



## **DRAFT Minutes of the Urchfont Parish Council (UPC) Full Council Meeting held in Urchfont Village Hall on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**Present: Councillor's: Moscrop (PM – Chair), Bamber (SB – Vice Chair), Waddell (JW), Stephens (AS), Rotherford (JR), Harding (RH) and Chadwick (RC)**

**Councillor for Urchfont & Bishops Cannings: Philip Whitehead (PW)**

**Clerk to the Council: Lunn (BL)**

**Members of the Public (for all or part of the meeting): Mary Chivers-Newman, Paul Newman**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

**1. Welcome by the Chair** – PM welcomed all to the first meeting of 2025 and wished all a very happy New Year. With regret she announced the resignation of councillor Pauline Kendall with immediate effect due to personal work commitments.

**2. Apologies:** Cllrs Hill (TH) and Shears (SS)

**B. PLANNING** – See Separate Agenda

### **C. JANUARY FULL COUNCIL MEETING**

**1. Councillor Declarations of Interest** – None declared at the meeting

**2. Time set aside for Public Participation and External Reports** – As a resident, PW sought a progress update on the proposed movement of the 20mph signs in Crookwood Lane which need to move 28.4 metres towards Potterne. The replacement gateway signs can be placed alongside making both more visible to drivers. This will be progressed through LHFIFG.

**ACTION: FC/01/25 - BL**

**3. Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Proposer</b>	<b>Seconded</b>	<b>Resolution</b>
<b>To approve and sign the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</b>	<b>PM</b>	<b>JW</b>	<b>AGREED with one abstention due to absence from the meeting.</b>

**4. Outstanding Action List Status Review and Update Reports from the Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024** – BL displayed current listing, it was noted that 68 is complete as it is referenced in the January Redhorn News report.

### **5. Finance**

**i. Financial Statement and Bank Reconciliation as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024** – Financial documentation had been circulated to all councillors prior to the meeting, BL confirmed that they are in good order. As we are approaching the end of the financial year, any appropriate outstanding spend should be progressed. Any committed spend not completed will be accrued into 25/26.

ii. **Financial Spend Items during December 2024** – BL displayed the details as shown on the bank reconciliation statement.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To ratify the financial spending details for December 2024			

iii. **PRECEPT 25/26** – BL referred to the funding requirement and impact of Precept increases data he had provided at the December meeting. JR felt that a better understanding of the indicated reserve at year end is needed along with the agreed reserve target which was set some years ago, perhaps this could be discussed at a subsequent meeting. BL commented that the reserve is purely an indication at this stage and is dependent on actual spend to end of March, budgets and spend are managed during the year to meet the target and keep finances within affordability.

PW commented that WC is likely to impose a 4-4.99% increase and the police a 12% increase. JR referenced the wider financial inflation scenario and suggested that UPC should agree a 3% increase. Following a discussion on the rationale for this increase, the following proposal was made which will increase the UPC element for a Band D property council tax by £3.09 to £106.14 per annum.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To demand a 3% increase in the PRECEPT for 2025/26 to £60,038.09.	JR	PM	AGREED unanimously

**ACTION: FC/02/25 - BL**

iv. **Contribution to Redhorn News for 2025** – in the absence of any documented proposal from Redhorn News, no decision could be made at this meeting. BL to write to Redhorn News seeking a written proposal to be considered at the February meeting.

**ACTION: FC/03/25 - BL**

## 6. **Lead Councillor, Working Groups, Clerk & other written Reports (see Appendix I on website version only)**

- a. **Clerks Report** – following the resignation of Cllr Kendall, UPC now has two vacancies,
- b. **Councillor reports**
  - **UPNP WG Report** – no further comments in the absence of TH.
  - **New Website Project** – JR reported that a very useful meeting had been held with BL which will help to map the way forward with a defined set of criteria which it is hoped will satisfy compliance issues and provide independent access for community organisations. We will be looking at a number of providers including the current provider to ensure value for money and ability to meet our objectives.

