WEST & MIDDLE CHINNOCK PARISH COUNCIL

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

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

25/1283 **Public Forum: i) Drains:** The Clerk apologised for not reporting the blocked drain on Scotts Way. She assured NV that it would be reported a.s.a.p. **ii)** Scotts Way riverbank/highway: IW raised concerns that for 3 years running SC has advised they have set aside funding for the river bank works at Scotts Way however, the work still hasn't been actioned due to various reasons given by SC. The Parish Council were asked if they had previously gone to SC to help jointly fund the repairs, citing section 137. *(Section 137 of the Act allows parish and town councils to incur expenditures for purposes that benefit their communities when no specific statutory power is available).* The Chair explained that the land was in the Parish of Merriott and that the PC had been in regular contact with the SC and the Landowners. Section 137 had not been considered as in a small village, the PC would not be able to raise a substantial amount of money through Section 137. IW explained that if the road was closed, then it would be due to lack of maintenance and then this would be because SC had not fulfilled its statutory requirement to maintain the Road. The road can only be closed under the Highways Closure Act, (Clerk to confirm legislation) and if this was the case the PC has the power to say no, within a 2 month period. The Chair explained that if it was dangerous, it did put either Merriott or W&MC in a difficult situation if there were any likely life-threatening incidents caused due to vehicles falling into the river. IW also raised concerns regarding the impact on cars having to divert to the Chiselborough junction, which he considered to be dangerous if there was an increased volume of cars using that junction. **Action: The Chairman thanked IW for his advice and recommended Cllr Aston be asked to liaise with Merriott PC. Clerk to research further, the Highways Closure Act.** The Clerk confirmed that they had been advised that there was funding in the Highways budget for 2025-26 set aside for repairs, however she would continue to ensure that the PC were kept informed if anything changed. **ii) Youth Shelter:** ZG queried why this item had been on the agenda for so long and if there were any plans to relocate the shelter. The Chair explained that the Youth Shelter was built from funds from the Greatfields allotments sale. There are specific requirements and covenants when using ring fenced capital and the Chair and Clerk are attempting to locate the original paperwork trail which will clarify whether or not the Youth Shelter can be taken down. Due to other pressing priorities during the transformation of SC, this item has not been a priority item for the Parish Council.

25/1284 **Apologies for Absence:** None.

25/1285 **Declarations of Interest: i)** Cllr Cawley, Allotments. **ii)** Cllr Ashton, Councillor for Crewkerne Town Council, Hinton St George Parish Council, Merriott Parish Council and Somerset Council. Member, National Farmers Union and National Association for Shooting and Conservation. **iii)** Cllr Bennett, Playground Committee.

24/1286 **To Approve and Sign as Correct the Minutes from the Parish Council Meeting held on 12th February 2025. Resolved.** JN had sent a note regarding the discussion on the previous Minutes, which the Clerk read out. **Members decided the original Minutes should stand and the Parish Council were happy to discuss the proposal again at a later date. All in Favour.**

25/1287 **Matters Arising Not on Agenda. None**

25/1288 **Somerset Council, Councillors Report:** Cllr Mike Hewitson attended the PC meeting representing the Coker Ward. No apologies were received from Cllr Patrick. Cllr Hewitson gave an update on SC Business. He confirmed the final budget had been approved. The staffing restructure is now coming to the tail end with staff leaving SC in the next few weeks. Cllr Hewitson offered support to the PC if we were unable to contact any specific departments. Cllr Hewitson asked for any

examples of potholes which had not been filled to a good standard.
SC is currently reviewing the quality of the work by its contractors and is doing a call-out for evidence. Cllr Hewitson confirmed the landslips had been cleared and thanked the community for their patience. A question was asked as to where the contractors who carried out the clearance came from, and whether they came from Swindon, rather than using local contractors. There was a conflicting range of answers, with some residents saying they were local contractors. **Action: Cllr Hewitson to find out and feedback to the PC in terms of VFM of using contractors from outside of Somerset. Cllr Hewitson agreed to find out from the portfolio holder for Highways regarding the ring-fenced funding for Scotts Way. Cllr Hewitson said he would also check his emails regarding the query JN had previously sent him on the Local Plan.**

