



WEST DEAN PARISH COUNCIL (WDPC)

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Mon-Thur 9.00am – 1.00 pm Fri)
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FULL COUNCIL MINUTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday 25th February 2026

Location: West Dean Centre, High Street, Bream

Present: Cllrs A Grant (Vice Chair) A Betenson, S Lewis, B Evans, S Yeates, S Dunford, J Richmond, M Bennett, S Francis, R Freshwater, S Crick & D Wheeler
County Cllrs P Camp, L Challis & B Hoyland
District Cllrs J Dale & B Llewellyn

Clerks: J Miles and P Holland

(These minutes are still in draft form until approved at a subsequent meeting of the Council)

Public Forum:

The meeting started at 19.00 with Cllr A Grant thanking everyone for attending. There were no members of public in attendance.

26020	<u>County & District Reports</u>	<u>Actions Completed</u>
26020.1	Reports from Gloucestershire County Cllrs P Camp, B Hoyland and Forest of Dean District Cllrs J Dale and D Wheeler were received. Cllr Lewis posed a question to Cllr Dale on recycling of batteries and she advised that the non-collection of these was being investigated. Cllr Grant asked for clarification on the meaning of CSP in Cllr Dale's report – this stands for Community Safety Partnership. Cllr Grant then asked for clarification of the job roles for the new jobs advertised, Cllr Dales gave an explanation. Cllr Evans asked Cllr Dale if there were any updates on the Local Government Reorganisation, Cllr Dale gave an update and suggested that everyone join in on the Consultation being held at present, Westminster will make their decision in June 2026.	
	Cllr Hoyland arrived at 7.13pm Cllr Hoyland gave a roundup of her report which included the new hourly bus route in Parkend.	

Signed by Chair _____ Date _____

	Cllr Grant asked Cllr Hoyland about the funding mentioned in her report, and if there would be any funding available to WDPC for the Forest of Dean Gateway? Cllr Hoyland advised that it would need to be shovel ready for her to be able to source funding. Cllr Dale asked what the sticking points were and Cllr Dunford explained what had happened since December 2025 with the change in planning officer. Cllr Wheeler advised that, to his knowledge, this application had been passed to the Environment Agency and it had failed due to the access through ancient woodland.	
	Cllr Bennett arrived at 7.22pm	
	Cllr Wheeler gave a District Cllr Report including the setting up of a new Empty Homes Working Group. All County and District Cllrs left at 7.25pm	
26021.1	<u>Council Formal Business</u>	
	Election of Chair Cllr Evans stated that he understood that a different Cllr could be elected as chair for each meeting, and felt this could give newer Cllrs the chance to experience the role. Cllr Grant read out the legislation, which was in the meeting pack, which confirmed this was allowed but was not best practice. Cllr Wheeler stated there were two main functions of the Chair: 1. To Chair the meetings 2. To work in the background with the Officers. Cllr Dunford nominated Cllr Grant, if he was willing to stand. Cllr Grant advised that he did not want the extra responsibility at this time as he is already Chair of Finance and Staffing, but would stand if no-one else was willing, but only until the May 2026 Parish Meeting. Seconded by Cllr Bennett and agreed by resolution of Council. Cllr Freshwater noted that if Cllr Grant was elected as Chair a Vice Chair would also need to be elected. Cllr Dunford proposed Cllr Grant be Elected Chair, seconded by Cllr Bennett and agreed by resolution of Council. Cllr Grant asked for nominations for Vice Chair, Cllr Freshwater advised he was willing to stand in if no-one else was, seconded by Cllr Grant and agreed by resolution of Council.	
26021.2	Apologies Apologies were received from Cllr A Moore, Cllr Costley had a dispensation for this meeting and Cllr Evans stated he would be leaving the meeting early – all were accepted by Council and noted.	Clerk to phone Cllr Costley re end of dispensation.
26021.3	Declarations of Interest/Dispensation Requests	

