

English Bicknor Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 1st April 2025 at English Bicknor Village Hall.

Those present were as follows:

Councillor Mrs P. Drinkall (Chair)
 Councillor Mr K. Braithwaite (Deputy Chair)
 Councillor Mr P. Gwilliam
 Councillor Mr D. Gunter
 Councillor Mrs A. Bowen
 Councillor Mr H. Cole
 Parish Clerk Jonathan Martin

389. Apologies and welcome.

The welcome was given. Apologies were received from County Councillor Terry Hale, who was regrettably unwell.

390. Public Forum.

No members of the public were present.

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

Proposed by Cllr Braithwaite.

Seconded by Cllr Mrs Bowen.

Resolved and signed by the Chairman as correct.

Cllr Gunter raised a question about the potential conflict of interest for Cllr Gwilliam, cited in the previous minutes, regarding the proposed community garden on the Village Hall playing fields. The Chair explained that as Cllr Gwilliam is both a member of the Parish Council and head of the Village Hall committee, some matters that overlap will require him to leave the Council meetings during discussions and resolution votes. It was further explained that this is standard practice and is implemented to protect all Councillors from accusations of bias, cronyism, intimidation and lapses in confidentiality.

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

Discussion on a proposed Community Garden on the Village Hall playing fields.

This item in the public forum of the previous meeting was deferred to later in the meeting.

186.1 Warning sign on the footbridge at Symonds Yat Rock.

Cllr Braithwaite brought the newly made sign to the meeting and presented it to the Council for inspection. The Council held that its scale, clear iconography, and bright and reflective material were ideal for making it visible and instructional for goods lorries, coaches and caravans to avoid the Symonds Yat Rock pitch.

However, Cllr Braithwaite was concerned about the sign's flexible material, believing it needed a wooden backing to reinforce it. This would be done by himself, and suspending the sign by chains would also be necessary. There was also a secondary concern that the sign might be loose when installed and move around in the wind. Cllr Braithwaite suggested that the sign be installed and put under observation for this. Being taken down and modified if needed. This reinforcement would cost approximately £50, which was still well below the original estimates of several hundred pounds. Cllr Gunter added that the chains would need to be tamper-proof to discourage mischief and vandalism. Cllr Braithwaite said that he would accommodate this.

Cllr Mrs Drinkall reiterated that permission from Forestry England would need to be reconfirmed as the bridge from which the sign would be suspended was their property. The Clerk will email Darren Edwards to keep them informed. The Council may have to sign insurance and safety agreements with this organisation as before with the previous sign.

Cllr Braithwaite said he would need assistance installing the sign and stressed that once it was up, residents would need to watch it as part of routine vigilance. The inexpensive cost of the sign was again regarded as a major success, saving the Council hundreds of pounds in anticipated costs.

951.3 Community speed watch camera.

It was reported that the new pole had been installed at the site. The new device may be donated to the Parish Council for free. However, if this is free, the insurance cover is equal to zero. This means that the Council's insurance will not cover the costs if it is damaged or lost again.

Cllr Cole raised the subject of a possible stone barrier, designed to protect the pole from accidental or deliberate ramming. It was agreed that Cllr Cole and Cllr Braithwaite would work together to place a stone down here.

84.5 Red House Lane.

Andrew Middlecoat has reportedly put the clearing of the mud buildup on the worklist. The Clerk had forwarded him pictures of the depth of the mud provided to the Council by a resident. So far, there has been no reply to this.

Cllr Mrs Drinkall suggested that the lane may need a sign to warn people not to follow the SatNav as they will get stuck.

219.2 Pavement weed spraying.

There was nothing new to report.

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

The previous reports of loose bolts have been investigated and repaired by Cllr Gwilliam and Cllr Cole. This, however, was merely a tightening up of the bolts and the addition of resin, and did not constitute poor installation by the workman. The loosening may have been the result of wind stress on the pole.

A local resident, Mr James Britton, will keep an eye on the condition of the Pole.

Forestry England has also installed a new flag free of charge. Mr Britton has the two keys for the flagpole, and he will be asked to provide the Clerk with the spare key.

The Clerk relayed a request from Forestry England's local manager, Mr Edwards, to remove the defunct pole. Cllrs confirmed that this is planned to be achieved in the near future, with the old pole to be either scrapped or recycled.

330. Potholes Eastbach Road.

The potholes on the road have been reported as being partially repaired. However, damage further down at the bottom of Church hill remains unrepaired. The issue may be that these holes are not large enough to qualify for repair yet. Rubble at the site must also be asked to be removed by Highways.

360. A Sinkhole. Redhouse Land.

Cllr Gwilliam reported that recent cave exploration had been undertaken down the sinkhole. There was a suggestion that filling the hole with boulders would be a better repair option than filling it with concrete. FODDC and the local caving club is said to be in liaison with Gloucestershire Highways to discuss these options.

360. B Lime Kilns.

Cllr Mrs Bowen agreed to arrange for the area to be sprayed to deter weeds.

371. Wildlife and pest matters.

There was nothing to report.

380. Report of the County Councillor.

Regarding the Motorcross planning application.

Cllr Gwilliam reports that the application is on hold for 56 days at the time of this meeting. If the application were to proceed, a road entrance would need to be installed to join it to the adjacent main road.

381. Report of the District Councillor.

Regarding the prospect of a housing need survey.

It was agreed that such a report would be a large undertaking by the Parish Council. Instead, the existing District Plan of the FODDC would be found and circulated to examine if any alterations were needed.

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

It was reported that the water leak from the field between Reddinhorn cottage and Rosebay Willow has stopped. However, the adjacent drains remained blocked, and the Clerk would need to report this to Gloucestershire Highways.

