

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL



MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

PRESENT: **Councillors:** Parsons (Chair), Avrili, Litchfield, Merryweather,
Russell, Thompson, Wright and Zavacky

The Clerk: A Marabese.

Others: 3 members of the public.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7:05pm.

1101. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- a. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Ward Councillor Stephenson.

1102. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. The Chairman read the Parish Council notice and announcement in relation to openness, transparency, and respect during meetings.
- b. To resolve to extend the meeting finish time beyond 2 hours.
Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Thompson. Resolved to extend the meeting finish time beyond 2 hours. Carried.
- c. Other information
- The Clerk has informed the Chairman of two complaints received regarding the installation of new play equipment in Old Road Meadow and Centenary Field. In both circumstances the complainants have concerns about privacy, noise and potential ASB. The Clerk has advised that MPC will monitor the situation and report back any issues to MPC.

1103. MEMBERS INTERESTS

- a. To receive declarations of interest from Councillors on items on the agenda and requests for dispensations for disclosable pecuniary interests.
No declarations or dispensations were declared or requested.

1104. PUBLIC SESSION

At this point (7:28pm) the Chairman suspended Standing Orders to receive reports from our Ward Councillor, village organisations and to allow members of the public to address the Council in relation to items on the agenda or request matters to be discussed at a subsequent meeting.

- a. Ward Councillor Stephenson provided apologies but sent a report to the Clerk as follows:
- I hope that everyone had a lovely Christmas, and I wish you all and the Council a successful 2025.
 - English Devolution - The Government released its English Devolution White Paper on 16th December. The White Paper sets out the Government's vision for the future of Local Government and covers two fundamental (and interlinked) themes:
 - Its ambition to have all areas of England covered by new 'Strategic Authorities' (a new name for combined Authorities) with an elected Mayor holding regional powers devolved from central government.
 - Local Government reorganisation to create new Unitary Authorities to replace the two-tier County/District council structure and to, where appropriate, combine smaller Unitary Councils.

For Central Bedfordshire Council the creation of a new Strategic Authority is the most pressing issue, as the Government has asked the Council, along with neighbouring councils, to consider being part of a 'priority programme' aiming to

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

create the first set of new Strategic Authorities. The Leader of Central Bedfordshire needs to respond to this invitation by 10th January 2025 and at an extraordinary Council meeting on the 6th January the Leader received unanimous support to open up discussions.

The White Paper suggests that a viable size for new unitary councils is one serving a population of at least 500,000 people. For context Central Bedfordshire's current population is around 307,000 people, Bedford Borough's is 185,000, Luton's 225,000 and Milton Keynes' is 292,000. It is not clear whether the Government considers Central Bedfordshire or any of the BLMK councils as unviable, but its focus is on two-tier areas, and councillors have been advised that it seems unlikely that the government will suggest change to unitary authorities in our area in the near future. We might however anticipate local authority boundary changes in the medium term, and in the longer term where Strategic Authority, Police, Fire and Health boundaries are not co-terminus, these could be changed to ensure alignment, with responsibilities resting with a Strategic Authority Mayor.

- Central Bedfordshire Council Budget - Revenue - Local government finances, particularly for upper tier authorities like Central Bedfordshire Council, are under immense pressure. Increased demand and rising costs in children's services, adult social care, SEND and school transport are causing many councils to drastically reevaluate which services they can afford to run.

Central Bedfordshire has seen an unexpected increase in demand for adult social care, resulting in a 35% increase in costs. Furthermore, the council has had a 70% increase in costs of residential care for children in its care, in just one year.

Adult Social Care and Children's Services make the biggest difference to vulnerable people's lives, and they are also services which must be provided by law. They are costly to deliver, and almost two-thirds of Central Bedfordshire's revenue budget is already spent on these two areas alone.