25/1289 **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 February Minutes. Action: Clerk to follow up with Cllr Patrick.**

b. **Determinations Since Time of Agenda: None**
   Planning Enforcement:
   i) **Smith's Hill:** The Clerk explained that she had contacted the enforcement officer as per the Parish Council request at the last meeting, due to various concerns, in particular, the clearing of the land. The enforcement officer had confirmed he was pleased with the progress of the wall however, did not reply to the query relating to the land clearance. The Clerk confirmed that there was an arborist report as part of the planning conditions which specified a programme of work including a reporting and supervision protocol for the clearing of the land on the site. The Clerk had not had any confirmation as to whether there was a Tree or Building inspector in post at the moment that would be leading on this and therefore could not confirm if the conditions had been met. It was noted that previously building works on the site had been stopped due to lack of conditions on landscaping and trees land by both Cllr Patrick and Phil Poulton. **Action: Clerk to write to the planning officer raising the PC's concern and disappointment that the requirements set out in the statutory planning conditions and the report by the independent consultant have not been fulfilled. Clerk to cc Cllr Hewitson and Cllr Patrick.**

25/1290 **Finance:**

a. **To Present and Agree Qtr 3 Accounts 2024/25.** The internal auditor, Neil Cochran confirmed he had carried out an internal audit and had discussed some queries with the Clerk however, was satisfied that all was in order. **Resolved. All in Favour.** The Clerk thanked Neil for finding a 10p variance, which was very much appreciated.
b. **To Pay Heating Village Hall, February Meeting 2025 £10.00: Resolved. All in Favour.**
c. **To pay any routine invoices: None**
d. **Delegated Powers Payments and Previously Agreed Invoices**
   i. **Clerks Salary February 2025 £425.38. Resolved. All in Favour**
   ii. **HMRC PAYE February 2025 £99.80. Resolved. All in Favour**
   iii. **To Purchase Clerks Refurbished Computer £345.00. (Agreed 25/1278,i (i) Finance February Minutes. All in Favour. Resolved.**
   iv. **Allotments Water Bill 2025/26: £218.00 (Previous Year £211.00). Resolved. All in Favour.**

25/1291 **Allotments: 21.47 tape**

a. **Advice from NAS regarding Plot Inspections:** The Clerk confirmed that she had been working with the legal advisor and the South West Regional Advisor from NAS on modernising the Allotment Inspection and Cultivation Policy and bringing them up to date with national standards, and simplifying West & Middle Chinnock's current guidance.
b. **Confusion over costs from the previous year:** The Clerk to reissue the budget to Neil and Phil. The confusion had arisen because the main column where the summing up was, did not say "total". **Action: Clerk to amend and reissue when the tenancy agreement is sent out.**

c. **Clarification of Plot Pricing for Allotment holders with 2 or more plots:** As previously agreed.
d. **Issue of Tenancy Agreements:** Tenancy Agreements will be issued at the end of March and the new Inspection & Cultivation policy at a later stage, once signed off by NAS.
e. **Vacant Plots:** There is 1 vacant full plot which needs inspecting and may be split into smaller plots and 1 x half plot. Clerk to confirm half plot with PN.
f. **Waiting List:** One person currently waiting.

25/1292 **Matters arising from the 12th February 2025 Meeting:**

a. **Youth Shelter:** Greatfields review of paper-work C/F. (Discussed in the Public Forum).
b. **Drain Cleaning on Highways:** Highways has given the Clerk a schedule of cleaning (verbally). The Clerk confirmed if a drain is identified as blocked a normal service request needs to be submitted. The caveat is that a number of drains in our villages are old, but if they are blocked, still report them**. Action: Keith and the Chair to do an inspection of all of the drains. Clerk to provide a map. Drain on Scott's Way towards Bow Bridge. Keith & the Chair to take pictures and send the narrative to the Clerk who will report to Highways.**
c. **Tender, Grass Cutting:** On hold as part of devolution review. To note, the first cut of the season has taken place at the Rec, Knapp and youth shelter. Not the Higher Street Triangle as the daffodils are still in bloom.
d. **Tree Maintenance Tender:** On hold as part of devolution review
e. **Inconsiderate parking around the school: Action: c/f**
f. **Footpaths Project:** All footpaths have been walked and are as shown in the footpath book. **Action: Consider re-print.**
g. **Boules Court:** Take off agenda until JN brings back to PC

