WEST & MIDDLE CHINNOCK PARISH COUNCIL

West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council Parish Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 11th September 2024

Cllr Bennett	**Cllr Ashton**
Cllr Cawley	**Cllr Cockrem**
Cllr James	**Clerk: Kim Duller**

24/1223 **Public Forum: i) Recreation Ground Gate Discussion:** It was **Resolved** that the recreation ground gate should be kept secured open at all times. **Action: NC agreed to secure open with a rope or similar. ii) Speed Concerns:** A Member of the public raised concerns regarding speeding in the village. A discussion was held between the resident and the Parish Council (PC). **Summary:** The Chair explained that the PC had previously undertaken work in an attempt to introduce a reduced speed limit with the Highways team and the police. However, the evidence collected did not meet the threshold for statutory implementation. The Chair highlighted successful community/resident led speeding initiatives locally and agreed that if residents in W&MC were to create a community led speed initiative and action group, the PC would consider supporting it. **iii) School parking and general parking:** A resident confirmed that Cllr Patrick has organised for Highways to consider putting yellow lines around the roads leading to the school to prevent inconsiderate and poor parking. Highways had confirmed this with the PC. The Chairman explained that the PC understood the problem and had previously worked with the police and school in an attempt to educate drivers to park sensibly. It was confirmed that PCSOs had also visited on a number of occasions in the previous year, however did not have the capacity to visit all of the rural schools in the area who are experiencing similar problems. The PC suggested if residents were concerned regarding blocked driveways, they could consider putting signs outside their own land, e.g. gates/driveway as a deterrent. Also discussed was for concerned residents to perhaps consider a community warden scheme during peak parking periods; or the school take a lead on inconsiderate parking, however advice from the police would need to be considered. The Chairman summed up by explaining that as concerns had also been raised about general poor parking and driving/speeding of other vehicles that perhaps a village combined community action group be formed by the residents, to look at both speed and parking, which the Parish Council could consider supporting.

24/1224 **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Griffiths

24/1225 **Declarations of Interest: i)** Cllr Cawley, Allotments, **ii)** Cllr Ashton, and Councillor for Crewkerne Town Council, Hinton St George Parish Council and Somerset Council. Member, National Farmers Union and National Association for Shooting and Conservation. iii) Cllr Bennett, Playground Committee.

24/1226 **To Approve and Sign as Correct the Minutes from the Parish Council Meeting, 10th July 2024. Resolved. All in favour.**

24/1227 **Matters Arising Not on Agenda:** Prior to the meeting the Clerk had received further information from Highways regarding proposed devolution changes. Details will be forwarded to Councillors after the meeting.

24/1228 **Somerset Council, Councillors Report:** The Clerk asked Cllr Hewitson if there had been a September newsletter, as the only one she had received was June/July. Cllr Hewitson to Check. **PCSOs:** Cllr Hewitson confirmed that the local PCSOs had been visiting other local PC meetings and agreed to get the details of the PCSO now covering W&MC as the understanding was that the area isn't currently being covered. It was noted that there are police driving through on a regular basis. Cllr Hewitson confirmed a PCSO would be able to provide statistics on speeding, anti-social behaviour reports etc.

Somerset Council Financial Position: Cllr Hewitson provided an update on the Somerset Council financial position explaining that they had started the year with a £26M shortfall and ended the year with a £2M underspend. He added the position doesn't look as bad in the longer term, however 24/25 will still be a tough year. Priorities going forward will be SEND and Health & Social care. Somerset Council is consulting on the Council tax reduction scheme, making sure that it is accessible for those who need it the most**.** **Planning:** It was noted there are now no planning officers in South Somerset; however there will be support pulled in from other areas. This now means that South Somerset is without enforcement, or planning officers and no tree officer. As a result, all planning matters will take longer. **Redundancies:** The redundancy scheme is still progressing; the majority of the voluntary redundancies have now taken place, and the remainder are compulsory. **Local Government Boundary review:** About to take place. This will reduce the number of Councillors to 95, and reducing from approx. 8,000 electors per ward, to 4000. **South Street Crewkerne Gas works:** Works to end 13.09.24. **SEND School in Misterton:** Now open.

