WEST & MIDDLE CHINNOCK PARISH COUNCIL

West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council Parish Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 12th February 2025

Cllr Bennett **Cllr Cawley**
Cllr Cockrem **Cllr Griffiths**
Clerk: Kim Duller

25/1271 **Public Forum: The Chair opened the meeting, wishing everyone a happy new year. i) Drains and Gullies.** A discussion was held. Keith Dodge explained that it would be a waste of money to clear drains where maintenance is needed. The Chair thanked Keith for rodding existing blocked drains where they are blocked. The Clerk explained that until the new Somerset Council (SC) main budget has been confirmed, any budgets for highways or any other services provided by SC will not be confirmed. Current shortfall estimated at £66 million. **Action: Clerk to ask SC if they could carry out an inspection to identify which drains need maintenance and to confirm statutory responsibility. Maps to be provided by Clerk. (As per similar situation with Riparian Law). Clerk to also ask for a definitive answer on drain scheduling and report back to the PC. ii) Drain Report.** N Vout raised issues regarding a drain/manhole with a continual flow of water coming out of Scotts Way, close to the Allotments. The Clerk confirmed she was unaware of this. There was some confusion as to whether Wessex Water had previously inspected the drain approximately 6 months ago. **Action: N. Vout to send pictures and exact location details to the Clerk who will report the incident to highways, or Wessex Water.**

25/1272 **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Ashton, due to a commitment at Wayford PC.

25/1273 **Declarations of Interest: i)** Cllr Cawley, Allotments. It was noted that Cllr Cawley could not take part in the Allotments item 8.b **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 Member of Merriott Parish Council. **iii)** Cllr Bennett, Playground Committee.

24/1274 **To Approve and Sign as Correct the Minutes from the Parish Council Meeting, 4th December 2024. Resolved. All in favour.**

25/1275 **Matters Arising Not on Agenda:** A paper by J. Naughton on a proposal for a Boules Court in the villages, will be presented and discussed under item 10. Reports and Correspondence.

25/1276 **Somerset Council, Councillors Report:** Cllr Mike Hewitson attended the meeting. Cllr Patrick standing apologies for childcare. **i) Full Council taken place today,** included in the discussion was the new structure in order to achieve further savings. 1 in 4 officers have now been made redundant, or left. Budget gap still around £63 million pounds. Permission to raise Council tax about the 5% limit has been given and it is anticipated SC will make a 7.5% rise in Council tax, thus providing an extra £9 million pounds, however SC still has one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the Country. To find funding for the gap in income, SC has been given permission by government to find alternative ways of funding the gap, including sale of assets. Biggest pressures are on statutory services SEND (Special educational needs) and Adult Social Care. **A round of applause and vote of thanks for Cllr Hewitson was proposed by the public gallery for his helpful verbal report and for regularly attending all of the Parish Council meetings in his role as Ward Councillor. ii) Roads Maintenance:** A discussion was held on how long it was taking to clear the Landslips. The Clerk explained that the following a large number of landslips and incidents which closed the Roads after the latest storm, priority for clearance has been given to getting main A roads clear and those villages who did not have access in and out. The landslip of Hollowell Hill is significant and will need additional equipment to clear it. Smokey Hole Lane is also on the list. It was also noted that West & Middle Chinnock have two existing entry and exit points in and out of the villages. The Clerk is having regular conversations with the Highways team **iii) Poop Hill:** A site visit

between the PC and Highways took place 3 weeks ago. The ditches were cleared immediately by the farmers and also heading south in to Middle Chinnock. The water cleared immediately and the potholes were marked up to be filled the following week. Unfortunately, the second storm hit and as a result maintenance priority is now being given to clearing the landslips, however some pot holes had been filled. The Clerk is being updated twice weekly on when there will be capacity to support West & Middle Chinnock.
iv) Scott's Way/Bow Bridge: This is still a major issue and the Clerk reported there had been significant concern raised on social media. The Clerk explained this work has been planned in for 3 years now, however the budgets have not been available. SC have explained that the works are in the budget from April 26, however this will depend on the outcome of SC's final budget and cannot be confirmed yet. It has also been confirmed by SC that the Road may have to be closed if further safety issues are raised. Concerns were also raised by the PC regarding the trees undermining the road and the need to clear the ditches. The Clerk confirmed that she has asked Ward Cllr Patrick to become involved in the strategic longer-term issues facing this piece of Road and liaise with SC on behalf of residents and the PC for a significant maintenance programme for this piece of Road. Cllr Hewitson confirmed he would liaise with Cllr Partick and Cllr Ashton on this matter. Cllr Hewitson confirmed the Highways team had not been impacted by the redundancies which were announced today. **Action: J. Naughton requested information from Cllr Hewitson regarding information in the public domain on legal liability between land owners and Somerset Council Highways, as he was interested in commissioning some legal advice. Clerk to forward to JN, the information she had received on Riparian Law and Cllr Hewitson to investigate further if there is further information in the public domain. The Clerk to set up a 3 way email, for correspondence on this request.**