7. **Farmers Field Update for 2024 (see appendix II on website version only)** – PM thanked the Working Party for the very comprehensive report and for the diligence of volunteers who maintain this facility. RH echoed this view, but expressed a view that water flow and the new spring might become a significant issue. PM highlighted the request for funding during 2025/26.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To provide a requested budget of £300 during 2025/26.	PM	SB	AGREED unanimously

**ACTION: FC/04/25 - BL**

8. **UPEG Daffodil Planting Report for UPC Jan 2025 (see appendix III on website version only)** – PM thanked the UPEG Chairperson for the comprehensive report and congratulated the volunteers for planting a huge number of bulbs in Urchfont and Wedhampton. This report also

requested funding for 2025/26.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To provide a requested budget of £600 during 2025/26.	PM	JW	AGREED unanimously

**ACTION; FC/05/25 - BL**

**9. Urchfont Parish Neighbourhood Plan – see written report at Appendix 1 on website version only** – PW reiterated his comments made at the December meeting that WC had submitted their new plan early to Government, but that the housing development target may be revised by up to 87% across the whole of Wiltshire.

**10. Proposal to submit a Current Neighbourhood Plan Material Modification application to WC** – PW reported that he had already had a long meeting with WC Officers on this, but suggested that the Material Plan Modification application should wait for the result of the Land south of Ballingers appeal. It was agreed that TH, JW, PW should work on a draft application for consideration at the February meeting.

**ACTION: FC/06/25 – TH/JW/PW**

**11. Emergency Hub Proposals** – AS reported that the parts had arrived to connect the generator to the 3 phase supply in the Village Hall, installation will proceed shortly. In the meantime plans are in hand to move forward in a compatible manner with emergency services and WC. The WG is now looking to recruit volunteers to help with the preparations for a role out in the community. SB asked when the hub will go live, AS responded hopefully within 2 months. SB reiterated that the Hub will be essential to cater for and protect the vulnerable.

**12. New notice board in Crooks Lane** – JW reported that she had not been advised when the board will be delivered. BL suggested that she needed to contact the manufacturer as UPC had already paid 50% of the cost. When delivered. The site will need to be prepared for installation.

(Post meeting note: an update has been received from the manufacturer which suggests delivery w/c 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025)

**13. Update on Current Issues not covered by above agenda items** – None reported.

**14. External Meetings** – None reported

**15. Other Reports from Councillors**

**i. High Street Junction with B3098** – JR reported that vehicles joining the B3098 often do not stop or look to the left at this junction, especially if nothing is coming from the Stonepit direction. He believed that this should be provided with a STOP sign rather than GIVE WAY. It was agreed that a request should be put to LHFIG.

**ACTION: FC/07/25 – PM/AS**

**ii. Potholes on road to Redhorn Vidette** – RH commented that the extent and size of potholes is becoming a serious safety issue. AS stated that this has been reported numerous times to WC Highways, PW asked that AS write to him with details of reports so that he can follow it up.

**ACTION: FC/08/25 - AS**

**iii. Accessibility to EV Charging points** – RH asked what plans had been considered for provision of EV charging in the Parish, especially as many properties do not have drives or garages. PW pointed out that lack of street lighting limited the provision of on street EV charging. PM commented that a previous councillor had initiated a review of potential EV supplies and grants available, but this was never completed. RH volunteered to investigate opportunities available.

**ACTION: FC/09/25 – RH**

**iv. Devizes Gateway** – Despite earlier information, PW advised that work is continuing on the proposed station, he suggested that Catharine Symington representing Devizes Town Council should be invited to the February meeting to give an update.

**ACTION: FC/10/25 - BL**

**v. New Scout Hut Proposal** – RC reported that the scouts are planning a new more substantial and

useful scout hut in Urchfont which it is estimated could cost £200k. He is looking for potential sponsors in this respect. BL confirmed that he had already provided advice to RC that UPC is unlikely to be able to contribute much to this proposal either through the financial assistance policy or CIL (normally used for whole community benefit). He has a better chance of securing funds from Scarecrow, WC, the scouts or maybe lottery. Having said this, it was nevertheless agreed that in the first instance RC should make a written proposal to UPC with more specific details which can be considered further and a decision made.

**ACTION: FC/11/25 - RC**

**16. Items for Future Agenda** (not identified from agenda items above)

- **Potential Parish Council hustings before the 2025 Elections**
- **Redistribution of Lead Councillor Roles (following resignation)**

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.06 pm.

**Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025 - 7.00pm Village Hall (Conference Room)**

## APPENDIX I TO JANUARY 2025 UPC MINUTES

### A. CLERK'S REPORT

- i. **Finance** – Copies of the Financial Summary and Bank Reconciliation on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 will be distributed to all councillors prior to the meeting. The accounts are in good order.
- ii. **Councillor Status** – One vacancy currently exists. Please remember that all councillors will stand down in May 2025 and be subject to re-election if they so wish. This is in accord with the normal 4 year term of office for all Unitary, Town and Parish councillors.
- iii. **PRECEPT 25/26** – The UPC agreed demand to WC has to be submitted by the deadline of 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

**Bob Lunn, Clerk to the Council**

### B. COUNCILLORS WRITTEN REPORTS

#### UPNP Working Group

Although the WG did not hold a formal meeting in December due to the festive season, a number of small WG sub groups continued to work on the Site Assessment Matrix, which is nearing its final draft. The Matrix includes a number of factors or 'criteria' ranging from Green Field/Brown Field, potential for 'affordable housing' to traffic/environmental impact. There are a total of 26 criteria and each criteria is subdivided into 5 scoring assessment guide on a 'best' to 'worse' sliding value.

The closing date for the submission of the 'Call for Sites' form was the 31st December and we have received a good number of sites for consideration. The WG can now start the evaluation of these sites, using the Site Assessment Matrix which will allow us to compare each site on a 'like for like' basis and give each site its score. This will provide the community with as much information as possible when making their selection of the most appropriate sites for inclusion into the UPNP.

The WG looks forward to a busy 2025.

Councillors Jackie Waddell and Trevor Hill

#### New Website project

An Internal Meeting has been held to discuss scope and conditions to create a new up to date UPC website. We will be in asking for proposals from the current supplier and two others after further scoping criteria is agreed including other entity representatives who may want access to the site. GPDR and compliance will need to be agreed

Councillors Pauleen Kendal and John Rotherford

## **FARMER'S FIELD UPDATE FOR 2024**

**Prepared for the Urchfont Parish Council (UPC)**

**by the**

**The Farmer's Field Working Party**

**(following the same format and largely covering the same subjects as the 2023 report, submitted to the UPC in the Spring of 2024)**

### **Work Carried Out During 2024**

Firstly, the UPC is aware that the present state of affairs in Farmer's Field (F.F.) has been greatly driven and influenced by the need to remove 100+ die back-affected ash trees. So, work over the last three years has been dominated by the felling of these trees and dealing with the mass of logs and brush so generated. This task has now largely been completed but a few ash remain standing because they are either showing no sign of the disease, are too close to the road and telephone cables (and thus potentially dangerous to fell), and/or are very awkward to take down due to the proximity of other trees. These few trees will be inspected regularly for signs of die-back and for safety: if no threat is detected then they will be left standing.

Secondly, the large quantity of logs, branches and brush produced from the felled ash has now been formed into a number of staked and loose dead-hedges or log piles to create a habitat for fungi, mosses, birds, insects, hedgehogs and rodents, all of which are present or have been seen in these structures.

Thirdly, the fifty or so replacement trees (of mixed species including walnut, rowan, cherry, cotoneaster and oak) are all doing well with none needing replacement in the last year. Also planted this year were two trees donated by parishioners, one being in memory of a deceased relative.

Fourthly, Martin Follet and his few able assistants have now Winter-laid about three-quarters of the Eastern mixed thorn hedge that they hope to finish by the end of this winter season. If not, then operations will cease this coming Spring so as not to disturb nesting birds and then resume in the Autumn.

Fifthly, March is the traditional and optimum time to coppice the several stands of hazel we have in F.F. and we are doing this on a five-yearly rotational basis; a few stands were coppiced in 2024 and some more will be this coming March.

Lastly, general tidying up/maintenance work is routinely carried out during our last-Saturday-of-the-month working sessions, mainly keeping brambles in check, checking the new trees and repairing dead hedges. The main consequence of the felling of the ash has been the substantial increase in sunlight in the wood thus allowing grasses, brambles, nettles and cow-parsley to proliferate. Although annoying and maybe greater than we anticipated this is unavoidable and part of nature and

is in accordance with our designation of F.F. as a “lightly managed wild wood”. We are thus letting the wood “do its thing” and evolve naturally but as the new trees grow and matures light levels on the floor of the wood will fall and hopefully these weedy plants will diminish.

