Little Witley Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of Little Witley Parish Council.

Clerk: Carole Hirst –littlewitleyparish@gmail.com

Monday 26th October 2026

Present: (Chair) Cllr. Roz London; Cllr. P Owen, Cllr. Bexley, Cllr. Neil Gibson, WCC Cllr. Justin Bowen

1. **To note apologies for absence.** Cllr P Cumming Parish & District Councillor, Cllr. Pam Cumming (Parish & District Councillor), Cllr. L Slater.

Absent: none

2. **To consider Registers of Interest:**
   a) Register of Interests: Councillors are reminded of the need to update their register of interests. **Noted.**
   b) To declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in items on the agenda and their nature. **None received.**
   c) To declare any Other Disclosable Interests in items on the agenda and their nature.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS – No public in attendance- no questions.

3. **To Consider written requests from Councillors for the Council to grant a Dispensation**
   (S33 of the Localism Act 2011) None Required.

4. **To approve the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 10th August 2026.** Cllr. R. London Proposed and Cllr. C Bexley Seconded that the Minutes be approved. All in favour.

5. **Councillors' reports and items for future agenda:** Councillors may use this opportunity to report minor matters of information not included elsewhere on the agenda and to raise future items for future agendas.

- Speeding, Speed Survey and VAS Signs .
- CALC Membership *alternatives*
- PCSO Lewis Thomas-West Mercia Police – invite to next meeting.
- To discuss holding informal meetings in between parish council meetings as PC meetings are quarterly
- Community Engagement Strategy
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6. **District and County Councillors' Reports:**
   Cllr. Justin Bowen WCC Report. See Appendix 1

   Cllr. Paul Cumming MHDC no report received. Apologies submitted.

7 **Planning**
   Nothing to report

8. Finance

a) **Approval of the payment of Accounts up to 26th October 2026 and note receipts received.** Cllr. R London Proposed and Cllr. C Bexley Seconded that all payments be approved. All in favour.

Payment Schedule to 26th October2026		
Payee	**Description**	**Amount**
C Hirst	Aug pay	£ 239.48
HMRC	Aug tax	159.20
IN2OUT	Lengthsman Aug	£ 170.00
C Hirst	Sept pay includes CALC PAYRISE BACKDATED TO APRIL 1ST	286.98
HMRC	Septtax	200.38
C Hirst	Clerk Expenses 3 months to 23rd Oct 26	£ 120.35
IN2OUT	Lengthsman Sep and grass verges	£ 224.25
C Hirst	Oct Pay	£ 247.53
HMRC	Oct tax	£ 164.40
CALC	Training online	£ 21.60
CALC	TRAINING	£ 48.00
	TOTAL	**£1,882.17**
RECEIPTS		
Payee	**Description**	**Amount**
WCC	Lengthsman July	£ 229.50
WCC	Lengthsman Aug	£ 170.00
MHDC	Precept 2	£2,894.00
WCC	Lengthsman Sept	£ 174.25
	TOTAL	**£3,467.75**

b) **Bank Reconciliation at 12th October 2026 – Noted.**
SEE APPENDIX 2

c) **To note the Budget Monitoring Report to 12th October 2026. Noted.**

SEE APPENDIX 3

d) **To note that the CALC National pay increase for 2026/27 has been awarded which is backdated to April 1st 2026. The clerk pay grade is Scp 24 which has now increased from £18.35 to £18.96 for 2026/27** Noted

e) **To set the 2027/28 Budget and Precept.**

Proposed by Cllr. Colin Bexley.

Because of the increase to the annual budget, particularly the increase in Clerk's hours, it

would require a 37% increase in precept this year to have the annual budget fully covered by the precept. The impact on householders of this increase is relatively small. However, given that the Parish Council currently hold reserves of over three times the current precept, which is unusually high, a precept rise of this scale in a single year is somewhat difficult to justify. This brief paper recommends an approach to handling the precept and surplus / reserves over the next few financial years.

This approach proposes a smaller increase in the precept (ideally 8% to 10% per annum) each year until the precept fully covers operating expenditure again. This will take approximately four years depending on the rate of increase of the budget in future years (for example due to Clerk's annual pay increase) and is predicted to eventually reduce our overall reserves by around £4000.

Cllr. Bexley Proposedand Cllr. London Seconded that the Budget be agreed for 2027/28 and that the Precept be set at £6309 representing an increase of 9% on the precept for 2026/27 and to follow the proposals below.

* **Increase the precept by 9% for the next financial year to £6309.**
* **Before the end of the current financial year, transfer £4000 from our reserves into an Allocated Reserve for Precept Stabilization. Funds will be taken from this Reserve in each of the next few years to cover the deficit in operating income against expenditure due to insufficient precept**
* **also in the current year, move additional funds from the surplus to Allocated Reserves as set out in the budget proposals. This would reduce our predicted General / Unallocated Reserve to around £11000, equivalent to a little over one year's operating expenditure, which is more consistent with national recommendations**
* **Review both the overall approach and the specific annual precept increase annually.**

All in favour.

See Appendix 4 for detailed budget 2027/28

f) **To approve that Cllr. Roz London and Cllr. Colin Bexley become bank signatories and have access to the PC bank accounts. Cllr Philip Owen Proposed and Cllr. Neil Gibson Seconded that Cllr. Roz London and Cllr. Bexley be approved as bank signatories and have full access to the bank accounts of the PC.**

g) **To confirm the appointment of Ann Dobbins as Internal Auditor for Little Witley PC for 2026/27.** Noted

9. **To appoint individual Councillor to the role of Community Engagement and Communications and to consider Communications and Engagement Strategy'.**

   Cllr. Roz London Proposed and Cllr. Colin Bexley Seconded that Cllr. Neil Gibson be appointed to the role of Community Engagement and Communications. All in favour.

   Community Engagement Strategy.

   Background by Cllr. Bexley: The parish Council developed a Community Engagement Strategy in 2020/21, but it would appear that we never formally adopted it. We discussed this briefly at our August meeting and I was asked to recirculate it for discussion at this meeting.

   There is no formal requirement for a Parish Council to have such a strategy, but a

range of bodies including Local Government Association and NALC encourage it as part of a commitment to active two-way communication with residents and a clear commitment to improve the local community.

Related, we are looking for one of our Councillors to take a lead on communications and engagement for the Parish Council. As seen above this is now Cllr. Gibson. This doesn't imply that an individual should do everything around engagement, rather that they should take a 'first amongst equals' role in ensuring the Council does this well - including documenting overall objective and approach / action plan, which is largely what the strategy should do.

I also think we need to review as a group of Councillors (and ideally in communication with residents) what the Council is here for and seeking to achieve, particularly with regard to working with residents.

Councillor Gibson agreed to investigate and report back to the January meeting.

10. Update on signage to the Village Hall

No further action- WCC Highways felt that signage for this within the parish was adequate.

11. Local Government Re-organisation.

The UK government paused the local government reorganisation process for Worcestershire on 7th September 2026.

Key Details of the Pause

- The Announcement: Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Angela Rayner paused 14 local government reorganisation proposals—including Worcestershire—following updated legal advice.
- What Was Planned: In July 2026, the government had approved a north-south split to replace Worcestershire's seven existing councils with two new unitary authorities (*North Worcestershire Council* and *South Worcestershire Council*) by 1 April 2028.
- Current Status: Councils have been instructed to cease implementation work immediately to avoid wasting public funds while the government reviews the process.
- Impact on Services: Normal day-to-day council services continue as usual, and existing council boundaries and scheduled local elections remain unchanged in the interim.
- Timetable: No final timeline for completing the government's review has been Following this announcement, Worcestershire County Council are seeking urgent clarification on what this means for Worcestershire, the timetable they have been working towards, and the significant amount of work already underway.

Until they receive that clarity, their priority remains delivering services for residents, businesses and communities across Worcestershire. There is no immediate change to the services people receive, and residents should continue to contact their existing council in the usual way.

The Parish Council website has been updated to reflect this.

12. Changes to Planning Policy

Outline for information.

Recent changes to UK local authority planning law in England—driven by the Planning and Infrastructure Act and the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026—aim to speed up development and standardize decision-making.

Key Structural and Policy Changes

- **National Scheme of Delegation (Coming into force 31 October 2026):**
  - Replaces individual local council delegation schemes with a standardized national framework.
  - Most routine, minor, and technical applications will be decided automatically by unelected planning officers.
  - Elected planning committees will restrict their focus to major, strategic, or complex developments.
  - Local councillor "call-in" powers that previously allowed members to send applications to committee solely due to public opposition or local concern are heavily restricted. Referral now requires joint agreement between the planning officer and committee chair that a significant planning or policy issue is involved.
- **Land Zoning System ("Growth", "Renewal", and "Protected"):**
  - Land is being divided into three functional categories.
  - **Growth zones:** Automatic permission for appropriate development (such as new homes, schools, and hospitals) where councils cannot veto compliant plans.
  - **Renewal zones:** Mainly urban and brownfield sites granted "permission in principle" subject to baseline checks.
  - **Protected zones:** Green belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) retain statutory safeguards, though councils are pushed to accommodate development elsewhere. [1]
- **Strategic Planning and Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs):**
  - Reintroduces top-tier strategic planning.
  - Combined authorities, county councils, and unitary authorities must prepare Spatial Development Strategies to coordinate housing and infrastructure across wider regions, replacing fragmented single-district planning.
- **Streamlined Planning Appeals (Effective 1 April 2026):**
  - Written representation appeals follow a faster, simplified process where the Planning Inspectorate primarily evaluates evidence originally submitted directly to the local planning authority during the initial application
- **Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs):**

Eliminates the need for central government approval for certain CPOs by local authorities and mayors and removes the "hope value" requirement in specific contexts to lower acquisition costs for public infrastructure and affordable housing.

A discussion took place raising awareness of changes and possible pitfalls and challenges facing Parish Councils once this is introduced.

The Parish Council agreed that Planning Working Group should further consider potential impact of national planning policy on future planning applications in our area (eg whether developing a Neighbourhood Plan could increase our ability to challenge).

13. **Progress on road conditions in the village**
Report below from Cllr. Bexley

I'm meeting Justin Bowen (our local County Councillor) to look at the passing place on Well Lane (left hand side, 40 yds below the grass triangle) which we asked the County Council to prioritise. This is also an opportunity to raise any other high priority issues regarding the road / verge condition.

Re the Well Lane passing place, I think it probably has had some basic improvement and is in reasonable, though not perfect, condition at the moment. It looks to me as if it may degrade again fairly quickly especially if we have a bad winter.
Justin and I agree some work has been undertaken to Well Lane passing place and it is in an 'ok' condition at the moment, although I am concerned it could degrade again quickly.

I've had a walk round some of the village roads. I've not spotted anything that I would describe as seriously dangerous right now. But there are sections where the holes and ruts between the road surface and the road are quite poor and, again, could get worse quickly - particularly the lower part Bank Road, below the triangle, on the Village Hall side; the section between there and the footpath to the Church, particularly on the north side, also has a few spots which are degrading; the bottom of Church Lane; and a few spots on Well Lane heading to Ockeridge.
I have not currently identified any other passing places, verges, potholes which are a serious danger at the moment. Lengthsman has same view. I asked other Councillors to identify and problem areas, no responses.
I am concerned some areas could become dangerous fairly quickly with prolonged bad weather.
I have to say I'm not clear on what our reasonable expectations should be re how bad holes and ruts have to be to demand action, and what form / quality of repair we should expect.

Action
* remind residents to report problems

14. **Footpaths to consider if there is anything else we can do / want to do in the absence of a Parish Path Warden.**

Report by Cllr. Bexley
- I understand from WCC that they do expect to re-open the Parish Path Warden scheme when they have recruited staff to undertake training etc
- Do Councillors think there is any other action we can / should take at the moment? Community Emergency Plans. Town/Parish Community Emergency Plans & Resilience Resources (see Minute 15 below)

Cllr. Bexley agreed to register to WCC that a Parish Path Warden vacancy exists within Little Witley Parish.

The Parish Council agreed that, in the absence of a Parish Path Warden, Councillors should aim to monitor footpaths periodically and report any issues (eg condition of stiles) to Worcestershire County Council.

The PC has a potential recruit for the vacancy of Parish Path Warden.

15. **Community Emergency Plans. Town/Parish Community Emergency Plans & Resilience Resources.**

Report by Cllr. Bexley

There is an increasing push from central government and from Worcestershire County Council for Parish Councils/ local communities to develop resilience plans, although it is not mandatory / not a statutory duty at the current time.

The purpose of Community plans is to help local groups respond quickly until statutory responders arrive and to liaise with statutory responders (eg. emergency services, county and District Councils, Environment Agency). A good plan lists key contacts and skills, safe places, available equipment and ways to support vulnerable residents. Developing a plan will therefore likely include liaison with other village groups and residents. Threats to be considered would include (but are not limited to) flooding, severe weather, loss of utilities and major transport incidents.

You can read more on this and find the template 'Worcestershire Community Emergency and Resilience Plan' here https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/council-services/communities/emergency-planning/worcestershire-prepared (expand the Community Advice section)
The template provided is very comprehensive and possibly excessive for a village of Little Witley's size. I asked Google AI for some advice on a pragmatic approach - it had some useful suggestions at this link

https://docs.google.com/document/d/10HlWvjBVr1n0fdpVsoOk579iMLT4neTBh93OF83vhT8/edit?usp=drivesdk

Before taking any work forward, we are encouraged to liaise with Malvern Hills District Council to ensure any plans we develop integrate with statutory agency plans.

The County Council are also encouraging local residents to develop Household Emergency Plans, stating 'Aim for at least 72 hours (3 days) of essential supplies, medicines and have key documents to hand, so your household can stay prepared, take care of yourself and avoid unnecessary difficulties during disruption'. You can see the householder template by expanding the 'Personal and Household Advice' section.

Potential next steps (for consideration)

- promote awareness of Householder Emergency Plans amongst residents
  liaise with Malvern Hills District Council re any further advice and support available, examples of other local Parish Council plans
- establish a Working Group of, say, three Councillors, to review the guidance in detail and recommend next steps to January meeting.
- The Parish Council agreed that Cllr. London, Cllr. Gibson and Cllr. Bexley should meet to discuss further the suggestion of a Working Group.

16. **Correspondence for Information:** (Where required, all covered on the agenda)

17. **Proposed dates for Parish Council meetings 2027.**

- 11th January 2027 at 7.30pm Ordinary PC meeting
- May 17th 2027 at 7.30pm - Annual Parish Meeting and Annual Meeting of the Parish Council
- 9th August 2027 at 7.30pm - Ordinary PC Meeting
- 25th October 2027 at 7.30pm - Ordinary PC Meeting

Cllr. R London Proposed and Cllr. Colin Bexley Seconded that the dates be approved. All in favour.

18. **Date of next Ordinary Parish Council meeting** is 11th January 2027

The meeting was declared closed at 21.10 pm

Signed……. Chair of the Parish Council Dated 11th January 2027

Appendix 1 - WCC Report from Cllr. Justin Bowen

Worcestershire County Council Matters

Advertising & Sponsorship Policy

In February, work began on a policy to allow companies and organisations to advertise and sponsor Worcestershire County Council property. This policy has now been completed and adopted by WCC and provides revenue opportunities. I have asked for the development of Tenbury Wells library to be supported through this policy.

Businesses and organisations who wish to explore advertising or sponsorship opportunities within our division can contact me to take forward to Worcestershire County Council.

Tenbury Division Matters

Rochford Landslip

Highways have confirmed that Geotech studies have now been completed both on the highway and surrounding land. The information obtained is being prepared as a Findings Report which is due to be completed imminently. The Findings Report will then be used by the Design Team to draw up plans to repair the road. However, there is presently no timescale for when the plans will be ready or how long it will take to repair the road. I am in contact with officers and the Cabinet Member for Highways and will provide on-going updates as I receive them.

Additionally, I was informed by Cabinet on 24th September that initial funding for repair of the landslip has been secured from government. The funding is a share of a £5 million grant received to support repair of the landslips in Rochford and Malvern.

Speeding Traffic

Speeding traffic continues to affect our area, and this is being exacerbated by the road closure at Rochford, which has resulted in various roads being used as alternative routes. I have been liaising with Parish Councils and Highways both in reviewing signage and obtaining Speed Surveys to inform decision making on how to address the issue.

So far this year, traffic calming measures have been installed in a number of locations across the division, including Abberley, Great Witley and Pensax. Improvements are due to be installed in Tenbury Wells later this month. These measures include improved signage, Vehicle Activated Signs, and additional road markings.

Further Speed Surveys have either been carried out or are due to be carried out in further locations, including in Stockton, Clifton upon Teme, Newnham Bridge and Eastham. Once the results of the surveys are known, I will then liaise with Highways and Town & Parish Councils to explore options for reducing traffic speeds through our area.

Cllr. Bowen agreed to undertake a speed survey on the main Worcester Road.

Tenbury Wells Library & Community Hub

Earlier this year, I asked Cabinet to consider developing Tenbury Wells library as a Community Hub. The library is already used by Citizens Advice, Age UK and TSB Banking Hub to provide services for residents, and I outlined a vision for Worcestershire County Council to expand this as a pilot for making it a fully functioning community hub.

I am pleased to say that officers and Cabinet Members have agreed to explore options for achieving this. I met with the Director of Public Health, and the Cabinet Members for Community, Environment and Public Health and initial plans are now progressing.

There is progress on developing a room within the library that could be used by residents to have online appointments with various services and organisations. This development will also now include looking to make use of the new advertising and sponsorship policy to support investment into the library. Work is also being done to allow residents who struggle to report Worcestershire County Council issues online to be able to do so face-to-face at the library (e.g. potholes, over hanging trees, blocked drains etc.).

Further work is also to be carried out on inviting other organisations to hold drop-ins within the library, and also to connect up with other community services within Tenbury Wells to create a fully developed Community Hub for the town.

Appendix 2 – Bank Reconciliation 12th October 2026

Reconcilliation to 12/10/26				
opening balances at 01/04/2026			£	22,538.35
add receipts			£	7,348.29
less payments to date			-£	6,341.43
Reconciliation to statement			**£**	**23,545.21**
		Lloyds Savings	£	7,867.59
Actual cash to bank 12/10/26		**Bus Bank Instant**	£	16,209.90
C Hirst Clerk Expenses to 23rd Oct			-£	120.35
		Period7 oct		
	C Hirst	clerk pay	-£	247.53
	HMRC	Period 7 Tax	-£	164.40
TOTAL			**£**	**23,545.21**

RECONCILIATION	
£	-

APPENDIX 3 Budget Monitoring Report 12th October 2026

Balance transferred from previous year		£ 22,538.35	
	BUDGET 2026/27	INCOME TO DATE	Expected out-turn at year end
INCOME			
Precept	5788	5,788.00	£ 5,788.00
Lengthsman	2400	1,066.75	£ 2,400.00
In Stock	£ 0.01	0.00	£ -
re drive	£ 0.01	0.00	£ -
VAT Refund	80	205.65	£ 80.00
Unallocated	£ 0.01	0.00	£ -
trsf deposit	£ 0.01	£ -	£ -
Grants	£ 0.01	0.00	£ -
Transfer reserve	£ 0.01	0.00	£ -
Banking	90	47.45	£ 90.00
CIL - restricted funding	£ 428.43	428.43	£ 428.43
TOTAL	£ 8,786.49	**£ 7,536.28**	**£ 8,786.43**

Appendix 4 – Proposed Budget and Precept 2027/28 (pages 1,2,3)

2027/28 DRAFT BUDGET

Balance transferred from previous year	22538.35	22538.35	£ 21,623.18	
	BUDGET 2026/27	expected out-turn to 31st March 2027	2027/28 Budget	
INCOME				
Precept	£5,788.00	5,788.00	£6,309.00	INCREASE 9%
Lengthsman	£2,400.00	2,400.00	£2,500.00	
In Stock	£0.00	0.00		
re drive	£0.00	0.00		
VAT Refund	£80.00			
Unallocated	£0.00	0.00		
trsf deposit	£0.00	£ -		
Grants	£0.00	0.00		
Transfer reserve	£0.00	0.00		
Banking	£90.00	90.00	£50.00	
OTHER (CIL)	£0.00	428.43	£0.00	
TOTAL	**£ 8,358.00**	**£ 8,706.43**	**£ 8,859.00**	

EXPENDITURE, excluding VAT			
	BUDGET 2026/27	expected out-turn to 31st March 2027	2027/28 Budget
Clerk	3350.00	4,943.00	5100.00
Lengthsman- **WCC Increased 2026/27**	2400.00	2,400.00	2500.00
Clerk Exp	450.00	650.00	700.00
Insurance	275.00	241.00	250.00
Calc/ICO	230.00	300.00	300.00
Internal Audit	130.00	123.60	150.00
Verges	300.00	300.00	300.00
Nora Parsons	0.00	0.00	0.00
Room Hire	60.00	60.00	60.00
Friends St Michaels	0.00	0.00	0.00
Website	250.00	250.00	240.00
Unallocated	300.00	300.00	300.00
Elections	0.00	0.00	0.00
Asset Repairs	0.00	0.00	0.00
Smart water		0.00	0.00
Stationery in with clerk expenses above	150.00	0.00	0.00
Comp equip	0.00	0.00	0.00
Training	0.00	40.00	200.00
Other		14.00	100.00
TOTAL	£ 7,895.00	£ 9,621.60	£ 10,200.00
FORECAST end of year 31/03/27 UNALLOCATED	**23,001.35**	**21,623.18**	**20,282.18**

ALLOCATED RESERVES				
Precept Stabilization		4000.00	2500.00	
to Earmarked Reserves for Contested election		3000.00	3000.00	
Asset Replacement and Upgrade		1500.00	1500.00	**I think this should now be no more than £2000 not £4000**
CiL		428.43	428.43	
Section 137 grants to local organisations MAXIMUM ALLOWED UNDER LEGISLATION £11.10 X 246	1000.00	1500.00	1500.00	
		10428.43	**8928.43**	
GENERAL UNALLOCATED RESERVES	**£ 22,001.35**	**£ 11,194.75**	**£ 11,353.75**	
TOTAL RESERVES (ALLOCATED AND UNALLOCATED RESERVES)			**£ 20,282.18**	