25/1277 **Planning:**

a. Applications:

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

ii) Chinnock House Middle Chinnock Crewkerne Somerset TA18 7PN: Application No(s):24/02904/HOU. The Parish Council has supported the application, however within the formal response it had raised with the planning officers the difficult timing of the application during the Christmas period and the initial lack of information from the conservation officer which had meant there had to be an extension on the submission. The PC noted the high quality of the plans which were submitted.

b. Determinations Since Time of Agenda: None

Planning Enforcement:

i) Smith's Hill: Further works are taking place, including a continuation of the building of the main wall and tree felling, hedge removal and clearance of the land surrounding and to the north of the plot. A discussion took place and the Clerk confirmed that she had contacted Cllr Patrick as previously requested by the PC to raise concerns. He had advised he would not take any concerns to planning and advised that the Parish Council should do this. J. Naughton had raised concerns in writing with the developer. It was also noted that further concerns have also been raised relative to the site and encroachment on to adjoining land. **Action: Clerk to contact SC in an attempt to establish if a planning enforcement officer, tree officer and building control are in post and request they visit the site to ensure the plans previously agreed in the original planning application and that conditions are being implemented.**

25/1278 **Finance:**

a. **To confirm the 2026/2027 Precept submission.** The Clerk read the key points of the budget statement which confirmed a rise of 5%. In real terms this represents a rise of £2.88pa on a Band D property. *(Average based on Band A to Band H Properties).* The Clerk explained this rise was lower than most PC's as the W&MCPC had previously budgeted for the anticipated devolution of services and had been prudent in the past 2 years with its financial planning. Other major budget items for PCs were the taking over of Recreation Grounds from Somerset Council. W&MCPC had taken advantage of this offer 5 years ago, when it was a peppercorn transfer.

b. **Financial Regulations C/F**

c. **To Agree Qtr 3 Accounts:** NC confirmed he was in the process of completing the internal audit, however all Councillors had received a copy of the accounts.

d. **To Pay Heating Village Hall, December 2024 £10.00. Resolved. All in Favour.**

e. **Notification of Credit £132.00 Cox & Co Payroll Solutions: Noted by all Members**

f. **Notification of Change, New Payroll Company, PATA: Noted by all Members.**

g. **To Pay PATA Payroll Set up Charge £50.00. Resolved. All in Favour**

h. **To Pay Monthly PATA Payroll Charge £12.45, December Payroll. Resolved. All in Favour.**

i. **Previously Agreed and Routine Invoices:**

   i. **Refurbished Computer for the PC after Motherboard failure £345.00 including Office 24 software, data transfer and I year warranty. (Quote to mend £295.00) Authorised by the Chair so that the Clerk could continue to work during February. Resolved. All in Favour.** The Clerk advised MS 10 will be coming to an end in October 2025 and suggested Councillors check if their computers can upload MS 11.

j. **Delegated Powers Payments:**

   i. **Clerks Salary December 2024 £399.34. Resolved. All in Favour**

   ii. **Clerks Salary January 2025, including Work from Home allowance £425.18. Resolved. All in Favour.**

   iii. **HMRC PAYE December 2024, £249.59. Resolved. All in Favour**

   iv. **HMRC PAYE January 2025. £100.00. Resolved. All in Favour.**

25/1279 **Allotments:**

Previous Cllr for the Allotments, Angie James attended the meeting to help to explain the accuracy of actions which had previously taken place. The Chair reminded Cllr Cawley that he could not take part in the discussions.

a. **Inspection Update:** Angie advised that plot inspections had taken place in July 24 and she had been able to talk to some of the plot holders regarding the condition of their plots. 4 plots were considered to be Red condition, which required immediate improvement and she had spoken directly to these plotholders. Angie had taken into account extenuating circumstances for two of the plot holders. There were also a number of Amber plots identified, which also needed addressing, however plot holders had not been notified. It was agreed that the plots would need a re-inspection at an appropriate growing season stage and the action was for the Clerk to contact the National Allotment Society to take their recommendations on when inspections should take place. In the meantime, in the absence of a Councillor Lead for the Allotments, the existing Parish Councillors asked for further detail on inspections, including the reports for each plot, cultivation standards, further understanding on the traffic light reporting method. Concerns were raised by Councillors that they did not feel the existing system for inspection was being effectively implemented and there was a lack of follow through. A discussion was also held on whether there is disregard for the standards, and to consider how these standards should be enforced going forward. A question was asked as to why the Allotments holders cannot manage the plots themselves. The Chair explained that the Parish Council had previously

