

DEFFORD & BESFORD PARISH COUNCIL
Defford Annual Parish Meeting - 19th March 2025

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting (Defford) held on Wednesday 19th March 2025 at 6.30pm at Defford Village Hall.

Present: Parish Council Chairman I Stephens, Vice Chairman S Rees and Cllrs: P Hale, D Lamont, L Peake, J Robinson. Ian Spiers and Seb Soukup and PCSO Luke Harris

Apologies were received from: Cllr G Marshall, County Cllr A Hardman and District Cllr P Middlebrough

Reports received are annexed to these Minutes – received from:

- Defford & Besford Parish Council – Chairmans report
- County Cllr's report
- District Cllr's report
- Defford Village Hall report
- Cowleasow Trust report (Defford)

Police Report: PCSO Luke Harris introduced himself, advising that Evesham Police were now covering Defford and Besford. Defford had a low crime rate, and a recent 'drop-in' session had been held at Defford Village Hall, and also at the school.

The parish council requested a police presence periodically around the Millennium during the lighter nights over the summer

Besford Annual Parish Meeting to be held on 21st May 2025

Reports are available from the Clerk: clerk@defford-besfordparishcouncil.co.uk

Defford & Besford Parish Council

Chair's report for the Defford and Besford Annual Parish Meeting

This year your Parish Council has continued work to improve the amenities of the village.

Councillors: We now have a full complement of councillors; we welcomed two new councillors in November including a resident from Besford meaning we now have a representation from both villages within the Parish Council.

Neighbourhood Watch and Smart Water: Through the determination of one particular councillor supported by the Wychavon Community Safety Team and other members of the Parish Council we have successfully rolled out Smart Water across the Parish. With 215 out of 295 kits having now been registered we have been able to install new Smart Water Street signage in addition to the existing Neighbourhood Watch signs. Local homeowners will continue to be able to sign up to SmartWater (using the remaining stock we have available). Parish Council Notice Boards show details of how to obtain a SmartWater kit.

These schemes act as a strong deterrent criminals, make us all safer in our communities and enable the police to return stolen items to their rightful owners should thefts occur.

Millenium Green: Although there have been no significant enhancements to the Millennium Green this year we have continued to complete routine maintenance work including ensuring the green is safe for all to use. The new picnic tables have been concreted in and we are replacing broken wooden benches with more durable and environmentally friendly ones made from recycled plastic.

Lengthsman: The Parish lengthsman who alongside other routine work has worked hard to keep the footpaths clear of vegetation, ensure we can see at junctions round the grass and cleaned the drains. The work is never ending especially with the changes in the climate and we do our best to keep on top of priority work within the budget available. We'd also like to remind residents that if you have hedges or vegetation boarding footpaths or road signs it is your responsibility to keep them appropriately pruned.

Footpaths: If you walk the footpaths and see a problem, please report it on the county council's website and let us know via the parish website as our footpath warden may be able to deal with it.

Planning: We have continued to review planning applications trying to balance increasing housing stocks which will benefit the villages and those which we feel may cause issues. We are expecting more houses to be built within the village as is happening in every settlement in the country. We wish to encourage a range of properties to be built to support existing services and provide a thriving community for the future.

Road safety: This year we have focussed on improving road safety around the village and there will soon be new electronic speed signs in both directions on the A4104 through the village and improvements to the 30mph signage on Upper Street and Harpley Road.

I would like to finish my year as chair by saying a big thank you to the other councillors who are so supportive and work hard to improve our communities. Also, to the support provided to us by our District and County Councillors. Finally on behalf of the whole Parish Council I'd like to thank Cllr. Soukup for his contributions especially his leadership of the Millennium Green as he steps down as a Councillor at the end of this year.

Annual County Council Report.

2024/25

Bredon Hill Division.

Defford Parish Council 19/03/25.

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.**

Conclusion

Despite financial pressures, the County Council remains 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, we continue to work towards sustainable solutions and strategic partnerships that will ensure Worcestershire remains a thriving and well-supported community.

Just to dwell for a moment longer local issues. 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 school on a better footing, and I hope we can deliver the school changes on time. I am sorry we have not fixed the broad walk issue to our residents' satisfaction.

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.

C/Cllr Adrian Hardman'

Bredon.

Spring 2025

Besford & Defford PARISH COUNCIL March 2025

Wychavon District Council Report

Key issues for Defford 7 Besford residents

Wychavon Finances

The Council approved a budget with a 2.5% council tax increase in 2025/26

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.

Wychavon is making £250 available to town and parish councils to support activities on and around Thursday, 8 May, to celebrate a significant milestone in the nation's history.

As well as the dedicated fund, Wychavon is also scrapping fees for road closure notices for anyone holding a street party either on 5 May, 8 May, or over the weekend from 9 to 11 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.

At Wychavon we are having council meeting on 19th March to decide whether the council supports the one Worcestershire or a two Worcestershire approach.

The government will decide in November what will happen.

PAUL
MIDDLEBROUGH
THE FORGE
CHURCH LANE
NORTON WR5 2PS

01905 821 732 Paul.middlebrough@btinternet.com
Paul.middlebrough@wychavon.net

Paul Middlebrough March 7

2025

Village Hall Report for 2025 Defford - Annual Parish Meeting

Since the last Defford Annual Parish Meeting in May 2024, the Village Hall has continued to provide a modern, well-equipped facility for a range of clubs and ad hoc functions e.g. birthday parties, weddings etc.

Whilst overall the Hall has seen high levels of occupancy during this period, more recently, one of the regular users of the Hall – who ran weekly Fitness Classes – has moved away from the area, which has left Mondays and Fridays with lower levels of occupancy.

We have upgraded the Audio-Visual system in the Hall, improving access, adding additional connectivity, a lapel microphone and reinstating the Hearing Loop facility.

We have also recently installed sound proofing panels on several of the walls of the hall to improve the acoustic qualities of the Hall i.e. to reduce echo (and enhance the effectiveness of the Hearing Loop).

We face the continued challenge of ensuring that the Hall is left “as found” after it has been used.

We are now starting to move forward with plans to extend the Village Hall to include the area under the entrance walkway – to provide a bigger, improved kitchen area & additional storage space for chairs. While we will be able to partially fund this project ourselves, we will need to secure grants from different sources in order to raise sufficient monies.

We are currently in discussion with the Developer of the potential next phase of the Glebeland bungalows about the possibility of acquiring the field directly behind the garden area of the Village Hall and the access driveway.

Peter Hale
Chair of Defford cum Besford Village Hall Trustees
12th March 2025

Report from the Cowleasow Trust for those living in Defford or around Defford.

We have money to give to people who have a need, it is difficult to identify those people, but we would really like to support people who are having problems especially now with the cost-of-living crisis. If anyone knows of anyone who would like support, please let us know. We are very discreet and keep all names out of the public domain.

This year we have been able to help three households in the village, this is very rewarding for the trustees as we see our efforts to publicise the trust coming to fruition. It is however an indicator that there are probably more people who could benefit from some support but not coming forward. Please do contact one of the following if you would like support. We have helped people buy new fridges, curtains, repair cookers, and with overgrown gardens in the past.

The Trustees are Sue Rees, Richard Clements, John Taylor, Beate Atter, Helen Ide, Hazel Wakefield, Tracey Gresham, and Jemma Siddons.

We have publicised the Trust around Pershore, on the village notice boards and on Facebook.

Sue Rees

Chair of Trustees