Unless the council makes further efficiencies, costs are forecast to be £32m more than income, next year. And the draft budget sets out some potential changes to services, but it also includes a proposal to reduce costs by £13m by reshaping the organisation. This will mean removing some posts which do not support statutory services and will likely affect staff across all directorates of the council. A summary of the draft budget is published on the Central Bedfordshire website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/budget

- Central Bedfordshire Council Budget - Capital - The draft capital budget was discussed at the Central Bedfordshire Executive on 7th January, and it includes investment in key facilities and infrastructure, although the capital budget is reduced from previous years to limit the impact on the revenue budget, proposing to spend £114m on infrastructure projects next year. This includes:
 - Over £40m on schools - this includes £29m transitioning schools to two-tier and £7m on Special Educational Needs provision.
 - £21m on leisure. A new leisure centre in Leighton Buzzard already under construction. Also, outdoor play areas, active travel and green wheel improvements.
 - £13.5m on Highways works, including resurfacing.

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

- £10m on new care homes and other facilities for people with a physical or learning disability – this includes the new Steppingley Road older people village in Flitwick.
- £1.5m on flood alleviation works, including £1m on the Pix Brook bridges and flood works.

The budget will be considered by Full Council on 27th February.

b. No village organisations were at the meeting.

c. Questions from the public sent to the Clerk.

None

d. The following questions were raised, or comments made by members of the public.

- Will MPC monitor parking on Hoo Road as it seems some people are driving children to the new play area? *Clerk advised that this will be monitored.*
- A resident has commended the Council on the installation of new signage on Hoo Road indicating no through traffic but requested that the street signage at the junction of the High Street / Shefford Road also indicate this. *Clerk was asked to contact CBC and ask what they can do to help, also contact the local MP.*

Standing Orders were reinstated at 7:40pm.

1105. MINUTES

a. To receive and approve distributed minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday, 25th November 2024.

Proposed Cllr Avrili/Seconded Cllr Thompson. Resolved that the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday 25th November 2024 are an accurate record of the proceedings and that they be signed by the Chairman. Carried.

1106. PROCEDURES, CONSULTATIONS & LEGAL

a. Co-option

i. To consider interest in co-option to role of parish councillor.

None received.

b. Policies

i. To re-approve MPC Dignity at Work v1.0.

Proposed Cllr Avrili/Seconded Cllr Thompson. Resolved to re-approve MPC Dignity at Work v1.0. Carried.

c. Stocken House

i. Update on identified issues, risks, meeting and actions required regarding land transfer.

The Clerk has not received any feedback from Davidsons and will chase them for an update.

d. IT and Communications

i. Update from the Clerk.

A report on website usage was circulated to councillors at the beginning of the month. The Clerk has issued a purchase order to Miss Standbridge for the creation of the Meppershall.org website and amendments to the MPC website.

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

1107. FINANCE

a. Purchase Orders.

- i. IPAD and carry case for Environment Officer.

It was agreed that this purchase would be made in the next financial year.

- ii. Shelving and workstation for storage container.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Thompson. Resolved to approve purchase of shelving and workstation for the storage container up to £1500+VAT. Carried.

- iii. Defibrillator for installation at Meppershall Care Home.

Councillors agreed that the far end of the village did not have a defib within quick reach and that the Care Home had agreed to always allow access to the defib if installed on its site. Councillors also confirmed after inspection by Councillor Litchfield the need to replace the defib cabinet located at Meppershall Academy.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Litchfield. Resolved to approve purchase of replacement cabinet for school defib and new G5 defib and cabinet for installation at Meppershall Care Home from Community Heartbeat Trust. Carried.

- iv. To approve any other purchase order requests.

1. Stump grinding required at allotments

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Zavacky. Resolved to approve cost of stump grinding at allotments up to £320+VAT. Carried.

2. Old Road Meadow fencing and installation

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Avrili. Resolved to approve cost of fencing and installation. Carried.

