



DRAFT Minutes of the Urchfont Parish Council (UPC) Full Council Meeting held in Urchfont Village Hall on Wednesday 14th December 2022

Present: Councillors: Botham (MB – Chairman), Hollyman (MH - Vice-Chairman), Bamber (SB), Holt (SH), Gibb (HG), Rotherham(PR)

Clerk to the Council: Lunn (BL)

Councillor for Urchfont & Bishops Cannings: Cllr Whitehead (PW)

Members of the Public (for all or part of the meeting): Trevor Hill, Malcolm Smith, Janet Hawkins, Corrine Rotherham

A. INTRODUCTION

- 1. Welcome by the Chairman** – MB welcomed all to the meeting.
- 2. Apologies** - Cllrs Turner (MT), Rotherford (JR), Moscrop (PM) and Scanlon (RS)

B. PLANNING – See Separate Minutes

C. DECEMBER COUNCIL MEETING

- 1. Declarations of Interest** - None
- 2. Time set aside for Public Participation and External Reports**

i. **Proposed Ballingers Development** - Malcolm Smith referred to his email (see Appendix II on website version only) regarding the proposed development opposite Ballingers which had already been distributed to councillors prior to the meeting. Mr. Smith mentioned that he could not find notes from the current steering group on the website. SB read out the email for reference purposes. MH agreed with some of the comments which make sense. SB had nothing to add apart from reiterating the need to learn from the Uphill experience. SH reminded all that there was no template for the current neighbourhood plan, Urchfont was the first to construct a plan and the public were fully consulted during the process and via the referendum. HG emphasized the need to be really open and transparent with the current review process. See further comments under item 7 below.

ii. **Hard Standing for path to Oakfrith Wood** - Trevor Hill referred to his email (see Appendix 111 on website version only) requesting a hard surface at the beginning of Oakfrith Path. He emphasized that Geoff Potter had originally offered to construct such a facility when he was working on the lay-by, but this offer was not taken up. Mr. Hill had approached Mr. Potter recently and he had said that the work could be undertaken for around £800. It was agreed that this should be put on the January agenda for further discussion. Mr. Hill agreed to submit further details to UPC.

3. Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 9th November 2022

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To approve and sign the minutes unchanged as a true and accurate record of the meeting.	MB	MH	AGREED Unanimously

4. Action List Status Review and Update Reports from the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th November 2022 – BL displayed the current outstanding action sheet which needs updating, it was agreed that he should distribute this to all councillors to update as necessary.

ACTION: FC/60/22 – BL

(Post Meeting Note: Action sheet sent to all councillors on 19th December 2022)

5. Finance

a. Financial Statement and Bank Reconciliation as at 30th November 2022 – BL confirmed that he had distributed copies of both documents to all councillors prior to the meeting, accounts are in good order.

BL advised councillors that they will need to consider and approve the PRECEPT demand for 2023/24 at the January meeting so that he could submit this to WC by the deadline of 18th January 2023. To assist with this he will distribute a spreadsheet in advance of the meeting showing the impact of percentage increases to the PRECEPT on the Parish Council element of Council Tax. As an example BL stated that a 5% increase in the PRECEPT will result in a Parish council tax increase of £4.86 per annum for a Band D property.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconder	Resolution
To ratify the list of individual payments made during November 2022 as shown on the Bank Reconciliation Statement	MB	MH	AGREED Unanimously

b. Request to fund / part fund works to large Ash tree adjacent to property boundary off Peppercombe Lane – BL confirmed that he had not received any information back from WC regarding funding for this activity. PW asked BL to email him and he would try to hasten a reply.

ACTION: FC/61/22 – BL

(Post Meeting Note : Email sent to PW on 17th December)

c. Request to contribute to notice board for Peppercombe Mill – at the November meeting Linda Jennings sought a contribution from UPC of £250 for the installation of lectern style information sign at Peppercombe Mill.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconder	Resolution
To approve a contribution of £250 for the sign at Peppercombe Mill.	MB	SB	AGREED Unanimously

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

a. Clerks Report – Nothing to add or clarify

b. Councillor reports – none received

7. Neighbourhood Plan (including 5 year land supply) - MB stated that the Steering Group had walked the villages last month to identify potential sites for development.