Signed by Chair _____ Date _____

	• Cllr Yeates declared he is a Heritage Expert and also a member of BHMI . • Cllr Wheeler declared that he is Chair of the Development Management Committee at FoDDC Cllrs were reminded that declarations could be given at any point in the meeting if required.	
26021.4	Minutes of the Previous Meeting The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 th January 2026 were reviewed, and these were proposed by Cllr Freshwater, seconded by Cllr Betenson and accepted by resolution of Council as an accurate record.	
26012	<u>Items for Consideration and Resolution</u>	
26022.1	Finance The budget monitoring information for WDPC and WDC was received and noted.	
26022.1i	The February 2026 expenditure payment schedule, Direct Debits, Standing Orders, and credit card transactions totalling WDPC = £13,337.82 exc. VAT and WDC = £1,604.46 exc. VAT were received, Cllr Richmond proposed accepting these, seconded by Cllr Freshwater and agreed by resolution of Council.	
26022.1ii	It was noted that Cllrs S Yeates & J Richmond are to authorise February 2026 payments on the banking system for WDPC & Cllrs A Grant & J Richmond for WDC	Payments to be authorised.
26022.1iii	It was noted that Cllrs S Dunford & M Bennett will undertake the February 2026 financial inspections of the WDPC and WDC accounts.	Clerk to arrange date for inspection
26022.1iv	The report and note the December 2025 financial inspection dated 03/02/26, giving a reconciled bank balance for WDPC of £281,636.61 and WDC of £37,009.07 , including transactions for WDPC totalling £66,618.05 and WDC totalling £3,925.81 which were undertaken by Cllrs Francis & Betenson was received and noted by Council with Cllrs Francis and Betenson confirming all was found to be satisfactory.	
26022.1v	The report and note the January 2026 financial inspection dated 25/02/26, giving a reconciled bank balance for WDPC of £271,637.75 and WDC of £37,458.20 , including transactions for WDPC totalling £50,174.76 and WDC totalling £5,374.11 which were undertaken by Cllrs Francis & Betenson, was received and noted by Council with Cllrs Francis and Betenson confirming all was found to be satisfactory.	
26022.2	Biosphere An update on the biosphere, following presentation on Saturday 7 th February 2026, at the Wilderness Centre, was given by Cllrs Dunford, Freshwater and Bennett, which included questions which had been sent to, and answered by, FODDC Officer A Chapman, who had offered to meet with WDPC.	

Signed by Chair _____ Date _____

	Cllrs had produced a set of further questions which they would like discuss further. <i>Cllr Dunford proposed that WDPC accept Mr Chapman's offer to talk to the Parish Council in a separate, dedicated meeting during which WDPC should seek clarification on the following (but not exclusive or exhaustive) points before a decision to support or reject the Biosphere bid is made</i> <i>1. That the boundaries of the Biosphere are not clearly defined. Whilst the Statutory Forest is within a core area the outer limits remain vague and with the likely demise of the District Council before status is awarded, these need to be more clearly set. (We also note the lack of understanding between the terms of 'Hundred of St Briavels' and the 'Statutory Forest' – these are not the same),</i> <i>2. There is a lack of clarity on how the general public are being given information to enable them to make an informed decision as to whether a biosphere is a suitable project for the Forest of Dean,</i> <i>3. That the District Council website lacks information to enable local people complete the feedback loop,</i> <i>4. That the online questionnaire seeking support is very difficult to find, has had limited response and it can be open to abuse as it can be submitted several times by the same person,</i> <i>5. That the public meetings set to gather people's views are poorly advertised and vaguely worded. There is too much reliance on the use of technology such as social media and AI.</i> <i>6. That the partnership organisation is very strong on 'interested parties' but lacks wider community representation.</i> <i>7. We note that two different bodies have been engaged to develop the bid, one a commercial organisation (Wylderne) and a voluntary group (FAVF) but who is setting their terms of reference, how are they being monitored and how is success being measured?</i> <i>8. There is no detail as to how the parameters of the bid are being set, what the economic effects will be or how they will be assessed and measured</i> <i>9. There is a lack of clarity in the means of setting, measuring the 'ongoing prosperity of the main economic sectors'</i> <i>10. How was the decision to opt for the Biosphere made, when other structures, with supportive legislation, are available off the shelf. There also appears to be no consultation on this decision.</i> seconded by Cllr Freshwater and accepted by resolution of Council. It was agreed that the Clerk would ask Mr Chapman regarding his availability for this meeting, an evening if possible and then liaise with Cllrs to confirm a date and time.	1. Clerk to contact Mr Chapman to get dates for an evening meeting. 2. Clerk to send further questions to Mr Chapman. 3. Clerk to arrange google pole of Cllrs on potential dates
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Signed by Chair _____ Date _____