## **Plans for the Coming Year**

The state of F.F. *as at early January 2025* is that virtually all ash trees have been felled, the replacement trees are doing well, dead-hedges and log piles are doing well also and visibly seen to be harbouring wildlife, mosses and fungi, the majority of the old thick thorn Eastern boundary hedge has been laid, and the small populations of snowdrops, blue/whitebells and wild garlic looked good last Spring. So, there is not a great deal to do this coming year in creative or destructive terms – mainly just the removal of some or all of the remaining few ash trees if they show signs of die-back, the completion of the laying of the Eastern hedge and the continued annual new planting or thinning out of snowdrops, blue/whitebells, foxgloves and wild garlic. We will thus merely revert back to monthly general maintenance duties, as we were prior to the ash dieback dilemma a few years ago.

The Working Party has always wished to create an under-storey of some sort, whether it be berry shrubs for birds, more bluebells, more snowdrops, and/or more wild garlic. However, with brambles, nettles and cow-parsley now dominating the ground layer of the wood this is not possible. All we can hope for is that in future years the growing new trees will block out enough of the sunlight to kill off or reduce the vigour of the nettles, cow-parsley and brambles so allowing bluebells etc. to spread (...but maybe too much to expect a vista like that shown below...?). We will however plant up the few bare patches of the woods’ floor where possible.







## **Fauna**

A fair amount of fauna is regularly seen or evidenced in F.F. – muntjac deer, badgers (?the big sett in the south-eastern corner has been abandoned), rabbits, mice, hedgehogs, frogs in the scrape and diverse birds of course including buzzards.

## **The Scrape**

The pond, or scrape, created some years ago at the Eastern end of the wood has reduced in size a little over time due to silting and rampant plant growth, so it is now more of a bog. This feature is now “Hobson’s Choice” as we do not have the funds or manpower to regularly renovate it, thin out the iris and other robust water plants (whose growth is greatly accelerated by the nitrates running off the adjacent farm fields) or dredge it. We are thus leaving it be and letting it “do its own thing”: a bog is as good a habitat as a pond and there is still plenty of clear water to allow frogs to lay their spawn, a feature of the scrape in recent years.

One issue in the last year has been the increased amount of ground water flooding into F.F. and on to the path between the scrape and the Eastern boundary hedge: this area has been permanently saturated this year and only passable with Wellington boots. In heavy rain we have observed very large quantities of water flowing down the Holloway from the fields over to the South-East and along the byway adjacent to our Eastern boundary, as well as increased ground seepage. This water of course eventually finds its way down to The Bottom, via our scrape, and so into Urchfont stream alongside The Baish. We have discussed the matter with Phil Snook who is very aware of the situation; he thinks a new spring may have developed?

## **The Water Main**



The UPC will be aware that the 150mm asbestos-cement mains water pipe that runs under much of F.F. and into the village from the Foxley Corner direction sprang a leak last Autumn. Contractors acting for the regional Water Authority thus dug a large hole down to the pipe, destroying one of our dead-hedges in the process, and carried out what turned out to be an easy and quick repair. We liaised with the contractors to negotiate a path through the wood for their digger and to ascertain the route of the pipe on its way to the village Allotments area, for future reference.

One positive consequence of this disturbed ground is that it has produced a good clear area, devoid of nettles and cow-parsley, that we can now plant up with bulbs and foxgloves this year.

## **Costings**

Fortuitously, apart from the purchase of the Shepton Mallet nursery replacement trees a few years ago, to date F.F. is a low-cost enterprise, usually just occasional expenditure such as mower and brush-cutter fuel and servicing. Funding over the last few years has been from a Scarecrow grant of £500 that was largely used to purchase the new trees and to obtain wooden stakes to form the various dead-hedges. No demand has been made on UPC funds for quite a while; it is believed just for chainsaw fuel by Peter Rotheram a few years ago?

We will however require, say, £300 this year for more bluebell and garlic bulbs, wooden stakes to maintain the dead-hedges and both strimmer and mower fuel: we could perhaps apply for Scarecrow funds again, although maybe our largely maintenance-based requirements do not meet their grant criteria?