SH reported that the steering group (SG) are looking to increase the number of members to about 12 which was the total number we had to develop the current Neighbourhood Plan (NP). Trevor Hill has already joined. The five year Housing Land Supply Target is under review by government following 100 or so Conservative MPs who were concerned about it. The Steering Group and UPC have written to our MP concerning the target, and he confirmed that he shared our concerns, particularly about the calculation of the number of houses counted by Wiltshire Council in the 5 year target. Wiltshire Council will wait to see what finally comes forward about it before making any decision about targets. There have been 14 Housing Ministers in the last 12 years, which really doesn't help provide continuity of policies! The SG will meet on the 4th of January and will have a full agenda to consider. The SG have set up a WhatsApp group to improve communications and notes of meetings will be attached there and also on the UPC website. Urchfont Parish Councillors and SG members have joined. The SG are looking to secure a grant from Locality, a government funded body. Grants of £10,000 are available together with an additional £8000 if new sites are identified. Grants would allow the SG to develop a new neighbourhood plan, deliver questionnaires and analyze results, print documents, deliver consultations in the village hall and employ a secretary. Communication of all types will be easier if a grant is secured, particularly as the original NP only had about £5000 to make the NP.

MB stated that the first item he wanted to address is the Facebook Comment that he made relating to the proposed development South of Ballingers by Grassroots Planning. He now realised that this was not a wise thing to do and with hindsight not the right place to comment. MB recognised that he should have consulted with the Steering Group and other Councillors prior to publishing anything in any media. UPC did reply to Grassroots Planning stating that the council would respond to a planning application for the site should they receive one from Wiltshire County Council. MB apologised if his comments caused any upset to members of the community. MB had learned a lot from this error especially just how significant and sensitive for the village the Neighbourhood Plan is.

BL reminded all present that the statement in the November minutes reflected the UPC corporate view on the Grassroots proposal, namely that a UPC response would not be made to the proposed development until a planning application is submitted to WC and UPC is consulted. As members of the electorate, councillors can express a personal view as long as they make it quite clear that it is their personal view only.

MB further stated that we have come to a natural pause in the review of the NP and we need to use the time wisely. He had with the Steering Group been looking at ways to improve the review process. Richard Hawkins (see Appendix IV on the website version only) and Malcom Smith make important points in their letters to the council in addition to commenting on Facebook issues covered above.

Mr Hawkins refers to communications in Redhorn News. The article in question relates to the Grassroots document and a response from Simon Holt. Richard's comments highlight how critical the scoring mechanism in the NP is. The scoring for sites in the NP is to be reviewed to provide consistency and identify anomalies. Similarly, in future all sites will be put forward for public consideration – none will be ruled out by any scoring mechanism including the Sustainability Appraisal.

Mr Hawkins also raises questions about members of the steering group. MB stated that any member of the steering group acting outside the terms of reference of the review and their individual terms of reference will be called to task.

Mr Smith raises some very important points including engaging more with the electorate before rushing to make a decision on its behalf. MB confirmed that the Steering Group is going to review the way in which it interfaces with the electorate and the influence the electorate have on the decision making process. Preparation for the current NP gave 25% of the vote on sites to the electorate and 75% to the output of the selection process this, is to be reviewed with the view to giving the electorate 50% of the vote. The process for Increased electoral participation will be reported at the January UPC meeting.

Mr Smith's points on the benefits of the Ballingers site, will be considered when the site is assessed in the NP review.

PW stated that whilst he had not seen the detail of the Gove paper on the 5 year land supply, the local Wiltshire plan normally remains in place for 10 years. To date it is worth noting that 140% of the current plan has been achieved. It is also worth noting that Persimmon are likely to sign the Section 106 agreement relating to an extensive development in Trowbridge which has been delayed for about three years.

