

**February 2026 Parish notes  
Cllr Catherin Brown  
Needwood Forest Division  
Staffordshire County Council**

Once again, thank you very much for your support. I am pleased to have had a good response from this monthly short bulletin. Please do forward any issues or highways reference numbers. I am planning a divisional meeting in May.

**Dates:**

Staffordshire History Day 28<sup>th</sup> March 2026- please visit your local libraries and museums.

1<sup>st</sup> May 2026 Staffordshire Day.

**SCC Full Council**

I think that it is only right for me to inform you about the last meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> February. It was very challenging due the political atmosphere, but one which I rose to the challenge politely, along with my fellow shadow colleagues. All SCC meetings are available to watch online.

The Council Tax was raised by 3.99% despite the Shadow Group submitting a strong alternative budget proposal including more money for Community Fund, Divisional Highways Fund, & additional new grit bins. All were costed out but rejected.

As the newly appointed Shadow for Communities and Rural Affairs, I followed my colleagues regarding the issue of the bus survey vs the low numbers available to complete the survey in my division vs the rural need for a bus service. This was acknowledged by Cllr Mynors. The same was said for the library survey. The numbers in our rural community would struggle to meet the numbers in the SCC towns.

Promotion of Family Hubs- for every day and not just for times of crisis, Burton our nearest.

County Farms- following a promise that the current administration, not For Sale, 2 had been request by SCC for inclusion into a development as part of the Local Plan for Betley and Audley.

**Local Government Reorganisation:**

Following a briefing from the SCC CEO & Communications Director, it was apparent the SCC endorsement of the East/West split is a political decision. The costs for the North/South split which is what my Conservative colleagues and I endorse are the same. Any more proposals with 3 or more unitary councils will cost more.

**Meetings:** Full Council 12/2/26; Shadow meeting cabinet meeting; Barton under Needwood highways meeting; A515 Steering meeting; LGR; Health & Care Overview & Scrutiny.; B5013 onsite meeting at Blithfield Reservoir; Abbots Bromley Community Shop meeting & opening day.

Following my attendance at the very interesting and enlightening 2 day NFU Conference last week I am reviewing:

1. Free Schools Milk- is this being implemented in Staffordshire Schools.
2. I will be enquiring with the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit whether there is a food strategy for Staffordshire residents if there is a Shock Event.

**Highways:**

See end of this report for the Highways Stats week commencing 16/2/26. In daily communication regarding potholes and speeding.

As you may imagine I have reported, dealt with and followed up, some repeatedly, scores of potholes this month. The morning in Barton with BPC chair was a worthwhile opportunity to review numerous complaints.

PLEASE REPORT POTHOLE. Let me have the reference numbers of those that are urgent or unresolved. Thank you.

**Wychnor:**

Dog poo bins ESBC.

Pot hole Church Farm.

**Barton under Needwood:**

Potholes- 15 roads were identified needing attention when I meet with the Chair Ed Sharkey. Urgent will be filled, with permanent infill will be 12 weeks due to the issue of advance warning and licences for road closure for Arden Road and Efflinch road.

Newbold Quarry complaint that the slip road to the A38 was not being cleaned. This has been acknowledged and rectified.

Barr Green request for the grit bin to be filled. Scheduled- either if imminent snow expected or part of a routine fill.

Bright Beginnings Nursery- Identified and actioned the SCC department to assist with the funding of an extension for the nursery.

War Memorial bollard re-instatement.

Report of antisocial and dangerous behaviour with someone gluing concrete bollards on a pavement to stop parking. They were removed and reported to the police.

**Hoar Cross:**

Environmental Team still required to clear the footpath by the church and Hoar Cross Hall.

Thorney Lanes- Speed & Volume survey- data- no action required.

**Branston TC:**

The 400 pupil Henhurst Ridge Academy requested a grit bin and the 'Close' to be gritted as part of the Henhurst Ridge/Aviation Lane schedule. Top of Aviation Lane- same request as for the primary school.

These are to be considered by the Cabinet lead for Highways and Divisional Highways Team at the summer/autumn review.

Some SCC Cllr's have asked their residents on social media for suggested sites for grit bins but there is not the money to support all. I think we have a strong case here outside the primary school.

Postern Road speed humps- with the new traffic lights and Tatenhill speed reducing measures, this is unlikely to be supported at present, and there is a move away from this type of measure.

Resident- request with help for publicity for a new business.

**Tatenhill & Rangemore:**

S106 Speed reducing measures. Expecting a response this month.

Wilmore stables sewage issue- still waiting for action from ESBC

Environmental Health Department for the plotting and investigation of the sewage pipe network.

**Abbots Bromley:**

Numerous emails regarding the Speed & Volume Survey on the Lichfield Road which has resulted in the implementation of the Speed Camera Unit.

Abbots Bromley Community Shop & Hub at the Village Hall.

Pinfold Lane- potholes. Visited.

**Newborough**

Abbots Bromley end chicane pothole- not urgent.

Moor Lane new fence meeting- ongoing.

Thorney Lanes- urgent potholes.

**Yoxall**

Gladmans- development ongoing.

Hadley Ends village gateways on-going.

**Dunstall**

Lichfield Road yellow lines meeting with Highways England- ongoing.

Potholes- inspected but not urgent. Saw them on Friday- will FU.

Lichfield road post/bin- SCC Ranger service. Please advise.

**Highways Update****Weekly Stats for w/c 16/02/2026****Highways enquiries:**

Closed (within the last 7 days): 1210

New (within the last 7 days): 2927

Open (inspectors – rolling): 6444

Open (other- rolling): 1201

**Gullies visited:** 1888 gullies visited, 82.9% observed running

**Potholes patched:** 761

**Emergency jobs completed:** 30

**Pothole jobs completed by category of pothole:**

Cat 3 - 109

Cat 2 - 155

Cat 1 - 196

Emergencies - 30

\*Please note a number of potholes could be patched under a single job, hence the difference in numbers between potholes patched and pothole jobs.

**Outstanding workstack:** 33,042

**Outstanding workstack CW/FW/CY Patching:** 17,701

**Drainage jobs completed:** 115

**Environmental jobs completed**

Total: 73

Gailey - 0

Leek - 32

Lichfield - 9

Stone - 32

**Quality Inspections**

27 Quality Inspections, 0 Non-Conformances

Stats & Perm, 4 audits, 0 Non-Conformances

OCR Audits, 24 audits, 4 Non-Conformances

**Percentage of pothole jobs completed on time\***

Cat 1 - 91.5% (-1)

Cat 2 - 55.5% (-1)

Cat 3 - 13.5%

Emergency - 100% (+1)

*\*Please note a number of potholes could be patched under a single job, hence the difference in numbers between potholes patched and pothole jobs.*

The majority of road works are carried out by the utility companies such as gas, water, phone and electric companies. For more information on these roadworks please visit [one.network](#)



**Attendees:** Councillors: Steve Naylor (Chair), Ed Sharkey, Hugh Frend, Derek Lord Siobhan Rumsby (Clerk/RFO), Clive Davis, Charlie Wallace

**Apologies:** None

**Did not attend:** None

1. The 2025/26 budget position was reviewed with the following points noted:
  - a. There are no significant variances to the planned income or expenditures. The current budget forecast shows an end of year close with net funds of £58,633 which is a satisfactory position.
  - b. The payment from the CO-OP for the car park lease is still outstanding. Councillor Naylor agreed to write to the CO-OP to expedite payment.
  - c. Fishpond is over-spending its budget (£4000 forecast v budget £3500). It was agreed to fund the fishpond Tree Work from the Tree Work reserve held centrally (£1150) although it was recognised that the quotations for tree work at the fishpond exceed this amount (lowest quote is £1250 plus VAT). It was agreed to undertake the works at the lowest quote, and push further tree work to next year or future years.
2. The budget for 2026/27 was reviewed. The following key points were noted:
  - a. VAT expense and reclaim has now been included in the budget figures
  - b. The loan for HSC Pavillion has been included in both the income and expenses of the budget, having a zero net impact.
  - c. Forecast net funds at end of 2026/26 is £41,962 (reduced from 2025/26 principally due to funding first year of HSC loan through reserves).
  - d. The approved increase in Precept has been included in the 2026/27 budget
3. Earmarked Reserves for year 2026/27 were reviewed:
  - a. The list was agreed in principle with no additions or deletions
  - b. The reserve amount for resurfacing of the Crowberry Lane Car Park needs to be updated. Councillor Sharkey agreed to obtain a budgetary estimate from Lichfield Tarmacadam and Councillor Wallace agreed to obtain an estimate from a further contractor. The reserve amount will be adjusted to reflect the estimates although it was agreed that if the estimates are significantly higher than the current reserve (£35,000) it may be necessary to build the required amount over more than one financial year.
  - c. It was agreed to submit the loan application for HSC Sports Club as soon as we have received the necessary inputs from HSC. The cash received will be held in a Council Bank Account and the Council will pay contractors directly.
  - d. It was agreed to check any carry-over items in the reserve from the current financial year
  - e. It was agreed to increase the reserve for HSC legal fees to £4500
  - f. The surface of Potters Way was discussed in relation to its robustness and ability to cope with HSC construction traffic. It was agreed to review the requirement to build-up a reserve fund for potential works post the construction. Photos will be taken so we have a record of the surface as-is.

4. A draft version of a new Financial Reserves Policy was reviewed and agreed after incorporating some minor amendments proposed by Councillor Lord. This document will now be issued to the Policy Committee for its approval. It will be presented to the next full council meeting in March for final approval and adoption.
5. Finance Training for Councillors. It was agreed that all members of the Finance Committee should attend one of the two courses proposed by the Clerk. Members of the Finance Committee agreed to inform the Clerk of their preference for which course.
6. It was agreed to appoint Kim Squires as Internal Auditor.
7. As provided for by Financial Regulations (section 19.2), the Finance Committee approved the extension of the current Grounds Maintenance Contract for one year. This decision to be ratified by full council meeting March 2026.
8. Next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 6pm.

Stephen Naylor  
Chair, Finance Committee

**Kim Squires Internal Audit Services**

52 HANDSACRE COURT  
CANON LANE  
RUGELEY  
STAFFORDSHIRE  
WS15 1PQ

26 Jan 2026

Dear Councillor,

Thank you for appointing Kim Squires Internal Audit Services as your Council's Internal Auditor for the current financial year.

I confirm that we are an independent company with no links, familial or otherwise, to the Council.

We recommend that you minute the receipt of this letter and its contents at the next meeting of the Council.

