

Minutes of the inaugural meeting of Beechingstoke Parish Council

held on Tuesday 10th May 2022 at 7.00pm in the Woodborough Parish Room

Present: Councillors Aimee Harman, Rosa Lancaster, Paul Oatway, David Pritchett and Edd Wright.

Clerk Ruth Kinderman

Clerk welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Cllr Oatway as the Unitary Authority Councillor for Pewsey Vale West.

Cllr Oatway explained that Wiltshire Council had considered it desirable to reintroduce local democracy to Beechingstoke, which had been without a parish council since 2017, when too few candidates had stood for election. This situation had recurred during the 2021 local elections, prompting Wiltshire Council to review governance arrangements for Beechingstoke.

Cllr Oatway thanked those present for stepping up to the plate and explained that they are appointed, rather than elected, councillors but with the same authority that they would derive from an election.

1. To receive apologies for absence

None.

2. To elect a Chairman

Cllr Pritchett proposed that Cllr Oatway be elected as Chairman; seconded by Cllr Lanacster, all in favour. Cllr Oatway thanked everyone for their confidence in him and explained that he was willing to take the chair for the first year to oversee the establishment of the parish council.

Clerk explained that parish councils are legally bound to hold their annual meeting in May, the first business of which is to elect a member to the chair for the ensuing year.

3. To elect a Vice-Chairman

Cllr Wright proposed that Cllr Harman be elected as Vice-Chairman; seconded by Cllr Pritchett, all in favour.

4. To sign Declarations of Acceptance of Office

All councillors signed their declarations, which were then signed by the Clerk.

5. To adopt Code of Conduct

Clerk had circulated three examples of Codes of Conduct for councillors to consider prior to the meeting. Cllr Oatway proposed that this parish council adopt the Code for Woodborough

Parish Council until Wiltshire Council publishes its new Code, which the majority of parish councils will then be expected to adopt. Cllr Wright seconded this proposal; all were in favour.

Cllr Oatway explained that he chairs the Wiltshire Standards Committee, which has been reviewing the new model National Code of Conduct, published in January, and which is more stringent than the current Wiltshire Code. A working group has produced an updated Wiltshire Code based on the new model, for consideration by Wiltshire Council party leaders. Once their views have been incorporated, the working group will submit a revised Code to the Standards Committee for review prior to it being presented to full council to consider for adoption.

Cllr Oatway said that once Wiltshire Council has approved a new Code, training will be made available for all clerks and councillors, probably through dedicated Area Board meetings. As Chairman of the Standards Committee, he has seen an increase in the number of complaints made between councillors and between councillors and clerks, though these situations remain rare and are usually as a result of personality clashes.

6. To declare interests

Clerk explained that the Register of Interests is held online rather than in hard copy; the link and password will be circulated as soon as possible. The form is straightforward and asks for councillors to declare their employment, property and any other factors that may affect their decision making. Clerk clarified that property and interests outside the parish need only be declared if relevant to parish council business, though if in doubt it is better to err on the side of caution.

ACTION:ALL

Cllr Oatway declared that he is the Unitary Councillor for Pewsey Vale West, which is the largest division in the Pewsey Vale. He is also the Vice-Chairman of Dorset & Wiltshire Fire Service. He is now retired from Wiltshire Police.

Cllr Lancaster said that she works with the Kennet Gateway and also runs her own business, both of which entities apply for funding from Wiltshire Council. Clerk confirmed that these items would need entering on the Register.

Clerk explained that interests pertaining to individual items such as planning applications must be declared at the beginning of the relevant parish council meeting.

7. To appoint Proper Officer

Cllr Oatway explained that Ruth Kinderman is an experienced clerk and proposed that she be appointed as Proper Officer, having been appointed temporarily by Wiltshire Council to instigate this meeting. Seconded by Cllr Pritchett; all in favour.

8. To adopt Standing Orders

Clerk had circulated draft Standing Orders based on the most recent NALC (National Association of Local Councils) model, produced in 2018 and revised in 2020. Clerk had explained that these are the rules by which parish councils conduct their business. Cllr Oatway proposed that the draft be adopted; seconded by Cllr Pritchett and all in favour. Cllr Harman noted that the draft refers to 'Chairman' and 'he' throughout. Clerk noted that this was not something she had needed to address before and that historically and linguistically the word 'Chairman' includes any human being. Cllr Oatway said that he would notify Democratic Services that this point had been raised. **ACTION:PO**

9. To adopt Financial Regulations

Clerk had circulated draft Financial Regulations and explained that these are the rules by which the parish council will manage its finances. Cllr Oatway proposed that the draft be adopted; seconded by Cllr Pritchett and all were in favour.

It is believed that the last chairman of the parish council prior to its dissolution in 2017 holds the bank details. Cllrs Harman and Lancaster will attempt to contact him; if unsuccessful, the Clerk will follow this up. **ACTION:AG/RL/RK**

Clerk distributed application forms for dispensation to discuss the budget and setting the precept, explaining that central government deems all parish councillors to have an interest in this matter. Forms are to be returned to Clerk at the next meeting, by which time councillors will have completed the Register of Interests, giving Clerk all the information needed to decide whether to grant the dispensations. **ACTION:ALL**

Clerk will draw up a list of projected expenditure for the remainder of this financial year; a small hire fee will be due to Woodborough Parish Room for this meeting. **ACTION:RK**

10. To appoint bank signatories

Clerk advised that three councillors be appointed bank signatories to minimise any delay to future transactions requiring two signatures.

Cllr Harman proposed that Cllr Wright be appointed; seconded by Cllr Lancaster.

Cllr Wright proposed that Cllr Lancaster be appointed; seconded by Cllr Harman.

Cllr Lancaster proposed that Cllr Pritchett be appointed; seconded by Cllr Wright.

There were no objections. Clerk to arrange relevant paperwork once the bank details have been obtained.

ACTION:RK

11. To review planning applications and procedures

Cllr Oatway explained that Wiltshire Council Planning Department issues lists of applications received and determined each week to all parish clerks. Planning applications are then circulated by the clerks to their councillors for comment; if considered necessary, a meeting is called to enable the applicant to speak to the parish council about the proposals and for the parish council to agree a response to Wiltshire Council.

12. To set date of next meeting

Cllr Oatway advised that all councillors should attend the next Area Board meeting on Monday 23rd May to get some idea of what goes on within the wider area. Other groups with which councillors will need to acquaint themselves in the coming weeks include PCAP (Pewsey Community Area Partnership) and LHFIG (Local Highway & Footpath Improvement Group).

Clerk will obtain the Electoral Register and the Definitive Footpath Map and Statement prior to the next meeting. Projects for consideration include a website and a second noticeboard for the parish to be installed at the eastern end. It was noted that the noticeboard near the church is quite old and may need replacing. It was agreed that the forthcoming Beechingstoke fete on 22nd May will be an opportunity to ask parishioners which are their preferred means of communication. Cllr Harman noted that it seems a shame that this council is obliged to meet outside of the parish and would like to explore the possibility of creating a suitable venue within Beechingstoke, possibly in conjunction with the PCC (Parochial Church Council).

The next meeting of the parish council will be held in the Woodborough Parish Room on Tuesday 20th September 2022 at 7.00pm

Meeting closed at 8.15pm