Mr Hill referred to a guideline paper issued by WC in 2013 and wondered whether this had been updated. BL to email PW who agreed to check whether updating has taken place.

ACTION: FC/62/22 – BL

(Post Meeting Note : Email sent to PW on 17th December)

8. Annual ROSPA on Children's Playground – SB reported that she and MB had visited the playground to review the ROSPA recommendations. In terms of damage to the seating in the shelter, PR had provided a quote to repair.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To approve the quote from PR of £100 to repair the shelter bench	SB	SH	AGREED with PR abstaining due to declared interest

PR had also examined the post and rail fencing along the pathway to Oakfrith Wood, it is rotten in several places due to the way that it had been installed directly into the soil. This will be a big job to repair and should be put out to tender, including the repair to the gate. SB/MB to prepare a common statement of requirement which can be used for the tender process to secure at least three quotes.

ACTION: FC/63/22 – SB/MB

9. Electric Vehicle Charging Points for villages– to consider WC opportunity (see WC grant scheme information at Appendix IV on website version only) – In the absence of Cllr Scanlon, this item was deferred to the January meeting.

10. Electronic Speed Signs on B3098 – MH reported that he had contacted the WC Highways Engineer who could find no documented Devizes Area Board comment that WC would pay for the installation of posts, his view is that either UPC will need to pay or make a submission to the LHFIFG. PW confirmed that the WC Highways Engineer will need to agree to the siting of any additional posts.

11. Farmers Field (including dog access status) – PR conformed that the large gate at the side of the Field had now been reinstated. Debate then took place on whether dogs should be allowed into the Field, they are not at present. MH expressed the view that he rarely sees anyone in the Field, maybe because they cannot take dogs in. It was pointed out that cubs, scouts and the school visit during the spring and summer months, they do not want to deal with irresponsible leaving of dog poo. SB commented that many beaches now operate a no dog policy during the summer months, maybe UPC could do the same.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To permit access to Farmers Field for dogs during the period 1 st October to 31 st March only	SB	MH	AGREED with one abstention

Provision will need to be made for proper signs and dog bin(s). Budget to be discussed and approved at the January meeting.

12. Naming of Hales Farm development roads and houses – The latest version of the proposal from Acorn Developments showing numbers and house names for ALL properties was discussed.

Proposal	Proposer	Seconded	Resolution
To approve the latest listing showing numbers and house names for ALL 13 properties	MB	MH	AGREED Unanimously

13. Proposal to publish UPC Facebook page – In the absence of Cllr's Moscrop and Scanlon, this item was deferred to the next meeting.

14. Celebrating the Coronation in 2023 – MB reported that he had been talking to Roger Chadwick (Urchfont Scouts) and he had agreed that the scouts will be very happy to devise and manage coronation celebrations. They will provide UPC with an indicative budget for consideration and approval, including any consideration of celebratory gifts.

15. Update on Current Issues not covered by above agenda items – MH reported that WC had replaced the lamp pole in Friars Lane which has been damaged for over a year, but the light itself has not yet been replaced. PW commented that the two elements are dealt with by different departments.

(Post Meeting Note: the lamp has now been replaced and is working.)

16. External Meetings – None reported

17. Other Reports from Councillors – None reported

18. Items for Future Agenda

- i. Proposal to appoint First Responders
- ii. 2023/24 PRECEPT
- iii. Notice Board for Foxley Fields
- iv. Proposal to publish UPC Facebook page
- v. Electric Vehicle Charging Points for villages
- vi. Hard standing at the beginning of Oakfrith Path
- vii. Dog bins and signs for Farmers Field - budget

Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 11th January 2023 - 7.00pm Village Hall (Conference Room)

APPENDIX I TO DECEMBER 2022 UPC MINUTES

a. CLERK'S REPORT

i. **Finance** – Copies of the Financial Summary and Bank Reconciliation at 30th November 2022 will be distributed to all councillors prior to the meeting. The accounts are in good order. The accounts have been updated to include all approved amendments to the budgets made at the November meeting.