Yours sincerely

*Kim Squires*

Receipts	Last Year 2024-25	Budget 2025-26	Actual to date	Year End Projection	Diff Proj v Budget	% variance	Comments
<b>Total</b>	<b>57,222</b>	<b>40,284</b>	<b>42,790</b>	<b>51,864</b>	<b>11,580</b>	<b>29</b>	
Local Authority Grant/Other	13,308	1,865	1,865	1,865	0	0.00	
Burial Ground	15,170	16,000	15,575	16,000	0	0.00	
Allotments	1,668	1,925	1,470	1,470	-455	-23.64	
Fishing	2,500	2,500	1,943	2,100	-400	-16.00	Income less due to a Fishpond closure
Interest	2,610	1,300	1,958	2,000	700	53.85	
Holland Sports Club Lease	478	450	0	450	0	0.00	Rent outstanding
Grants	100	0	8,372	8,372	-8,372		Reimbursement VE Day from B&D Key & Gauge costs from EA
VAT Reimbursement	10,997	5,500	11,143	11,143	5,643	102.60	Claim for Year 24-25
Car Park	10,391	10,744	0	8,000	-2,744	-25.54	Co-op invoice still outstanding
Other		0	464	464	464		Refunded solicitors fees and Lloyds bank compensation

Payments	Last Year 2024-25	Budget 2025-26	Actual to date	Year End Projection	Diff Proj v Budget	% variance	Comments
<b>Total</b>	<b>136,234</b>	<b>133,115</b>	<b>117,013</b>	<b>132,048</b>	<b>-1,067</b>	<b>-1</b>	
Staff costs	62,000	67,800	52,136	62,563	-5,237	-7.72	Budget based on 6.7% increase and includes uplift in Employer NI Contribution
Lengthsman	3,000	3,000	2,245	2,694	-306	-10.19	Living wage increase 6.7%
Admin / T&D/Professional	11,000	11,000	10,704	11,000	0	0.00	Subs, office supplies, hall hire, phone, postage, insurance, website, T&D, professional fees
Donations & S137 payments	700	700	483	500	-200	-28.57	
Bank Charges	192	250	157	200	-50	-20.00	
Capital Expenditure	1,000	1,000	4,958	4,985	3,985	398.50	Gague cost (Reimbursed by EA)
Maintenance / Repairs )	3,328	3,500	3,490	3,600	100	2.86	Includes annual maintenance for Gauge
General	12,080	350	3,154	3,154	2,804	801.14	Includes VE Day expenses (Reimbursed by B&D Key Trust)
Burial Ground	4,864	5,000	1,918	3,000	-2,000	-40.00	
Parks & Open Spaces	13,500	24,213	22,985	24,000	213	0.88	8,300 ground maintenance, 180 CCTV; £800 seasonal planting; £260 playground inspection; £800 tree work
Fishpond	12,845	3,350	3,399	4,000	650	19.40	Includes topographical survey £850
Allotments	2,200	2,152	1,557	2,152	0	0.00	Committee budget
Car Park	1,725	1,800	1,162	1,300	-500	-27.78	Maintenance and car park lighting
Events and Communications	2,500	3,500	1,357	1,500	-2,000	-57.14	
Other Projects	0	0	0	0	0	0	
VAT	5,300	5,500	7,309	7,400	1,900	34.55	

Precept 2025-2026	82,292	<b>Bank Balances as at: 02-Feb-26</b>		<b>Earmarked Future Provision 2025-26</b>	
Less Projected Payments	132,048	Lloyds Current A/C	2,000.00	<b>Ring-fenced Reserves</b>	
<b>Draw on Reserves</b>	<b>-49,756</b>	Lloyds Deposit A/C	24,997.89	Car Park Maintenance & Resurface	£35,000
		Unity Trust	82,546.40	Brook Clearance funds (SCC)	£427
Projected Income	51,864	National Savings	35,540.95	Election expenses	£5,625
<b>Projected Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>2,108</b>			Burial Ground Bench, fence memorial garden	£2,250
				Professional fees HSC - legal & VAT	£3,550
Working Capital	109,294	<i>Less unrepresented cheques</i>	250.00	Communications	£1,200
General Reserve	35,541	<i>Plus credits outstanding</i>	-	Tree work (survey mapping and work)	£1,150
Ring-fenced Reserves	49,202				£850 spent on topo survey £2k-850
Minimum Reserve	37,000	Total	<b>144,835.24</b>	Total	<b>£49,202</b>
<b>Net Funds</b>	<b>58,633</b>				

Receipts	Projected 2025-26	Budget 2026-27	Comments
<b>Total</b>	<b>55,677</b>	<b>164,825</b>	
Local Authority Grant/Other	1,865	1,865	
Burial Ground	16,000	16,000	Charges to remain same
Allotments	1,470	1,925	Charges to remain same
Fishing	2,500	2,500	Charges to remain same
Interest	2,500	1,300	
Holland Sports Club Lease	450	450	Rent offset by HSC Insurance premium
Grants	8,372	0	Possible EA grant for fishpond, awaiting management plan
VAT Reimbursement	11,500	27,000	Claim for previous year plus £20k VAT expected for changing rooms project
Car Park	10,744	13,785	potential recalculation of formula
Other	276	0	
PWLB draw down		100,000	Loan to cover Sports Pavilion Changing Rooms project

Payments	Projected 2025-26	Budget 2026-27	Comments
<b>Total</b>	<b>129,795</b>	<b>250,652</b>	
Staff costs	65,000	68,250	5% increase
Lengthsman	3,000	3,000	
Admin / T&D/Professional	11,000	11,000	Subs, office supplies, hall hire, phone, postage, insurance, website, T&D, profess
Donations & S137 payments	700	700	
Bank Charges	250	250	
Capital Expenditure	1,000	1,000	Contingency for any equipment replacement
Maintenance / Repairs )	3,500	3,500	includes £500 per annum for Gauge on costs
General	500	350	
Burial Ground	5,000	5,000	
CA&E	28545	25,302	See separate table
Sports Pavilion		100,000	Potential Funding for Sports Pavilion Changing Rooms Project
Car Park	1,800	1,800	Maintenance and car park lighting
Events and Communications	3,500	3,500	
Other Projects	0	0	
VAT	6,000	27,000	

CA&E	Operating Costs	Capex	Earmarked	Total	Income
Collinson	3500				
Toddler gate		750			
Bench Replacement		6000			
Fishpond	2500				2500
BG Memorial Gdn		2250	2250		16000
Allotments	2152				2000
Grounds Maintnce	9400				
Brook Working Party	1000				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>18552</b>	<b>9000</b>	<b>2250</b>	<b>25302</b>	<b>20500</b>

Precept	88,876	<b>Bank Balances as at 02-Feb-26</b>	
Less Budgeted Payments	250,652	Lloyds Current A/C	2,000.00
<i>Draw on Reserves</i>	-161,776	Lloyds Deposit A/C	24,997.89
		Unity Trust	82,546.40
Projected Income	164,825	National Savings	35,540.95
<b>Projected Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>3,049</b>		
Working Capital	109,294	<i>Less unrepresented cheques</i>	250.00
General Reserve	35,541	<i>Plus credits outstanding</i>	-
Ring-fenced Reserves	65,674	<b>Total</b>	<b>144,835.24</b>
Minimum Reserve	37,000		
<b>Net Funds</b>	<b>42,162</b>		

<u>Earmarked Future Provision 2026-27</u>	
<b>Ring-fenced Reserves</b>	
Car Park Maintenance & Resurface	£35,000 ) estimates to be
Potters Way Resurface	) revisited
Brook Clearance funds (SCC)	£427
Election expenses	£10,625
Burial Ground Bench, fence memorial garden	£2,250
Professional fees HSC - legal & VAT	£4,500
	based on £100k loan over 10 years
Holland Sports Club PWLB repayments 1st yr	£12,872 Annuity basis
<b>Total</b>	<b>£65,674</b>

**Barton under Needwood Parish Council - Receipts and Payments Monthly Summary**

2025-26

Receipts	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	Total	Budget	Budget Balance
Rents	1,220.00	140.00	110.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,470.00		
Interest	20.48	23.87	499.81	23.38	21.23	477.13	22.43	27.00	473.07	369.38	12.64	0.00	1,970.42		
ESBC	41,146.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	41,146.12	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	82,292.25		
LA Other	932.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	932.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,865.00		
Burial Ground	2,235.00	185.00	3,060.00	1,950.00	480.00	1,545.00	885.00	3,080.00	1,440.00	715.00	300.00	0.00	15,875.00	16,000	-125
Fishpond	409.00	260.00	130.00	228.00	316.00	0.00	400.00	0.00	0.00	200.00	0.00	0.00	1,943.00	2,500	-557
VAT	0.00	0.00	11,143.16	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11,143.16		
Car Park	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
Other	116.80	0.00	92.18	0.00	0.00	67.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	187.98	0.00	0.00	464.26		
Grants/donations	50.00	8,322.08	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8,372.08		
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>46,129.91</b>	<b>8,930.95</b>	<b>15,035.15</b>	<b>2,201.38</b>	<b>817.23</b>	<b>44,168.05</b>	<b>1,307.43</b>	<b>3,107.00</b>	<b>1,913.07</b>	<b>1,472.36</b>	<b>312.64</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>125,395.17</b>		

Payments	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	Total	Budget	Budget Balance
Bank Charges	8.50	34.25	0.00	18.88	18.75	10.20	31.41	0.00	15.35	19.55	0.00	9.35	166.24		
Salaries	3,682.12	3,806.67	3,464.72	3,806.67	3,807.38	3,521.80	3,869.51	3,521.60	3,802.25	3,863.75	3,521.80	0.00	40,668.27		
Lengthsmen	195.40	259.38	195.40	244.46	195.40	195.40	244.46	195.40	275.40	244.46	195.40	0.00	2,440.56		
HMRC	0.00	967.25	1,556.57	1,294.44	2,345.34	1,510.89	1,330.55	1,482.89	1,304.76	1,477.55	2,318.78	0.00	15,589.02		
Nest Pensions	183.28	0.00	183.28	183.28	183.28	407.70	0.00	189.16	388.82	0.00	189.16	0.00	1,907.96		
Admin	1,660.47	1,976.74	1,464.68	854.10	107.99	808.77	1,322.94	159.45	1,863.71	446.29	0.00	0.00	10,665.14		
Donations	0.00	132.50	25.00	40.00	130.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	80.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	457.50		
Parks	13,370.37	405.97	2,398.45	1,479.79	1,207.85	1,346.65	1,507.85	1,207.85	30.00	30.00	0.00	0.00	22,984.78	24,213.00	1,228.22
Burial Ground	20.00	0.00	0.00	366.66	149.65	789.03	0.00	183.33	0.00	408.95	328.05	0.00	2,245.67	5,000.00	2,754.33
Allotments	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	95.77	0.00	0.00	1,461.67	0.00	0.00	76.57	0.00	1,634.01	2,152.00	517.99
Fishpond	425.24	0.00	297.28	394.34	127.00	1,220.75	98.00	214.70	523.99	98.00	339.39	0.00	3,738.69	3,350.00	-388.69
Capital Exp	0.00	4,958.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4,958.00		
Maintenance	0.00	32.21	69.21	60.84	78.82	0.00	91.36	97.86	1,265.00	1,791.59	0.00	0.00	3,486.89		
Car Park	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,161.65	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,161.65		
General payments	360.00	2,690.08	0.00	19.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	20.00	0.00	65.00	0.00	0.00	3,154.38		
Projects	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
PEC	179.99	100.00	0.00	567.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	20.47	253.33	235.70	0.00	0.00	1,356.87	3,500.00	2,143.13
VAT	2,860.26	1,036.07	548.75	436.07	256.59	683.16	319.59	335.61	375.78	524.30	53.64	0.00	7,429.82		
<b>Total Spend</b>	<b>22,945.63</b>	<b>16,399.12</b>	<b>10,203.34</b>	<b>9,766.21</b>	<b>8,703.82</b>	<b>11,656.00</b>	<b>8,815.67</b>	<b>9,089.99</b>	<b>10,178.39</b>	<b>9,255.14</b>	<b>7,022.79</b>	<b>9.35</b>	<b>124,045.45</b>		

