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Little Birch Parish Council

Minutes

**Meeting held at Little Birch Village Hall on the Wednesday 4th March
2026 at 7:00pm**

Present:

Councillors (CA) Chris Atkinson (Chair), (SC) Steven Coles, (ND) Nick Deacon, (TP) Tom Palfrey

Molly Walters (Parish Clerk), (CF) Chris Fowler (PROW Officer), (TF) Toni Fagan (Ward Councillor). No members of the public present.

- 1. To receive apologies for absence – Kate Dillon**
- 2. To receive declarations of interest and written requests for dispensations –**
None received.
- 3. To consider minutes of the previous meetings held on the 4th February 2026 -**
It was RESOLVED to approve the minutes as a true and proper record of the meeting. The minutes were signed by the Chairman.
- 4. Open session for members of the public.**
 - 4.1 Matters raised by local residents:** During the 10 minutes allowed for this item, members of the public present may speak for up to 3 minutes each –
No members of the public in attendance.
- 5. To receive brief reports from:**
 - 5.1 Ward Councillor - Toni Fagan provided the following update:**
 - Information was provided regarding the Parish Charter, which aims to give Parish Councils better access to information from Herefordshire Council.
 - The Parish Summit, facilitated by Herefordshire Council on 3 March, was discussed. Presentation slides from the event have been circulated. The event included information on 2026/27 funding streams for the Lengthsman scheme.
 - An update was given on the Public Realm contract, including the transition of services back in house to Herefordshire Council.
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- An overview of the 2025/26 Public Rights of Way (PROW) grant funding was provided. It was confirmed that the full £250,000 grant allocation had been committed, with 73 applications covering 465 assets.
- For 2026/27 PROW funding, up to £4,000 per parish will be available to support the maintenance of existing assets or the creation of new drainage assets. The deadline for applications is 3 May. Concerns regarding this deadline were raised by parishes during the Summit event.
- Toni raised a concern regarding water pooling opposite Merrivale Farm. Councillors advised that this location falls within the Aconbury Parish boundary.
- Information was shared about the launch of Child Friendly Herefordshire, which aims to consider how decisions made by Herefordshire Council impact young people. The initiative also highlights how decisions made by Parish Councils may influence young people. Further information is included in the Summit presentation slides.
- Members were advised of the Nature Strategy for Herefordshire consultation, with a closing date of 31 March.
- Toni noted that some other counties allow Lengthsmen to undertake minor pothole repairs. This feedback has been shared with Herefordshire Council.
- Toni advised that the Annual Plan Schemes for 2026/27 had previously been circulated and requested feedback on any roads that may have been omitted. SC advised that the U71609 is in poor condition due to flooding and potholes. This road falls within Aconbury Parish, but also affects residents of Little Birch.
- CA raised concerns about the condition of the road from Wrigglebrook to Much Birch Church. Toni confirmed that this road is included in the planned programme of works.
- Toni confirmed she has contacted Henry Snell to request an update regarding Parish Lane.
- Toni advised that the Great British Spring Clean is approaching. Parishes undertaking litter picking can obtain purple bags from the Balfour Beatty offices.

5.2 Balfour Beatty – Locality steward is Lee Fishwick, available on email. It was NOTED Lee Fishwick has returned to work following absence.

5.3 West Mercia Police – Current Priorities required Councillors RESOLVED for the Police priorities to remain the same.

5.4 Footpaths Officer: Chris Fowler provided the following update:

- CF advised that PROW gates funded through the Herefordshire Council PROW grant scheme have been delivered and are expected to be installed within the next few weeks.
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- An update was provided regarding the Parish Map, which had been discussed at a previous meeting. A further meeting of the working group had taken place to review the content. Due to the volume of information initially proposed, the group agreed to condense the material to ensure the map remained clear and accessible. While a large amount of historical information had been suggested, it was agreed that the map should instead focus on facts and locations that residents and visitors could access and visit. As part of this process, a paragraph relating to Little Birch Wells was removed to allow space for information about accessible locations. Councillor Kate Dillon assisted with preparing the content. The maps will be installed in both Little Birch and Much Birch and will include information relating to both areas.
- CF advised that he is currently in correspondence with Accessible Herefordshire, an organisation that supports accessible rural walks across the county. Concerns were raised regarding the accessibility of Ruff Lane, due to the presence of multiple potholes. Councillors discussed the potential for the Lengthsman to undertake remedial works. The Clerk will follow up with the Local Authority regarding the condition of the area.

6. To comment on applications to be determined by Herefordshire Council – None received.

7. Finance:

7.1 To note the Bank Balance as at 28/02/2026 - £8985.53

7.2 The following payments were approved:

7.2.1 The Birches Newsletter annual contribution - £200 (No VAT)

7.2.2 Information Commissioner Office (ICO) Annual Registration due to be renewed via direct debit on 17/03/2026 - £47.00 (No VAT)

7.2.3 Marches Grounds Maintenance – Drainage Grant Works (INV SI-409) - £2200.00 (No VAT)

7.3 Payments made between meetings under delegated powers:

7.3.1 Clerk Salary as per contract (February 2026)

7.3.2 PAYE to HMRC- £32.00 (February)

7.3.3 Herefordshire Association of Local Councils Annual Membership (INV H6057) - £535.75 (inc VAT)

7.3.4 Little Birch Village Hall – Hire from March 2025 – January 2026 (INV 330) - £142.00.

The above payments were **NOTED**

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- 7.4 Financial Monitoring and Bank Reconciliation 2025/26 – To note the current status of the Parish Council finances** – Clerk confirmed there were no outstanding cheques or income as of 28/02/2026 and the bank balance remains at £8985.53. ND requested clarity on the Reserve Balance for end of the 25/26 FY. Clerk confirmed the end of FY balance will be circulated to Councillors in order to facilitate a Reserves Policy, incorporating the Reserves figure.
- 7.5 To consider instructing FMS Hereford to undertake the 25/26 internal audit at a cost of £210.60 (inc VAT)** – It was RESOLVED to instruct FMS Hereford to carry out the internal audit.
- 7.6 To note VAT126 claim has been submitted for the total of £623.29 for reimbursement – NOTED.**

8. New Computer Equipment:

- 8.1 16 inch Laptop & Microsoft Office Subscription, still to be purchased
TP confirmed he is reviewing costs of suitable laptops to be purchased. Councillors discussed obtaining a Microsoft 365 subscription in order for files to be stored securely.

9. To receive update on progress of transitioning Parish Council website and email addresses to gov.uk

TP confirmed since he is not an authorised domain supplier, he has to approach an authorised domain supplier in order to request creation. TP contacted Eyelid Productions, who confirmed this is requested via CloudNext. TP confirmed he has a meeting with CloudNext to confirm the application cost. Indicative costs provided were the following: The first year of hosting is free and then £50+VAT for subsequent years for hosting domain and £50+VAT for email usage.

10. Drainage:

- 10.1 To receive update on drainage grant funding awarded by Herefordshire Council:
Clerk confirmed the grant funding invoice previously submitted to Herefordshire Council for the total of £2200 has been reimbursed.
- 10.2 To receive update on outstanding drainage concerns
Councillors advised the Lengthsman is due to return to finish drainage grant works due to adverse weather. This will be completed before March 31st.

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11. To raise future agenda items – no discussion:

To call an extraordinary meeting to discuss the 2026/27 Lengthsman Scheme following correspondence received from Herefordshire Council.

12. To note the dates & time of the next meeting on Wednesday 6th May 2026

Meeting closed at 7:50 pm

SIGNED.....CHAIRMAN

DATED.....