

Minutes of Cheddleton Parish Council held on 24th September, 2025 at 7.00 pm, Wetley Rocks Village Hall

Present:

Mahfooz Ahmad (Chair)
Malcolm Cunningham
Kevin Grocott
Susan Rogers
Su Beardmore
Tom Williamson
Mike Worthington
Andrea Grocott
Valorie Cornes
James Fernihough
Victoria Salt
Ruby Hammer

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Oliver Pointon, Lorraine Shaw and it was noted that G Grocott would be attending late.

2. Swearing in of Recently Co-opted Councillor

Before the swearing in, Councillor Rogers raised a query about Declarations of Interest (DoI). Councillor Rogers queried whether Councillor Salt had sent her DoI to the Clerk, Louise Eyre. Cllr Rogers stated that a Freedom of Information Request sent to Cheddleton PC had not revealed a DoI. Councillor Salt stated that her DoI had been sent on the 3rd June, 2025. Councillor Rogers queried whether the DoI also disclosed a pecuniary interest. It was agreed that Councillor Salt would re-send her email outlining the DoI to Cheddleton PC. **Action – VS to resend DoI to all Cheddleton PC Councillors.**

3. Members' Sec. 33 Dispensation Requests

None recorded.

4. Announcements

The announcement of Councillor Caroline Lovatt's resignation was made – dated 25th August, 2025. Councillor Lovatt gave a statement which indicated that her decision to resign had been influenced by poor public conduct in previous weeks which had resulted in anonymous phone calls, discriminatory and libellous allegations and a line had been crossed. Councillor Lovatt thanked the Clerk (Louise Eyre) and Chair for the support she had received over previous years and highlighted how challenging the future would be with the move towards a larger unitary authority.

Councillor Ahmad thanked Councillor Lovatt for all her hard work and dedication before restating the purpose of the Parish Council was to work on behalf of the community.

Councillor Cornes announced that the Clerk remained absent but that applicants had been sought to provide 2 days cover and that this should help whilst the Clerk remained off. Councillor Ahmad confirmed that the Clerk needed additional support to cope with the workload. Questions were raised about the continued absence of the Clerk and what was being done to support her. Councillor Worthington indicated that the Clerk had indicated she required an apology from Councillor Rogers before returning to work. Councillor Ahmad stated that a fact-finding investigation had been launched to look into the various matters which had arisen. Councillors Beardmore and Rogers stated that an acting councillor could not carry out an investigation of this nature, and an independent person must be appointed. Councillor Rogers stated that she should not be blamed or scape goated for any matters which had not been proven. Discussions took place around previous Council resignations and Councillor Rogers accused Councillor Ahmad of suggesting Councillor Rogers should resign. Councillor Ahmad denied that he had ever stated this. It was agreed that SMDC would be approached for advice on how an investigation should be approached. **Action – PC to liaise with SMDC.**

6. Election of Vice Chair

Mike Worthington proposed Kevin Grocott as the new Vice Chair, this was seconded by Malcolm Cunningham. Councillor Grocott indicated he wanted this to go to a vote. Vote 7 For, 2 Against, 3 abstentions. Councillor Grocott was duly elected as Vice Chair.

7. Standing Order Update

Councillor Cornes reported that the PC had met to review the up-dated SO. Amendments had been made but further queries had been found. Councillor Rogers stated that there were many typographical errors which could be dealt with simply but that there were also issues relating to financial matters and management of the press. It was agreed to defer this item until the next meeting. Councillor Harvey suggested that the PC consult the professional body which supports local government to assist. Councillor Rogers will go through the document in detail and Councillor Ahmad supported her to do this. **Action – defer approval of SO until next PC Meeting.**

The SO also refers to the GDPR requirements. Consall PC are undergoing a review of their GDPR policy to ensure it is up-to-date. The Clerk from Consall PC agreed to share the document with Cheddleton PC when this was ready.

