

LITTLE WOLFORD PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the General Meeting of 18 October 2016 held in The Wolfords Village Hall

Present: David Farman, Chair (DF); Beryl Braithwaite (BB); Chris Cond (CC); Gill Cotter (GC); Simon Lewis (SL); Jane Revere (JR); Michael Revere (MR); Diz Shirley (DS) and Henry Warriner (HW).

Mr Dave Webb, Executive Director of Stratford District Council and Parish Trustee (DW), was also present for the first half of the meeting.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.36pm. He recorded with sadness the recent deaths of parishioners Jim Heritage and Roy Hardiman.

1. **Apologies** were received from Bob & Shirley Large, Charles & Jane Hobbs, Colin & Gill Ablewhite and Roz Warriner.

2. **The Minutes of the previous meeting** of 19th April 2016 were unanimously approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising:

a. The Chairman reported that Grant Thornton LLC had issued an External Auditor Certificate in respect of the Parish Meeting's 2015/16 Annual Return, but had drawn attention to two matters which they considered gave cause for concern that relevant legislative and regulatory requirements had not been met:

i. Firstly, the Chairman had, as in previous years, signed the Accounting Governance Statement but no Clerk's countersignature had been entered. The Chairman had explained that this was because, as a Parish Meeting rather than a Parish Council, we did not appoint a Clerk, nor is there any requirement for us to do so. (In a parish with a Parish Council, the Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Parish Council; in a Parish without a Parish Council, the role of Proper Officer falls to The Parish Trustees).

ii. Secondly, the Chairman had, again as in previous years, signed the Accounting Statements both as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) (in accordance with the Parish Meeting's Financial Regulations) and as Chair of the meeting approving the statements. The auditor's view was that the RFO should be a servant of the Parish Meeting, preferably the Clerk, rather than an elected officer. We therefore need to appoint (not elect!) an RFO at the next Parish Annual Meeting; since a Parish Meeting lacks the power to employ staff, the appointee would need to be a volunteer.

b. The Parish Meeting's account with Unity Trust Bank plc had been closed, following the introduction of a monthly service fee, and a new account opened with Lloyds Bank plc.

c. HW confirmed that County Highways had failed to carry out the remedial work requested at the top of Broadmoor Lane, where a gap alongside the carriageway regularly fills with rainwater, making it difficult to see and avoid.

4. Chairman's Report

a. Only one planning application had been submitted since the previous meeting, for a change of use of part of Tower Farm Barn to a holiday let; this had been granted without objection.

b. Work had been carried out to improve the reliability of SugarNet's wireless broadband service to the village, including the installation of a larger dish antenna on HW's grain store at Manor Farm, Julian Majzub having apparently declined to accept installation on the outbuilding where

the earlier antenna had been sited. GC commented that she had received no response to recent emails to SugarNet asking whether she might be able to access their service. There was no news to report regarding the possibility of "superfast broadband" arriving in the village, courtesy of CSW Broadband's upgrade contract with BT, before 2019/20.

5. **Expenditure incurred under delegated powers** since the last meeting: The Chairman, as RFO, reported expenditure of £28.80 to renew the hosting contract for the Parish Meeting website, and £11 to renew membership of the Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC). This expenditure was within budget and was approved unanimously by the meeting (proposed SL, seconded BB).

6. **Anticipated future expenditure** during the remainder of the current financial year: The Chairman, as RFO, reported that he expected to pay £200 in respect of budgeted expenditure on maintenance of Wolford Churchyard, which is our parish cemetery; minor expenditure on stationery was also anticipated. The Chairman expected to end the financial year with a credit balance of around £1,000.

7. **Future of Little Wolford Parish:** The Chairman invited DW to address the meeting in his capacity as a Parish Trustee.

DW reported that he had discussed the future of Little Wolford Parish Meeting with the Electoral Registration Officer. The current Chairman will not stand for re-election in April 2017; if we were then unable to elect a new Chairman for the coming year, DW would take the chair as Parish Trustee in order for the meeting's remaining business to be conducted. He would seek the view of the meeting regarding future options before instigating a Community Governance Review. The two options would be a merger with another parish, or to continue as a separate Parish with another Parish Council accepting overall responsibility for the Parish Meeting.