supported the Allotment holders with setting up a regulated formal committee, however after a significant amount of work attempting to set it up, it did not go ahead. NV & Cllr Cawley disagreed with this view. Cllr Griffiths explained that the Allotment holders were not prepared to accept the updated legislative framework for the creation of a committee and thus the proposals did not go any further. **Action: When a date for inspection is agreed, a full inspection will take place using the framework which is currently in place, based on national cultivation standards. It was discussed that previously plotholders with a Red rating have lost their tenancy. The Parish Council was confident that the existing systems for assessing the plots are in place; however were not been implemented, or followed through. The Parish Council has a list of those plot holders who are already aware of their plots being classed as Red, and will expect that these are bought up to standard when the new inspection takes place. The Parish Council is keen to move forward on inspections and cultivation of plots and the next inspection will be the bench mark for future inspections.**

b. **Response to Queries from the Allotment Holders:** 9 out of 23 plotholders/tenants attended a meeting at the Muddled Man pub on 29th January 2025, to discuss a number of issues relating to the Allotments. The Clerk explained that a number of the points which were discussed at the meeting, had already been raised with Cllr James and the Clerk and various plotholders, however that there had been some mis-communication as there had been no formal matters brought to the Parish Council. Unfortunately with Cllr James leaving in October, there had been no opportunity to discuss and formalise queries at a full Parish Council meeting. The Clerk and Cllr James had already discussed a number of the queries raised as follows:

   i. **How useful is the membership of the Allotment Society, currently £66.00 plus VAT, moving to £75.00 plus VAT in 2025?** The Clerk explained the Parish Council had previously discussed this. The Clerk explained there are many levels of Membership and she had checked out if the PC could share its Membership. Unfortunately it can't. The Chair advised that the Membership was part of the overheads of running the Allotments and will continue as an operational cost. The PC considered VFM provided by membership of NAS to be excellent. The Clerk also advised that the NAS had played a major role in the modernisation of the site, with the move towards smaller plots and accessibility to the wider community as well. Benefits included; disability access policy and advice, sizing of plots during recent transformation, legal advice on size of plots. (2 plots are still too big in terms of legislation), pricing and deposits, ongoing legislation updates, clearance of plots, change of policies, amendments of Tenancy agreements, best practice across the county and nationally, access and visits by regional representatives, advice on setting up a Committee/Allotment Association, ongoing questions, queries and complaints.
   NV was still concerned about the charge. The Chair and the Parish Council advised that this was an operating cost and part of the management cost of the allotments. The Clerk advised NV that she had taken advice from NAS on this matter and the answer was that Allotment holders would have to have their own Membership and, Landowners, Parish Councils, Town Councils, and large government run organisations, have to have their own Membership. **It was <u>agreed</u> to continue to pay this cost as part of the Allotment costs.**

   ii. **The Maintenance Figure of £100 2025/26 seemed high when maintenance costs for 24/25 are about £25.00?** The Clerk explained concept of having a sink fund was based on having a fund for small repairs on the site and also to build up a reserve for any major costs. For example the clearance of top plot in 22/23 which was £910.00. Future costs for maintenance, fencing, gates, entrance etc. The Clerk had taken

advice from NAS on this matter and was advised that maintenance is a direct cost to the Allotments and cannot be part of the Precept. As a result the following was considered: Does the PC still want to have the £100 sink fund each year, how big should it grow too, could the PC agree a limit, (A limit can be permitted as long as it is shown within the Allotment Accounts), should the PC drop the concept of a sink fund, but any costs for maintenance and repairs are passed to the plot holders in the following year. This will mean a review of contracts. A discussion was held and all agreed the concept of passing repairs direct to plot holders was not acceptable. It was therefore **agreed** to continue with the £100.00 sink fund to cover costs.

iii. **Refundable deposit charge:** This was proposed to be £50 per plot (whatever the size). The Allotment tenants understand this has been levied on new tenants during 2024/25. The Clerk advised this discussion had previously taken place between herself and Angie, which some plotholders were aware of. The Clerk confirmed she had taken advice on this matter from NAS who explained that the PC would to have a protocol in place which includes pictorial evidence in place when a tenant takes on a plot and which would then be compared when a tenant leaves a plot. The recommendation put forward by the Clerk and Angie based on advice from NAS is that as this is difficult to implement retrospectively for existing tenants that it should apply only to new tenants. Once this protocol is in place it will take away the reliance of any decisions to be taken by plot holders on what is "acceptable" in terms of cultivation and the state of the plot. It will also allow the PC to have full control of the clearance of any works which need to be done. With regards to the clearing of the plots by NC and Cllr Cawley, which was mentioned at the Allotment meeting, the Clerk queried whether charges are made for any work to clear plots. Cllr Cawley confirmed no charges have been made. It was **agreed** that no deposits would be taken from existing tenants, however all new tenants would be charged a £50.00 deposit, using the new protocol which will be put in place. All deposits will be £50.00, whether tenants come from West & Middle Chinnock or outside.

