ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 21 May 2025
At Birlingham Village Hall

Welcome

Present:

Councillors: Councillors Steven Byrne, Rupert Day, David Glover, Michael Porter and Ian Yates.

In attendance:

District Councillor Paul Middlebrough, Clerk, June Hiden, Paul Burton representing the Village Halll Committee and 2 parishioners.

1) Election of Chair

Councillor Ian Yates was elected as Chairman.

2) Welcome from the Chairman

The Chairman explained that the meeting gives residents an opportunity for annual reports of activities and achievements from the County Council, District Council, Wardens, and community groups to be heard from the last 12 months.

3) Present

As above.

4) Apologies

Apologies were received from County Councillor Adrian Hardman, Councillor Paula Aston, Lengthsman, Carl Brassington, Footpath Warden, Bruce Hayward, Steve Morris representing the Jubilee Committee and Ann Maxwell.

5) Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting

The Minutes of the Parish Meeting, held on 21 May 2024, were verified by Councillor Ian Yates as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

6) Parish Council Chairman's Report

Councillor Yates presented his report:

"*This report is a summary of some of the many activities that have taken place over the last 12 months.*

Members of the Parish Council

The following were members of the Parish Council between May 2024 and May 2025 except where stated.

Ian Yates – Chair
Paula Aston – Vice Chair and Financial Support Officer
Katie Parsons - Head of the Planning Group (until her resignation from the Parish Council in March 2025)
Steven Byrne – (Head of the Planning Group from March 2025)
Michael Porter
David Glover
Rupert Day – (Joined the Parish Council in July 2024)

Under the County Council's scheme of delegation Carl Brassington was re-appointed as Lengthsman, Bruce Hayward as Footpath Warden and Rupert Day as Tree Warden. June Hiden agreed to continue as Clerk for the 19th year in a row! We are very grateful to everyone who volunteers their time in support of the Parish Council and as always, I would like to begin by thanking everyone who have given their time for the benefit of the parish. They have all been involved in the many different projects undertaken by the Parish Council over the last 12 months as detailed later in this report.

I would also like to thank the following;

County Councillor Adrian Hardman, for his help with arranging funding for various village projects and District Councillor Paul Middlebrough, who took over the Eckington Ward from Ron Davis. It is much appreciated that they find time to attend our meetings whenever possible. Thanks also to Steve Morris who continues to develop and maintain the village website, including a page for the Parish Council and amongst his many activities heading up the Jubilee Committee and Birlingham News.

Parish Council Vacancy

Councillor Katie Parsons decided to step down in March 2025 so there is currently a vacancy on the Parish Council. If you are interested in joining, please contact June Hiden the parish clerk at birlingham_clerk@yahoo.co.uk

Parish Council Financials

The Parish Council discussed the budget for 2025/26 which sets the precept for the year. It considered funding for various projects in discussion for the coming year. So, a small increase of £210 in the precept was agreed equivalent to approx. £1.40/property.

Each year the parish council makes provisions from their budget to cover possible future costs in areas such as

- *the costs that the parish council are charged to run an election.*
- *to build a community fund to support village projects some of which are listed below.*

My thanks to Councillor Paula Aston and Clerk June Hiden for their management of the parish finances.

Full Fibre Broadband (Fibre to the Premise - Airband)

The government's stated ambition was to roll out full fibre to most of the country. However, it was recognised that rural communities could be delayed by several years as they were less commercially attractive. In 2023, the Parish Council decided to secure the installation of a full fibre infrastructure for Birlingham (alongside the existing copper connections) by working with Airband who were already very active in Worcestershire. We were able to work with Worcester County Council to add Birlingham to the infrastructure planned in Pershore, Bredon, Eckington and Defford so giving residents choice - between full fibre or remaining with their existing copper service.

The installation of the fibre infrastructure was not without its problems and the Parish Council spent a large amount of time dealing with issues raised by residents such as pole locations, ducting runs and intermittent service. However, the installation was completed in September 2024 with many residents then signing up for the new service. The fibre infrastructure future proof's internet and voice communications for the village given the government plan to switch off traditional copper telephone cables and terrestrial television in the not too distant future.

Consultation on Potential Community Infrastructure Projects

In early 2024 we reported on a meeting between community groups and the Communities Officer at WDC to discuss possible grant funding for projects in the village. The Village Hall committee was one of the groups to benefit from this and received funding for new hall lighting which was installed at the end of 2024.