24/1229 **Planning:**

a. **Applications:**
   i) **Fortunes Well 22/00724/FUL, Higher Street, West Chinnock**: No further movement. **Action: Clerk to keep checking the planning portal for updates.**
   ii) **Higher Gatchell, Higher Street West Chinnock 24/01665/HOU: A discussion was held.** The response to this application had been granted a delay as the submission had been made after the July Parish Council meeting, as there is no Parish Council meeting in August to enable the Parish Council to discuss planning applications. A site visit to the property to view the plans in situ had been declined by the applicant. As the property is in the Conservation area, the PC determined it could not take decisions on the plans alone. Queries on loss of ecological habitat, archeology of the site, phosphate mitigation and landscape were discussed. A query had also been raised regarding the validity of the Planning Application due to a potential error in the submission. **Action: The Clerk to submit the objection.**
b. **Determinations:** None
c. **Planning Enforcement:**
   i) **Smith's Hill:** No Further works have taken place. **Action: Clerk to find out if enforcement checks are still taking place, but thought unlikely in the absence of any available enforcement officers.**
d. **Planning Queries:**
   i) **Planning Query Scott's Way:** The Chairman explained to the meeting that the Parish Council cannot respond or comment on anonymous complaints, however can in certain circumstances give advice to those it may impact. The Chairman explained to the meeting that due to other previous planning and enforcement issues relating to the improvements on properties in the conservation area in W&MC, that the PCs recommendation would always be for owners to contact the planning team and conservation officer for advice. A member of the public gave a presentation on improvements to Hollybank. The Chairman thanked him for his for the presentation, however summed up by advising that he should speak to the planning team and conservation officer for advice for this and any other work which is planned, as the Parish Council does not have statutory planning powers. He also advised any householder in W&MC to seek advice in advance of any improvements, which could prevent any potential enforcement issues at a later date. A discussion followed on rules relating to thatching. Again, the Chairman's advice was to seek advice from the planning and conservation team, as there were regulations specific to listed buildings.

24/1230 **Finance:**

a. **To Approve Qtr. 1 24/25 Accounts: Subject to internal audit: Resolved, all in favour**. The Clerk responded to the two queries which had been made by the internal auditor. i) The Annual insurance had been paid twice, in the first quarter, however there is a refund in Qtr.2 accounts. ii) The £1000 insurance pay out for the works after the fallen tree at the rec, Easter 24, had been received, however a Minute had not been made. This will be Minuted in the Meeting.

b. **To Approve Capital Asset Register amendment on the AGAR, (Annual Governance and Accountability Return), Section 9, Accounting Statements.** The Clerk had previously confirmed that the PC is now subject to external audit, due to the rise in income and expenditure above the £25K threshold. The external auditors had requested that the PC list the value of its assets separately, in line with the asset register. The Clerk had prepared this figure for agreement at the meeting. The figure was £34,866. **Resolved, all in favour. Signed and dated by the RFO and Chair. Action: Clerk to send a copy to the external auditors by 13.09.24. and reissue the asset register.**

c. **NALC updated Financial Regulations C/F**

d. **To record receipt of insurance claim for fallen tree at the Recreation Ground, Easter 2024, £1000.00. Noted.**

e. **To pay any routine invoices:**
   i. **To Pay Cox & Co management fees June, July August 2024. £186.00. Resolved, all in favour.** The Clerk explained she is hoping to change to a new payroll company from October 2024, who are more cost effective.
   ii. **To Pay SALC Invoice £176.88: Resolved, all in favour.**

f. **Delegated Powers Payments and Previously Agreed Invoices:**
   i. **Clerks Salary July and August 2024**
   ii. **HMRC July £134.20 and August £95.20**
   iii. **Somerset Landscapes July Invoice £344.60**
   iv. **Weebly Website Domain £13.00**
   v. **Weebly Website Annual Charge £90.00**

24/1231 **Allotments Report: Cllr James**

a. **Inspection:** Cllr James confirmed she had visited the site and met a number of the plot holders. **Action: Cllr James and the Clerk to meet to discuss publication of inspections for those where concerns have been raised.**

b. **Plot 4a & b:** Now that the plot is managed as a single plot the owner has requested, they pay a full plot price, rather than paying for 2 half plots. **Resolved,** all in favour. **Action: Clerk to amend.**

c. **Plot Identification: Action: Cllr Cawley to organise, pegging out for identification of plots for any new plot holders, not existing ones.**

d. **Vacancies:** There was a query relating to how many plots were vacant. It was resolved that 20d cannot be cultivated. There was also a query relating to whether plot 20a is vacant. **Action: Clerk to check allotment register relating to plot 20 tenants to confirm and report back to Cllr James. Currently 2 applicants have made enquiries. Cllr James to check if there are any plot holders likely to either reduce the size of their plots or relinquish plots. It was noted that plots cannot be sub-let.**

e. **Deposit charge and plot charges for Plot holders who do not come from W&MC**: A discussion was held and it was agreed that the charging structure is to support applications from residents within W&MC and plot holders from outside would be subject to a higher/premium rate.