ii. **Councillor Vacancies** – The Council still has one vacancy to be filled by co-option, but no nominations have been received to date.

iii. **Meeting Dates in 2023** - 11th January, 8th February, 8th March, 12th April, 10th May, 14th June, 12th July, 9th August, 13th September, 11th October, 8th November, 13th December

Bob Lunn, Clerk to the Council

b. COUNCILLOR REPORTS - None received

APPENDIX II TO DECEMBER 2022 UPC MINUTES

Email received from Malcolm Smith on 9th December 2022 – Development opposite Ballingers – distributed to all councillors on 9th December 2022

Hi, Bob,

Please could you circulate the following text to all councillors, and append a copy to the minutes of the next UPC meeting? Many thanks.

I was astonished to read that UPC had chosen to condemn the proposed development opposite Ballingers after the most perfunctory consideration, citing a number of negative comments on Facebook as justification. Speaking as one of the not-so-silent majority who choose not to broadcast our opinions on social media, may I ask that UPC make a little more effort to engage with their electorate before rushing to make a decision on our behalf?

Having taken the time to study the proposals, I make the following observations:

1. The development would satisfy 85% of the supposed quota of housing.
2. It would supply all of the affordable housing required in one fell swoop.
3. There would be no additional strain on the already inadequate road infrastructure within the village either during the construction phase or thereafter.
4. The plans take into consideration in some detail the latest national and local guidelines including the current Neighbourhood Plan.
5. As Councillor Holt has pointed out, the development boundary will need to be expanded to meet the 'housing quota'. So, why not expand south of the B3098?
Wherever you build, you will spoil the view for somebody - ask the residents of Uphill and Foxley Fields!

In an extraordinary display of double standards, some of the Steering Group who oppose this site because of the 'important view' were actively promoting the Uphill Site DESPITE its 'important view'!

Please can we have some measured, rational, informed public debate on these issues, rather than a knee-jerk reaction triggered by a minority of 'keyboard warriors'.

Malcolm Smith
7, The Croft
Sent from my iPad

APPENDIX III TO DECEMBER 2022 UPC MINUTES

Email received from Mr. Trevor Hill on 15th November 2022

Dear Bob,

Can you please ask the Parish Council to consider establishing a more suitable hardstanding access to the footpath to Oakfrith Wood at its start point adjacent to the entrance to the School access road. This footpath is in constant use and this usage has turned the current access into a slippery muddy slope. As the winter weather deteriorates this access will become more and more treacherous.

Councillors may remember that when the new lay-by was constructed opposite Hales Farm by Geoff Potter he offered (free of charge) to construct a 'bell mouth' gravelled access with a gradual slope from the tarmac School road to a level point on the footpath. This type of access hardstanding would seem appropriate and relatively easy to achieve at a relatively low cost. However, councillors may feel a more substantial access is required, but whatever is decided will be far less hazardous than what is there at present.

Thanking you.

Trevor (Hill)

APPENDIX IV TO DECEMBER 2022 UPC MINUTES

Letter received from Mr. Richard Hawkins (distributed to all councillors on 8th December 2022)

To all Urchfont Parish Councillors

Neighbourhood Plan 'Update'

I am concerned about the way our Neighbourhood Plan 'update' is being developed. Some of you will have read my previous letters to the Parish Council relating to the irregularities in the management of our existing Neighbourhood Plan during its development process. Indeed, minutes of the Parish Council meetings during this period contain numerous comments relating to the lack of 'Openness and Transparency'!

I have read recent Facebook comments, the November minutes of the Parish Council and an article in the December Redhorn News Magazine, all of which raise concerns.

Facebook

During a Facebook discussion prior to the November meeting, regarding a possible development opposite Ballingers, the following comment/response was made by Mark Botham (on behalf of the Parish Council or Steering Group?)

The comments from residents are all against the development. When the development last came up it was voted 19th out of 19 proposed sites for the Neighborhood Plan, and it did not make it as far as being considered by the village – it fell at the first hurdle.