The Parish Council has £4000 of funding available within its Community and Projects provisions (CIL). In addition, we were notified that a Community Infrastructure Levy payment of £1543.91 would be paid by WDC to Birlingham Parish Council as a Neighbourhood Fund. The money can be spent on the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure and is available to help fund any village community group projects.

20isPlenty

During the Open Session at the May 2024 Parish Council meeting a presentation was made on behalf of residents in Upper End entitled 'Making Upper End safe and with an acceptable quality of life for residents'. The concern raised was the increase in traffic since the pandemic with more home deliveries and an increase in HGV's since the expansion of Redstar's refrigerated packing sheds. Amongst other things, this is causing traffic problems at pinch points, erosion of verges and structural damage at Court Cottages. It proposed a reduction in the speed limit to 20mph.

Comments on the presentation were opened to the floor and a wide-ranging discussion took place. Members of the Parish Council gave details of work they had done in 2017/18 working with the police to survey traffic speeds and encourage enforcement but actions were limited as the volume of traffic was considered too low to justify enforcement resources. It was decided to carry out a survey of residents to understand their views on the 20mph proposals. Residents in Upper End were contacted initially and this was then expanded to include some properties in the centre as well. 50 houses were visited and 72% were in favour of a reduced speed limit. Monitoring of vehicle speed and volume in Upper End was also carried out through a request to Worcester County Council.

A proposal was put forward to Worcester County Council identifying many of the relevant points set out in The Government Guidance Setting Local Limits (updated March 2024. However, the proposal was rejected by the Head of Traffic Management at WCC as not meeting their policy relating to 20mph limits which only considers it in limited situations as follows:

- *Outside schools through advisory limits.*
- *At accident collision cluster sites.*
- *In connection with major projects as appropriate.*
- *For all new residential development through appropriate design*

As a result, the Parish Council has escalated this to the Cabinet Member responsible for Highways and Transport at WCC asking why WCC is not aligned with the National Guidance on the issue of assessing speed limits and how their decision was taken.

In addition, consideration is being given to:

- *Improved signage including radar activated speed signs.*

- *Traffic calming in the form of additional painted lines indicating where the road narrows.*

- *Further meetings with the farm to ensure that the existing guidance to hauliers regarding preferred routes and time restrictions on access to the village is being followed.*

VE Day Celebrations

A £19,000 fund was made available to help communities across Wychavon mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe and the Parish Council received £250 to support the street party organised by Steve Morris and the Jubilee Committee held on the 5th May 2025.

Changes To Councils

Whatever happens, on the 31 March 2028 Wychavon council along with Wyre Forest, Worcester City, Redditch, Malvern Hills and Bromsgrove councils, along with Worcestershire County council will cease to exist. The service provided by all the councils will be run by a new council covering the footprint of the existing Worcestershire or two councils, one covering the north of Worcestershire and the other covering the south of Worcestershire. The new councils are called unitary councils covering all county and district functions from dustbins to coroners, planning to potholes. Many county areas have already gone through the changes such as Wiltshire, Dorset Shropshire etc. and it is said that Parish Councils will be required to take on some local services and activities although how this will be funded is not yet clear.

Planning

Multiple planning applications in Birlingham were discussed during the year and comments sent to the LPA at Wychavon.

In one example, the Parish Council made several comments and recommendations on the Broadgrove Nursery, Eckington Road application. The original application was for seven industrial units on the site and this was approved despite opposition from neighbours who were supported by the parish council, and the case being taken to planning committee. Subsequently a second and alternative Planning in Principle (PIP) application was made for 4 residential houses on the site. This application was supported both by neighbours, the parish council and district councillor as preferable to the industrial units. However, this application was refused! The applicant appealed the decision and this appeal was again supported by the parish council and we were pleased that the appeal was successful.

The Parish Council continues to monitor changes to legislation and provide input where necessary.

The Chancellor Rachel Reeves' recent announcement that she wants to accelerate housing with a new 10,000 home town planned for the area around Worcestershire Parkway station. The scheme is already in the proposed review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan.

Water leak on the road by The Manor House Lower End

It is disappointing to report that 12 months on from the last report the water leak, which has been a problem for the last ten years, has still not been fully resolved. This is despite considerable work being carried out to address the problem in 2023 and 2024, and many meetings between the Parish Council, Severn Trent and WCC.

Millennium Bench

The carpenter who restored the bench for us has returned to carry out annual maintenance. The bench has been rubbed down and retreated with oil.

In conclusion, within the constraints of its budget, the Parish Council has been able to carry out a large program of activities on behalf of villagers and the community."

The Chairman thanked everyone for their participation.

The members of the Parish Council present gave a thank you to Ian Yates for chairing and for his excellent report.