**Barton under Needwood Parish Council -**

**Schedule of Payments presented to Full Council  
(invoices and quotations emailed with meeting pack)**

05/03/2026

		£	£	£	Allocation
<b>Payee</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Value Gross</b>	VAT	NET	
Salaries total		3,717.20		3,717.20	HR
Nest Pension Scheme		189.16		189.16	HR
HMRC		1,330.55		1,330.55	HR
Lloyds	Bank Charges	9.35		9.35	Admin
Sky mobile	mobile phone and CCTV data	44.00		44.00	Admin & CA&E
G A Cannell Memorials	Memorial plaque	457.02	76.17	380.85	CA&E
Burton Skip Hire	Skip Burial Ground	365.00	60.83	304.17	CA&E (Fishpond)
Barton Village Hall	Hall hire	11.25		11.25	Admin
Staffordshire CC	Rent for Allotments	1,130.00		1,130.00	CA&E
			Total	<b>7,116.52</b>	

Signed:

**Barton under Needwood Parish Council****Bank Reconciliation as per statements at:**

28-Feb-26

Lloyds Business Account	£	2,049.00
Lloyds Commercial Instant Access Saver	£	17,849.58
Unity Trust Bank Instant Access Saver	£	82,546.40
National Savings	£	35,540.95

**Total Bank Balances** **£ 137,985.93**

Add Credits not on Statement

£0.00 **£ 137,985.93**

Less unpresented payments:-

DD	9.35
FP	50.00

£59.35 **£ 137,926.58**

**Opening Balances :-****Bank Statements as at 31st March 2025**

Lloyds Current A/C	£	2,000.00
Lloyds Deposit A/C	£	18,771.11
National Savings	£	81,156.32
Petty Cash	£	35,189.06

Parish Council - **Total £ 137,116.49**

*Add Receipts to date* £ 125,395.17

*Less Expenditure to date* £ 124,585.08

Total Cash and Investments as at -

**£ 137,926.58**

**Difference** -£ 0.00

RFO. S. Rumsby

## **Barton under Needwood Parish Council**

### **Notes of the Planning Committee Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**Present:** Cllrs Lord, Sharkey and Wallace and Roger Bell as co-opted member

**Declarations of Interest:** None

**P/2026/00114 Monterey 97 Efflinch Lane:** Pollarding of two Weeping Willow Trees to retain the framework and structure to a height of 7m. (TPO trees)

**Resolved: No objections, but we felt that some further information would have been helpful in order to explain what appears to be quite a drastic solution.**

**P/2024/01084 Rhosyn Farm, Scotch Hills, Barton Gate:** Amended opening times for the retention of the animal experience

Cllr Sharkey had received an e-mail from the applicants requesting the Parish Council's attendance at ESBC's Planning Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> February, when amended and updated opening times will be discussed following the Planning Committee's earlier consideration of the proposal.

The Parish Council had previously objected to this proposal for an animal experience as we felt that it did not accord with Local Plan policies for farm diversification. These policies required information explaining how the development might impact on the local economy, and also how it would affect the long-term viability of the farming enterprise. As far as we could tell, no such information had been forthcoming. ESBC's Committee report confirmed that this was the case, but nonetheless considered it was suitable and acceptable in this location. As a result of this endorsement by the Local Planning Authority, the Parish Council felt that it had no real grounds for continuing its objections. We did, however, submit further comments expressing disappointment at the lack of any explanation as to how ESBC had reached this conclusion. We also felt that this decision might act as a precedent for similar farm diversification projects.

**Resolved: The Parish Council's comments on this planning application have been well documented and recorded by ESBC in the Committee report. Whilst we await to see the updated Planning Committee report, we feel that we would have nothing to contribute by attending the Committee meeting. Cllr Sharkey will respond to the owners explaining the Parish Council's views.**

**P/2025/01275 12 Meadow Rise :** Erection of first floor, part two storey side extension , single storey rear extension , conversion of garage to form additional living accommodation incorporating a single storey front/side extension, erection of a dormer extension to the rear elevation, installation of storm porch, alterations to the fenestration on all elevations and rendering to front and rear elevations

Roger Bell drew the Committee's attention the Case Officer's report approving this proposal. The Parish Council had objected to the application on the grounds that the side extension would link to the neighbouring property. We also had concerns that the scale of the

proposal and the rear dormer would extend above the roof ridge line and, as a consequence, would have an overbearing impact. We also felt that the proposed materials could be more in keeping with the character of the area.

ESBC's Case Officer's report stated that the scale and design was sympathetic, and the proposed materials would not have any adverse impact. The report also felt that the proposal fitted in well with the surroundings and amended drawings (not seen by the Parish Council) had apparently made the rear dormer lower than the roof line.

The Parish Council felt that we had reasonable grounds for objecting to this proposal in the light of the local plan policies. We were concerned, in particular, that ESBC had not followed the criterion of Local Plan Policy SP 24 which states that all development proposals must make a positive contribution to the area in which they are located. Just saying that the proposal fits in well, or indeed is sympathetic, is not the same as making a positive contribution.

**Resolved: The Committee resolved to remind ESBC that they had previously acknowledged a commitment to come and talk to Committee members about various planning issues. Such a discussion could usefully include ESBC's thought processes in determining such applications as this one, and the case at Rhosyn Farm.**

#### **Local Government Reorganisation**

The Committee considered the e-mail from the Staffordshire Parish Council's Association informing us of the Government's consultation on the options for the reorganisation of local government in Staffordshire. The Committee echoed the points we had previously made suggesting that the need for a well-funded and resourced Unitary Authority that was able to respond to local needs was perhaps more important than any specific merging of existing areas. We would have liked to have seen more emphasis on how the claims of sustainable and high-quality services could have been achieved. But it was accepted that the proposed Southern and Mid Staffordshire proposal did have some economies of scale and efficiencies.

**Resolved: Roger Bell will draft a report for discussion at the Parish Council meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

**Date of Next Meeting: Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2026 at 5:00pm**

## **Barton under Needwood Parish Council**

### **Notes of the Planning Committee Meeting 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2026**

**Present:** Cllrs Hassall, Lord, Sharkey and Wallace and Roger Bell as a co-opted member

**Apologies:** None

**Declarations of Interest:** None

**P/2025/00513 Land to the north of The Green:** REVISED Outline application with all matters reserved for the demolition of the existing agricultural buildings and the erection of up to 70 dwellings, with associated open space, car parking and sustainable drainage

The reason for this re-consultation is that the applicants have updated their technical information for this site with regard to the Flood Risk Assessment, Drainage Strategy and their Transport Assessment. Staffordshire County Council as highway authority was concerned about the distribution of traffic from the proposed development to the A 38 and consequently along Dogshead Lane. They were also concerned about whether Dogshead Lane, with a 60mph speed limit and a narrow carriageway was suitable to take this level of traffic from a safety point of view. Traffic consultants for the applicants have addressed these issues in the form of this additional information.

The applicants have also undertaken a review of the drains on the site to address issues raised by the County Council about the impact of surface water downstream, and also to address Severn Trent's concern that there should be no surface water flowing into a combined drain.

**Resolved: The Planning Committee's view is that there are flaws in both these technical reports and we are in the process of preparing a detailed response. We will be able to meet the planning application's deadline for a response to ESBC by 20<sup>th</sup> March, but this means that this response will only be seen by the Parish Council at the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2026.**

### **Local Government Reorganisation - Staffordshire**

The Staffordshire Parish Council's Association has informed us that the Government has launched a consultation on the proposed reorganisation of local government in Staffordshire. The Staffordshire local authorities are promoting 5 options to divide the County into Unitary Authorities (i.e. combining County Council and District Council functions) and the Government is asking for comments. East Staffordshire Borough Council has supported a six authority area for "South Staffordshire" and this includes, Lichfield, Tamworth, East Staffordshire, Stafford, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire. We have read the detailed the case for this proposed South Staffordshire authority and made comments accordingly

**Resolved: That the Parish Council consider the report of the Planning Committee and support the recommendation that it is submitted to the Government as representing the Parish Council's response.**

### **Proposed Meeting with the Planning Manager at ESBC**

The Notes of the last meeting suggested that it would be helpful for the Planning Committee to meet with the Planning Manager, or their representative, to discuss the policy issues associated with how various planning applications are determined. In the past we have also expressed concerns about how we can protect, preserve and enhance the Conservation Area and maintain the viability of our Rural Centre.

**Resolved: Attached to these Notes is a draft suggested agenda for the Parish Council to understand the issues that require discussion. The Parish Council's views on these issues are requested before a final agenda is prepared.**

**Date of Next Meeting: Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

# DRAFT

## Suggested Draft Agenda for Meeting with ESBC's Planning Manager

General concern that Case Officer reports do not always address the specific criteria within planning policies, and we illustrate this by some specific questions below:-

### Specific Questions

#### Policy SP 24 High Quality Design – elements of this policy

- Design Review Panel – you previously informed us that this only applies to major proposals and it is very costly, but the policy doesn't say that.
- "Positive contribution of proposals" – case officer reports often say "it fits in well" but that is not the same as making a positive contribution
- Developers need to demonstrate how they have complied with the policy – this aspect is rarely complied with.

#### Policy SP 8 Development outside settlement boundaries

- What does essential to the support and viability of an existing lawful business" mean and what information is required?
- Is domestication of the countryside an concern of this policy?
- We still find it hard to understand the difference between the decisions for a westward extension along Bar Lane and the rear extension on The Green. Both to our minds extend into the open countryside

#### Trent Valley and Newbold Extension and Joint Working

- On two occasions – separated by 2 years - we wrote and asked the question about progress on para 4.18 in the Local Plan about proposed joint working between agencies operating in the Trent Valley. We felt that the outcome of any joint working might have some impact on the consideration of this now approved extension to the sand and gravel workings. Your undated response letter said that you had asked a colleague to contact us, but we have had no such contact, so we still have no idea of any progress on joint working.

#### Precedent and applications on their merits – some examples

- Rhosyn Farm – following the recent approval, we are fearful that by accepting such limited information about the long term viability of this enterprise that this might set a low bar for future applications;
- Westmead Road – is an area of predominantly semi-detached dormer bungalows, but on two instances detached properties have been approved with the precedent argument by a former proposal used to support the more recent instance;
- Park Road Estate – a similar situation where the vast majority of properties are red brick and again where one property allowed to be rendered was used as a basis for allowing the second. We know that all applicants are treated on their merits but if that is the case then what role does precedence play?