The Chairman reported that he had attended a meeting of Great Wolford Parish Council, but sensed little enthusiasm for a merger with Little Wolford, particularly if that involved reserving seats on the combined council for elected representatives of Little Wolford. The sense was that, since there appeared to be rather little interest on the part of Little Wolford electors in securing the future of their own Parish Meeting, they were unlikely to make a significant contribution to a joint enterprise. SL felt that this confused two different issues: there is certainly a general reluctance to take on the role of Chairman as currently undertaken by DF, as this was considered too onerous, but there is certainly interest in our future governance. DW emphasised that he, too, felt that there was no lack of interest in our future governance, and would take this message back to the District Council. He questioned whether he should initiate a Community Governance Review at this point, or whether further discussion should precede this.

The Chairman asked whether the Parish Meeting could, in effect, suspend all activity until such time as it might be resurrected at the instigation of our District Councillor or the necessary number of electors. SL queried how we would, for instance, get potholes repaired, road markings maintained, etc. if no longer represented at parish level; DW replied that this would be by contacting the District and County Councils, either directly or via our District and County Councillors, although we would lose the power of communal strength. JR queried how many parishes are currently governed in this way; DW replied that there was probably only one, and that he would certainly not recommend that approach.

DS felt strongly that to initiate a Community Governance Review now would signify a lack of optimism about finding a new Chairman, and would confirm the Great Wolford impression of a lack of interest on the part of Little Wolford electors. DW agreed, and advised further discussion with Great Wolford, which he was willing to broker: once a Review is formally instigated, an outcome for change, which may not be to our liking, becomes inevitable. GC felt sadness at Great Wolford's apparent lack of enthusiasm, as she considered that we should be a united community. DF pointed out that Great Wolford raises a higher parish precept than we currently do, so ours would inevitably increase in the event of a merger. BB felt that, since we share a village hall and church, there was some logic in having a common parish council; DF observed that Great and Little Wolford together

form the single ecclesiastical parish of Wolford, and would probably form a single civil parish today had not the knight's fee of Wolford been divided into two half-fees in 1242!

DF asked if the meeting was in favour of pursuing the option of a merger with Great Wolford: all present were in favour provided that DW facilitated further discussion. DS summarised the will of the meeting as, firstly, to remain optimistic that a new chairman would be found; secondly, to take discussion forward with Great Wolford; and, thirdly, that this be brokered by DW. This was proposed by BB and seconded by GC; all were in favour. BB proposed thanks to DW, who then left the meeting at 8.10pm.

8. Funding Request from the Trustees of The Wolfords Village Hall

Before discussing the budget and precept for next year, DF read a letter from DS, as Secretary to the Village Hall Trustees, requesting a contribution from parish funds towards the cost of essential restoration of the Hall. Since the Village Hall is a shared resource, DS had also written to Janet Piller, Clerk to Great Wolford Parish Council, asking for a similar item on the agenda for their next Parish Council meeting. HW, also a Village Hall Trustee, described the ivy damage which has been found to the back wall of the hall and its guttering, and also to one gable end, leading to internal dampness and rodent ingress. The likely cost of repairs is close to £6,000 and the Village Hall does not have reserve funds sufficient for this. DS stated that applications are in hand for grants on a matched-funding basis, so that the Trustees have to raise additional funds locally. Fundraising is already underway; there had been a successful Quiz Night, and a variety concert is booked for 25th November, featuring local artistes.

DF observed that a contribution towards restoration of the Village Hall would not normally be within the powers of a Parish Meeting; however, with this kind of eventuality in mind, Little Wolford Parish Meeting had, in 2013, sought and been granted limited powers of a parish council, specifically those conferred by Sections 133 and 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. The Section 133 power is to "acquire or provide and furnish buildings to be used for public meetings and assemblies or contribute towards the expenses incurred by any other person in acquiring or providing and furnishing such a building". DF felt that he would need to take advice as to whether this power extended to repairs or restoration but, on the face of it, this seem to provide a way to meet the request. The Section 137 power is less restrictive: "to incur expenditure for certain purposes not otherwise authorised which in their opinion is in the interests of, and will bring direct benefit to, their area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants", although the maximum expenditure incurred under this power in any financial year is limited to a specified sum "... multiplied by the relevant population of the authority's area". For 2016/17, the specified sum is £7.42: consequently, using this power, we could incur expenditure of up to around £640 each year.

JR asked where the money would come from: DF replied that it could come either from reserves (estimated to amount to a little over £1,000 at the end of the current financial year) or from revenue, by increasing next year's precept. Our current precept (£460) adds only £7.42 to the Council Tax bill for a Band D property, which is low compared with other local parishes (Great Wolford £16.15, Barton-on-the-Heath £16.27, Cherington & Stourton £17.99, Whichford £31.67, Long Compton £34.54, Burmington £40.50). The original reason for building up a reserve fund was in case we were ever expected to contribute towards the cost of bringing high-speed broadband to the village, although our current reserves are well below the level that might be required to do so.

HW suggested that, if we were to merge with Great Wolford in the future, it would be good if both parishes contributed a similar amount to the Village Hall. DF observed that in respect of the other shared resource, the cemetery, the two parishes each contributed roughly the same amount on a *per capita* basis (Little Wolford £200, Great Wolford £400) towards the cost of maintenance.

BB and GC proposed that we should support the Village Hall as requested; this proposal was endorsed unanimously. GC suggested that payment out of the precept was the fairer approach. SL proposed the sum of £250. DS suggested £500, half to come from reserves and half from revenue, and that Great Wolford should be encouraged to follow the precedent of proportionality set by

churchyard maintenance funding; this composite resolution was proposed by DF, seconded by JR and agreed unanimously.

9. Matters raised by an Elector of the Parish

Since these matters had potential budget implications, it was agreed to consider them before moving on to agree next year's budget.

DS described the surprise of her decorator that there was no dog waste bin in the village. DF stated that, whilst the District Council does offer a dog waste collection service to parishes, the approved bin would cost £300 and the fee charged for regular emptying was £102 per annum. The general feeling was that residents could perfectly well dispose of their own dogs' waste in their black refuse bins. The lack of enthusiasm for a dog bin in Little Wolford was unanimously shared.

HW raised the need for a new village notice board; this was supported unanimously. It was then agreed that this should be situated on the Green and should be lockable. DF offered to seek permission from Stratford District Council, the owners of the Green, and to investigate costs, which he estimated at about £400. This course of action was proposed by HW, seconded by MR and agreed unanimously.

10. Budget for 2017/18

DF suggested that the budget for cemetery maintenance should be increased from £200 to £250, since this was tied to Great Wolford Parish Council's contribution, which was expected to rise. He estimated that the budget requirement for stationery, Village Hall rental and website maintenance would be around £100, together with £250 towards Village Hall restoration (supplementing the £250 to be taken from reserves) and £400 for the new village notice board. He further suggested that, in view of uncertainty regarding the future of the Parish Meeting, we should not add to the reserve fund at this time.

DF therefore proposed a budget for 2017/18 of £1,000; this was seconded by SL and approved unanimously.

11. Precept requirement for 2017/18

DF suggested that, whilst we had agreed not to increase reserves, neither should we deplete them by more than the £250 also agreed: we should therefore aim to meet our budgeted expenditure entirely from revenue, i.e. from the parish precept.

HW proposed that the parish precept requirement for 2017/18 be set at £1,000 (less any Council Tax Benefit Grant offered by Stratford District Council); this was seconded by CC and agreed unanimously.

12. Issues of particular local importance

MR suggested that the number of new houses expected to be built in Moreton would inevitably increase traffic through Little Wolford, and felt that traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, should be installed at both ends of the 30mph zone. This suggestion attracted unanimous support, although DF cautioned that such a scheme would require the support of Warwickshire County Council's Road Safety Engineering Team and inclusion in the Council's future programme of works. MR agreed to discuss this, on behalf of the Parish Meeting, with County Councillor Chris Saint as an initial step.

13. The meeting ended at 8.50 pm with refreshments.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

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David J Farman, Chairman