iv. **Disproportionate charging of plots based on size:** The Clerk reported this had previously been discussed and minuted in the September 2024 Parish Council Minutes when it was agreed that where plot holders had 2 half plots, 2 Qtr plots etc, they would be charged accordingly a half or a whole. The Clerk explained that one of the reasons this situation had arisen was due to the success of tenants taking on qtr plots and now upgrading to half plots, which was one of the aims of attracting new tenants; giving them a taste of renting an allotment, without a massive commitment. Previous Minute see below:

24/1231 **Allotments Report: Cllr James – September 2024 Minutes**

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. **agreed,** all in favour. **Action: Clerk to amend.**

With regards to the question on disproportionate charging, the Clerk had again checked this with NAS who confirmed what had previously been proposed and reiterated the background to this decision. She explained again that the administration cost of whatever size of plot a plot holder is the same and this is taken in to account with the pricing structure. It was **agreed** the current price banding will remain the same.

v. **Broadstone Farm income: The Allotment Holders assume that the land rented by Broadstone Farm at Greatfields is still classed as allotments?** The Chair explained that Broadstone Land is no longer classed as Allotment Land and comes under land management by the Parish Council, as part of Parish Council income. (Precept).

vi. **Additional charge of 10% to non-parish residents.** This question had previous been discussed in the September 24 meeting, however on reflection and following advice from NAS the PC agreed there were currently no identifiable uplift costs to tenants from outside of the villages. However the PC reserved the right to consider how priority is given to tenants from within the villages if there is a waiting list. *(As at 12.02.2025, there is no waiting list.).*

vii. It was agreed that moving forward, any detailed discussions on the Allotments would be taken outside of the Parish Council meeting, however would still stay as an item on the agenda.

viii. It was confirmed that all future tenancy agreement payments will be requested to be paid by Bacs or cheque.

ix. NC asked the Clerk to clarify the difference in the annual figure of direct expenditure of £585.12 against £844.00 shown in the initial Allotment pricing review. The Clerk agreed to report back.

25/1280 **Matters arising from 4th December 2024 Meeting:**

a. **Youth Shelter: Greatfields review of paper work – Clerk/Chair**
b. **Tender, Grass Cutting: On hold as part of devolution review – C/F**
c. **Tree Maintenance Tender: On hold as part of devolution review – C/F**
d. **Inconsiderate parking around the school C/F**
e. **Second Hand Bike Donation:** Very positive response from the Community, 17 bikes were collected. The Chair thanked the community for taking part and engaging in such a worthwhile project and especially to Tricia Piper who had been the inspiration for the project.
f. **West & Middle Chinnock Footpaths Project:** Cllrs Cockrem and Griffiths are walking the Paths to confirm and changes or amendments to the routes.

25/1281 **Reports & Correspondence:**

a. **Boules Report:** A report had been submitted by Jonathan Naughton and was discussed. The PC agreed in principle to the proposal, however asked JN to come back with a more detailed proposal before taking any decisions.
b. **Bus service improvement:** Details have been passed to Cllrs Patrick and Hewitson to ask if they could lobby for better bus services in the villages.
c. **Local Plan Development**: 2 further meetings have taken place. Concern has been raised again that rural issues not taken in to account. 179 conservation areas have been identified, Approximately 4000 homes across Somerset will need to be built. It has been acknowledged rural sites important, but it won't stop housing proposals in rural locations. Rural villages will be expected to take new developments. More aware of flooding issues, but hope to help with green drainage structures and improved infrastructure. Another planning consultation is due to take place on 21st Feb – JN is hoping to attend.
d. **Devolution:** No further update
e. **LCNs:** Mixed reviews on effectiveness.
f. **Co option**: 2 Councillor vacancies. Recruitment is a national issue. Focus recruitment on specific roles.
g. **Flooding**: Community Flood Recovery Drop Ins. Information circulated to residents and Parish Councillors to encourage attendance, rather than just comment on social media.
h. **Clerk Report: West & Middle Chinnock Community Website.** Feedback received that the site is out of date. The Clerk explained that the website was originally a community wide project, however despite asking for volunteers, it has fallen on to the PC to administer. Clerk

to email individual organisations to see if they will take on responsibility and ask for volunteers again.

i. **Footpaths:** A new gate has been installed with steps up to the East Lane entrance to the footpath going over to Middle Chinnock. A report of a muddy footpath was received. Unfortunately the PC has no control over these.

25 /1282 Correspondence & Matters for the Parish Council Meeting, Wednesday 12th March 2025 Agenda. Please forward any items to the Clerk by Friday 7th March 2025.

Meeting closed 8.55pm

Next Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 12th March 2025

7.30pm, Village Hall, West Chinnock