## **More general issues regarding Conservation Areas and the role of Barton as a Rural Centre**

### **Conservation Area issues**

- Lack of, or poor quality heritage statements or statements of significance Quality of Heritage Statements (NPPF) and Statements of Significance (Policy DP 5) by applicants. Lichfield DC refuse applications for inadequate statements. Can more information be provided to applicants so that better quality statements are submitted?
- Plastic vs wooden windows
- Demolition
- Signs and how the SPD is applied
- Differences in approach as between the determination of extensions to listed buildings
- Extensions generally, and the issue that we get the impression that if they can't be seen then they don't really matter
- Assessment of trees in conservation areas for TPOs. Does visibility affect amenity value and, if so, how does this relate to the criteria in TEMPO guidance? TEMPO guidance states, "*Whilst the scores are obviously weighted towards visibility, we take the view that it is reasonable to give some credit to trees that are not and it is accepted that in exceptional circumstances such trees may justify a TPO*"
- Replacement tree planting and informatives – some case officers just say it can't be authorized and others sometimes include an informative, but the latest one we saw said that this was at the request of the Parish Council. How and why did we get name checked?
- Role of Article 4 Directions – previous advice from your Conservation officer was that Article 4 Directions are seen as politically undesirable – is that still the case?
- How do you define 'preserving' and 'enhancing'?
- How to arrest the decline in the fabric of the conservation area?
- Updating Appraisals and preparing Management Plans

### **Rural Centres**

- What can be done to support the commercial centre of the village as we feel that the protection of these facilities is not being met? In the light of changes to the Use Classes Order how is Policy SP 20 to protect shops etc. being interpreted?
- We have been disappointed by previous decisions to the loss of retail and commercial provision on Main Street. The issue is surely one of sustainability because if facilities are lost then residents will drive to other larger centres.
- Barton Marina – as the Planning Inspector said it was more or less a sustainable location then does that mean that more retail space may be allowed there which could directly impact the village centre?

## Barton under Needwood Parish Council Parish Council Meeting 5<sup>th</sup> March 2026

### Report of the Planning Committee

#### English Devolution, the Government's Consultation Local Government Reorganisation - Staffordshire

##### Introduction

The Parish Council received an e-mail dated 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 from the Staffordshire Parish Council's Association informing us that the Government had launched a formal consultation on the proposed Local Government Reorganisation for Staffordshire. This statutory consultation seeks views on the proposals that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has received from the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent's principal councils.

The proposals are:-

- (1) Two Unitary Authorities consisting of **North Staffordshire** (Newcastle under Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke on Trent) and **South Staffordshire** (Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth);
- (2) Two Unitary Authorities consisting of **East Staffordshire** (East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke on Trent and Tamworth) and **West Staffordshire** (Cannock Chase, Newcastle under Lyme, South Staffordshire and Stafford);
- (3) Two Unitary Authorities consisting of **North Staffordshire** (Newcastle under Lyme, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire Moorlands and 15 parishes from East Staffordshire and 6 from Stafford) and **Southern and Mid – Staffordshire** (Cannock Chase, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Tamworth and the remaining 22 parishes from East Staffordshire and 34 from Stafford);
- (4) Three Unitary Authorities consisting of **North Staffordshire** (Newcastle under Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke on Trent), **South West Staffordshire** (Cannock Chase, South Staffordshire and Stafford) and **South East Staffordshire** (Lichfield, East Staffordshire and Tamworth);
- (5) Four Unitary Authorities consisting of (1) **Newcastle under Lyme**, (2) **Cannock Chase, South Staffordshire and Stafford**, (3) **Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke on Trent** and (4) **East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Tamworth**

The Staffordshire Parish Council's Association is encouraging every local council to submit a formal response, as well as sharing the response with local residents, and encouraging them to take part. **Responses are required by 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

##### Background Context

We need to step back a little to try and put this particular consultation into its context. In December 2024, not long after coming into office, the present government produced a White Paper on English Devolution. A White Paper is generally produced as a prelude to legislation. The aim of the White Paper is summed up nicely within the first paragraph of the Executive Summary, "**England is one of the most centralized countries in the developed world. Devolution across England is fundamental to achieving the change the public expect and deserve: growth, more joined up delivery of public services and politics being done with communities not to them**".

The White Paper was prescriptive in its solution – universal coverage in England by Strategic Authorities. These will be a kind of new regional authority, with the long-term ambition that they will be led by Mayors who will chair the authority and lead strategic planning. The existing situation in London and the West Midlands will provide the model for this arrangement. There is a lot in the White Paper about the role of Mayors and so it looks like the Government is seeing this role as the publicly recognizable figurehead for each Strategic Authority.

Existing below this level will be one or more Unitary Authorities. The consequence of this reorganization is that the existing two-tier structure of County Councils and District Councils will be abandoned in favour of one joined-up authority providing all the services currently run by both district and county. Parish Councils represent the third tier of local government. The White Paper notes that unitary councils can lead to better outcomes for residents, save significant money, which can be reinvested in public services, and improve accountability with fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents. It also proposes to rebuild local authority workforces and modernize how councils do business.

The Government had invited reorganization proposals from local areas and set a deadline of November 2025. Invariably this has meant existing districts and boroughs combining in some shape or form to make up the unitary authorities. The rules for this indicate that mergers are to be along existing local authority areas, and proposals should be for sensible economic and geographical areas. Proposals must be supported by robust evidence and should aim for a population of 500,000 or more. Efficiencies should be identified to ensure that council taxpayers get the best value for money and proposals should set out how the transition process will be managed. Unitary structures should prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable services and engage meaningfully with the local community.

## “Redefining Staffordshire”

A Working Group of the associate local authorities developed an Interim Plan in March 2025 for a Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Authority, consisting of the six local authority areas as set in the first of the options above. This proposal was developed in parallel with a similar case for a Northern Staffordshire unitary authority. The six authorities’ Interim Plan acknowledged that the final proposal, in terms of the two new unitary Authorities, will be determined by the need to secure financial stability and how it supports a wider devolution settlement for Staffordshire as a whole. The total population of the 6 districts is 674,676.

Residents in East Staffordshire Borough were asked for their views on the principle of local government reorganisation and also had to consider a range of 5 options for unitary areas within Staffordshire. These options were not the same as the ones on which the government is now consulting, but they did include the six authority South Staffordshire area which includes East Staffordshire (ESBC). The Planning Committee prepared a report for the Parish Council at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2025. The report set out the background to the White Paper, and the conditions which had been set by the Government for local areas to put forward proposals. The general gist of the Parish Council’s position was that if there was to be a large unitary authority then it should be fully staffed and resourced to deal efficiently and effectively with Parish Councils and local residents’ needs. We felt that this was more important than any grouping of local authority areas and so we did not express any opinion for any specific option. The Parish Council’s comments were sent to the Chief Executive of East Staffordshire Borough Council (ESBC).

Whilst drafting our report last September, we became aware of increasing criticism about the potential costs associated with the Government’s proposals for reorganisation. Ministers have tended to promote reorganisation as a potential cost saving measure which could then result in re-investment in public services. We understood that the Government’s figures were based on an assessment undertaken in 2020 which suggested cost savings of £2.9bn over 5 years. A recent report by the County Council Network, however, indicated that reorganisation could actually cost £850m over 5 years and deliver no savings if 58 new councils were created with a minimum of 300,000 population. Similarly, the District Councils Network has suggested that mega councils with populations of half a million could be imposed on areas when there is no independent evidence to justify councils of this size and when many large councils created previously are struggling.

As a Parish Council we were not in a position to comment on the veracity of these costs. We did assert, however, that as a country we seem to be in the middle of a period of severe constraint on public finances, especially as the prospects and forecasts for growth, nationally, appeared limited. This made us question that if savings cannot be achieved, so as to be reinvested, then should the reorganisation of local government continue to be pursued as a priority at the present time?

During the course of 2025, the associate authorities also prepared a more detailed case for this six authority South Staffordshire unitary area. This Report, “Redefining Staffordshire” concluded that their option provided a clear vision, a robust financial case and a practical implementation plan. This would focus on residents, remove duplication, streamline

governance and empower residents. (For some reason this document also seems to be referred to as, “Delivering a Stronger Staffordshire”).

A report on reorganisation was considered by the Full Council of the Borough Council on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025 and The Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2025. This report considered the feedback from their consultation, noting that residents of East Staffordshire emphasised social care, roads and residents needs as their priorities. There were also worries about unitary areas being too large, but they saw opportunities for these new authorities to provide better services. The Borough Council endorsed this six authority solution as they felt that this option could achieve a clear single tier of local government, meet the Government’s population and financial sustainability criteria and establish a credible platform for devolution.

## The Government’s Consultation on proposals for Staffordshire

The Government’s consultation poses a number of questions. In this report, we will attempt to address these questions by reference to our earlier response to the ESBC Consultation. In addition, we have read through the case for a South Staffordshire authority report entitled, “Redefining Staffordshire” as this was the favoured option supported by ESBC. We have not read, in any great detail, the similar reports for the other options set out above and, therefore, our responses relate primarily to the case for the North and South Staffordshire division of the County.

## To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?

We agree that Unitary Authorities need to be based on geographical and economic allegiances. The problem, however, is that the Government’s insistence for a 500,000 population means that some local authorities now proposing to be merged may not have any ties with each other. We feel that East Staffordshire has some allegiance with Lichfield and Tamworth. We would have looked more thoroughly at this option but for this Government’s population threshold. We have some links with Stafford, but this is focused on it being the headquarters for the County Council. We have no real links with Cannock Chase or South Staffordshire. We do recognise the links between Lichfield and Cannock Chase. So, if the threshold population is an imperative then we would have to conclude that geographical and economic areas forming the proposed South Staffordshire area will feel contrived and, therefore, may not achieve the role of true economic and geographic allegiances.

The ‘Redefining Staffordshire’ report indicates that the proposed South Staffordshire authority will bring together, “... **nuances and individualities of the component parts under a shared sense of place that acknowledges the history, culture and economy of the area**”. This comes across as management speak. It is not clear what it means and so we are

uncertain, for example, as to what 'shared sense of place' we have with South Staffordshire District Council.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?**

We hope that they can. The document 'Redefining Staffordshire' offers laudable ambitions. What it does not really address is how it will deliver these outcomes, how they can be certain that they are the outcomes that residents require and how will they be implemented and monitored. Without more information about how outcomes can be delivered in practice, it is difficult to answer this question.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks?/  
To what extent do you agree or disagree that this proposal will put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing, particularly given that some councils in the area are in receipt of exceptional financial support?**

Looking at the 'Redefining Staffordshire' document, the financial analysis claims to deliver a positive net financial gain achieving breakeven after 1.4 years taking into account initial costs of implementation and transition. The analysis results in a net financial positive impact over five years of £92.7m. If this is achieved, then it will justify the Government's claim of reorganisation saving money. But something in the order of 30% of local government funding comes from the Revenue Support Grant. We have seen over the last 10-15 years that local government has not necessarily been a priority for government spending. In the present financial climate, we cannot see that situation improving. The savings look substantial but if Government funding to local authorities continues to decline, then we just wonder if even this level of savings will be sufficient to compensate, especially as many councils are struggling under the weight of the social care budget and spending on SEND.

We are also aware of the government's published intention to reduce the Revenue Support Grant for some allegedly wealthier council areas and redirect it to other allegedly deprived areas as part of levelling up. It is unclear what this would mean for the proposed South Staffordshire area as we have both relatively wealthy and some deprived and low income areas.

We would hope that a Unitary Authority of the proposed size of South Staffordshire will be financially robust enough because of the size of the tax base. But this is not always the situation as the case of Birmingham City Council exemplifies. Allegedly the largest local authority in Europe, but through a number of financial decisions going awry, it has fallen into financial difficulties.

