

MINUTES OF CUSOP ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
held in Cusop Village Hall on 21st May 2021
(there was no meeting in 2020, owing to Covid 19 pandemic)

Present: - Cllr J Wesley (Chairman), Mr N Blayney, Cllr D Evans, Cllr M Hainge, Cllr I Jardin, Mr C Kemp, PCSO P Knight, Ms J Stannard (Clerk), Cllr J Whittall, Mrs P Winter.

1. Minutes of the last Parish Meeting. Draft minutes of the Meeting held on 17th May 2019 were circulated. The meeting agreed the minutes and approved their signature by the Chairman at a later date (a printer problem having produced a poor quality hard copy).

2. Local Police Team Report: - PCSO Knight reported that crime remained low in the area and asked parishioners to remain vigilant and to report any suspicious activity. The police had made two recent visits to Hardwicke Road to enforce speed restrictions, but had been unable to do so on Newport Street as there was no suitable place for motorists to pull in.

3. Parish Council Reports:

a) Chairman's Report. Cllr Wesley reported that having taken on the role of chairman in 2012, he was now standing down. He had enjoyed giving something back to a community that he loved being part of. It had been a difficult couple of years since the previous 'Annual' meeting in May 2019, owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, but the council had managed to hold 19 well-attended meetings (of which 10 were held remotely). He thanked all the councillors for their selfless contribution.

For several months the council had lacked a clerk, as Nigel Howard had retired on health grounds. Jane Stannard was now in office, and Cllr Wesley wished her all the best as she grew into the role.

Cllr Wesley welcomed Julia Whittall, who had joined the council on the resignation of Alison Matthews. He thanked Mrs Matthews for her work as councillor.

Martin Leighton had taken on the role of parish contractor and was working his way through the backlog of tasks that had accumulated while the post was vacant.

Sixteen planning applications had been made in the parish during the two years. The policy of delivering a note to local neighbours and offering assistance if required, continued to be well-received.

The council's decision to maintain the precept at £8,500 had been reflected in the Council Tax demands.

The playing field had to be closed in March 2020, with severe restrictions in place when it reopened.

Although no newsletter had been produced since September 2019, in March 2020 a leaflet was produced and delivered to every house in the parish giving advice and guidance on the lockdown restrictions.

The boules court had briefly been put to good use, but the lockdowns had restricted recent enjoyment of it.

The council was increasingly frustrated with Herefordshire Council over the difficulty in accessing the S106 monies that had been allocated following the development of Bookers Edge.

A working group had been formed to measure the depth of feeling about speeding and road conditions in the parish and to investigate solutions to the perceived problem.

Cllr Wesley thanked Sharon Marsh for her efforts as Footpaths Officer, Alison Matthews as Website Administrator and Jennie Hewitt as Cusop's Ward Member at Herefordshire County Council.

Finally, he thanked the volunteers who had been involved with the Hall, the Playing Field and the Events Committee. He invited parishioners to involve themselves with these groups.

b) Clerk's financial report. The Clerk gave an interim report on the Council's financial position for the year 2020/2021 and stated that the Parish Council remained in a stable situation with healthy balances in both the current and reserves accounts. There had been additional expenditure during the year on her CiLCA training.

c) Footpath officer's report. Cllr Wesley read the report from Sharon Marsh. She said that during the winter months she had been continuing with inspections of the footpaths in Cusop. There had been a deterioration in the fabric of some stiles and gates on a number of paths due to the winter weather, and these problems had been brought to the attention of the landowner.

There continued to be heavy use of a number of paths; particularly those from the church up Cusop Hill and towards the road, and of the path towards the old golf course.

The crossing of the Dulas Brook had at times been very difficult owing to wet and slippery paths in both directions.

Hereford Council were beginning to catch up on the backlog of works that had built up last year and Mrs Marsh was hopeful that improvements in the signage (damaged by hedge cutting) from the roads onto footpaths would be completed this year. Many of these signs were currently damaged or absent.

Clearing of vegetation from the pathways and new signage would continue as weather allowed.

Mrs Marsh asserted that as the lockdown restrictions eased and more visitors came to the area, she would continue to monitor the impact of this on footpaths and would take appropriate steps to ensure that access to the parish was safe and enjoyable.

d) Website administrator's report. Cllr Wesley read the report for Alison Matthews, who reported that the Cusop website had come into its own during the past tumultuous year.