## **Miscellaneous**

The shipping container parked in F.F. is still proving hugely successful and useful and, as the UPC is aware, is shared with the Rights of Way Group (RoW). It remains in good condition. The F.F. Working Group will likely again invite the RoW team to a joint BBQ in F.F. this Summer.

The old corrugated iron cowshed we use for shelter and wheelbarrow, wood etc. storage is also in good condition for its age and we have not had to carry out any repairs to it. Oak planks sawn from a fallen tree in Oakfrith have been stored in the shed by Martin Follet to season and dry out for a year: these have now been removed and made into new benches by him - for Oakfrith and for sale. No doubt more planks will be placed in the shed to season as and when a suitable tree falls or is felled in Oakfrith.

The two wooden access gates into F.F. are in sound condition and this year Liz Clifton-Page cleaned and renovated the three benches we have in the wood.

One continual issue is the clearing of litter thrown over the hedge into F.F. from the layby just up from the Crooks Lane junction. Despite there being a dustbin at the layby people still find the need to throw rubbish over the hedge. We pick up a bin-bag's worth of trash every monthly working session.

Another problem discovered in the December just gone is the collapse of the part of the brick retaining wall that forms a section of the culvert running under the main road, by the layby. This debris has been cleared away and the area inspected with no further threat noted and no repairs or re-building work really necessary. We will keep an eye on this area when we regularly clean out the two ditches that take the outflow from the scrape towards the culvert.

## **The Future**

With the constructive and destructive works just about finished in the last year, in 2025 we will be reverting to general maintenance activities during our last-Saturday-of-the-month working sessions, as we did in the pre-ash die-back years. This will involve keeping brambles within reasonable limits and digging them out where we can, checking the new trees, dead-hedge maintenance, clearing out the two scrape outflow ditches, removing some of the invasive scrape plants to keep them in check, completing the laying of the eastern hedge and carrying on with the March coppicing of the hazel. Where there is sufficient clear space, we will continue with bulb planting each Autumn and snowdrop thinning and spreading each Spring. An ongoing task is to continue liaising with the Snook's about the farmland water run-off. All our work to date has been in the spirit of the ***Wild Landscapes*** report prepared by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust for the UPC some years ago.

**1st. January 2025**

## **UPEG Daffodil Planting Report for UPC Jan 2025**

### **The Planting**

Several UPEG members and volunteers met on a sunny day last late-September and planted c.1,700 daffodil bulbs in: The Paddock Green, on the corner of Manor Close, along Blackboard Lane, between the lamp post opposite 'Hartley House' to just over half way to the 20MPH sign, on the raised traffic island at the bottom of Stonepit Lane, by the wishing well spring down The Bottom, on a private side lawn of a house in Foxley Fields opposite Yardlands, both sides of the grass verges at the entrance to Walnut Close, at the entrance to The Croft, and by the allotments main gate. Pauline Guiney and her happy band of cubs planted more bulbs, on a different day due to scheduling, in the High Street at the top of School Lane the pond area by the entrance to Manor Farmyard and in Church Lane. Bob & Joyce Organ planted around 100 bulbs by the Ballingers bus-stop, whilst a group of Wedhampton'ites planted a further c.1,000 there along the High Street and on Greengate Road next to the notice board.

### **The Method**

The planting style used was a combination of the naturalistic method whereby a handful of bulbs was cast on the ground and then planted where they fell and/or planting in formal groups of 15-20. The method used depended to some degree on the nature of the area to be planted and the judgement of the planters. Where the grouping method was used, then at least 15 bulbs were planted as a certain percentage of bulbs will likely grow up "blind" (i.e. plenty of leaf but no flower).

### **Maintenance**

We would be most grateful if you could advise Goddards of the newly planted areas so they do not to mow or trim the areas they are responsible for until the daffodils have finished flowering and the leaves have died back.

### **The Future**

UPEG's intention is to expand on this planting this coming autumn as there is scope for other areas to be planted - for example continuing along Blackboard Lane towards the School gate, at Lydeaway by the mile marker at the road junction to the A342 as well as other areas we have already identified. We hope that UPC would be willing to supply further funding for this and allocate us a similar amount (£600) as in 2024.

Many thanks

Liz Clifton-Page

UPEG Chairman

Jan 2025