



WOMBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the FULL COUNCIL MEETING held on **Monday 25th March 2024 at 7.00pm**

This meeting was held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Gravel Hill, Wombourne, WV5 9HA.

Present -

Councillors: Andy Clay, Mike Davies, Jan Evans, Mark Evans, Ed Hughes, Elizabeth Keeling, Dan Kinsey BEM, Vince Merrick (Vice-Chairman), Mary Roberts, Ian Sadler.

Clerk: Rachael Wright.

Public: 8 Wombourne residents, 1 member of the public from outside of Wombourne, Peter Elms from Alpaca Communications, Luke Shackleton from PACE and Chloe Brown from TRP (Third Resolution Project).

33/24 – Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Barry Bond MBE, Alan Peace, Martin Perry and Daisy Tait.

34/24 – Declarations of Interest

Councillor Dan Kinsey BEM noted he was a member of Wombourne Best Kept Village Committee and a trustee of Wombourne and District Community Association.

Councillor Mary Roberts noted she was a member of Wombourne Carnival Committee, Wombourne Best Kept Village Committee, Wombourne and District Community Association and the Santa Sleigh Committee.

Councillor Mark Evans noted his interest in item 5 on the agenda given he is the Chairman of the Planning Department at South Staffordshire Council. He informed members we would keep an open mind in relation to any forthcoming planning application and would only form his opinion on the matter once he had heard debate from all parties.

35/24 – Public Participation

A resident from Apse Close requested an update in relation to the closure of Wombourne Recycling Centre, noting the alternative in Codsall involved a round trip of over 20 miles.

Councillor Mike Davies informed the resident he had contacted the appropriate Cabinet Member at Staffordshire County Council for an update, who had informed him due to subsidence the site was no longer safe for public use. They are exploring alternative options in the short term, however, due to the nature of the issue, no re-opening date has been set. Where possible, they are encouraging residents to use bring banks instead.

The resident from Apse Close noted there had been a planning application for change of use to a car sales business at Orton Lodge, Pool House Road. In view of complaints regarding HGVs using the roads in the village, he asked for the Parish Council to request that the Planning Department at South Staffordshire Council put a condition in place that if any car transporters are to be used to convey vehicles for sale to the site, that such

vehicles are only permitted to use the route from Bridgnorth Road along Pool House Road and reverse. He noted it was an attempt to prevent more HGVs passing three schools and travelling over speed humps as the alternative route.

Councillor Mark Evans agreed to look into the matter for the resident.

Finally, the resident from Apse Close noted a post on Wombourne Online from 4th March about delays caused by temporary traffic lights on Orton Lane. Someone had commented on the post, stating the lights were only advisory and as long as it was clear you could drive through. As the resident felt that advice was incorrect, he took it upon himself to make some enquiries with the Cabinet Member at Staffordshire County Council and the Chief Inspector on the matter. The Chief Inspector's response was that if a light is red, you must stop and went on to say that any problems with lights not working was the responsibility of County Highways. The Cabinet Member at Staffordshire County Council Highways responded briefly to say they encouraged all drivers to comply with red signals, but failed to comment upon repairing faulty signals. The resident commented that the advice on Wombourne Online was wrong and given the platform has 16,000 followers suggested the Parish Council ask the Police to contact Wombourne Online to rectify the post to ensure it provides accurate information.

Councillor Mark Evans agreed to look into the matter for the resident.

A resident from Brookside Close informed members he had attended last month to complain about potholes in the village and in the 4 weeks since he had attended the roads were still in the same state or even worse.

Councillor Mike Davies acknowledged the challenging problem in dealing with potholes, not just in Staffordshire, but up and down the country. He informed the resident every pothole reported to Staffordshire County Council was categorised and dealt with according to its urgency. Temporary repairs were carried out over the winter period. The County Council have employed more staff to review potholes categorised three, which may move up to category two or one. He encouraged everyone to report potholes to Staffordshire County Council, noting unless they were reported they could not be dealt with.

The resident also requested an update on the Christmas Parcel Scheme he had suggested the Parish Council take up at the last meeting.

Councillor Mary Roberts informed the resident the Parish Council had made enquiries with the Parish Council in Swindon he had referred to and after deliberation of the information they had provided, they felt the boxes did not offer good value and so they had agreed to liaise with Friendly Faces regarding Christmas lunches for residents instead.

A resident from Rushwater Close complained about parking outside schools, particularly outside St Benedict Biscop and Westfield Primary Schools, noting it was getting worse and she felt an accident was inevitable.

