Draft Minutes of the Barlaston Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Tuesday 6 May 2025 at the Methodist Church Hall, Park Drive ST12 9DP

Present:

Cllr S Tudor (Chairman)
Cllr G Lloyd
Cllr C Hurst
Cllr G Jones
Cllr E Philpott
Cllr D Borasinski
Cllr L Pickering

Also In attendance:

Vivien O'Dunne (Parish Clerk)
4 members of the public were in attendance.

In accordance with Schedule 12, Part III of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Sue Tudor, presided over the meeting

1. **Welcome:** Cllr Tudor welcomed all those present to the meeting.
2. **Apologies:** Apologies were received from Cllrs Dando and Oakden.
3. **Minutes:** The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 30 May 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record.
4. **Chairman's Report:** Cllr Tudor presented the Chairman's Report, summarising the work of Barlaston Parish Council during the 2024/25 financial year:

- Staffing: Appointment of a new Clerk in August 2024, with thanks extended to former Clerk Karen St Leger for her support during the transition.
- Governance & Finance: The 2024/25 precept was set at £108,923, with a Band D equivalent of £103.48, general reserves were strengthened in line with audit guidance. Earmarked reserves totalling £110,273 were reported (Earmarked reserves: Election £7,000, Village Hall contingency £10,000, Village Hall renovations £43,273 and Playpark £50,000)
- Planning: Ongoing commitment to protecting the village character through planning scrutiny aligned with the Neighbourhood Plan, which is currently under review.
- Village Maintenance: Downs car park improvements, signage, tree work, play area repairs, and installation of new benches and memorial figures funded through bequests.
- Leases: Progress was reported on new leases for Barlaston Cricket Club and the former Meadow Road play area, with community consultation planned for the latter.
- Village Hall: Work continued to formalise the governance relationship between the Parish Council and the Village Hall Charity, in line with its role as Sole Trustee.
- Communication: Introduction of a monthly newsletter and migration to a .gov.uk domain to improve transparency and accessibility.
- Community Engagement: Support for local groups and initiatives was noted, along with a current casual vacancy in the Barlaston Park Ward.
- Recognition: The Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Award will be presented to Michala Black. Certificates of Commendation will be awarded to ten other residents and families for their contributions to village life.

Cllr Tudor concluded by thanking all councillors, the Clerk, and residents for their continued support and service to the community.

5. **Village Group Updates:**

Stone Community First Responders: Representatives from the group reported that a grant from the Parish Council contributed towards the cost of a new response vehicle, which has enhanced their ability to respond to local emergencies. They also kindly offered to provide free CPR and defibrillator training to community groups in the parish.

Barlaston Wassail Group: It was reported that a grant from the Parish Council helped cover essential costs for the annual event, including fire extinguisher refills and insurance.

Volunteer Car Scheme: In 2024/25 the scheme had purchased a new phone system, allowing the group to maintain a local dial number accessible to all volunteers. The scheme completed an impressive 403 trips in 2024/25; an average of 34 trips per month delivered by just six dedicated volunteer drivers.

Warm Welcome Wednesdays: Warm Welcome Wednesday continues to be a valued and well-attended community event, providing a welcoming space for social connection, refreshments, and local stalls. Attendance regularly averaged around 40 people, with free drinks and cake offered year-round and soup in the winter months. Over the year, combined income from the coffee mornings and bi-monthly markets enabled donations of £1,242 to local causes and supported stallholder fundraising totalling at least £3,456.98. Warm Welcome Wednesday continues to offer a much-appreciated, friendly environment for residents, as reflected in positive attendee feedback. The Parish Council's continued support plays a vital role in keeping this event accessible to all.

Barlaston Community Group: Barlaston Community Group continues to act as an umbrella organisation, supporting a wide range of local volunteer-led initiatives, both financially and practically. Its founding mission: *to foster community spirit, enhance the local environment, and encourage neighbourliness*, remains central to its activities.

The Group's Facebook presence is used to promote events, share updates, and encourage engagement across the community. It also provides administrative support and funding advice to local projects as needed. Some key supported initiatives include:

- Silver Surfers: Offers one-to-one tech support for residents, helping them gain confidence with digital tools such as email, video calling, online banking, and social media. Over 50 people have benefited from the group's workshops and individual sessions, supported by Parish Council grant funding for transport and equipment.
- Barlaston Strollers & Striders: A thriving walking group meeting twice monthly, with attendance often exceeding 30 people. The group promotes physical health, mental wellbeing, and social connection, with all walks ending in a shared cup of tea or coffee. Routes are inclusive and vary in location and difficulty.
- Barlaston Womblers: Volunteer litter-pickers who help keep the village clean, safe, and welcoming. While many Womblers look after routes near their homes, group clean-ups are also held six times a year. The group works closely with Streetscene and local schools and youth groups, contributing to campaigns like the Great British Spring Clean.

Together, these initiatives enhance village life, reduce isolation, support local wellbeing, and encourage environmental responsibility. The Community Group plays a vital role in coordinating and sustaining this positive momentum.

Cllr Tudor thanked all the groups for their ongoing service to the community and acknowledged the valuable role these initiatives play in village life.

6. **Open Forum:** Residents raised serious concerns about the condition of the former Wedgwood Memorial College site. Describing the site as dangerous and not secure, noting that both houses have been vandalised. Concerns were expressed about the lack of site security and the perceived failure of the owners to meet their duty of care. Residents asked what action could be taken, including whether pressure could be applied through the local MP or County Councillors.

   Cllr Fisher outlined the history of the site. He noted that the Parish Council produced a design brief for the site, which is now incorporated into the Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council would welcome appropriate development of the land in line with this guidance.

   Councillors confirmed that they share the residents' concerns, although their powers over private landowners are limited. It was agreed that the issue would be added to a future Parish Council agenda for further discussion.

Councillor Tudor thanked all those in attendance and formally closed the meeting.