24/1232 **Matters arising from 10th July 2024 meeting:**

a. **To Agree River Safely Signage at the Recreation Ground:** It was agreed that the PC should conform to statutory H&S regulations, and that the design of the proposed sign was accepted. The proposed cost of £93.00 plus VAT was considered too expensive.

Action: Clerk to find a cheaper sign, which is still robust enough not to be damaged and can be secured.

b. **Hedge Cutting Hollowell Hill and throughout the Villages**: Actioned, although there was a query as to whether this was carried out by local farmers or Highways. **Action: Clerk to check with Cllr Griffiths and the Highways Officer.**
c. **Youth Shelter: Greatfields review of paper work in order to understand use of land where the Youth Shelter is located: C/F Clerk.** It was discussed that there is definitely some more information filed somewhere. NC was also sure he had seen some information in a formal letter from Secretary of State.
d. **Tender, Grass Cutting Review:** The Clerk has now received the breakdown of the cost of hedge cutting at the Allotments which formed part of the pricing structure. **Action: Clerk to now prepare a tender.**
e. **Tree Maintenance Tender C/F**
f. **Payroll Company Review: Discussed under finance 24/1230 item.**
g. **Planning Team Update: Discussed under item 24/1228**

24/1233 **Reports & Correspondence:**

a. **Devolution Update:**
   i. **Dog Bins and General Bins:** A suggested price per bin of £9.38 Inc VAT has now been confirmed by Somerset Council as the approximate cost to the PC with the exact cost to follow for emptying bins. A list of W&MC bin locations and ownership has been sent to Somerset Council. Rather than pay for 7 bins as originally budgeted for, the PC will only have to pay for the cost of emptying the bins at the Recreation Ground, where there are 2 bins. The total cost originally budgeted for 24/25 (using 23/24 figures), based on 7 bins was £3000.00 ex VAT. Based on emptying 2 bins the cost will be approximately £975.00 Inc VAT. It was agreed that the Parish Council could reduce costs further by creating a single multi-purpose bin on the Recreation Ground. The decision as to whether signage would be required on the bin will be made once the dog waste bin has been removed in March 2025. **Action: In the meantime, Councillors to keep a check on how full the bins get in the recreation ground.**
   ii. **Grit bins:** The Grit bins will be filled by Somerset Council, who will finance the filling, in this financial year. Cllr Cawley had surveyed the salt levels in the bins and these have been sent to Somerset Highways team, along with the location of the new salt bin on Smiths Hill. Somerset Council has advised that they cannot guarantee if they will be re-filled if they become empty winter 24/25.
b. **Local Community Networks: No update.**
c. **Clerk Report, by exception 10th July to 11th September 2024:**
   i. **Report of Dogs using the new wooden play equipment and sitting on picnic tables at the recreations ground:** A discussion was held. **Action: The Chairman to send a letter advising that this is not acceptable.**
   ii. **Stones in the riverbank:** These have been put back into the side of the river again**. Action: Cllr Cawley agreed to remove again.**
   iii. **Electricity Power Cable Damage Little Silver:** Caused by a tractor carrying a high load of bales. Emergency works took place and the incident was reported and electricity restored. **Action: The Parish Council discussed the incident and agreed no further action at this stage.**
d. **Bus Shelter timetable location:** Discussion. **Action: It was resolved that the Parish Council that they did not want a formal sign and they would rather have a paper-based sign inside of the existing glass Parish Council notice board. (To be removed if the Board is full with Parish business).**

e. **Local Communities Questionnaire: Action: Clerk to fill in on behalf of the Parish Council.**
f. **Enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot:** A price list has been produced for services which could be provided by the Council, for Parishes to buy in to. Rates per day had been provided for a wide range of services, including hedge cutting, gully emptying, pot holes, training of volunteers for litter picking, weed removal etc. The Parish Council felt the day rates were astronomical for the provision of the basic services and queried statutory responsibility. Clerks have raised concerns as to whether Insurance is covered by Somerset Council for Parishes taking on all of the extra responsibilities. It was also noted that Clerks have not had confirmation on statutory duties relating to some of the areas of work which the Council is attempting to devolve, for example pot holes. **Action: Clerk to check with other PCs on their thoughts and report back. Clerk to arrange meeting with Cllr Ashton and other Parishes regarding the proposals. NT offered to find out more information on the volunteer pot hole filling which was piloted by Devon CC. (Somerset Council had initially reviewed the Exmoor pot hole filling pilot, however all had now gone quiet).**
g. **Highways, Drains, Potholes and Hedges: Pot holes have been marked up.**
h. **Councillor Training:** Cllr James is undertaking Councillor Essentials and Code of conduct training. The Clerk reminded Parish Councillors of their duty to keep their training updated. The Clerk also advised the auditors had recommended the Parish Council have a dedicated email address. The Clerk also recommended that Parish Councillors have a unique Parish Council address and although not statutory, the Clerk highlighted recent issues of GDPR with Parish Councillors using their own personal email addresses. Councillor Cawley confirmed he did have an email address and would forward details to the Clerk. **Action: will provide a schedule of previous Councillor training for the next meeting.**
i. **Parish Grants/Section 137 Community Benefit:** A discussion was held relating to whether the Parish Council will be giving any grants in 24/25. The Clerk confirmed that there was no formal grant budget ring fenced for 24/25 due to the uncertainty around devolution; however it is acceptable to consider using Section 137 Community funding. It was **Resolved**, all in favour, that due to the continued uncertainty around devolution of services no grants could be considered at this stage.
j. **Footpaths: i) Sign at Bridge Farm:** Concern has been raised that the sign which is outside of Bridge Farm could be mis-interpreted and ambiguous in relation to the footpath being closed. It was noted that there is a finger sign at the beginning of the footpath and the hope is that walkers realise the path is open. **ii) Footpath on Layne Terrace:** Over the first field and then into the maize field, a complaint has been received that the footpath was blocked. Cllr Cockrem has spoken to the farmer and suggested that as the harvest is in the next two weeks it would be inappropriate to create cut through. Cllr Cockrem has suggested to the farmer that an application should be made to have the footpath diverted to avoid the same complaints by walkers wanting to walk across the "diagonal" which arises each year. It was noted this has been suggested previously. Cllr Cockrem advised she had sent invitations to the footpath officer since July to come and discuss the issues which have been officially reported in W&MC, but he has still not arranged a meeting. He has however, agreed to come out in 3 weeks time.
k. **Neighbourhood Plan:** The Clerk confirmed that the new government is keen to engage Parish Councils in developing their own Neighbourhood plans and there is currently training available. **Action: The Chair advised that W&MC Parish Council would not consider a Neighbourhood Plan, whilst there was still so much uncertainty around devolution of services from Somerset Council.**
l. **NALC Training:** For information**. Action: Clerk to circulate as and when it is available.**

m. **Update Parish Councillor Vacancy:** Currently no further applications. **Action: Clerk to re-advertise.**

n. **Extraordinary Items not on the agenda received by residents and passed to Cllr Cockrem: i)** Query if the route for tractors at the back of Broadstone Farm which had previously been discussed, was going to be implemented**. Action: Clerk to enquire with Broadstone Farm. ii)** Complaint regarding the use of mobile phones whilst driving tractors, causing driving without due care and attention and not being aware of other road users. **Action: Cllr Cockrem to verify with complainant that they are willing to give permission to the PC to take the complaint forward and to gather more evidence in relation to the time and date and any details of the tractors when mobile phones were being used.**

24/1234 **Correspondence & Matters for the Parish Council Meeting, Wednesday 9th October 2024 Agenda. Forward any items to the Clerk by Friday 4th October 2024.**

Meeting closed 8.50pm

Next Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 9th October 2024

7.30pm, Village Hall, West Chinnock

Change of December 2024 Parish Council Meeting Date

The December Parish Council meeting will be held on the 4th December instead of the 11th December 2024