386. Correspondence received since last meeting.

Regarding the change of meeting rooms for the Parish Council for its public meetings.

The Clerk provided the recent email from the Village Hall management about the costs of using the bar area as a meeting venue, which would remain at £20 for the meeting, or £7 per hour. It was argued that the rates should be lowered to reflect the smaller size of the room, its general informality and the likelihood of having to contend with the noise from the main hall.

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

The Clerk made this request after the last meeting but did not receive a reply. There was also no indication that the email had been acted on. The Clerk will chase this up.

388. Pavement Castle House.

The pavement at Castle House, near the entrance to the school remained unattended, and the Clerk will report this again to Gloucestershire Highways.

389. Hedgerow and pavement weeds opposite Cowmeadow farm.

The Hedgerow and pavement weeds opposite Cowmeadow farm would soon be too overgrown for people to safely walk by them without being forced along the road. Parents walking to and back from the school with their children passed this complaint to the Parish Council. The landowner is willing to cut the hedge, however, the law protects hedges, and their cutting times are regulated. The Clerk will approach DEFRA for permission to cut the hedges under the road safety exception.

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

Continuing from the public forum of the previous meeting, the area for the garden has been allocated, the grass has been cut and the site is ready for planting. Cllr Gwilliam confirmed that no planning permission is needed to change the use of that part of the field.

However, it does remain up to the Parish Council, as the lease grantor, to give formal permission for this. It was also stressed that all of the organisation of this must remain with the gardeners and the Village Hall. It was also confirmed by Cllr Gwilliam that the Village Hall's insurance would cover the garden. Lastly, if the project were to end for whatever reason, the playing field would have to be returned to its original condition.

It was agreed that the Parish Council would give the Village Hall Committee its written permission to confirm this. The Clerk would draft a letter and check this with the Chair before sending it to them.

391. Damaged electricity pole in English Bicknor.

The Clerk took photos of the pole and the loose ground wires and sent them to the relevant body. The repair is now being looked into.

392. Report of the County Councillor.

None present.

393. Report of the District Councillor.

None present

394. Planning Matters.

- **P0187/25/FUL The Grange, Braceland, Christchurch, Coleford. Erection of a first floor extension above existing annexe to create a hobby room.**

The Parish Council reviewed the plans and the application details and had no objections or observations to make.

395. Financial report and accounts for payment:

- **GAPTC subscription renewal - £123.09**
- **Mr Jonathan Martin – Clerk's wages, office allowance and expenses - £334.94**
- **HMRC – income tax on Clerk's wages - £83.74**

Total: £541.77

Proposed by Cllr Warden.

Seconded by Cllr Cole.

Resolved.

The Clerk reports on the Parish Council's finances with nothing out of the ordinary to mention, however, the Council is now being charged a monthly rate of a few pounds by Lloyds bank as a service charge for March this was £5.67.

The question was raised whether an alternative, free current account could be found. From his previous experience, the Clerk said that none of the local High Street banks offer free accounts or even accounts to Parish Councils. Although, the Clerk will ask GAPTC for recommendations on this matter.

The Clerk will transfer the £500.00 from the current account to the savings account as prescribed by the budget to regenerate the Council's reserves.

The Clerk has confirmed the services of the internal auditor for the review of the accounts.

Cllr Braithwaite asked that the potential purchase of a new Speed Camera be included in the following Agenda for discussion.

396. Highway Matters.

No new matters to report.

397. Footpaths in the Parish.

Cllr Gunter asked the Council to make a complaint about the condition of REB18, specifically its overgrowth. The Clerk would see to this.

Cllr Mrs Drinkall reported that a resident has trimmed one obstructing tree, though part of the trunk remains. Discussion was held about the maintenance of the trees in this lane and whose responsibility this is. The Clerk was asked to contact the PROW initially to try and ascertain this. If it is the Parish Council's responsibility, it may be necessary to engage a tree surgeon.

399. Wildlife and pest matters.

There are no new updates or information to report. Although it was believed that the feral Pigs were now being discreetly culled.

400. Correspondence received since last meeting.

There was no other correspondence other than what had been mentioned above.

401. Any other matters affecting the Parish Council.

Cllr Braithwaite stated that Gigaclear had previously used an area of land opposite the Rock Hotel in Hillersland as a parking area. This had resulted in land being cleared, but subsequently becoming overgrown with brambles. Residents have since cleared the area, however, they would like to plant the area with grass seeds. Moreover, they would like the Parish Council to purchase the seed at approximately £30.00. The Clerk will check that this is agreeable with Gloucestershire Highways and add this item to the next Agenda. If permission is granted, the Council has no objection to funding this.

Cllr Gwilliam announced his intention to resign as a Parish Councillor at the Parish Assembly. The Clerk had been handed his formal resignation letter at the start of the meeting, but Cllr Gwilliam gave a brief summary of his reasons for this. He believes that his efforts in serving the community are better spent as a representative of the Village Hall committee than the Parish Council. The Chairman thanked Cllr Gwilliam for his two years of service on the Parish Council.

The Parish Council will need to co-op a new Councillor to fill the role in due course.

Cllr Mrs Drinkall told the meeting she had arranged for the Robin bus service to stop at Smithy Close. This is potentially a helpful new service to residents as it offers bookable trips to key facilities, such as the community hospital, for as little as £3.00 a ticket. She has also asked if possible for Hillersland and Symonds Yat Rock to be included and is awaiting a response on this. The Clerk will have the links to this service added to the website.

402. Date of next meeting

The next meeting was agreed upon to be on 6th May 2025, as both the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual Parish Assembly. The next bi-monthly meeting will be the 3rd of June.

Meeting ended at 8:33 pm.