	Cllr Dunford asked that all Cllrs make a concerted effort to attend this meeting.	
26022.3	Assertion 10 GDPR training Cllrs were asked to complete the Assertion 10 training as soon as possible, and sign to confirm slides were received and read, to comply with GDPR	
26022.4	Devolution A discussion was held on the LGR Consultation. Cllr Grant rounded up the thoughts of all Cllrs as follows:- 1. A meeting with WDP Cllrs is needed to formulate questions. 2. A meeting should be arranged with our MP 3. All Parish & Town Councils should be invited to meet with our MP 4. A written response to the Government Consultation is needed Cllr Freshwater proposed <i>West Dean Parish Council compiles a list of issues with regards to Devolution. The list will be sent to all Parish Councils in the Forest of Dean District Council area and a meeting with the MP organised to discuss the impacts of devolution on local democracy and the potential impact to Parish Councils.</i> , seconded by Cllr Richmond and agreed by resolution of Council.	Clerk to arrange these meetings and responses.
26022.5	Bream Play Area Lease The amended Forestry England Lease for the Bream Play Area, and agreement of the new clauses was discussed. Cllr Freshwater proposed acceptance of this lease, seconded by Cllr Dunford and agreed by resolution of Council.	Deputy Clerk to sign agreement and return to Forestry England.
	Cllr Evans left the meeting at 8.25pm	
26022.6	Sheep Liaison Group A discussion on the way to move forward was held. Cllr Freshwater proposed <i>WDPC facilitates a meeting and invites all former members of the Sheep Liaison Committee, and other interested parties, to discuss the formation of a reconstituted committee.</i> , seconded by Cllr Richmond and agreed by resolution of Council.	Clerk to write to all former members of SLC, and other interested parties.
26022.7	Date and Time of Highways and Footpaths Meeting Moving the date and time of Highways & Footpaths Committee meetings was discussed. Cllr Richmond proposed <i>alternating the meetings between daytime and evening, seconded by Cllr Freshwater and agreed by resolution of Council</i>	Deputy Clerk to ensure times changed for each bi-monthly meeting
26022.8	Proposed Traffic Order Scheme – Nibley Discussion of the proposed Traffic Order Scheme – Nibley was held. Cllr Dunford proposed that a letter of thanks and support be written, seconded by Cllr Bennett and agreed by resolution of Council	Clerk to write letter.

Signed by Chair _____ Date _____

26022.9	Response letter received from Scarlett Newman (Community Engagement Officer) – Anti-Social Behaviour at Ellwood The response received from Community Engagement Officer at the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner was discussed. The Clerk asked if Council was happy for this response to be shared with Ellwood residents, Cllr Lewis proposed sharing the response, seconded by Cllr Freshwater and agreed by resolution of Council. Cllr Freshwater noted that the question of the off-road bike problems had not been answered. Cllr Wheeler proposed that a letter be sent to the Community Engagement Officer at the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to ask that the question of the off-road bike problem be addressed, seconded by Cllr Freshwater and agreed by resolution of Council. Cllr Bennett suggested that perhaps WDPC should ask the residents for any pertinent information they have which can aid investigations. Cllr Betenson proposed the clerk contact residents, seconded by Cllr Wheeler and agreed by resolution of Council.	Clerk to share response. Clerk to write to OPCC Clerk to contact residents.
26023	<u>Items for Information – Councillors to note.</u>	
26023.1	Highways & Footpaths The minutes of the Highways & Footpaths Committee meeting held on 17th February 2026 were received and noted. Cllr Freshwater gave an update on the flooding at the Game Keepers PH. Cllr Richmond advised Council that a resident of Ellwood had sent a thankyou letter for the Village Gates.	
26023.2	Planning Committee The minutes of the Planning Committee held on 3th February 2026 were received and noted. Cllr Freshwater gave an update on the Planning Enforcement case at Turley's Farm.	
26023.a	Clerks Report This item had been missed from the agenda in error. The Clerk gave a report on the following subjects. 1. Closure of the Bream Community Fridge. After discussion it was agreed that Cllr Crick would liaise with the Clerk on this subject. 2. Slides from a webinar on age friendly towns and parishes – For Councils information. 3. Details of the Forest Road, Lydney Closure for Councillors information. 4. Forestry England's visitor strategy for the Forest of Dean – information for Counsellors and survey links. 5. Information uploaded for WDPC Internal Audit – WDPC has now been assigned a GAPTC Internal Auditor.	1.Cllr Crick to liaise with Clerk