7) To receive annual reports from elected representatives

County Councillor

County Councillor Adrian Hardman gave his report:

"*Bredon Hill Division.*

Birlingham Parish Council 22/05/25.

I am sorry not to be with you for the annual parish meeting because this is a meeting I tried always to attend.

Following the County Council elections, I was delighted and slightly dismayed by the majority; to be elected for the next three years as your county councillor I was lucky to be able to count the Birlingham box and let me tell you it was a real three-way go! But this is democracy in action. As to what happens next at the County Council is very difficult to say. There should be three options; a minority reform administration; a rainbow coalition all global parties except reform or a reform coalition with another party. If I knew the outcome, I will be off down there the bookmakers. But in some ways the result reflected the pressures that the County Council has been under, but the Reform Councillors seem to have no idea as to what they need to do.

This has been the most challenging year for the County Council as it continues to face relentless financial pressures due to increasing demand and rising costs in key service areas.

- *Children's social care placements*
- *Home-to-school transport*
- *Adult social care*
- *Dealing with inflation*

The net budget of the Council is now just shy of £0.5 billion for the coming financial year. These pressures are not unique to Worcestershire but are widespread across county councils and upper-tier authorities nationwide, who are responsible for Social Care services. Despite ongoing efforts to manage spending and demand, the council's forecasted financial position remains challenging, with £7.9 million in reserves being used to cover in year costs.
Key Budget Challenges are complex, and mainly due to the demographics, National legislation that did not anticipate the ongoing effects of Covid 19 on mental health, and the increasing numbers of special education needs provision, which also causes a much higher bill in home to school transport to deliver this service. The council's budget is essentially fixed in cash terms, limiting its ability to raise income.
National restrictions on council tax and business rates further constrain funding. It is very difficult for the County Council to engage in Income generation from trading activities. The cost of service delivery continues to outpace income growth, exacerbated by factors such as:

- *National Living Wage increases*
- *Changes to employer National Insurance contributions*
- *Rising costs faced by suppliers, partners, and contractors*

Budget Deficit & Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)

At the final budget stage, the council faced a £48.6 million budget gap. This was reduced by:

£12.5 million in cost efficiency and the use of £15 million in one-off reserves.

This left a remaining gap of £33.6 million. Given the severity of the situation, Worcestershire County Council, in line with many other councils, approached the government for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)—the request that was granted but this is not a long term solution and as we await Baroness Cassey's report on Social Care, a review of special educational needs and I believe it is important that the funding formula for Local Government finance is looked at as a matter of urgency.

Worcestershire Unitary Discussions & Devolution

A key development in local government reform being driven by the new Government is the discussion around unitarization as part of the national devolution agenda. This is being delivered in a top-down approach from Whitehall.

- *Worcestershire applied for inclusion in the accelerated unitary program, but this Shire was not accepted on to the programme at this stage. As a result, County Council elections will proceed as scheduled on 1st May 2025.*
- *Government policy indicates that all areas will transition to a unitary model before the end of this parliamentary term. This will require:*

- *Each area will be required to have a Parish Council*
- *Consideration of unitary structures based on local demographics and needs*

Potential Unitary Models for Worcestershire

1. *A single Worcestershire-wide unitary*
2. *A North/South Worcestershire split*

The government's guideline is that unitary authorities should ideally serve a population of 500,000+. This does not simplify the governance of the County since following the abolishing of all Councils in the County. The Government wants to create a strategic authority with a population of 1.5 million or more, which will include the election of a regional mayor. In conclusion despite financial pressures, the Conservative run County Council remained committed to:

- *Promoting health and well-being*
- *Delivering a good standard of adult social care*
- *Helping children and families*
- *Protecting the environment*
- *Supporting businesses*

While significant challenges remain, I will continue to work towards sustainable solutions and strategic partnerships that will ensure Worcestershire remains a thriving and well-supported community, under a Reform administration this will change, since only 1 of these appear to be on their agenda. What they plan to do is a total mystery to me and everyone in Worcestershire, but I find myself reminded of the speech Mussolini made in Milan in 1923, when I see their leader!

Just to dwell for a moment longer local issue. I continue to work with all the agencies to resolve flooding issues, and chase Highways to deliver the standard of roads I believe you deserve. As well as a vast range of other issues from Broadband poles, ambulance waiting

times, mobile phone signals; just to name a few problems I have been helping residents with. I am delighted that we are moving to a two-tier school system since it will keep the local schools on a better footing, and I hope we can deliver the school changes on time. I am aware that yesterday the two different teams of contractors racing to beat the rain caused a degree of chaos on the road network.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Parish Council for all they do for this Community, and I would like to thank you the resident for your support.