Anyone who might be supportive of the development would certainly not get involved with a Facebook 'spat' and the vitriol that could follow. I am unsure of where this '19th out of 19 proposed sites' information came from as publicly available information produced at the time clearly shows it came 13th out of 17 proposed sites. I expected all available sites to be considered fairly but these public comments would appear to demonstrate the Council's negativity towards this site.

The Minutes of the November Parish Council meeting

My previous correspondence concerned irregularities in the management of our Neighbourhood Plan and those who did not act in an open and transparent manner. I am appalled to see that those same people, outlined in my previous correspondence, will be actively involved in this update. There is so much mistrust in the village generally, but particularly with 'Uphill residents, who were prevented from seeing documentation that was instructed to be made public and would have caused the site to be possibly withdrawn!

Redhorn News

The following is a paragraph from the Redhorn News Magazine – December 2022

The supposed lack of a 5-year target may be why a group is currently asking Parishioners for feedback about a site south of the B3098. This site was rejected in the current Neighbourhood Plan as it is outside the Development Boundary, will materially affect a protected view identified in the Neighbourhood Plan and near a protected Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It would also affect the amenity value of houses in Stonepit Lane and Ballingers. Wiltshire Council recommends we should build 65 houses between 2016 and 2036. We feel this is unrealistic because we have already built 27 houses in the current UWLNP period. There are also still six to come forward to Planning. The Rural Housing Needs Survey identified an aspiration for 8 affordable homes and the most popular number of new houses supported was 10-20. To achieve 8 affordable homes, the total number of homes required is felt to be 28 – and the NPSG have written to Wiltshire Council proposing that as a total. We await a response. Of course, these figures may change as negotiations progress and also if the 5-year target is not carried forward by central Government or Wiltshire Council.

I am appalled by the statements made in this paragraph particularly if they are compared to the previous Uphill development. The statements were completely ignored during the planning process for this site as detailed below.

Redhorn News Article	Uphill Development
<i>This site was rejected in the current Neighbourhood Plan as:</i>	
<i>it is outside the Development Boundary</i>	Uphill' was outside of the development boundary but the plan included extending the boundary.
<i>it will materially affect a protected view identified in the Neighbourhood Plan</i>	The correct term is 'Important' not 'Protected' 'Uphill' was also an 'Important' view in our Neighbourhood Plan.
<i>it is near a protected Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)</i>	The SSSI is further away than an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) is to 'Uphill'
<i>It would also affect the amenity value of houses in Stonepit Lane and Ballingers</i>	This was certainly not a consideration in the 'Uphill' planning process and applies to all development.

I must ask who drafted this document and why include these totally negative statements which are made purely to object to this site? To put it crudely it is like waving two fingers to the community adjacent to the Uphill development.

I am unsure why we have proposed 28 houses when our requirement by Wiltshire Council might be less. Even 28 houses do not guarantee 8 affordable units if the 28 are all built on small sites! In fact, it does not guarantee any!

My 12th April 2022 Letter to UPC

A letter I sent to the Parish Council on 12th April 2022 contained the following paragraphs:

10. Proposed Sites – *Allocating sites has not achieved the aims of the Neighbourhood Plan and perhaps a different approach should be adopted. Our revised Plan should clearly define the size, type and number of houses required and any planning application put forward should be required to comply with those details. The development boundary should only be adjusted when a ‘compelling’ application, meeting the Plan requirements, is submitted.*

Most of the completed sites to date require access via the inner village road network increasing dangers to pedestrians, horse riders, cyclists and others. Future development should be restricted to sites adjacent to the B3098 to limit the further impact on the inner road network.

I have emphasised the last paragraph which I believe is an important ‘positive’ for any site adjacent to the B3098.

I will not be attending the December Parish Council meeting. I walked out of a meeting in September 2021 after receiving evasive and ‘misleading’ comments from a councillor regarding an ongoing concern. If I cannot trust councillors to give respectful answers I see no point, sadly, in participating in any meeting!

Richard Hawkins
8th December 2022