Councillor Mike Davies agreed it was unacceptable how some parents parked outside their children's school and he had been discussing solutions with the Council's Police Liaison, Councillor Vince Merrick. He agreed to report the matter of parking on grass verges to Staffordshire County Council to see if a solution could be found.

Councillor Mark Evans noted he had been a Police Officer for over 30 years and the problem of parking outside schools was not isolated to our village, it was a countrywide issue, which was very difficult to resolve. Councillor Ed Hughes noted in USA schools had been encouraged to utilise their playing fields for parking at drop off and pick up times and perhaps schools in Wombourne should be encouraged to pilot a similar scheme.

Councillor Mike Davies reminded everyone of the current Parking Pilot in the village, whereby residents could report inappropriate parking to South Staffordshire Council and action would be taken by either Staffordshire County Council or the Police.

36/24 – Police Report

Councillor Vince Merrick noted the report had been shared with Members prior to the meeting. No one raised any questions regarding the report.

37/24 – Presentation from Alpaca Communications

Peter Elms from Alpaca Communications, Luke Shackleton from Pathfinder Clean Energy (PACE) and Chloe Brown from Third Resolution Project (TRP) introduced themselves as interested parties in the proposed development for battery storage off Wombourne Road.

They explained PACE is a leading independent developer of energy projects and was established in 2017 as a global developer and investor in clean energy. They are working with the National Grid to develop a portfolio of strategically located solar photovoltaic and battery storage installations that ensure low carbon electricity is delivered when and where it is needed. They have 2 successful developments in Canada and 4 projects in development in the UK at present.

They shared a map outlining the proposed site which is currently arable fields. The exact location is land to the east of Wombourne Road, which lies south of Wombourne. It was explained the site for Wombourne Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) had been carefully selected as part of a detailed assessment process and consideration had been given to the proximity to a point of connection (connection to Penn Substation), visibility from settlements, landscape character, potential effects on heritage assets, flood risk, access for construction vehicles, potential effects on ecological designations and habitats, topography and existing landscape features on the site.

It was explained that energy storage is an important technology that will help the UK Government achieve its goals outlined in the British Energy Security Strategy published in April 2022, which aims to shift from fossil fuel to a more environmentally friendly system. The system should assist in making energy more reliable, reduce the reliance on greenhouse gases, aligning to targets for a low carbon future and providing localised benefits, such as jobs and increased biodiversity for the area.

The team are currently carrying out pre-submission consultations, which as well as their attendance to the meeting, will also include an open afternoon on Wednesday 27th March in the Council Chamber from 2pm to 7pm. The aim is to seek feedback for the project team, who will finalise the proposed design in April, ready to submit the planning application in May in the hope that permission is granted by the end of 2024.

Councillor Mark Evans invited Councillors to ask questions of the team, which included the following:

Q – Lithium batteries are well known to catch fire. How safe are they and will they interfere with radio signals?

A – The team have instructed a Fire Consultant to ensure the safety of the site and the batteries will comply to the highest standards of safety. The batteries do not radiate anything, so will not interfere with radio signals.

Q – Will there be any link to 5G masts and would PACE consider wind turbines on the land earmarked for biodiversity?

A – Wind turbines would be unsuitable for this site and there is no connection to 5G masts.

Q – Is the Director of PACE here tonight? Can you advise on the noise output from the site? Have any of you visited Wombourne prior to tonight's meeting?

A – The Director of PACE is not present. The noise output is no greater than any background noise level. A Noise Consultant has been appointed to provide guidance on the adequacy of the level of noise from the site. When deciding upon the site, they found it appropriate given its proximity away from housing, along with the natural acoustic barrier of the hedges already in place. All three representatives confirmed they had visited the site previously.

Q – Have you completed any other projects yet in the UK?

A – No, two projects have been completed in Canada and four are in development in the UK.

Q – Can you provide specific noise out information from the sites in Canada? How would wind direction impact noise levels? Has consideration been given to the proximity of the site to Himley Plantation? What benefit does this development bring to Wombourne?

A – The team agreed to seek answers to the noise level and wind direction impact and have those ready for presentation on Wednesday 27th March. They agreed to look further into the proximity of the site to Himley Plantation, including the planting of trees specific to the area on site. In relation to the benefit to Wombourne, they informed members they had agreed to include a community benefit scheme into the development and would be open to ideas around this, but a previous example had been EV charging points at a Village Hall.

Q – You have shared aerial views of the site, can you also share other images of what the site will look like?

A – Yes, these will be shared at the consultation event on Wednesday 27th March.

Q – Can the part of the site left for biodiversity be linked to the Himley Plantation via the Woodland Trust?

A – The team will seek advice from an ecologist and use some of the features of the Plantation in their development.