3. Brush Clearance at Old Road Meadow

It was requested that the chippings be taken to the allotments.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Parsons. Resolved to approve cost of brush clearance at Old Road Meadow up to £1800+VAT. Carried.

4. Overseeding at Centenary Field

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Avrili. Resolved to approve cost of overseeding on Centenary Field up to £400+VAT. Carried.

5. Dog poop bags for dispenser.

Proposed Cllr Avrili/Seconded Cllr Thompson. Resolved to approve purchase of 2 boxes of dog poop bags for dispense. Carried.

b. 2025-2026 Budget

- i. To consider grant applications for inclusion in 2025/2026 budget.

Councillor Thompson declared an interest in this agenda item.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Avrili. Resolved to approve inclusion of grants to organisations as proposed in the 2025/2026 budget. Carried.

- ii. To review and approve 2025-2026 budget.

Councillors reviewed the proposed budget prepared by Councillors Thompson, Wright and the Clerk line by line making some minimal changes. The Clerk had previously reviewed the current financial year actual and forecasted income and expenditure to predict end of year general reserves (carry forward) together with earmarked reserves for both the current year and the recommended start position for 2025-2026.

The Chair thanked those responsible for the preparation of the budget.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Merryweather. Resolved to approve the 2025-2026 budget as amended. Carried.

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

c. 2025-2026 Precept

- i. Review and approve 2025-2026 precept request.

Councillors debated precept options based upon the approved budget and the impact on both general and earmarked reserves. The Clerk provided data on average Band D Council Tax charges for Central Bedfordshire parishes and England (2024/2025) to compare Meppershall to.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Wright. Resolved to approve and to set a precept of £91,134 which equates to Band D Council Tax charge of £83.00 (increase of £10.00per annum on 2024-2025). The Clerk was also asked to write an article for the Messenger. Carried

d. Document approval.

- i. To approve journal entries, bank reconciliations and bank statements.

Proposed Cllr Thompson /Seconded Cllr Russell. Resolved to approve bank statements and reconciliations current account 198 and 199, savings account 61 and 62, and MultiPay statement and reconciliation 26/11/24 and 27/12/24 Carried.

e. Orders for the payment of money.

- i. A schedule of payments was distributed at the meeting for approval and authorisation. Payments presented for payment were checked by two councillors present at the meeting.

Proposed Cllr Wright/Seconded Cllr Russell. Resolved that the schedules of payments as presented be approved and authorised for payment by Councillor Thompson or Parsons. Carried.

Payment No:	Payee	Purpose	Amount	MultiPay Card
Payments made prior to meeting date including direct debits, standing orders, salaries etc				
DD01-2412	Standard Life	Clerk ER Pension Contribution (16/12/24)		Direct Debit
DD01-2412B	Standard Life	Clerk ER Pension Contribution due to back pa		Direct Debit
DD02-2412B	Everflow	Allotment Water (08/01/25 to 07/02/25)	-£84.25	Credit
DD02-2501	Everflow	Allotment Water (08/02/25 to 07/03/25)	£29.45	Direct Debit
DD06-2411	Lloyds Bank	Multipay monthly charge (26/11/24)	£3.00	MultiPay
DD06-2412	Lloyds Bank	Multipay monthly charge (27/12/24)	£3.00	MultiPay
DD04-2412	Smarty Mobile	Clerk Monthly Mobile Plan (19/12/2024)	£7.20	MultiPay
DD07-2411	Smarty Mobile	Allot Co-ord Monthly Mobile Plan (28/11/24)	£5.40	MultiPay
DD07-2412	Smarty Mobile	Allot Co-ord Monthly Mobile Plan (28/12/24)	£5.40	MultiPay
DD08-2412	Smarty Mobile	Env Officer Mobile Plan (3/12/24)	£4.50	MultiPay
DD08-2501	Smarty Mobile	Env Officer Mobile Plan (3/01/25)	£4.50	MultiPay
SO01-2412	A Marabese	Monthly Salary (16/12/24)		
SO01-2501	A Marabese	Monthly Salary (15/01/25)		
FA01-2412	Mrs V Thorne	Salary (16/12/24)		
FA02-2412	NEST	EE Pension Contribution		Direct Debit
FA03-2412	NEST	ER Pension Contribution		Direct Debit
FA01-2501	Mrs V Thorne	Salary (09/01/25)		
FA02-2501	NEST	EE Pension Contribution		Direct Debit
FA03-2411	NEST	ER Pension Contribution		Direct Debit
FA04-2412	Mr R Hirst	Salary (16/12/24)		
FA05-2411	NEST	RH ER Pension Contribution		Direct Debit
FA04-2501	Mr R Hirst	Salary (09/01/25)		
FA05-2501	NEST	RH ER Pension Contribution		Direct Debit
BACS953	BATPC	RA - Chairmanship Training 1	£45.00	
BACS954	Amazon Business EU S.a.r.l, UK Branch	CCTV signage	£16.88	MultiPay
BACS955	Amazon - HD Home Direct Limited	Green cloths	£40.72	MultiPay
BACS958	Meppershall Social Club	Drinks supplied to litter pick volunteers	£21.60	
BACS960	Health & Care UK Ltd t/a Safety Gloves	VT - Safety Gloves	£14.36	MultiPay
BACS961	Unity Trust Bank	November 2024 banking charges	£6.00	Direct Debit
BACS966	ICO	ICO renewal fee	£35.00	Direct Debit

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

BACS971	Unity Trust Bank	December 2024 banking charges	£6.00	Direct Debit
BACS972	Amazon - KG Polymer Ltd	Heavy Duty Bin Bags	£20.57	MultiPay
BACS973	Boots	First Aid Supplies	£6.48	MultiPay
Payment requests received before agenda published				
BACS956	Mr R Hirst	Various Christams tree items	£26.78	
BACS957	Scotts Grounds Maintenance	Christmas tree install and straps	£216.00	
BACS959	The Play Inspection Company	Outdoor Play & Gym inspections	£208.80	
BACS962	HMRC	Qtr 3 PAYE & NI	£876.38	
BACS963	Meppershall Munchkins	Grant	£500.00	
BACS964	The National Allotment Society	Annau membership fee	£84.00	
BACS965	Meppershall Social Club	Storage container	£2,000.00	
BACS967	HAGS SMP Ltd	ORM Installation	£22,438.80	
BACS968	The Play Inspection Co Ltd	RH - RPII Trainign and Exam	£490.00	
BACS969	HAGS SMP Ltd	ORM Play equipment	£63,361.20	
BACS970	Meppershall Village Hall	Room Hire 25/11/24	£40.00	

1108. PLANNING AND HOUSING

a. Applications responded to under delegated powers.

- CB/24/03232/FULL - Plot 99, Land off Shefford Road, SG17 5LL - Erection of a single garage for plot 99 (semi-detached with plot 98). Retrospective.
- CB/24/03231/FULL - Plot 98, Land off Shefford Road, SG17 5LL - Erection of a single garage for plot 98 (semi-detached with plot 99). Retrospective.
- CB/24/03230/FULL - Plot 97, Land off Shefford Road, SG17 5LL - Erection of a single garage for plot 97 (semi-detached with plot 96). Retrospective.
- CB/24/03229/FULL - Plot 96, Land off Shefford Road, SG17 5L - Erection of a single garage for plot 96 (semi-detached with plot 97). Retrospective.

The Clerk advised that a response of 'no comment' had been provided for the above retrospective planning applications.

b. Applications since last Council meeting for consideration.

- CB/24/03647/DOC - Stocken House, 59 Shefford Road, SG17 5L - Discharge of Condition 7 against planning appeal ref. 7) No development shall take place until details of the finished floor and site levels for each building, hard surfaced and landscaped area have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The proposed levels shall be shown in relation to a fixed, existing datum point. The development shall thereafter be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved details APP/P0240/W/17/3190584 and planning permission ref. CB/17/03887/OUT.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Merryweather. Resolved that the Council respond to CBC re: 24/03647 noting an interest in the green open space and providing transparency on concerns raised directly with Davidsons. Carried.

1109. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

a. Report from the Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group met with the CBC Officer responsible for neighbourhood plans after reviewing input from CBC officers and amendments required. There is much work to do that will include:

- Surveys for residents, youths, workers and visitors to Meppershall.
- Design Guide

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

- Housing Need Survey
- Review of SEA Screening.

The steering group have already started work on survey templates and will be instructing organisations for the preparation of the Design Guide and Housing Needs Survey. A new technical grant application will also need to be submitted.

Noting the work required the Chair asked all councillors to assist in tasks with the neighbourhood plan where possible.

1110. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

a. Update on Shefford Road repairs / re-surfacing.

It was noted that some potholes have been filled but others remain. The Clerk will ask Mr Hirst to complete a road survey in March.

b. Update on other parish Highways issues including pedestrian footway on Fildyke Road.

Clerk to chase update on footway on Fildyke Road and from Poppy Gardens to Crackle Hill.

1111. ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE

a. To receive update on Christmas Tree and Lights switch on event.

The Clerk reported that the Christmas Tree and Lights switch on event went extremely well with a great turn out from residents. Meppershall Academy and the local choir provided entertainment and Ward Councillor Stephenson turned the lights on. The pre and post switch on events at the village hall were very well attended and there was a great sense of community. After the event the Clerk has continued to receive thanks and compliments concerning the event.

Special thanks were noted for the following: Meppershall Village Hall, Meppershall Social Club, Mr Gordon Cordes, MAPTA, Meppershall Academy, Church Choir, Scotts Grounds Maintenance, Shefford Town Council, volunteer marshals and first aiders, council staff and members, and to those who donated funds to the Christmas tree.

The Clerk would like to begin preparation for the coming years event and will co-ordinate with village organisations on this.

b. Update on allotments.

The Clerk is currently chasing payment of annual allotment rents from some plot holders.

c. Update on new play equipment installations.

Installation of new play equipment at Old Road Meadow is complete and a post installation inspection report received. Works have started on Centenary Field, but the weather is delaying works. The Clerk is in constant contact with the supplier and installers.

d. Update on all other environment and leisure issues.

CPRE have started hedge laying in Old Road Meadow this week.

1112. HEALTH & SAFETY

a. Update on most recent Police Priority setting Meeting.

The Clerk and Councillor Addy attended the most recent Police Priority Setting meeting. Priorities for our area remain focussed on drugs, ASB and shop lifting. The local police team continue to ask parish councils and residents to report all incidences to them via either 999 (if urgent) or 101 (via telephone and online).

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH JANUARY 2025

1113. PERSONNEL

a. To review and action staff pension payment contributions.

A review of staff salary and employer pension contributions was conducted as part of the 2025-2026 budgeting process. The review has highlighted an underpayment by MPC of employer pension contributions for qualifying employees compared to other local parish councils who contribute to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Wright. Resolved that the Council increase employer pension contribution for qualifying employees to 26.8% from January 2025. Carried.

1114. CLOSE OF THE MEETING

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9:30pm and reminded everyone that the next meeting would be 10th February 2025, starting at 7pm in the Village Hall.

Where no signature exists in this electronic version, a hard copy version is available for inspection from the Clerk.

Glossary

- CBC = Central Bedfordshire Council
- MPC = Meppershall Parish Council
- MVH = Meppershall Village Hall & MVHT = Meppershall Village Hall Trustees
- NP = Neighbourhood Plan
- ORM = Old Read Meadow Nature Reserve
- PCC = Bedfordshire Police Crime Commissioner