most of the relevant hedges, said that he has done as much as he is happy with, and was thanked for this. Any remaining areas should be reported to Gloucestershire Highways via the Fix My Street app.

390. Regarding the proposal for a community garden on the Village Hall playing field.

The Clerk confirmed that the confirmatory letter had been sent to the Village Hall committee without any problems. This item will be removed from further Agendas.

391. Damaged electricity pole in English Bicknor.

There was no information available relating to this.

408. Report from the County Councillor.

The Chair requested an update on the Forest of Dean District Council's overall performance.

409. Report from the District Councillor.

District Councillor Elsmore reported that the program of devolution was the primary focus of the organisation. There were growing concerns that the abolition of the District Council would deny local people a voice, as well as jeopardise funding issues for local projects. This process takes 2-3 years at best. This process is open to public comment.

It was also said that the West Dean Parish Council might be divided into two councils, with Berry Hill possibly becoming the new Parish Council.
Cllr JE was thanked and left the meeting at 8:20.

397. Footpaths in the Parish.

Cllr Gunter explained that homeowners may have an obligation to care for the trees adjacent to their land. Mr Simon Andrews had been consulted about this. Cllr Jeff Wheeler, as footpath manager, will be aware of this and the Parish Council await the outcome of any report issued by them.

400. Correspondence received since last meeting.

The Clerk reported that despite his attempts at communication, he had not received any positive confirmation that residents may reseed the area with grass.
Councillor Camp reiterated that Fix My Street was the best option for reporting road and weed issues.

The establishment of the new Gloucestershire unitary government continued to take centre stage. The deadline for submitting the proposal to the central government is 12th November. The varying options remain either dividing the County up into east or west blocks, or expanding Gloucester's remit. There remains no clear information on how Parish Councils in the Forest of Dean would be affected by this.

410. Discussion and resolution on the overall community policy of the Parish Council for 2025-26.

The Chairman described his idea for reorganising the Parish Council's finances. He suggested separating the budget into two main headings. These were statutory expenditure and discretionary expenditure. The three categories of this discretionary funding include investments in the safety of the Parish, maintenance work within the Parish, and projects within the Parish.

The Chair cited that the quote from Elan City for a new Camera at £2,300 plus VAT. This includes a solar panel power pack. Postage is an additional £90.00. The decision to purchase this camera was proposed and agreed.

Proposed. Cllr P. Drinkall.

Seconded. Cllr P. Warden.

Resolved. To purchase the new speed camera.

Regarding the grass cutting grants to the Village Hall, the current budgetary allocation is £450 as a grant for mowing on the playing field. The question as to why the costs of the mowing experienced by the Village Hall had gone up by so much was yet to be answered. It was confirmed that the Parish Council has no plans to reduce the current grant amount for this year and that Councillors would undertake an investigation into grass cutting costs themselves in order to benchmark the Village Hall costs. This issue of budget allocation and Parish expenditure would be added as a new item in the August meeting.

411. Planning Matters.

- **P0456/25/LBC The Coach House, Bicknor Court, English Bicknor, Coleford. Listed building consent for the erection of single-storey side/rear extension with associated works. Demolition of conservatory.**

The application in question was clarified as being necessary due to the listed nature of the property. Although permission had already been granted, the Parish Council voted to support this application. It was noted that the FODDC council had not resolved on a previous planning application. However, the Parish continues its support for application P0636.

412. Financial report and accounts for payment:

Resolved.

- Mr Philip Gwilliam – Flagpole resin - £24.21
- Symonds Yat Bridge Road Sign Replacement (a) SAMURAI SIGNS

£45.00 and (b) B&Q £41.97, both paid in advance by Cllr Braithwaite, total £86.97.

- Community Heartbeat – yearly subscription renewal - £162.00
- Community First insurance renewal cost - £301.41/£290.42 (dependent on policy type)
- Mr Jonathan Martin – clerk's wages, office allowance and expenses - £334.94
- HMRC – income tax on clerk's wages - £83.74

The Clerk would investigate other quotes for possible alternatives to the current insurance provider. GAPTC would be approached for their recommendations on this.

A cheque was made to the WI, as no invoice would be received from the WI. This payment would be authorised on the next Agenda.

413. Highways matters.

This is covered in the items above.

414. Footpaths in the Parish.

This is covered in the items above.

415. Wildlife and pest matters.

Cllr Gunter reported that Forestry bought Hawthorns Farm for tree planting but no thought has been given to the increase in wild life and the threat of disease spread from them. This issue is being tracked by the National Farmers Union.

Wild boars are still reported to be present in the region. Concerns remained over the threat of disease including African Swine Flu, to which the wild pigs are susceptible. Culling the animals remains difficult, especially as some regions of the Forest are protected.

416. Correspondence received since last meeting.

The Clerk reported on a recently received email from WI, complaining to the Village Hall about a refusal to open a dividing wall during the annual meetings. This is related to another previously received email from a Village Hall Committee member regarding the substance of these complaints. However, the Village Hall informed the Parish Council Chair that the email from this person did not represent the views of the Village Hall Committee. It was confirmed and agreed that the standing meetings of the Parish Council would be moved back to the first Monday of every other month to ensure access to the main hall. The Clerk would arrange this.

The Clerk handed out paper copies of the Standing Orders for Councillors who required them. The review of the Standing Orders would be a task for the Parish Council over the coming year. The use of a GAPTC template, Standing Orders may be used.

417. Any other matters affecting the Parish Council.

Cllr Gunter reported a leaning telephone pole by Lower Tump Farm.

Growth around a pole near Lucy Court is obscuring the view and requires attention.

Cllr Drinkall reported that the triangle of grass at Godwins Lane is no longer being cared for the person who used to as they are no longer able to. A letter to Mr Owen should be sent to thank him for his years of care for this. Mr Grubb has offered to cut it going forwards using the church mower with kind permission of the warden.

Following a complaint by a parishioner during the Parish Assembly of the 60mph speed limit along the lane from Joyford the council should send a letter to Nathan Choat to show this is where the cost of a TRO does not work as it does not allow local Parish Councils to address local speed limit issues.

Cllr Cole informed that the rocks along side the road at the Symonds Yat are a hazard and he would look into the possibility to nudge them back slightly.

The details of the previous Member of Parliament, Mark Harper, would be removed from the notice board.

418. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting is set for Monday, 4th August.