Q – What type of construction traffic do you anticipate will be attending site and from which routes?

A – There will be three routes in and out of the site and construction is anticipated to take place over 25 weeks with 8 HGV movements per day during the peak weeks of construction. Once the site is fully formed, there will be one vehicle accessing the site once per month.

Councillor Mark Evans opened up questions from members of the public.

Q – Why are the Parish Council considering this application and will they drop a leaflet to every home in Wombourne to let them know about the development?

A – Councillor Mark Evans informed the resident the Parish Council are being consulted on the plans the same as residents are and everyone will have the opportunity to comment formally once the development becomes a formal planning application. The Parish Council will consider how to inform residents of the plans once we get to that stage.

Q – Projects such as these do not tend to have any longevity, so who will be responsible for restoring the site should PACE go into liquidation? Who is funding the project? What can the community expect?

A – Every site has to have a decommissioning fund which alters across the lifespan of the project. If the company were to go into liquidation in year one, the full fund would not be in place, but the liquidator would find value in the batteries, which would be sold to pay for the land to be restored. The questions regarding the funding and what the community benefits are were not answered.

Q – What will be the full environmental impact on the site be over the full 40-year lifespan of the project? How will the site be secured? What consideration has been given to homeowners and the value of their properties? What will the impact be on the natural landscape and what control measures are in place?

A – There will be no negative environmental impact, in fact the project will see biodiversity have a net gain of 10%. The site will be monitored 24 hours a day offsite via CCTV and there will be full security fencing around the site, as well as visits to site once per month. Impact on property valuations is not a material planning consideration. The site will see gaps in hedges built up and additional planting to provide screens so there should be no impact to the natural landscape. Further images of the site will be available for viewing at the consultation on Wednesday 27th March.

Councillor Mark Evans thanked Peter, Luke and Chloe for attending the meeting and for answering the questions posed to them. He encouraged residents and Councillors to attend the consultation on Wednesday 27th March from 2pm to 7pm, if they wanted to find out more information or speak to them on a one-to-one basis.

38/24 – Approval of Minutes

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting on Monday 26th February 2024.

39/24 – Reports from Committees

- a) Councillor Dan Kinsey BEM informed members the Civic Centre Management Committee had met on 11th March where they had discussed and agreed items for removal from the History Room. He noted a meeting had taken place with May Griffiths' family and thanked Councillor Ian Sadler for his input into that meeting. The Fire Risk Assessment was reviewed in depth and fire safe room plans agreed. The Day Centre was discussed and action points agreed for consideration with all members agreeing a plan needed to be formulated to ensure greater use of the room. Solar panels were discussed, again with thanks to Councillor Ian Sadler for investigating the matter, as members noted it was unfeasible to install panels on the Civic Centre roof, so the roof above Goode Tutoring was being explored. The Committee discussed and agreed their own bar needed to be opened on Carnival Day to balance out the cost of holding the Carnival at the Civic Centre.
- b) Councillor Mary Roberts informed members that the Finance and General Purposes Committee had met on 18th March where they had discussed the Parish Council's newsletter, planned for distribution via the website and social media from the first week of May. Content including updates from the Civic Centre, panto and dinner dances would be included, as well as articles of local interest, news about the Local Plan and speed watch. Residents can sign up to receive copies via our website. Parcels for the elderly at Christmas were discussed but the Committee felt they were unable to endorse the scheme as presented to them from another Parish Council and they would rather explore the option of supporting a Christmas meal. Members agreed upon a card machine for the office and unanimously supported the Clerk's decision regarding some members of the public being blocked from their Facebook page and had agreed to update their policy to inform the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council what action had been taken if it occurred in the future.

- c) Councillor Mike Davies explained six plans had been commented upon since the last meeting, five where no objections had been raised and one where the Planning Officer had been asked to seek further clarification on the plans.
- d) Councillor Elizabeth Keeling informed members the Committee had met on 4th March where they had agreed Heads of Terms for the lease at Brickbridge Playing Fields, requesting an amendment for sub-letting and seeking clarification on grounds maintenance arrangements. The electricity contract at Brickbridge Playing Fields had been renewed for a period of 12 months. There was an 8–12-week lead time on the new exercise equipment for the playing fields currently. The Committee had agreed to write a statement of support for Wombourne Allstars in seeking their own home ground, which was due to be approved this evening. Lottery funding had been applied for at Poolhouse Play Area, but it had brought about a few queries from the National Lottery, so this needed to be explored further. The plans for the new play area would be unveiled at the Community Showcase Event on 24th April. Members had agreed to complete the S106 agreement from South Staffordshire Council for funding of £10,000 towards the project. Finally, the Committee Chairman had met with a resident at Bratch Park to discuss a replacement ash tree after the felling of one last year and the Committee noted the play inspections would take place in May and November 2024, February 2025 and the annual inspection in August 2024.
- e) Councillor Mary Roberts informed members the Staffing Committee had recently met to consider approve contracts for staff who had changed their hours and were still considering a request from a member of staff for job share.