A new area of the website had sprung into life when the first lockdown was announced. New pages were created to cover the current restrictions; symptoms to look out for; what to do if you or someone in your household tested positive; how to get a test etc. The all-important page during that first lockdown was the one detailing which local shops and businesses were open and when, and who was offering click & collect or delivery. Mrs Matthews thanked Zoe McLean for helping keep this vital information updated.

The 'News' emails had alerted residents to important changes regarding restrictions; Covid symptoms; how long to isolate; as well as the local matters such as whether the playing field & church were open or closed.

The Planning Tracker was still not working properly, despite regular emails to the website provider. Mrs Matthews and the Parish Clerk were working to improve planning information on the website.

Mrs Matthews invited suggestions from residents as to what they would like to see on the website. She thanked the various content editors for keeping their pages up-to-date, especially Celia Cundale for the church section.

4. Hereford Councillor's Report: No report had been received from Ward Cllr Jennie Hewitt.

5. Reports from Community Bodies:

a) St Mary's Church. The Chairman read out Celia Cundale's report for St Mary's.

The pandemic had affected all areas of church life. From 23rd March to 13th June all churches were closed. On 21st June, Cusop Church opened on Sundays for Private Prayer. The first service with social distancing and face masks was held on 5th July. Some services took place in the churchyard, but the "Churchyard Christmas" was cancelled owing to a rise in Covid cases. Many services had been shared online.

Cusop Parochial Church Council had held regular meetings via Zoom.

There had been ten funerals, including two past Churchwardens and a previous PCC member. Covid restrictions had greatly increased the distress of all those who had lost loved ones.

Happily, two weddings had taken place in line with Covid restrictions.

The new kitchen and storeroom had been completed, as well as the new doors leading into the vestry.

The Big Clean had taken place in March. Thanks were offered to the church's cleaners & flower arrangers.

The churchyard was the only public space "open" during the first lockdown. People had appreciated the freedom to wander in its peace and tranquillity, and Hay Youth Theatre had held regular meetings there.

Caring for God's Acre – volunteers took part in five Taskforce Days.

The Eco Church Committee had overseen the planting of eight apple trees and the provision of a cycle rack.

Volunteers were taking food bank donations to Dorstone weekly, and the PCC were donating 10% operating income to be shared between Hereford Foodbank and UNICEF's Covid Vaccination Programme.

b) Cusop Village Hall Councillor Wesley, as chairman of the Village Hall, reported that 2020 had been a very quiet one for the hall. Its doors had closed on March 21st, and it was closed until September when it then got very limited use for a few months. The hall qualified for some grants during the period of the pandemic and benefited to the tune of nearly £27,500 (the greatest annual rental income being just over £8000).

A progressive re-opening was underway, with a BBQ planned for lunchtime on 4th July, after the AGM.

He reported that some progress has been made with outstanding works: The bollard lights were repaired but were still 'work in progress'. A soffit had been installed and some internal painting carried out. The sagging gutter on the front of the building and some gaps in the fascia board had been repaired.

Projects awaiting progress included the Trim Track, the overhead projector and using Mary Ridger's legacy.

The hall was being professionally cleaned and checked, with no more than one booking being taken per day.

Hire charges, increased to reflect the extra costs, would be reviewed again at the lifting of Covid restrictions.

c) Playing Field. The Chairman read out a report from Andy Fryers. The past year had seen only limited use of the playground, owing to Covid restrictions. Monthly inspections had been undertaken during the periods when the playground had been open. The general state of the playground was good, with only slight wear and tear. Mr Fryers thanked the Parish Contractor for undertaking the few pieces of maintenance that had been required. He proposed giving some of the play equipment a good wash to remove algae build-up. In the coming months he would pursue Herefordshire County Council for Section 106 monies, in order to improve the state of the goalposts, nets and some of the perimeter fencing.

d) Cusop History Group No report had been received.

e) Cusop Speed Awareness Group Nick Blayney told the meeting that as yet the group had little to report as it was in its early stages. Over 100 people had responded to Cusop's speeding and road safety petition, and meetings had taken place with Ward Cllr Hewitt and Powys Cllr Gareth Ratcliffe.

Comments or Questions on any other matters: - The council was asked to consider the provision of a baby swing in the Playing Field, and it was agreed that this would be looked into.

There were no other comments or questions, and the meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.