

WEST & MIDDLE CHINNOCK PARISH COUNCIL
West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 4th December 2024

Cllr Bennett
Cllr Cawley
Cllr Griffiths

Cllr Ashton
Cllr Cockrem
Clerk: Kim Duller

24/1259

Public Forum: A discussion was held on the implications of any potential changes arising from the “Local Plan” consultation; specifically relating to those areas in the villages which are currently part of the Conservation area. Also discussed were individual cases where it was suspected that planning permission had not been sought for properties which had inappropriate extensions in the conservation area. A specific case of a resident, who had moved into the village in the past few years and had been forced to take out an additional indemnity insurance relating to a conservatory extension, when purchasing the property, was discussed. **Summing up:** Parish Councillors felt that it was too early in the consultation process to predict if there would be any significant changes in the new Local Plan relating to the conservation area. The PC agreed to address this matter further at the next stage of the Local Plan consultation.

24/1260

Apologies for Absence: None

24/1261

Declarations of Interest: i) Cllr Cawley, Allotments, ii) Cllr Ashton, Councillor for Crewkerne Town Council, Hinton St George Parish Council and Somerset Council. Member, National Farmers Union and National Association for Shooting and Conservation. Cllr Ashton confirmed he had also recently become a Member of Merriott Parish Council. iii) Cllr Bennett, Playground Committee.

24/1262

To Approve and Sign as Correct the Minutes from the Parish Council Meeting, 13th November 2024. Resolved. All in favour.

24/1263

Matters Arising Not on Agenda: None

24/1264

Somerset Council, Councillors Report: Cllr Mike Hewitson attended the meeting. Cllr Patrick standing apologies for childcare. It was noted, that there had been no general circular for December. Several questions specifically relating to West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council were asked. Cllr Hewitson helpfully agreed to provide answers where he could. **i) Grit Bins:** The Clerk asked why the grit bins, not only in West and Middle Chinnock but also those in other rural villages, had not been filled. The Clerk explained she was aware that complaints had been put in by PCs, including via Ward Members. Secondly, the Clerk asked whether it was true that the order had not been placed by Somerset Council. Thirdly, could the PC please have exact confirmation of when the grit will be delivered? The Clerk gave some context and background that grit had not been supplied despite the PC being asked to submit a request for grit supplies from Somerset Council in September 2024 and that it had been agreed to provide grit FOC up to April 2025. It was noted that W&MC grit bins are regularly checked and all bins were either full or half full in the run-up to the recent cold spell. The Clerk confirmed she had asked residents to keep an eye open to check grit levels as the grit must have been removed in the two weeks before the cold spell, specifically from the bin on Duckpool Lane. It had not been confirmed who had taken the grit. Cllr Cawley topped up the grit and extra emergency grit was kindly hand-delivered and supplied by Somerset Council Highways. **ii) Legal Liability for Accidents:** The Clerk asked Cllr Hewitson to confirm that if there was an accident and the grit had not been supplied by Somerset Council, would legal liability remain with Somerset Council? The Clerk also asked for exact guidance whether or not it was a statutory requirement for Somerset Council to provide grit to rural roads and villages. **iii) SALC AGM and Conference:** It had been reported on FB by Cllr Patrick that this was a very positive conference and also by the organisers, however other feedback had not been as positive. The Clerk had written to SALC and copied

in the new Chief Executive to ask for a set of outcomes from the conference to be shared as she was unable to attend. (As were many other Clerks and Parish Councillors). The Clerk asked Cllr Hewitson to follow up with SALC and Somerset Council on whether there was a set of outcomes and an action plan as a result of the conference. Also asked, in terms of VFM, how much did the conference cost to put on, and was this a shared cost between SALC and Somerset Council? Also requested was the guest list, to demonstrate attendance coverage of Parish Councillors, Clerks, SC Officers, Ward Councillors and the SALC board. The Clerk stressed that it was really important to share these actions and outcomes with Parish Councils who were unable to attend, and queried how VFM would be assessed, especially during such difficult and challenging financial times. Suggested outcomes included i) What was the impact of the conference; what difference it will make; what are the tangible outcomes? **vi) VFM, Ward Councillors:** Cllr Patrick had recently posted a comment on Facebook about VFM in planning and the use of Officers' and Councillor's time. The Clerk explained that Clerks have to account for their time in terms of their salary, and asked, during a period of so much scrutiny, is there a process in place where Ward Councillors account for their expenses of a base rate of £15K pa, plus committee attendance payments. Cllr Hewitson explained each Ward Councillor is different, however, there is no exact guidance on how a Ward Councillor's time is measured. He explained that some Ward Councillors go above and beyond and are often working up to 70 hours per week for their Parishes; however others perhaps do not do the same number of hours. Cllr Hewitson explained there is no job description and Ward Councillors support in different ways. The Clerk explained the question had been raised as a result of the latest situation with grit bin filling, where it was felt that time was wasted by duplicated effort spent chasing by individual Clerks and Ward Councillors. It was felt that this didn't represent VFM if everyone was chasing the same Officers at the Council. It was suggested the responsibilities of Ward Councillors, Parish Councillors and Clerks needs to be re-visited and a great opportunity exists to do this when the new boundaries are agreed upon. The Clerk explained that local Clerks are looking at ways of rationalising the way they work due to the increase in expectations that they attend so many meetings, increase in paperwork, consultations and various U Turns. It was noted at this point that the LCN for Crewkerne had not had any impact on West & Middle Chinnoek and wondered if this was the same for other Parishes, bearing in mind the cost to set them up. **C/F: Opening of the new Boundary Commission map.**

24/1265

Planning:

a. Applications:

- i) **Fortunes Well 22/00724/FUL, Higher Street, West Chinnoek:** No further movement and no planning officers to ask at the moment. **C/F from November Minutes. Action: Clerk to follow up with Cllr Patrick who is on the Area South Planning Committee.**

b. Determinations:

- i) **A H A H WARREN AH Warren Trust Application Type Section 73A. Determination, Application Number: 24/02093/S73A:** Determined with conditions. Officer reports circulated to PC Members, also available on the Somerset Council planning portal.

c. Planning Enforcement:

- i) **Smith's Hill: Further works are taking place. Action: Clerk to contact Cllr Patrick in the absence of any enforcement officer in post in South Somerset, for an update on the development with proposed timescales.**

d. Planning Queries: None

24/1266

Finance:

- a. **To Pay Clerks Back Pay, National Agreement September 2024: £152.90. Resolved.**
All in favour
- b. **NALC Updated Financial Regulations C/F**

- c. **To Pay Qtr. 3 Clerk Home Office Expenses:** £92.00. (Work from home standard HMRC rate £6.00 per week, plus £20.00 printer depreciation). **Resolved.** All in favour
- d. **To Pay Stationary, Ink, x 3 cartridges.** **Resolved.** All in favour
- e. **To Pay Heating, Village Hall, October & November:** £14.00. **Resolved.** All in favour
- f. **To Pay for new Microphone for AI translation at Meetings:** £59.99. **Resolved.** All in favour
- g. **To Pay Any Routine Invoices:** None
- h. **Delegated Powers Payments:**
 - i) **Clerks Salary November 2024:** £497.81 Gross
 - ii) **HMRC PAYE November 2024:** £130.00

24/1267

Allotments Report: Clerk

- a. **Registration of Chickens, statutory guidance from DEFRA, commenced 1st October 2024:** Clerk received a copy of his certificate from N. Vout. **Action: Cllr Cawley has received confirmation from DEFRA. Cllr Cawley to email the Clerk with a copy.**
- b. **Waiting List:** 2
- c. **Clerk to organise a handover with Cllr James: C/F from November 2024.**

24/1268

Matters arising from 13th November 2024 Meeting:

- a. **Youth Shelter: Greatfields review of paper work: C/F**
- b. **Tender, Grass Cutting Review:** On hold as there is a review of procurement of local services. **C/F**
- c. **Tree Maintenance Tender:** Advice as per Grass Cutting Review, part of devolution of services. **C/F**
- d. **Inconsiderate parking around the school: C/F**
- e. **Second Hand Bike Donation:** 17 bikes collected. The Clerk thanked the Community for their support, with bikes being donated from Norton, West & Middle Chinnock and Chiselborough.
- f. **West & Middle Chinnock Local Walks:** Local interest on physically walking the paths to check access, confirm the route is the same as previously (no diversions), any maintenance required etc, is low. Over the Christmas period Cllr Griffiths, the Clerk and Cllr Cockrem offered support. **Action: Clerk to co-ordinate walking the walks and arrange any amendments to the walks booklet, including any new paths. Publish updated booklet in the New Year.**

24/1269

Reports & Correspondence:

- a. **Somerset Council Financial Situation, Impact of Further Redundancies on Decision Making for Parish Councils:** Cllr Hewitson reported that the Budget is due to be finalised by February. It is anticipated that it will be a balanced budget. (TBA).
- b. **Local Plan Consultation:** Submitted 30th November 2024. The Chair formally thanked Jonathan Naughton for his input, seconded by the Clerk.
- c. **Somerset Planning Validation Consultation: Circulated to Members.** Cllr Ashton explained that this was a big document and that he had produced a pro-forma which could help simplify the process of submission. Cllr Ashton agreed to share this with the Clerk and also agreed that the Clerk could share the document with the Clerks in the newly formed local Parish Council Clerks Group. Cllr Ashton was stressed how important it was for Parish Councils to respond to this document. **Action: Clerk to use the pro-forma as the basis for W&MC response and to ask Jonathan Naughton for his input. Cllr Ashton to send the Clerk the pro-forma. W&MC Clerk to circulate to local Clerks. Deadline 12.01.2024.**
- d. **Grit Bins:** Discussed under item 24/1264, i). **Action: Clerk to provide count of bags of grit in W&MC which had previously been purchased. It was suggested that the PC continue to lobby Somerset Council to prevent any further reduction in the Highways team under Somerset Council's transformation plan.**
- e. **Parish Council Budget: 24/25:** The Clerk reported there had been no further announcements on Somerset Council's devolution plans or any items which would impact

on budget setting. **Action: Clerk to continue to monitor decisions made by Somerset Council which could impact on the PC budget setting process. It was agreed to review again mid-January. Final decision required by 31st January 2025.**

f. **Devolution: No further update.**

g. **Clerk Report, by Exception, 14th November 2024 to 4th December 2024:**

i. **Procurement of Services for Drains:** Further discussions are being held relating to how one single company, Keir, has been given the contract to carry out drain works on behalf of Parish Councils, with no apparent formal tender process. There has been no clear pricing structure apart from it will cost £6000.00 per day to use a tanker. It has also transpired that Keir sub-contract their services, which is felt by the Clerks to be the cause of issues with communication. Clerks had been advised that they were not to use alternative contractors as they would not be able to provide insurance should problems occur. Clerks felt this then restricted choice of contractors and represented a monopoly. Clerks have asked to see if there was a formal tender process; who was invited to tender and a copy of the original tender. **Action: Clerk to monitor progress on procurement. There is still a lack of clarity on the statutory responsibilities by Somerset Council to keep the drains clear. Clerks would like to approach other companies to quote for drain cleaning and maintenance, however are being advised they cannot due to insurance cover considerations. Clerks are attempting to ensure VFM and due diligence.**

ii. **Fly Tipping, Top of Smokey Hole Lane:** Asbestos roofing material and pipework. Reported to Somerset Council.

iii. **Broken Drains, Road Surfaces, and Flooding in Middle Chinnock:** Following the submission of photographic evidence, the Clerk has arranged for inspection, along with ditches and road surface going towards Middle Chinnock from Poop Hill, once the water level has dropped. The Clerk confirmed that after previous investigation it was established that there were a number of blocked drains and pipes on the highway and verges. It had also been previously acknowledged that the increased usage of that particular piece of road and the size of the vehicles using it had widened the road and caused ongoing maintenance issues as the road size had increased to a greater size than the existing Highway. Further written advice has also been sought regarding Riparian ownership from the recreation ground through to Middle Chinnock village, on both sides of the road.

h. **Local Community Networks:** Crewkerne and Chard LCN was not quorate at AGM. Waiting for advice on next steps as to whether the LCN can continue to function. **C/F. No further update.**

i. **Footpaths: i)** The proposed new gate to the Lower Street entrance to the recreation ground which was originally signed off, has now been vetoed by the Somerset Council finance board, because it goes against Somerset Council's disability policy. Cllr Cockrem has asked Somerset Council to come up with a solution which will assist with access and report back to her. **ii)** A new gate on East Lane has been agreed, with 3 steps down to the road.

24/1270

Correspondence & Matters for the Parish Council Meeting, Wednesday 12th February 2026 Agenda. Please forward any items to the Clerk by Friday 7th February 2025.

Meeting closed 8.20pm

Next Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 12th February 2024

7.30pm, Village Hall, West Chinnock