40/24 Report from Staffordshire County Council

Councillor Mike Davies informed members it was very much business as usual for the County Council at present going into the new financial year. The big issue to be resolved next was the Wombourne Recycling Centre and he would provide an update once one was available.

41/24 Update from Members appointed to Outside Bodies

- a) Club at the Day Centre – Councillor Mark Evans informed members the gentlemen playing pool continued to use the room.
- b) Locality Forum – Councillor Dan Kinsey BEM informed members the last session had focused on the Community Wellbeing Fund which was now open for applications and he would be speaking to the Chairman of Wombourne and District Community Association about.
- c) Wombourne and District Community Association – Councillor Martin Perry and Councillor Daisy Tait were absent from the meeting, so no update was given.
- d) Wombourne Carnival Committee – Councillor Jan Evans informed members the Committee were due to meet this week so an update would be given at the next meeting.
- e) Wombourne Charity Trustees – Councillor Mike Davies informed members no requests had been received for funding.
- f) Wombourne Best Kept Village Committee – Councillor Dan Kinsey BEM informed members last week's meeting had been cancelled, but members were still very active with Jane Evans and Phil Hoult working hard to clear debris along the High Street. Individuals, including himself, had also been working hard litter picking across the village. He noted sadly a former member of the Committee, Elaine Colbourne had passed away and he wanted to note members were all mourning her loss.
- g) Wombourne Retailers Liaison – Councillor Daisy Tait and Councillor Matt Powell were absent from the meeting, so no update was given.
- h) Police Liaison – Councillor Vince Merrick informed members good results had been seen from the Parking Pilot. So far, 99 reports had been made to South Staffordshire Council, with 18 of those being sent to Staffordshire County Council and 23 being sent to Staffordshire Police for action. He encouraged all members to send in any photographs of vehicles inconsiderately parked.

- i) Giggetty Action Group – Councillor Vince Merrick informed members he had requested a walk about with Officers prior to the next meeting.

42/24 – Parish Council Finances and Administration

Members approved the payment schedules for February 2024.

43/24 – Planning Applications

Members noted the responses to planning applications made to South Staffordshire Council in lieu of a meeting.

44/24 – Policies

Members approved the following policies:

- a) Standing Orders
- b) Financial Regulations
- c) Financial Risk Assessment
- d) Risk Register
- e) Terms of Reference (Scheme of Delegation)
- f) Investment Policy
- g) Governance Framework Policy

45/24 – Asset Register

Members approved the following:

- a) 2022/2023 Asset Register – assets re-stated at £349,944.
- b) 2023/2024 Asset Register – assets valued at £374,679.

46/24 – Lease for Poolhouse Play Area

Members agreed to request a lease from South Staffordshire Council to install play equipment on their land.

47/24 – Statement of support for Wombourne Allstars

Members approved the statement of support.

48/24 – Correspondence

None.

49/24 – Meeting Schedule

Members noted:

- a) The next Full Council meeting will take place on Monday 29th April 2024.
- b) Other meetings will be held as follows (subject to enough items to be discussed):
 - Monday 8th April 2024 – Civic Centre Management Committee Meeting at 7pm followed immediately by Recreation and Amenities Committee Meeting
 - Monday 15th April – Finance and General Purposes Committee Meeting at 7pm
 - Wednesday 24th April – Annual Parish Meeting (Community Showcase Event) at 7pm

50/24 – Reminders

- a) The office will be closed from Friday 29th March up to and including Tuesday 2nd April for Easter.

- b) The new office opening hours from 3rd April are:
 - Monday – 8.30am to 3.00pm
 - Tuesday – 8.30am to 5.00pm
 - Wednesday – 8.30am to 5.00pm
 - Thursday – 8.30am to 3.00pm
 - Friday – 8.30am to 3.00pm.

51/24 – Chairman’s Closing Remarks

Councillor Mark Evans thanked members for their hard work and dedication, noting they were dealing with resident queries without his knowledge. He noted he had had a meeting with the Chief Executive of South Staffordshire Council that morning and it was acknowledged how proactive Wombourne was as a Council and it was regarded as a flagship Council. Finally, he reported he went to see Chicago at Wombourne High School and commented what an excellent show it had been.

The meeting closed at 8.25pm.

Signed:

Dated: