

**Draft Minutes of a scheduled meeting of the parish council held on Tuesday 24 February,
7.30pm in Pencombe and Little Cowarne Parish Hall**

Present

Councillors: James Lewis (Chair), Tim Burge (Vice Chair), Tony Brazier, Colin Hadley, David Legge, and Paul Thomas

In Attendance

Jane Legge – Parish Clerk
Bruce Baker – Ward Councillor
Six members of the public

1. Apologies for absence – none

2. Declaration of interest and written dispensation requests – none received.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 January 2026

It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes with an amendment to 10.4 to show ‘the costs were per cut’ and not annual as stated.

4. Open Session

4.1. To receive an update and consider action from the Chair on current matters

4.1.1. Ditching work is progressing well and once complete, the drain will be checked for blockages. It is likely that a jetter will be needed for a day to clear any blockages.

4.1.2. There have been some weather-related delays with the other drainage project, so only two out of the three areas will be completed within the grant period – the Pound and Poppy Bank. There will be a road closure on Poppy Bank whilst the work is taking place (05/06 March). The Chair will reapply for the grant money for 2026/27 to complete the outstanding work.

4.1.3. A review was undertaken of the Defib machines as follows:

- Village Hall – working okay.
- Little Cowarne – not working and requires a new battery and new pads. The suppliers advised the Chair that the model of defib is now obsolete, so will need replacing in two years’ time.
- Sparrington – not working and requires a new battery (covered under service contract).

The Chair advised that the defib machine at Little Cowarne needs checking quarterly and the machine at Sparrington needs checking monthly.

4.2. A brief verbal report from Ward Councillor Bruce Baker included:

- 4.2.1. Herefordshire Council have announced a shortfall of £30 million due to a lack of funding, including the loss of the Rural Services grant of £7 million by Central Government. Having reviewed their budgets, the Council are confident that they can find £20 million in savings to offset the loss.
- 4.2.2. As part of the budget review, it was highlighted that funding for rural counties is 40% less per person than urban counties. The Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council met with Government officers recently to discuss this, but no change agreed.
- 4.2.3. At its budget meeting on 13 February, Herefordshire Council voted in favour of 4.9% council tax increase for 2026/27.
- 4.2.4. Rising service demands for SEND pupils and Social Care are being reviewed by central government.
- 4.2.5. Paul Walker, Herefordshire Chief Executive is retiring in March 2026, but has agreed to stay in post until a replacement can be found.
- 4.2.6. At the beginning of February, Herefordshire Council partook in a Race Equality Week and an Apprentice Week.
- 4.2.7. There is a hope that tourism to Herefordshire will increase following the release of the film 'Hamnet' which was partially filmed in the county.
- 4.2.8. The new NHS Community Diagnostic and Treatment centre in Hereford (situated behind B&Q on Holmer Road) is now open and was commended by Bruce.
- 4.2.9. There is due to be an increase in road tax for cars classed as 'luxury' in April 2026.
- 4.2.10. Some members of the Conservative Group would like to put a motion to the Council asking them to write to Central Government to reconsider the ban of trail hunting. This has not been supported by all group members.
- 4.2.11. The date of 03 August 2026 has been set to fix the fence and railings in Little Cowarne.
- 4.2.12. Contrary to what he had been told, it was reported to Bruce that the potholes had not been filled in on the C1117 and that the road was deteriorating fast. Also, the road at Gasbage was in the same condition.

4.3. To receive views of local residents

4.3.1. It was requested that the Leader of the Council is contacted by the Parish Council regarding the condition of the roads within the Pencombe Group.

4.3.2. A request was received for the Parish Council to consider improving the accessibility of the footpath styles or replacing them with either self-closing or kissing gates.

5. Finance

5.1. The bank balance was noted as £20,011.00.

5.2. Tim Burge presented the financial report, and it was RESOLVED to approve it.

5.3. The service charge to maintain the Defib machine at Sparrington will cost £135.00 to cover a four-year period. It was RESOLVED to approve this expenditure.

6. Lengthsman & PROW

6.1. The Pencombe Footpath Officer has undertaken a review of all the footpaths in his area and noted broken styles and cross styles, some of which are already earmarked for repair.

6.2. Part of the path to the broken bridge on the Hawkhurst footpath is no longer accessible due to overgrowth, so will have to be factored into the repair work.

6.3. It was suggested that the Parish Council should aim to create circular routes within their public rights of way remit and signage should be clearer.

6.4. The current Footpath Officer for Little Cowarne wishes to stand down, so will need to recruit a replacement.

6.5. It was RESOLVED to investigate the costs of gates and other improvements that could be made.

6.6. The Footpath Officer reported that he was having difficulty reporting issues using the Herefordshire Council app on his iPad. He asked the issue is reported to the Council. It was RESOLVED to report the issue.

7. Village Hall Committee update included:

7.1. The Village Hall Trustees meeting in February was postponed and has been rescheduled for 16 March 2026.

7.2. The hook-up for the generator is now in place and a protocol for use will be discussed at the next Trustees meeting.

7.3. Thanks were given to Alec Brazier and Adam Turner for sourcing a generator that can be used by the village hall if needed.

7.4. The problem with the media centre had been fixed and it is working again.

7.5. The pub nights are going very well, but the committee are asking for more volunteers to help run the bar.

7.6. The Borderlines Film Festival has started with good attendance on the first night.

8. Parish Matters

8.1. The Chair reported that the cost to replace the dog litter bins was either £141 for a 40-litre plastic bin (delivery included) or £145 for a 60-litre metal bin + £50 delivery. It was RESOLVED to purchase one 40-litre bin to check its suitability before purchasing the second one.

9. Parish Council Website

Tim Burge reported that although not all the content will be available, the new website is due to go live the last week of February and training will be provided as required.

10. To consider agenda items for the next meeting

10.1 To consider options and costs to create a parking area on the Pound to prevent further damage to the grass.

10.2 To consider additional motion solar lights at the bottom of the village hall ramp.

11. Date of next scheduled meeting – Tuesday 24 March, 7.30pm

Meeting Closed: 20:25