We are, therefore, not convinced that a new Unitary Authority will be any more financially robust than the present situation. The financial savings put forward in the case for South Staffordshire appear impressive, but we are not convinced that this will be enough unless and until the financial relationship between central and local government is resolved and placed on a firmer and long-term footing.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services? /  
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?**

In 2024, the Parish Council undertook a survey of local residents and so we feel we have a reasonable up to date idea of the village's concerns and issues. As far as the survey was concerned, it highlighted some issues which included:-

- Blocked highway drains and potential flood risk;
- The need to ensure local businesses continue to thrive and the village centre remains robust and sustainable;
- Potholes!!
- Through traffic and parking;
- The poor reception of the mobile signal;
- Need for increased police presence to deal with anti-social behaviour;
- Re-open a former local railway station.

No doubt these sorts of concerns will be common to most parishes and areas within a combined unitary authority. But these are the stated needs that are important to local people. The fact that they have been identified means that they are not being met at the moment. We are not confident that a larger local authority will be able to address them, because if there is no money or resources now to tackle them then how will they be tackled in a larger unitary authority? How can we be certain that meeting these local needs will have any priority for limited expenditure?

Some of the issues identified above cannot necessarily be resolved solely by a new Unitary Authority. They require a more joined-up approach by working with statutory undertakers and other service providers. The Parish Council has recently commented on a planning application for 70 houses in the village. Through this process we have become aware of local capacity issues. We know that both the Infant and the Junior schools are, more or less, at capacity. We were also told that the GP Practice would have difficulty in coping with the extra demand. This application has also highlighted the local problems regarding the capacity of the local highways, sewage works and the drainage system. Whilst the public utilities and NHS fall outside the scope of local government, if a unitary body wants to genuinely tackle local problems, then they will need to work proactively with all service providers to address these local needs.

Our fear is that when you have an authority covering such a large geographical area and serving a large population then major infrastructure projects, seen as beneficial for the area as a whole, and tackling the most deprived parts, will always take priority over more local and especially rural needs. Unless the new Unitary Authorities can guarantee that they will be well staffed and resourced then we are sceptical as to whether both high-quality services can be provided and that they can respond effectively and efficiently to local needs.

### **To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support devolution arrangements?**

In theory, the notion of a joined up and fully staffed and resourced unitary authority is to be welcomed. The issues mentioned in the 'Redefining Staffordshire' document of ensuring economies of scale through joined up procurement, developing universal or at least linked IT systems, considering council assets and existing Town Hall space, and taking an holistic view of regeneration are all advantages that a unitary authority can bring. For a Parish Council, it will be good to be able to liaise with just one authority. From a planning standpoint, for example, it will be refreshing to think that we may be able to discuss transport issues within the wider context of the needs of the village. So, we do see some advantages in terms of combining services within just one authority.

### **To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment? / To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal sets out a strong public services and financial sustainability justification for boundary change?**

From the perspective of a Parish Council, we find it very disappointing that the White Paper does not really address the role of Parish and Town Councils and, particularly, the problems of rural areas. What may be appropriate in Battersea may not work in Barton and so some form of devolved local government which can reflect local needs by engaging more effectively with local areas is to be welcomed

There is also irony in the government's desire to want to ensure that local communities and neighbourhoods have a greater say in their future while at the same time creating local authorities with a population of half a million people or more. This will potentially mean that local communities are further distanced from local government. The Associate Councils' Interim Report recognizes that a unitary authority must be delivered in a way, **"that enables stronger community engagement and delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment"**. The Government Minister, in response to a query about the role of Parish

Councils stated, **"We will rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal Local Authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice"** (Jim McMahon Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

These are all fine words, and we are sure that they are well intentioned, but they have to mean something. At present there is not enough detail about how this rewiring will be enacted or indeed how the proposed Unitary Authority will deliver genuine empowerment. The 'Redefining Staffordshire' document suggests that a steamlined model of a single unitary structure, **" will make it easier for communities to access the services they need, fostering greater trust and responsiveness"**. We are sure technology can be harnessed to enable a better relationship between local government and the community, but it is not at all clear what this means in practice and how it will be enacted.

If we are going to support these ambitions for greater empowerment, then we need to see in detail exactly how South Staffordshire proposes to strengthen engagement with town and parish councils such that our local communities are better listened to and our needs met.

The impression we get is that the reality of this proposed reorganization, because of the size of the Unitary Authority, is that local communities will be further removed from contact with their local authority than they are now. We are, however, heartened by the South Staffordshire model which suggests that with 92 Councillors in 46 Wards this could mean a ratio of 1 Councillor to every 5.847 members of the electorate, within a 2 member ward. This level of contact seems reasonable, and it should ensure that each Councillor would be able to develop a strong understanding of the needs of their patch. But the downside is that groupings of Councillors for the urban areas may still predominate when it comes to voting, and there appears to be no checks and balances in the system for how the needs of the rural areas will get any priority for services or funding.

The main vehicle for achieving empowerment in the case proposed for the South Staffordshire authority is a Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC). "The purpose of the NACS is, **' to empower local communities by amplifying their voice, preserving their unique identity and influencing programme design and delivery in local services through engaged member- led decision making and effective action plans, ultimately shaping a better future for their neighbourhoods"**. NACS are intended to work at a district or sub-district level, be member-led and include opportunities for co-opted members from business or youth sectors. Regular forums are intended as well as locally devolved budgets.

As a Parish Council we are concerned that what appear to be unelected NACs will usurp the role of the elected Parish Councils. The document suggests that they will complement the role of Parish Councils but again it is not at all clear how this will work in practice. Because they operate at a particular local level and are an established tier of local government, Parish Councillors are embedded in the community and know their area well. Creating NACS would just seem to establish another level of bureaucracy which could lead to confusion about who does what. We are also concerned about who nominates or appoints co-opted members to NACS. How can we be sure that vested interests will not dominate such a grouping? How will any devolved budget operate in practice? If some sub-area body is deemed to be necessary,

then why not build on what is already in existence? Some form of grouping of Parish Councils representing small villages and rural areas might provide a better way of ensuring that the rural voice is heard in the corridors of power. The Needwood Division Forum attended by Parish Councillors and Council officers and chaired by a County Councillor could provide a useful template. In addition, if the ratio of Councillor to electorate is achieved then, then areas will already have an elected representative within the authority. This further begs the question as to what role the unelected NACS will perform.

Whilst the emphasis of both the Government's and the South Staffordshire case is one of addressing local communities and their empowerment, we are not convinced the Neighbourhood Area Committees, as proposed, provide the most appropriate vehicle to achieve this. Reading the 'Redefining Staffordshire' document we get the impression that financial stability and saving money are higher objectives and concerns. Within that context, we are not sure how addressing local needs fits into this framework. We also fear that the rural voice will be lost unless more robust structures are proposed so as to enable a fair division of the available resources.

#### **Recommendation**

**That this report and the response to the Government's questions as set out in the consultation be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. For information purposes a copy of this report will also be submitted to East Staffordshire Borough Council and the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association. The report should also be made available on the Parish Council's website. Parish Councillors will make local residents aware of the proposals and encourage them to respond.**



**Attendees:** Councillors Sally Bedford (Chair of Committee) (SB), Ed Sharkey (ES), Margaret Hassall (MH), Jo Sellers (JS), Susie Miller (SM) and Siobhan Rumsby

### 1. Welcome and apologies

Councillor Bedford welcomed everyone. There were apologies from Cllr Derek Lord.

### 2. Minutes from the meeting held on 12th November 2025

The minutes were approved.

### 3. Outstanding actions

#### Actions from PFCC meeting

The PFCC to be asked for an update following the meeting last March. ES updated the Committee that following the restructure of local government the Mayor of the proposed new Unitary Authority would pick up these functions and that there would presumably be a handover process by which the current PFCC's outstanding actions would be picked up for action.

#### First Responder Training

SM to identify a one day First Response training course and speak to the Village Hall Committee Chair.

### 4. Christmas Lights Switch on – feedback

#### Tree Raising

Thank you to all volunteers as the tree had been erected successfully. In future Vernon Wright would not be asked to use his scaffold tower as it's erection was a potential hazard that could be eliminated, ES had used his 4 metre Tripod Tower to take the decorations down, which was more stable and worked very successfully and so could be used to put decorations up.

#### Switch on

We had had a good number of Marshalls, as well as vehicles used as road blocks which had worked well.

The additional DMRB 'Chapter 8' compliant road signs hired following TK's review of the closures and advice at the last meeting had worked well and ES proposed similar signs were purchased as with at least 4 village events annually requiring diversion signs it would be more cost effective for BPC to own a set of signs. The committee agreed to this. ES to refresh quotations. These could be stored in the large shed in the Village Hall back yard, Steve Murray the VH Caretaker having confirmed there was space. Additional signage needed for the Dunstall Road junction by the cricket club particularly for night time closures as drivers continue to drive into the village. SM suggested 'Road closed tonight'. ES noted that there would be specific Highways compliant signs ES stated it took 2.5 hours to put the signs up and 2 hours to take them down.

PCSO had asked if a spare VHF radio might be made available for use at the event to keep her in the loop. SB to check with LJ that the BPC walkie talkies were compatible with the Teddy Bear Festival ones.

Thank you letters and payments to be issued to Rev Andy for the Hire of the PA system (£50), to the Church and the pub for the use of the electricity and to Neil for erecting the star.

Santa had already been paid.

JS to investigate purchasing a new star(1.2m tall x 1.0m wide).

The tree star would need to be repaired as the wire had been accidentally cut when the tree was being taken down.

Next time it would be better to site the choir next to Rev Andy's MC position against the pub wall.

Stephen Taylor (BMM) and James Avery (TRJS) were both agreeable to this.

The elves had been a great success and were thanked. Next time we will ask adults and children to dress up too. It was suggested we do Elfie Selfies and the children make reindeer glitter whilst queuing. The DJ in the pub was too loud for Santa – liaison needed with Neil Munro and DJ on the night.

SB to contact Anita McKinly, Nat and Knitter (Skinny Kitten on Mondays ) to make more poppies for the railings for Remembrance Day and stars for the railings for the Christmas celebrations.

Checks with the Christmas lights to be done sooner.in advance of the 2026 event.

For 2026 it was suggested we might have more stalls for food and drinks and BBC to get involved with Christmas trees on Main St etc. The Committee will look at how Main Street Businesses can be supported to install the mini trees above their shop fronts.

SB thanked everyone for all their hard work and said what a successful event it was.

### **Tree take down**

This went well with the use of ES's 4m tripod ladder.

The tree star wire was unfortunately cut through by accident and will be mended for next year.

Vernon Wright had refused a present to thank him for his continued support over many years in putting up and taking down the tree. SB to write to thank him for his continued help and support.

### **5. Future Events**

The Committee reflected on the busy year with the VE Day celebrations as well as Remembrance Day and the light switch on. HSC are holding a Village Fete in June which the Parish Council should support. Apart from Remembrance Day and the Christmas Tree/Lights it was agreed to hold no additional 'BPC-only' events in 2026. BBC are meeting again on 1<sup>st</sup> March

It was agreed Parish Councillors should take it in turns to support the Police drop in sessions at the library and the Tuesday coffee mornings at the Village Hall to help improve public awareness of the PC and its members in the village.

The Committee were informed that in 7 years (2033) St James Church would be celebrating its 500 year anniversary.