Councillors Salt and Fernihough left the meeting at 19.41 pm

8. Public Question Time.

Helen Bridgett raised 3 questions as follows:

1) In the past 5 years, what has been the turnover of Councillors due to the death/resignation or other reason? *Councillor Harvey answered it was difficult to answer this presently as all such information was held by the Clerk. He reassured the public that the information would be released as soon as possible. Councillor Harvey also explained how challenging it was to get members of the public to come forward to apply to be councillors.*

2) When vacancies have occurred, were they advertised? If so, promptly and in accordance with the SO's? Can this be verified? *Again, it was emphasised that the details would be properly checked and released when the Clerk returned from her absence. Helen Bridgett acknowledge the response and indicated she was happy to wait for the information.*

3) What was the number of co-options and by-elections? *Helen Bridgett indicated she was happy to await the provision of this information from Cheddleton PC. **Action – Cheddleton PC to publicise answers and information relating to the above questions and election processes.***

Finally, a point was raised about the audibility of meetings. It was noted that it was difficult for those in the public area to hear clearly and that this raised equality and diversity issues. One suggestion made was for Councillors to stand when they addressed a point, but Councillor Beardmore stated that this could also raise equality issues in relation to mobility. It was agreed that the PC would investigate the purchase of a microphone to aid communication. **Action – Cheddleton PC to investigate the purchase of a microphone for meetings.**

The meeting moved onto discuss questions raised by John Barbour

John Barbour

1) What progress has been made by Cheddleton PC in acquiring the site? Are there any hurdles or difficulties? *Councillor Ahmad stated that Cheddleton PC had made a successful offer to purchase the garages on Mill Lane. John Barbour asked if such an action was in keeping with the financial orders of the PC. Councillor Rogers stated that any such action would need authority of the full council and that this could not be given without a vote. To allow for a vote the PC would need to be in possession of information relating to a sound business case, consultation processes, a valuation and a survey. Councillor Rogers asked for it to be recorded that no formal voting had taken place and that, under the Standing Order, it was not possible to have retrospective voting permission. Councillor Rogers stated that under the Local Government Act 1972 it*

would be considered an unlawful expenditure if Cheddleton PC had failed to follow the correct procedures. Councillor Ahmad replied stating he had acted properly throughout his life and knew how the system worked.

At this point in the meeting there was a great deal of public outcry and disruption to the meeting. Councillor Ahmad suspended the meeting. Councillor Worthington left the meeting. Members of the public continued to express their concern over the matter and requested that the meeting continue.

It was agreed that the meeting should be resumed. Councillor Rogers echoed the decision recorded in the PC Minutes of the 19th August, 2025 – that approval had been given to explore the possibility of purchasing the garages and confirmed no vote had taken place in relation to the actual purchase.

Councillor Williams stated that the PC had been informed that the vendors had demanded that a bid be made no later than the 29th August and that this had generated the actions taken by the Chair, Councillor Ahmad. Councillor Rogers replied stating the date was immaterial if the proper process had not been followed. Councillor Cunningham stated that the SMDC processes for purchase were unhelpful and that they had not communicated properly with the PC. Councillor Ahmad indicated he had spoken to the Cheddleton PC Clerk, Louise Eyre, who had told him to send the offer.

Councillor A and V Grocott left at 8.30 pm

Councillor Rogers reiterated the absence of proper procedures and accountability. Members of the public continued to express alarm and concern about the matter.

Consall Parish Clerk, Ruby Hammer, who had volunteered to take the minutes indicated that since no resolution would be achieved at the current meeting, a separate extraordinary meeting of the PC should be arranged to focus on the matter of the Mill Lane Garages. **Action – PC to arrange separate meeting to discuss the Garages at Mill Lane, Wetley Rocks.**

2) Would the Parish have any desire to acquire The Oval on Mill Lane? *It was reported that Your Housing also owns the green space known as The Oval on Mill Lane and they are likely to sell this. Councillor Ahmad indicated that he was not convinced it was worth the PC getting involved in such a purchase and queried who would be responsible for upkeep. Councillor Bagnall indicated it would be useful to see what the advantages/disadvantages for the residents would be and felt the matter should be investigated further. Councillor Rogers stated that any investigation of this purchase must follow the correct processes. Councillor Grocott indicated that public behaviour made matters difficult and was challenged by Helen Bridgett and Christine Alcock who accused him of harassment and shouting. Christine Alcock stated that Councillor Grocott had called her out on two occasions for the expression on her face and she*

*found this intimidating. Councillor Grocott apologised. **Action – PC to explore the issues around the purchase of The Oval, Mill Lane, Wetley Rocks.***

3) If, and how, could Cheddleton PC support road safety in Wetley Rocks – *It was reported that although the speed had been reduced to 40m, the signs still indicated 50m. The County Council had not up-dated the signs. Councillor Beardmore stated she would contact the County Council and put pressure on the Highways Department to correct this. **Action - Councillor Beardmore to follow up.***