Signed by Chair _____ Date _____

	6. Yorkley Court Solar Farm Community Fund – Grants awarded 7. West Dean Parish Council Community Grant Awards – Spring 2026 8. Monthly Budget versus expenditure was noted.	7.Closing date approved.
26023.3	Chairs items 1. Cllr Francis asked that a letter of thanks be sent to Alison Bruce, for all her work on behalf of West Dean Parish Council during her time serving as a Councillor and Chair, this was supported by all present. 2. Cllr Dunford spoke of his disappointment that no one had responded to either date given for the proposed meeting to discuss the FODDC Local Plan Consultation. He pointed out that every village is affected, there are huge ramifications for West Dean Parish, he encouraged all Cllrs to look at their own wards and asked that all present agreed to attend a meeting to enable full discussion and response to the consultation.	1.Letter sent 26.02.26 2.meeting set for 7pm 04.03.26
26014	Public Round-up – 10 minutes There was no Public Round-up.	
	The meeting ended at 21.25	
26015	<u>Forthcoming Meeting Schedule:</u>	

Feb-26				
Tues	3rd February 2026	5.00pm	Planning Committee	West Dean Centre
Tues	17th February 2026	2.30pm	Highways & Footpaths	West Dean Centre
Tues	17th February 2026	5.00pm	Planning Committee	West Dean Centre
Weds	25th February 2026	7.00pm	Full Council	West Dean Centre
Mar-26				
Tues	3rd March 2026	5.00pm	Planning Committee	West Dean Centre
Tues	17th March 2026	11.30am	Governance & Scrutiny	West Dean Centre
Tues	17th March 2026	5.00pm	Planning Committee	West Dean Centre
Weds	25th March 2026	7.00pm	Full Council	West Dean Centre
Apr-26				
Tues	7th April 2026	5.00pm	Planning Committee	West Dean Centre
Wed	13 th May 2026	7.00pm	Annual Parish Assembly	West Dean Centre
Tues	21st April 2026	2.30pm	Highways & Footpaths	West Dean Centre

Signed by Chair _____ Date _____

Tues	21st April 2026	5.00pm	Planning Committee	West Dean Centre
Weds	29th April 2026	7.00pm	Full Council	West Dean Centre

- 1 The Public Questions & Comments is designed to give electors the opportunity to make representations to the Council or to ask questions. It takes place before the formal meeting of the Council.
- 2 The time allocated to the whole period of the open forum is 30 minutes.
- 3 Whether your attendance is part of a deputation or as an individual, the spokesperson will be invited to put the case with a maximum time limit of 10 minutes. Follow up speakers will be allowed 5 minutes in total.
- 4 The Chair will decide whether he/she can advise the deputation immediately or if he needs to sound out members and/or consult the Clerk. The Chair will then inform the deputation what action the Parish Council intends to take.
- 5 The initial response by the Council will be to establish if the matter is something which the Council should be involved in as a matter of public interest or is a private matter for the electors to deal with themselves.
- 6 What the Council may not be able to do at this initial stage is to attempt to solve the actual problem itself. What the Council will do is to decide the best method to deal with the problem and this can take several forms as follows –
The Council can decide -
 - (i) The degree to which the Council can act as advocate on behalf of the individual or group of electors.
 - (ii) To refer the matter to a Committee of the Council for action.
 - (iii) To place the matter on a future Parish Council agenda.
 - (iv) To instruct the Clerk to make further enquiries or conduct correspondence on behalf of the deputation or arrange meetings as considered necessary.
 - (v) If the matter is already on the Council agenda the Chair will invite electors to make any points they feel are relevant regarding the agenda item. The deputation can then remain and listen to the debate in Council.
- (vi) If, during the formal meeting, the Chair feels that the deputation has information which will be useful to the Council, the Chair with the agreement of members can invite a spokesperson to address the Council.

Signed by Chair _____ Date _____