### **6. Social media**

It was agreed the High School should be asked to do short videos with each Councillor. MH to liaise with JTTHS which would be put on the web-site.

Also to ask the Junior school to write a story about the Barton Bunny.

### **7. Liaison with Schools**

MS will meet both the Infant and Junior schools on 6<sup>th</sup> March. No date arranged yet for MS to meet with JTTHS, but she would follow this up.

ES explained that when the Junior School was built, the only access was owned by the Parish Council via Gilmour Lane. An easement for access was agreed between the Parish Council and the Staffordshire County Council Education Department with SCC taking responsibility of maintenance of Gilmour Lane. If the school is to become part of the JTS MAT, then both schools need to be reminded of this and SCC Education Department and JTS MAT to confirm who is picking up continued liability for maintenance of Gilmour Lane. MH to speak to the Junior School Head about this in the first instance.

#### **8. Policies –**

A Reserves Policy is going to the next Finance Committee for approval.

IT Policy required to comply with proper practices. SR has sourced a template policy from NALC which SB will ask former Councillor Chris Allcok to have a look at revised policies which he had volunteered to do.

SB and SR will review the master spreadsheet for policies and any work required to update them for the next meeting.

#### **9. Any other business**

A Parish Council statement about the proposed new Holland Park Sports Club to be drafted following the Parish Council closed meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> January.

Councillor Frend had asked the Committee to share the Fix my Street website with parishioners to raise issues. The Committee agreed to do this.

The Chime article will include Fix my street, a thank you to Cllr Lindy Young, details of her replacement and a statement about our position regarding Holland Park Sports Club.

JS had been asked by the Barber Shop to help them navigate the planning system for their new sign.

#### **10. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at 9.30am.

# BARTON UNDER NEEDWOOD PARISH COUNCIL



## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Prepared by: Clerk/adapted from NALC

Reviewed by: Policies & Events Committee

Reviewed and adopted by Full Council Meeting dated .....

Minute No.....

Signed by Chair of Parish Council .....

Next Review: May 2027

## **1. Purpose of the IT Policy**

The purpose of this IT policy is to establish clear parameters for how Councillors, staff, and other authorised users use Council-provided technology or equipment in the course of their duties. A well-defined policy helps to:

- Set expectations for appropriate use of equipment and systems;
- Raise awareness of risks associated with IT use;
- Safeguard the Council's data and digital assets;
- Clarify what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable use;
- Outline the consequences of policy breaches.

## **2. Monitoring of IT Use**

As an IT provider, the Council has the right to monitor the use of its IT equipment and systems, provided there is a legitimate reason for doing so and Councillors, employees and other authorised users are informed that such monitoring may take place. Any monitoring must be proportionate and comply with relevant data protection and privacy laws. Other persons may be included if they access or use Council systems e.g. if they have a Council e-mail address

## **3. Scope of this policy**

This policy applies to all Councillors, staff, and other authorised users, regardless of their working location or pattern, including those who are home-based, office-based, or work on a flexible or part-time basis. It sets out the expectations for the appropriate use of IT equipment and systems provided by the Council.

## **4. Computer use**

### **4.1. Hardware**

- 4.1.1. Council computer equipment is provided for Council purposes only.
- 4.1.2. Locking computers when leaving desk: all Councillors, staff, and other authorised users must lock their computers when leaving their desks to prevent unauthorised access. This applies to all Council and personal devices used for work. Failure to comply may lead to disciplinary action.
- 4.1.3. All computer and other electronic equipment supplied should be treated with good care at all times. Computer equipment is expensive, and any damage sustained to any equipment will have a financial impact on the Council.
- 4.1.4. Computer and electronic hardware should be kept clean, and every precaution taken to prevent food and drink being dropped or spilled onto it.
- 4.1.5. All computer and mobile equipment will carry a number which is logged against the current owner of that equipment. A record of equipment issued will be logged in the asset register.

- 4.1.6. Equipment should not be dismantled or reassembled without seeking advice from the manufacturer/supplier.
- 4.1.7. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users are not to purchase any computer or mobile equipment (including software), unless previously authorised by full Council.
- 4.1.8. Personal disks, USB stick, CDs, DVDs, data storage devices etc cannot be used on Council computers without the prior approval of the Clerk.

## **5. Equipment**

### **5.1. Portable equipment**

- 5.1.1. Council portable equipment includes laptop computers, notebooks, tablets, mobile and smart phones with email capability and access to the internet etc.
- 5.1.2. It is particularly emphasised that Council back-up procedures specific to portable equipment should be followed at all times.
- 5.1.3. All Council portable computers must be stored safely and securely when not in use in the office, i.e. when travelling or when working from home. Portable equipment (unless locked in a secure cabinet or office) should be kept with or near the user at all times; should not be left unattended when away from Council premises and should never be left in parked vehicles or at any Council or non-Council premises.
- 5.1.4. It is important to ensure all portable devices are protected with encryption in case they are lost or stolen. All smartphones or tablets that hold Council data, including emails and files, must be protected with a pin code. Where possible, these devices should also be programmed to erase all content after several unsuccessful attempts to break in. Any security set on these devices must not be disabled or removed.
- 5.1.5. Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) is a security process that requires users to verify their identity using two or more independent methods - for example, entering a password (something you know) and confirming a code sent to your mobile device (something you have). This significantly reduces the risk of unauthorised access to systems and sensitive data. NALC recommends implementing MFA as a best practice to enhance information security and support compliance with data protection obligations under the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- 5.1.6. If an item of portable equipment is lost or damaged this should be reported to the Clerk. If the loss or damage is due to an act of negligence, the individual responsible may be liable to meet the first £500 of the loss/damage.
- 5.1.7. To protect confidential information, unless it is a requirement of the job and this has been authorised, it is forbidden for photographs or videos to be taken on Council premises, without the prior written permission of the Clerk. This

includes mobile telephones with camera function, camcorder, tape or other recording device for sound or pictures - moving or still.

- 5.1.8. Under no circumstances should any non-public meeting or conversation be recorded without the permission of those present. This does not affect statutory rights (under The Openness of Local Government Regulations 2014).
- 5.1.9. In addition, the Council does not permit webcams (which may be pre-installed on many laptops) to be used in the workplace, other than for conference calls for Council purposes. If there is any doubt as to whether a device falls under this clause, advice should be sought from the Clerk.

## **5.2. Use of own devices**

- 5.2.1. The Council recognises that some Councillors, staff, and other authorised users may wish to use their own smartphones, tablets, laptops etc to access our servers, private clouds or networks for normal Council purposes, including, but not limited to, reading their emails, accessing documents stored on the Council's Vision ICT network or to store data on the Council's server or access data in other services. Any such use of personal devices will be at the discretion of the Council, but consent for standard systems (MS Windows, Mac OS X, Linux - in commercial configurations) will normally be permitted. Such devices should be kept up to date so that any vulnerabilities in the operating system or other software on the device are appropriately patched or updated.
- 5.2.2. However, the same security precautions apply to personal devices as to the Council's desktop equipment. For continuity purposes, calls made to external parties (such as external stakeholders must be made on Council landlines or mobile phone numbers to ensure that only these numbers are used and/or stored by the recipient, rather than personal numbers. Any emails sent from own devices should be sent from a Council email account and should not identify the individual's personal email address.
- 5.2.3. Councillors, staff, and other authorised persons that use Council systems are expected to use all devices in an ethical and respectful manner and in accordance with this policy. Accessing inappropriate websites or services on any device via the IT infrastructure that is paid for or provided by the Council carries a high degree of risk, and, for employees, may result in disciplinary action, including summary dismissal (without notice). An example would be downloading copyright music illegally or accessing pornographic material.
- 5.2.4. In cases of legal proceedings against the Council or external stakeholders, the Council may need to temporarily take possession of a device, whether Council-owned or personal to retrieve the relevant data.
- 5.2.5. Wherever possible the user should maintain a clear separation between the personal data processed on the Council's behalf and that processed for their own personal use, for example, by using different apps for Council and personal use. If the device supports both work and personal profiles, the work profile must always be used for work-related purposes.

- 5.2.6. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who intend to use their own devices via the Council's infrastructure must ensure that they:
- 5.2.6.1. use a 6-digit pin, strong password (i.e. one which uses three random words (e.g. PurpleCandleRiver) or finger print (preferably the latter) to protect their device(s) from being accessed. For smartphones and tablets this should lock the device after 3 failed login attempts;
  - 5.2.6.2. configure their device(s) to automatically prompt for a password after a period of inactivity of more than 10 mins;
  - 5.2.6.3. always password protect any documents containing confidential information that are sent as attachments to an email, and notify the password separately (preferably by a means other than email);
  - 5.2.6.4. for smartphones and tablets, activate the automatic device wipe function (where available). Note that use of the remote wipe function may also involve the removal of the individual's personal data. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users are therefore advised to keep personal data separate from Council data where possible;
  - 5.2.6.5. ensure secure WiFi networks are used;
  - 5.2.6.6. ensure that work-related data cannot be viewed or retrieved by family or friends who may use the device;
  - 5.2.6.7. inform the Clerk if their device(s) is/are lost, stolen, or inappropriately accessed where there is risk of access to Council data or resources. To prevent phones being used, they will need to retain the details of their IMEI number and the SIM number of the device as their provider will require this to deactivate it.
- 5.2.7. Personal data relating to Councillors, staff, and other authorised users, associates, residents, external stakeholders should not be saved to any personal accounts with third-party storage cloud service providers as this may breach data protection legislation or create a security risk if the device is lost or stolen. This applies especially if the passwords used to store/access data are saved onto the device, or if the service permits Councillors, staff, and other authorised users to remain logged in between sessions.
- 5.2.8. Personal information and sensitive data should never be saved on Councillors, staff, or other authorised users own devices as this may breach confidentiality agreements, especially if the device is used by other people from time to time.
- 5.2.9. If removable media are used to transfer data (e.g. USB drives or CDs), the user must also securely delete the data on the media once the transfer is complete.
- 5.2.10. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who open any attachments should ensure that any cached copies are deleted immediately after use. The Clerk will provide assistance or training in doing this if needed. Additional risks

include data belonging to the Council being accessed by unauthorised persons if the device(s) is lost, stolen, or used without the owner's permission.

- 5.2.11. Any work done on user's own equipment should be stored securely and password protected and should always be backed up.
- 5.2.12. Prior to the disposal of any device that has work data stored on it, and in the event of a user leaving the Council, Councillors, staff, and other authorised users are required to allow the Clerk access to the device to ensure that all passwords, user access shortcuts and any identifiable data are removed from the device.
- 5.2.13. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users must take responsibility for understanding how their device(s) work in respect to the above rules if they are accessing Council servers/services via their own IT equipment. Risks to the user's personal device(s) include data loss as a result of a crash of the operating system, bugs and viruses, software or hardware failures and programming errors rendering a device inoperable. The Council will use reasonable endeavours to assist, but Councillors, staff, and other authorised users are personally liable for their own device(s) and for any costs incurred as a result of the above.

## **6. Health and safety**

- 6.1. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who work in Council offices will be provided with an appropriate workstation.
- 6.2. The Council has a duty to ensure that regular appropriate eye tests, carried out by a competent person, are offered to employees using display screen equipment. Further details are set out in the Council's Health and Safety Policy.
- 6.3. Any VDU user who feels that their workstation requires changes to make it compliant must speak to the Clerk.
- 6.4. If any hazards are detected at a workstation, including 'noises' from the IT equipment, this should be reported immediately to the Clerk.