25/1293 **Reports & Correspondence:**

a. **VE Day celebrations:** Angie suggested that VE celebrations take place in the villages. The Chair advised the PC would support the village coming together, and could help with various contacts – referring to the last VE celebrations. The Chair explained the PC would struggle to make a significant contribution this year, but would possibly be able to make a small grant. Gary from the Muddled Man has offered to organise the BBQ again. The Clerk had forwarded all previous VE day information to Angie, where previously residents had organised their own picnics however, this was due to the event taking place during the Covid lockdown. This is also what happened during the coronation village celebration. It was recommended that the date of the event is clearly advertised, as the date of the May Bank holiday isn't actually VE Day. A beacon was discussed however; the Chair explained that a number of issues had prevented it from happening before due to the level of risk. The Clerk offered to send any requests for support to village organisations. Road Closure has to be applied for by 23rd March 2025. A discussion centred on the availability of military memorabilia and perhaps some vehicles. The Chair offered to support as much as he could. Displays including photographic and "Show and tell" medals were suggested. Angie confirmed she will put a working group together. Liaison with the PC via the Clerk.
b. **Library Service Update:** No Update
c. **Somerset Council Financial Situation: under 25/1289**
d. **Local Plan:** A further consultation had taken place which JN attended. The Clerk read out feedback.
e. **Devolution:** Currently a hiatus as discussed in item 25/1289. There has been a lot of press coverage regarding the number of officers being made redundant without a transition plan in place. The Clerk confirmed that there is a lack of named officers in place, but is optimistic these may be announced when the new geographical boundaries are also announced.
f. **Local Community Networks:** It was asked if the Crewkerne LCN actually still existed as there had been no feedback or action. Cllr Ashton said it does still exist and last met in January 2025.**Action: Watching brief.**

g. **Parish Councillor Co-Option, recruitment of non-Parish Councillor Volunteers: Ongoing.**
h. **Flooding Update: Somerset Resilience Plan.** The Clerk had promoted the call for support for residents to join the local community initiatives to reduce flooding at the key pinch points in the village, particularly as this is a hot topic for residents on social media. Sadly there had been no volunteers willing to support. **Action: Clerk to persevere asking for support.**
i. **Reporting of Incidents:** Need to encourage a culture of reporting evidence to Somerset Council in the community rather than complain about issues. It was noted that if defects are reported they do normally get fixed. Photographic evidence is preferred as well as a brief narrative. **Action: The Clerk to list links to the main reporting portals on the community webpage.**
j. **Landslips:** Roads now open, Hollowell Hill and Smokey Hole.
k. **Bow Bridge/Scott's Way, Riverbank Maintenance: covered under Public Forum.**
l. **Clerk Report, by exception 13th February - 12th March 2025.** All items discussed in the Minutes.
m. **Dog Fouling Reports, East Lane entrance across the fields to Middle Chinnock:** A number of residents have been seen with their dogs not picking after the dogs have fouled. These incidents are in the process of being investigated with the Somerset Locality Officers. Preventative signage has been put up and the situation will be reviewed over the next 2 weeks. Clerk to pass details of residents who have also made complaints to Cllr Cockrem. There were a number of concerns raised in the public gallery regarding the increase in dog fouling in the villages again, in particular on footpaths. **Action: PC to consider another poster campaign with support from the Community Locality Officer.**
n. **Highways, Drains, Potholes and Hedges:** It was noted by IW that after reporting, the repairs had been completed, again supporting the push towards reporting rather than complaining. Foxwell Lane was given as a positive example. It was noted that if more residents report incidents, it is much more likely the incidents will be dealt with.
o. **Footpaths: Update & Feedback:** Cllr Cockrem confirmed she had chased the outstanding action at the Lower Street entrance to the recreation ground, which had previously been accepted on the SC list of actions.

25 /1294 **Correspondence & Matters for the Parish Council Meeting, Wednesday 9th April 2025 Agenda. Please forward any items to the Clerk by Friday 4th April 2025.**

The meeting closed 8.30pm

Next Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 9th April 2025

7.30pm, Village Hall, West Chinnock