Gary Walker

Gary Walker enquired about the sale of Bridge Ey and asked what the PC's position was. He also asked if the PC felt that the Cautionary Land Trust (CLT) had acted in best interests. *Councillor Ahmad stated that Bridge Ey should not be sold and confirmed it would not be sold. Councillor Rogers raised the issue of reference to a sale being made in previous CLT minutes. Discussions took place around the issue of the standing of CLT and whether they could even decide to sell since the land was owned in trust for the 'benefit of the landowners'. Councillor Ahmad confirmed his position on the CLT was as an elected representative on behalf of Cheddleton PC.*

9. Minutes of the Meeting 19th August 2025

Pages 1-5 agreed to be true and accurate record. Councillor Rogers noted that the concern about the defibrillator batteries related to John Pointon Sports facility and also reported that the John Pointon facility defibrillator is to be relocated to render it more accessible.

10. Matters arising therefrom

- Footpaths and Rights of Way Committee – need to organise a meeting.
- Councillor Beardmore raised the issue of complaints made by public about behaviour of members of the PC. It was confirmed that such complaints should be formally sent to the PC for resolution and Councillor Ahmad confirmed that if they involved intimidation and harassment, they should be referred to the Police. Ruby Hammer suggested that such matters should be referred to the PC's Human Resources Committee for investigation.

11. Events

Councillor Rogers reported that the Classical Music Concert hosted at the Flint Mill had been a great success and raised in the region of £500.

12. Correspondence

Due to the Clerk's absence, none to report.

13. Financial Matters

Accounts were produced for approval and Councillor Rogers noted that the paperwork only went up to the end of May, there were no financial statements following the absence of the Clerk – **Action – approval deferred until temporary Clerk appointed.**

14. Update on Defibrillators

Councillor Rogers reported that all defibrillator venues receive weekly checks, but the John Pointon Facility is broken.

15. Attendance at Parish Council Meetings

Sue Arnold (Member of Public) enquired why Councillors left early. Councillor Ahmad indicated they should stay but some have commitments.

16. Update Highways Issues with Staffordshire County Council

Councillor Beardmore reported on work to be carried out / completed in the areas of Mill Lane, Coalpit Lane (15 Oct), Hollow Lane (29-30 October) and Ox Pasture (10 and 14 November). Maintenance work was also scheduled for Leek Road (6-8 November) and Folly Lane will be shut from 8-10 October.

17. Reports of Committees and Outside Bodies

17.1 HR Committee – Nothing to report.

17.2 CCMC – Councillor Williamson reported that a positive meeting had been held. There was an on-going problem with the fire alarm due to an inherent defect. It was noted that the car park opening times did not reflect required usage patterns when open from 7.00 am to 6.30 pm. It has been proposed to pilot opening from 7.00 am until 9.00 pm. The changes will be communicated via the website and a new notice will be placed. Permit holders will be exempted. Councillor Williamson proposed the pilot and Councillor Rogers seconded it.

17.3 Advanced Proteins Committee – The next meeting was scheduled for the 26th September at 4.30 pm. It was noted that this was not a public meeting and therefore Councillor Rogers invited the public to send her questions to raise.

18. Report on Request for Improvement to Toilet Facilities and Redecoration of the Tea Rooms, Cheddleton

An estimate had been received for the repair work. The matter was deferred until the next meeting. **Action – review estimates at next PC Meeting.**

19. Any Other Business

Councillor Harvey noted that the Lengthsman had not been receiving clear instructions from the PC in the Clerk's absence. There had been a meeting and a list of work to be

completed had been agreed.

James Barber asked what was being done to look after the sundial at Wetley Rocks. James volunteered to carry out the work needed but Councillor Ahmad said that there was no need, the matter was in hand.

Councillor Rogers queried whether the financial accounts for the VJ Day had been finalised for scrutiny. A request for the accounts to be carried forward as an Agenda item for the next meeting was made.

20. Public Question Time

Councillor Beardmore raised the matter of the Planning Committee due to concerns that planning applications were not being commented upon by the PC. Councillor Beardmore offered to organise a meeting and Councillor Ahmad asked her to call him to arrange a suitable date.

Further discussions took place about recording Council meetings.

21. Forward Agenda Items

Meeting ended at 9.45 pm