It is an honour and privilege to represent the Bredon Division, and I look forward to continuing in this role.

Spring 2025"

Councillor Hardman was thanked for his continued support and very comprehensive report.

District Councillor

District Councillor Paul Middlebrough gave his report:

"I am delighted to give you a report of the main events of Wychavon Council over the past twelve months.

Key issues for residents

During the year Wychavon services have continued to be run in the efficient manner expected by residents. Waste collection remains unchanged but there are impending changes due to Government policy for a separate waste food collection service on the horizon for 2028.

The planning service is very busy with many applications coming in across the district. The applications for the Eckington ward were as follows:

	Besford	*Birlingham*	*Defford*	*Eckington*	*Strensham*	*Total*
Planning Applications	*11*	*9*	*11*	*31*	*10*	*72*
Approved	*8*	*6*	*9*	*28*	*7*	*58*
Refused	*0*	*1*	*1*	*0*	*0*	*2*
Withdrawn	*0*	*1*	*1*	*0*	*1*	*3*
Pending decision	*3*	*1*	*0*	*3*	*2*	*9*
Pending decision from previous	*0*	*0*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*3*
Enforcement	*0*	*0*	*0*	*2*	*0*	*2*
Enforcement from previous years	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*

The review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan by the Independent inspectors has finished and their conclusions will emerge towards the end of the year.

POLITICAL CHANGE

The election of the Labour Government last July has resulted in the impending abolition of Wychavon in 2028 when a unitary council will provide services. On the 31 March 2028 Wychavon council along with Wyre Forest, Worcester City, Redditch, Malvern Hills and Bromsgrove councils, along with Worcestershire County council will cease to exist. The service provided by all the councils will be run by a new council covering the footprint of the existing Worcestershire or two councils, one covering the north of Worcestershire and the other covering the south of Worcestershire. The Government will decide in November what will happen.

Worcestershire County Council

Following the May 2025 County Council elections the Reform Party are the largest party at County Hall. Wychavon awaits to find out how the council will be controlled."

Councillor Middlebrough added that he was glad the Adrian Hardman has been voted in so they can work together.

Councillor Middlebrough spoke of the preliminary comments of the Mitton and J9 proposals. He mentioned the SWDP housing allocations and how this was watched online during the legal process. Street cleaning will be improved as no one was managing the contract.

Councillor Middlebrough can be contacted on paul.middlebrough@wychavon.net

Councillor Middlebrough was thanked for his report.

8) Annual Reports from representatives

The Parish Warden reports were given.

Footpath Warden

Bruce Hayward is the Footpath Warden. Birlingham has two volunteers who, together with local landowners and others, look after the Parish footpaths on behalf of the County Council. The County Council meet any small expenses incurred and will often supply 'furniture' (e.g. gates, stiles etc.) that needs to be replaced; they also provide an annual strimming service for certain paths which are difficult to maintain.

At each Parish Council meeting a report is made of work undertaken during the previous two months.

All the footpaths in Worcestershire are shown on the Public Rights of Way web map which is maintained by the County Council Countryside Service. You can view footpaths at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/countryside and click on Public Rights of Way and then Interactive Map. (There is a link from the village website).

If anyone has any concerns or suggestions regarding the footpaths in the Parish, please contact Bruce at Tadpole Cottage or the Parish clerk.

Bruce was thanked for his work and his continued support to the parish for 16 years.

Lenthsman's Report

Carl Brassington's report was given:

"Lengthsman Report 2024 - 2025

Manor House water leak

Still ongoing with more camera investigations and replacement of the pipe work to a road gully by WCC Highways. The running water has again disappeared due to the dry weather.

Shorthill/The Avenue

No updates on this issue. The gully and pipe work are restricted causing the gully to flood onto the carriageway.

Maryworth Barn

No updates on this issue. The gully and pipe work again restricted causing the carriageway to flood in heavy rain.

Eckington Road

The footway has been sided out by WCC highways.

Court Cottages/Barncroft

Tree and soil debris makes its way down the road and settles around the gully grids causing flooding in heavy downpours. I have attended a couple of times and the road soon drains when the gully is cleared

Verges Church Lane/Rectory Road

The verges have suffered damage from animals including badgers, rabbits and moles. His has left them very uneven and full of holes which make walking around the Church quite difficult and sometimes dangerous.

There is also traffic damage particularly to the kerbs around the war memorial."

Carl was thanked for his continuing support of the parish.