## **7. Password and Authentication Policy**

- 7.1. All user accounts must be protected by strong, secure passwords. The Council follows the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) recommendations for creating passwords using three random words (e.g. PurpleCandleRiver). This method helps create passwords that are both strong and easy to remember, while offering effective protection against common cyber threats such as brute-force attacks. This approach is endorsed in NALC guidance.
- 7.2. In addition to strong passwords, Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) should be enabled wherever possible. MFA requires users to provide two or more independent forms of verification—for example, a password (something you know) and a code sent to your phone (something you have). This significantly reduces the risk of unauthorised access to systems and personal data.
- 7.3. To further strengthen account security:

- 7.3.1. Initial user account passwords must be generated by the IT provider.
- 7.3.2. Default passwords provided by vendors or the IT provider must be changed immediately upon installation or setup.
- 7.3.3. Service or System (e.g. Website) account passwords are generated and managed by the IT provider.
- 7.3.4. The Council recommends these practices as part of its commitment to robust information security and to support compliance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

**For more guidance, see the NCSC's advice on password security: [NCSC Password Guidance](#)**

#### **7.4. Access to Passwords**

- 7.4.1. Passwords are personal and must not be shared under any circumstances.
- 7.4.2. Only the assigned user of an account may access or use the associated password.
- 7.4.3. In exceptional cases (e.g., incident response or employee offboarding), access to system credentials may be granted to authorised personnel from the IT provider with appropriate approvals and logging.
- 7.4.4. Administrative credentials must be stored securely and only accessible to authorised personnel with a copy provided to the chair of Council, in a sealed envelope, only to be accessed in an emergency.

#### **7.5. Password Storage and Management**

- 7.5.1. Passwords must not be stored in plain text or written down in insecure locations.

#### **7.6. Password Change Requirements**

- 7.6.1. Immediately change password if compromise is suspected.

#### **7.7. Password Access Control and Logging**

- 7.7.1. All access to administrative or shared credentials must be logged and auditable.
- 7.7.2. Attempts to access unauthorised passwords will be treated as a security incident.

#### **7.8. Responsibility**

- 7.8.1. Users are responsible for creating and maintaining secure passwords for their accounts.

The IT security provider is responsible for:

- 7.8.2. Managing system/service credentials.

7.8.3. Enforcing password policies. Auditing and monitoring password-related security practices.

## 8. Monitoring

- 8.1. The Council reserves the right to monitor and maintain logs of computer usage and inspect any files stored on its network, servers, computers, or associated technology to ensure compliance with this policy as well as relevant legislation. Internet, email, and computer usage is continually monitored as part of the Council's protection against computer viruses, ongoing maintenance of the system, and when investigating faults.
- 8.2. The Council will monitor the use of electronic communications and use of the internet in line with the Investigatory Powers (Interception by Councils etc for Monitoring and Record-keeping Purposes) Regulations 2018.
- 8.3. Monitoring of an employee's work account email and/or internet use will be conducted in accordance with an impact assessment that the Council has carried out to ensure that monitoring is necessary and proportionate. Monitoring is in the Council's legitimate interests and is to ensure that this policy is being complied with.
- 8.4. The information obtained through monitoring may be shared internally, including with relevant Councillors if access to the data is necessary for performance of their roles. The information may also be shared with external HR or legal advisers for the purposes of seeking professional advice. Any external advisers will have appropriate data protection policies and protocols in place.
- 8.5. The information gathered through monitoring will be retained only long enough for any breach of this policy to come to light and for any investigation to be conducted.
- 8.6. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users have a number of rights in relation to their data, including the right to make a subject access request and the right to have data rectified or erased in some circumstances. You can find further details of these rights and how to exercise them in the Council's Data Protection Policy.
- 8.7. Such monitoring and the retrieval of the content of any messages may be for the purposes of checking whether the use of the system is legitimate, to find lost messages or to retrieve messages lost due to computer failure, to assist in the investigation of wrongful acts, or to comply with any legal obligation.
- 8.8. The Council has software and systems in place that can monitor and record all internet usage. A daily log is kept of all activity, which details the names of all websites accessed, along with the date and time of access, by individual Councillors, staff, and other authorised users. Records of internet use and sites visited will normally be retained for a period of six months.
- 8.9. The Council reserves the right to inspect all files stored on its computer systems in order to assure compliance with this policy. The Council also reserves the right to monitor the types of sites being accessed and the extent and frequency of use of the internet at any time, both inside and outside of working hours to ensure that

the system is not being abused and to protect the Council from potential damage or disrepute.

8.10. Any use that the Council considers to be 'improper', either in terms of the content or the amount of time spent on this, may result in disciplinary proceedings.

8.11. All computers will be periodically checked and scanned for unauthorised programmes and viruses.

## 9. Remote working

9.1. Increased IT security measures apply to those who work away from their normal place of work (e.g. whilst travelling, working from home or at an external stakeholders' premises or any other different venue), as follows:

- 9.1.1. if logging into the Council's systems or services remotely, using computers that either do not belong to the Council or are not owned by the user, any passwords must not be saved, and the user must log out at the end of the session deleting all logs and history records within the browser used. If the configuration of the device does not clearly support these actions (for example at an internet café), Council services should not be accessed from that device;
- 9.1.2. the location and direction of the screen should be checked to ensure confidential information is out of view. Steps should be taken to avoid messages being read by other people, including other travellers on public transport etc;
- 9.1.3. any data printed should be collected and stored securely;
- 9.1.4. all electronic files should be password protected and the data saved to the Council's system/services when accessible;
- 9.1.5. papers, files or computer equipment must not be left unattended at a non-Council premises unless arrangements have been made with a responsible person at a non-Council premises for them to be kept in a locked room or cabinet if they are to be left unattended at any time;
- 9.1.6. any data should be kept safely and should only be disposed of securely;
- 9.1.7. papers, files, data sticks/storage, flash drive or backup hard drives should not be left unattended in cars, except where it is entirely unavoidable for short periods, in which case they must be locked in the boot of the car. If staying away overnight, Council data should be taken into the accommodation, care being taken that it will not be interfered with by others or inadvertently destroyed;
- 9.1.8. where possible the ability to remotely wipe any mobile devices that process sensitive information should be retained in the case of loss or theft;
- 9.1.9. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who work away from the office with sensitive data should be equipped with a screen privacy filter for mobile

devices and should use this at all times when accessing such data away from the office.

9.1.10. Use of paid for Wi-Fi access, for example at airports should be carefully monitored and restricted to essential Council use.

## **10. Email**

- 10.1. Council email facilities are intended to promote effective and speedy communication on work-related matters. Although we encourage the use of email, it can be risky. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users need to be careful not to introduce viruses onto Council systems and should take proper account of the security advice below.
- 10.2. On occasion, it will be quicker to action an issue by telephone or face to face, rather than via protracted email chains. Emails should not be used as a substitute for face to face or telephone conversations. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users are expected to decide which is the optimum channel of communication to complete their tasks quickly and effectively.
- 10.3. These rules are designed to minimise the legal risks run when using email at work and to guide Councillors, staff, and other authorised users as to what may and may not be done. If there is something which is not covered in the policy, Councillors, staff, and other authorised users should ask the Clerk rather than assuming they know the right answer.
- 10.4. All Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who need to use email as part of their role will normally be given their own Council email address and account. The Council may, at any time, withdraw email access, should it feel that this is no longer necessary for the role or that the system is being abused.
- 10.5. Email messages sent on the Council's account are for Council use only. Personal use is not permitted.

## **11. Use of the Internet**

### **11.1. Copyright**

- 11.1.1. Much of what appears on the Internet is protected by copyright. Any copying without permission, including electronic copying, is illegal and therefore prohibited. The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 set out the rules. The copyright laws not only apply to documents but also to software. The infringement of the copyright of another person or organisation could lead to legal action being taken against the Council and damages being awarded, as well as disciplinary action, including dismissal, being taken against the perpetrator.
- 11.1.2. It is easy to copy electronically, but this does not make it any less an offence. The Council's policy is to comply with copyright laws, and not to bend the rules in any way.
- 11.1.3. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users should not assume that because a document or file is on the Internet, it can be freely copied. There is a

difference between information in the 'public domain' (which is no longer confidential or secret information but is still copyright protected) and information which is not protected by copyright (such as where the author has been dead for more than 70 years).

11.1.4. Usually, a website will contain copyright conditions; these warnings should be read before downloading or copying.

11.1.5. Copyright and database right law can be complicated. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users should check with the Clerk if unsure about anything.

## 11.2. Trademarks, links and data protection

11.2.1. The Council does not permit the registration of any new domain names or trademarks relating to the Council's names or products anywhere in the world, unless authorised to do so. Nor should they add links from any of the Council's web pages to any other external sites without checking first with the Clerk.

11.2.2. Special rules apply to the processing of personal and sensitive personal data. For further guidance on this, see the Council's Data Protection Policy, a copy of which is included in the Policies Handbook.

## 11.3. Accuracy of information

11.3.1. One of the main benefits of the internet is the access it gives to large amounts of information, which is often more up to date than traditional sources such as libraries. Be aware that, as the internet is uncontrolled, much of the information may be less accurate than it appears.

## 12. Use of social media

12.1. Social media includes blogs; Wikipedia and other similar sites where text can be posted; multimedia or user generated media sites (YouTube); social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, etc.); virtual worlds (Second Life); text messaging and mobile device communications and more traditional forms of media such as TV and newspapers. Care should be taken when using social media at any time, either using Council systems or at home.

12.2. Personal use of social networking/media and chat sites are not permitted during working hours on Council equipment.

12.3. The Council recognises the importance of Councillors, staff, and other authorised users joining in and helping to shape sector conversation and enhancing its image through blogging and interaction in social media. Therefore, where it is relevant to use social networking sites as part of the individual's position, this is acceptable. However, inappropriate comments and postings can adversely affect the reputation of the Council, even if it is not directly referenced. If comments or photographs could reasonably be interpreted as being associated with the Council, or if remarks about external stakeholders could be regarded as abusive, humiliating, sexual harassment, discriminatory or derogatory, or could

constitute bullying or harassment, the Council will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users should be aware that parishioners or other local organisations may read Councillors, staff, and other authorised users' personal weblogs, to acquire information, for example, about their work, internal Council business, and employee morale. Therefore, even if the Council is not named, care should be taken with any views expressed.

- 12.4. To protect both the Council and its interests, everyone is required to comply with the following rules about social media, whether in relation to their Council role or personal social networking sites, and irrespective of whether this is during or after working hours:
  - 12.4.1. Contacts from any of the Council's databases should not be downloaded and connected with on LinkedIn or other social networking sites with electronic address book facilities, unless this has been authorised.
  - 12.4.2. Any blog that mentions the Council, its current work, Councillors, employees, other users associated with the Council, partner organisations, local groups, suppliers, parishioners, should identify the author as one of its Councillors or employees and state that the views expressed on the blog or website are theirs alone and do not represent the views of the Council. Even if the Council is not mentioned, care should be taken with any views expressed on social media sites and any views should clearly be stated to be the writer's own (e.g. via a disclaimer statement such as: "The comments and other content on this site are my own and do not represent the positions or opinions of my employer/ the Council.") Writers must not claim or give the impression that they are speaking on behalf of the Council.
  - 12.4.3. Any employee who is developing a site or writing a blog that will mention the Council, our current or potential plans, Councillors, staff, and other authorised users, partners, must inform the Clerk/ the Council that they are writing this and gain agreement before going 'live'.
  - 12.4.4. The Council expects Councillors, staff, and other authorised users to be respectful about the Council and its current or potential staff, including employees, Councillors, Clerks, and authorised users and not to engage in any name calling or any behaviour that will reflect negatively on its reputation. Any unauthorised use of copyright materials, any unfounded or derogatory statements, or any misrepresentation is not viewed favourably and could constitute gross misconduct.
  - 12.4.5. Photos or videos that include employees or other workers wearing uniforms or clothing displaying the Council's name or logo should not be posted on social media if they could reflect negatively on the individual, their role, their colleagues, or the Council. Additionally, photos, videos, or audio recordings must not be taken on Council premises without explicit permission
  - 12.4.6. Comments posted by Councillors, staff, and other authorised users on any sites should be knowledgeable, accurate and professional and should not compromise the Council in any way.

- 12.4.7. Inappropriate conversations with external stakeholders should not take place on any social networking sites, including forums.
- 12.4.8. Any writing about or displaying photos or videos of internal activities that involves current Councillors, staff, and other authorised persons, might be considered a breach of data protection and a breach of privacy and confidentiality. Therefore, their permission should be gained prior to uploading any such material. Details of any kind relating to any events, conversations, materials or documents that are meant to be private, confidential or internal to the Council should not be posted. This may include manuals; procedures; training documents; non-public financial or operational information; personal information regarding other Councillors, staff, and other authorised users anything to do with a disciplinary case, grievance, allegation of bullying/harassment or discrimination, or legal issue; any other secret, confidential, or proprietary information or information that is subject to confidentiality agreements. This does not affect statutory requirements to publish information including under the Freedom of Information Act.
- 12.4.9. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users must be aware that they are personally liable for anything that they write or present online (including on an online forum or blog, post, feed or website). Councillors should always be mindful of the Members Code of Conduct and Nolan Principles. Employees may be subject to disciplinary action for comments, content, or images that are defamatory, embarrassing, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous, or that can create a hostile work environment. They may also be sued by other organisations, and any individual or Council that views their comments, content, or images as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous or creating a hostile work environment. In addition, other Councillors, staff, and other authorised users can raise grievances for alleged bullying and/or harassment.
- 12.4.10. Postings to websites or anywhere on the internet and social media of any kind, or in any press or media of any kind, should not breach copyright or other law or disclose confidential information, defame or make derogatory comments about the Council or its Councillors, staff, and other authorised users, or disclose personal data or information about any individual that could breach data protection legislation.
- 12.4.11. Contacts by the media relating to the Council, should be referred to the Clerk.
- 12.4.12. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who use sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook must ensure that the information on their profile is accurate and up to date and must update their profile on leaving the Council.
- 12.4.13. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who use X.com, LinkedIn, or other social media/networking sites for Council development purposes must ensure they provide the Council with login details, including password(s), so that these sites can be accessed and updated in their absence.
- 12.4.14. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users who have left the Council must not post any inappropriate comments about the Council or its Councillors,

staff, and other authorised users on LinkedIn, Facebook, X.com or any other social media/networking sites.

12.4.15. During your employment/ involvement with the Council, you may create or obtain access to a variety of professional contacts and confidential information. This includes, but is not limited to, contacts made through professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn, where those contacts have been established or maintained in your capacity as a Councillor, member of staff, or other authorised user. All such contacts will be considered Council property and may be subject to disclosure upon request.

12.5. Note that the Council may, from time to time, monitor external postings on social media sites. Any employee who has a profile (for example on LinkedIn or Facebook) must not misrepresent themselves or their role with the Council. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users are also advised that social media sites are not an appropriate place to air Council concerns or complaints: these should be raised with the Council or formally through the grievance procedure.

12.6. It is important to note that external stakeholders contact details and information remain the property of the Council. In addition, Councillors, staff, and other authorised users leaving the Council will be required to delete all Council-related data including external stakeholders contact details from any personal device/equipment.

### **13. Misuse**

13.1. Misuse of IT systems and equipment is not in line with the Council's standards of conduct and will be taken seriously. Any inappropriate or unauthorised use may lead to formal action, including disciplinary proceedings or, in serious cases, dismissal.

# BARTON UNDER NEEDWOOD PARISH COUNCIL



## FINANCIAL RESERVES POLICY

Draft v1

Prepared by: Siobhan Rumsby/Cllr S Naylor

Reviewed by: Finance Committee / Policies Committee

Approved for recommendation to full Council by: Policies Committee

Reviewed and adopted by: Full Council

Meeting dated ..... Minute number .....

Signed by Chairman of the Council

Next Review Due:

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1. **Introduction**
2. **Principles Governing Reserves**
3. **Overall Reserves Benchmark**
4. **Types of Reserves**
5. **Carry Forward of Underspends**
6. **Setting and Reviewing Reserves**
7. **Review and Variation of Policy**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Barton under Needwood Parish Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to ensure the effective and sustainable delivery of its services.

1.2 Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require the Council to have regard to the level of reserves needed to meet estimated future expenditure when calculating its budget requirement. There is no statutory minimum or maximum level of reserves; however, reserves must be held only for reasonable working capital needs or for specific earmarked purposes.

1.3 The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) has a statutory duty to advise the Council on the adequacy of reserves and to ensure that appropriate procedures exist for their establishment, maintenance and use.

1.4 This policy sets out how the Council will determine, manage and review its reserves. It should be read in conjunction with the Council's Financial Regulations and Investment Policy.

1.5 The Council's reserves position is reviewed annually as part of the budget-setting process and is subject to scrutiny by both Internal and External Audit.

## **2. Principles Governing Reserves**

2.1 Reserves are held to:

- Provide working capital and manage uneven cash flow.
- Meet known or predicted liabilities.
- Mitigate financial risks identified in the Council's risk assessment.
- Provide resilience against unforeseen or emergency expenditure (e.g. elections, legal or infrastructure issues).

2.2 Reserves must not be held to fund ongoing revenue expenditure, as this is unsustainable and would lead to their eventual exhaustion.

2.3 Where reserves are used to meet short-term funding gaps, they should normally be replenished in the following financial year. Earmarked reserves used for their intended specific purpose do not require replenishment unless the Council resolves otherwise.

2.4 The opportunity cost of holding reserves will be considered as part of the annual budget process, balancing financial resilience against the effective use of public funds.

## **3. Overall Reserves Benchmark**

3.1 In line with sector guidance and audit expectations, the Council recognises that total reserves should not normally exceed:

**1.15 × the higher of the annual Precept income or Total Payments for the financial year.**

3.2 This benchmark will be calculated and reported by the RFO annually during budget setting and again at year end.

3.3 Where total reserves exceed this benchmark, the Council will consider:

- Earmarking funds for planned community or capital projects;

- Drawing down reserves in line with medium-term plans; or
- Adjusting the future precept where appropriate;
- or reducing the costs of some services that the Parish Council charges for.

#### **4. Types of Reserves**

The Council's reserves fall into two main categories:

##### **4.1 General Reserves**

4.1.1 General Reserves are unallocated funds held to meet the Council's overall financial needs. They may be used to:

- Smooth the impact of uneven cash flows;
- Meet unexpected or emergency expenditure;
- Provide short-term financial resilience.

4.1.2 General Reserves are not intended to fund ongoing expenditure and should be replenished through the budget process if used or the value diminished materially through inflation.

4.1.3 The Council will normally maintain General Reserves equivalent to **between three and six months of net revenue expenditure**.

4.1.4 As a minimum, General Reserves must not fall below:

- **Half of the annual precept**, and
- **An amount sufficient to cover at least three months' operating costs**, including staff costs.

4.1.5 If, in extreme circumstances, General Reserves are exhausted due to major unforeseen pressures, the Council may temporarily draw on Earmarked Reserves to provide short-term resources, subject to formal Council approval.

##### **4.2 Earmarked Reserves**

4.2.1 Earmarked Reserves are held for specific purposes where the Council reasonably anticipates future expenditure or liabilities.

4.2.2 Earmarked Reserves may be established for:

- Planned renewals or replacement of assets, equipment or infrastructure;
- Specific projects or community initiatives;
- Carry forward of committed but unspent budgets at year end;
- Known or predicted liabilities (e.g. elections, insurance excesses, refurbishment works).

4.2.3 Any decision to create, amend or close an Earmarked Reserve must be made by resolution of Full Council having been previously approved and recommended by the Finance Committee.

4.2.4 Expenditure from Earmarked Reserves may only be authorised by the Council, or in accordance with any specific delegation approved by the Council.

4.2.5 All Earmarked Reserves will be recorded and monitored on a central schedule maintained by the RFO, showing:

- The purpose of each reserve;
- Its opening and closing balances;
- Any planned drawdown or replenishment.

## **5. Carry Forward of Underspends**

5.1 Where the Council has committed expenditure in the approved budget but the expenditure is not incurred within the financial year, the unspent balance may be transferred to a Carry Forward (Earmarked) Reserve.

5.2 A corresponding budget provision will be included in the following financial year to enable completion of the committed project or activity.

## **6. Setting and Reviewing Reserves**

6.1 The level of both General and Earmarked Reserves will be determined by the Council as part of:

- The annual budget-setting process;
- The Council's financial risk assessment;
- Its medium-term financial planning.

6.2 The RFO will provide an annual report to Council detailing:

- The level and purpose of all reserves;
- Compliance with the overall reserves benchmark;
- Any recommendations for changes to reserve levels.

6.3 Internal and External Auditors will review the adequacy and justification of reserves as part of their annual audits.

## **7. Review and Variation of Policy**

7.1 This Reserves Policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or earlier if required, as part of the budget-setting process.

7.2 The Council may, where it determines there is clear justification, make decisions that vary from this policy. Any such decisions will be formally minuted and supported by an explanation of the financial rationale.

## CORRESPONDENCE & COMMUNICATIONS

### GENERAL

1. Lakeside resident complaint about light pollution from floodlights at Rugby pitch – *Clerk signposted to HSC/Barton Rugby Club*
2. Resident concerns and photographs of obstruction to the Highway; Arden Road – *clerk advised to report to the police.*
3. Barton Village Hall Committee – boundary queries – *Clerk responded*
4. Resident photographs of trees adjacent allotments, request to approach allotment holder re any further works.
5. Severn Trent – notification of improvement works – *Cllr Lord to respond*
6. Resident report of concerns over dog off lead in Holland Park – *Clerk signposted to ESBC Enforcement*
7. Barton Library – Invitation to Celebration Day 11am-3pm, Saturday 9 May.
8. John Taylor High School – Invitation to Annual Presentation Evening 6pm; 14/7/26 and request for donation
9. Burton Community First Responders – offering CPR Training and Lions Message in a Bottle service
10. Copy Residents comments re revised planning application The Green Development

### SPCA/NALC

11. Newsletters and training opportunities- forwarded to all Cllrs;