

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 2ND APRIL 2026 At THE VICTORY HALL, LOWER PENN

PRESENT: Cllr S McEwen (chairman), Cllr Mrs C Taylor, , Cllr D Hughes, Cllr M Mulvihill, 2 members of the public, and District Cllrs R Reade and Mrs V Wilson.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies of absence were received from Cllr D Williams, Cllr K Crane, Cllr G Fanthom.

2. To receive for confirmation and adoption, the Minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on 3rd April 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on the above date were approved and signed as a true record of that meeting. It was proposed by Cllr Mrs C Taylor and seconded by Cllr S McEwen.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Report of the Chairman of the Council

Introduction - A busy 12 months dominated by planning applications for BESS (Battery Energy Storage Systems) along with a new housing application for up to 65 dwellings on land off Springhill Lane. Against this background Lower Penn Parish Councillors have worked hard not to lose focus on other Parish matters; these are referred to later in this report, but it is important we should recognise and thank the departing Councillors ie Holly Fuller, Kate Brazenell and Martin Edwards but also welcome new Councillors being Dave Hughes, Gordon Fanthom and Mick Mulverhill.

Last Thursday, 26 March we received the very sad news that Dave Everett, Lower Penn Parish Councillor and previous Charman had peacefully passed away at home with his wife and family by his bedside after several months' illness. Lyn has asked for privacy and no flowers but any donations to Compton Hospice. Lyn's comments are that Dave is 'in a better place now'. Our thoughts are with Lyn and her family. Dave was an outstanding and really committed member of Lower Penn Council, an example to us all; his every action and deed were to protect and improve our Parish. I'm now going to ask us all to pay our respects with a minute's silence and reflection.

BESS Background – LPPC meetings and discussions in mid-2025 carefully considered the changing circumstances of the Parish. Led by Central Government targets for energy and housing we became aware of potential harm to our community. In the case of BESS installations Lower Penn was preferred due to the existence of the National Grid substation on Penstone Lane. It was recognised that special measures needed to be taken by our Parish to appoint external planning, legal advice.

BESS update - A Public meeting was held on August 1 to secure residents understanding and support. Following this Councillors voted democratically in favour of this measure and Planning Advisor Hannah Barter of UVE was subsequently appointed. Three BESS installations had been approved at that time and there was speculation another six were planned. Hannah worked with us on the Dimmingsdale application (off the Roughs) and Market Lane. Dimmingsdale was approved after being deferred. Market Lane was rejected at South Staffs Planning Officer stage though an appeal can be submitted by the applicant up to 6 months after rejection ie 19 June 2026. Our thanks must go to Lower Penn residents for their help in assisting our objections and the whole community for submitting objection letters.

Langley Road BESS installation has been completed and commissioned. Early-stage construction has started at The Hollybush, Penstone Lane but not at the other approved sites, why?

National Grid set up a new organisation NESO (National Energy System Operator) to assess supply and demand on the Grid ie BESS, Solar and Wind farms also. The report was anticipated in February 2026, so far, we are unable to access this information which may lead to some installations being delayed and others not being connected? With these questions it appears progress with BESS projects is in suspense?

Other matters – our thanks to County Councillor Victoria Wilson who has supported Lower Penn in the matters above and is keeping us closely informed on the following. Robert Reade, District Councillor has supported many initiatives in the Parish.

Unitary Authorities – the County and District Council structures set up in the 1972 Local Government Act are due change to a single Unitary Authority. This change is due to take place in April 2028

Lower Penn Parish Plan – led by Councillor Dave Hughes with support from Mick Mulverhill a new Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared in anticipation of new initiatives emerging from the Unitary Authority structure. To inform the Plan a resident's survey is to be organised seeking resident's opinions. Photographs of Lower Penn are sought to assist the illustration of the Plan and reference is being made to the research completed by Angus Dunphy, particularly his publication to celebrate the Millenium in Lower Penn.

Highways

- Potholes – this item is of key concern to all residents; Victoria Wilson is representing these concerns to the Staffordshire Highways team.
- Speeding – Councillor Ken Crane has been maintaining the Speed Indicator Devices in Langley Road where top speeds of 150mph have been recorded. The situation has been reported to South Staffs Police, and their advice is being sought. There is concern about traffic on Market Lane and other narrow lanes in our Parish. Community Speed Watches are planned.
- Dimmingsdale Bridge – a notorious blackspot, South Staffs Highways are attending a site visit in April

Flooding – numerous cases of flooding are being reported to South Staffs Council with assistance from Victoria Wilson. This has been particularly bad in Market Lane. The last few months have seen exceptional levels of rainfall and likely to increase with climate change in years to come.

Victory Hall (VH) – Lower Penn Parish Council are one (of four) Trustees). Cllr Dave Williams is the Chair of Victory Hall and updates are reported every month on usage along with the financial position. Councillor Corrine Taylor coordinates and supports VH events, it is well used and efforts are being made on social media to promote increased use.

Community – Lower Penn has always had a vibrant community as the recent 'Spring Fair' in VH showed. Litter picks are taking place, and the 'Best Kept Village' group are actively involved. Further ideas on initiatives are always welcome and volunteers to help are always welcome too!

Council Tax Details - Increase Council Tax from for a band D property is to be increased to £165.33 (or 178.7% increase), the council tax for a band D property for the Lower Penn part only for 2026/27 is £99.18, which is calculated by taking the precept £48355 / £487.50 (set by District/Government) = £99.18.

If the precept had remained at the previous level of £17260 it would be £35.41 per year.

Therefore, the current monthly costs are 2025/26 are £3.54 a month for 10 months, in the year 2026/27 costs will increase to £9.91 per month for 10 months - a difference of £6.37 a month.

£10,000 that was been allocated and agreed (£1804 to end of Feb with March costs for Springhill Lane housing advice to be advised but estimated at circa £1000) to spend towards fighting large planning developments such as BESS and housing developments from the reserves as there was no provision in the 2025/6 budget for this as this was totally unexpected expenditure.

No increase for many years on the Precept and needed to increase to enable the Parish Council to undertake more work for the community and catch up with inflation.

Increase in Precept reasons are summarised below:-

Breakdown of increases in estimated expenditure April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027

- New SIDs £10,800
- Return of funds to reserves £10,000
- Telephone box repair and reinvent as a possible book swop £2,500
- New planters £900.00
- new seats / benches £3,000
- Resident's communications £2,500
- Memorial war stone £1,500
- NI Increase £650.00

Any questions on the increases will be addressed by the Council, but they will not respond to comments made on social media.

Finally, many thanks to all the residents of Lower Penn, your support, thoughts, and ideas are very important to help us develop the Parish in years to come.

5. Any other matters raised by the public

There were no questions raised by the public.

Meeting closed at 6.50pm