Tree Warden

Rupert Day regularly walks around the village to check on the trees. Rupert gave his report:

"*Despite 2 big storms - Darragh in December and Eowyn in January, no trees impacted roads in the year.*

The Sycamores at Church Lane and the Limes at the corner of Upper end/Avenue are yet to be addressed but so far have not caused a problem. I still wait for Henry Porter and Tom Roe to get back to me on progress."

Rupert was thanked for his support.

9) Community Groups

Groups and organisations were invited to send their reports. They are as follows:

Birlingham Village Hall

Paul Burton, Chairman of Birlingham Village Hall gave a report.

There are two new members on the Village Hall committee, Tony Hawgood and Nigel Haddock. The existing members are Phil Harris, Valerie Gilmore, Deborah Grant and Wendy Yates. There is a new booking from an organisation in Pershore which has been good news. The 1 hour or 1.5 hour bookings do not cover the heating costs. The committee need to decide whether to increase the hire charges or put a minimum time. The committee are grateful to Wychavon District Council for their grants. The next exercise is to replace the existing boiler estimated to be c£6,000 as it is 25 years old. The committee will ask Councillor Middlebrough what he can facilitate.

Paul will publish an article for the Birlingham News. Paul can be contacted at paul.burton1@btinternet.com

Paul was thanked for his attendance and report.

Jubilee Committee

Steve Morris, Chairman of the Jubilee Committee, reported:

"The Jubilee Committee has had another active year, especially with the recent commemoration of the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

The VE Day event comprised a Street Party in front of the Village Hall. Over 90 residents, their families and friends came along for the afternoon, which was made possible with more than 30 people helping in various ways. We held a raffle, which raised £338 for two charities working for veterans and children of members of the armed forces.

Birlingham News is now delivered to all but a handful of households, as well as many former residents. We publish two issues per month on the second and fourth Wednesdays. Our subscribers are still alerted by an email when the online edition is ready to download and the number of downloads is regularly over 160.

Our recent survey resulted in 87% saying they are happy with the current format. We are considering how we can take account of the concerns of the other 13%.

Thank you to the many people who now contribute on a regular basis and particularly Ian Yates for his comprehensive Parish Council reports.

In the last twelve months we have produced a further two issues of the Birlingham Bystander, with the Spring edition just delivered.

The village website continues to receive many visitors but more volunteers are still needed to help keep it up to date.

The Jubilee Wood is looking much more impressive this year. Thanks to Tree Warden, Rupert Day, for his continuing advice on the upkeep of the wood.

Our equipment includes a water boiler (currently on loan to the church), 24 trestle tables, bunting, 30 camping chairs, 50 plastic chairs road signs and more, all of which are available for village residents and organisations to borrow for private or public functions. We also have a one-third share in the village marquee. The Cricket Club has recently agreed to provide storage for much of this equipment, for which we are very grateful.

Thank you to the scores of people who have been involved in all these activities over the past year."

10) Open Session

20isPlenty

The residents present wanted an update on the progression of 20isPlenty following their survey to part of the village, discussions over the last year and what was happening currently to progress the matter. They understood the approval of the note to Marc Baylis, Worcestershire County Council, and the various signage considerations but the Group was uncertain of their present role. Rupert Day has been liaising with authorities and the Group and would give an update at the Parish Council meeting. The main issues of discussion would be the most appropriate signs, the positioning of these, are they legal, activated/slow down signs feasibility, the existing signage both Highways and advisory actioned through the Divisional funding and a potential meeting with Red Star Growers.

The residents' group was happy for Rupert Day to advise further on the improved signage, traffic calming and the outcome of the meeting with the farm.

Leak at Lower End

Councillor Steven Bryne gave an explanation to those present on the history and responsibilities of Severn Trent Water (STW). The village drainage has c40 years deterioration. The pipework on the boundary of The Moors has collapsed. STW tried to make the responsibility of all the old drainage to landowners. With great help from a resident the CEO was contacted and STW admitted a technical error. However, within 2 months STW were trying to put the ownership back as private. It is a broken pipe and the local authorities have done all they can with repairs to the highway drainage. The communications continue back and forth.

No Mow May

Several residents have contacted the Clerk with concerns about visibility splays at the entrances/exits to the village due to long grass. The highway authority has a policy for No Mow May however there is a safety issue. County Councillor Hardman will be contacted.

Closure – with nothing further to discuss the meeting closed at 7.45pm. **The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting will be in May 2026.**

Signed: . . . . . Ian Yates, Chairman

Date: . . . . . .