

WEST & MIDDLE CHINNOCK PARISH COUNCIL
Annual Meeting of West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council
Wednesday 8th May 2024

Cllr Bennett - Chair
Cllr Cawley
Cllr Griffiths
Cllr Partridge
2 Members of the General Public

Cllr Ashton
Cllr Cockrem – Deputy Chair
Cllr James
Clerk: Kim Duller

- 24/1173** **Election of Chairman and Declaration of Office:** Cllr Mark Bennett was proposed as Chair by Cllr Cockrem, seconded by Cllr Griffiths, all in favour. **Resolved.** Cllr Bennett accepted Office.
- 24/1174** **Election of Vice Chairperson and Declaration of Office:** Cllr Cockrem was proposed by Cllr Mark Bennett, seconded by Cllr Cawley, all in favour. **Resolved.** Cllr Cockrem accepted office.
- 24/1175** **Councillors, Declaration of Office:** Cllrs Cawley, Griffiths, James, Ashton and Partridge accepted office. **Resolved.**
- 24/1176** **Election of Committee Representation:** 1. Cllr Bennett, PC representative on Playground Committee: **Resolved.** 2. Cllrs Ashton and Partridge, Lead Members for planning. **Resolved.** 3. Cllr Partridge, Lead Member Quarry Farm Allotments: **Resolved.** 4. Cllr Cockrem, Lead Member footpaths, environment and flooding. **Resolved.** 5. Cllr Griffiths, Lead Member, legal advice. **Resolved.** 6. Cllr Ashton, LCNs and devolution Lead Member. **Resolved.**
- 24/1177** **Appointment of Responsible Financial Officer (RFO):** Kim Duller, Clerk, proposed by Cllr Bennett. All in favour. **Resolved.**
- 24/1178** **Appointment of Internal Auditor:** Neil Cochran kindly agreed to continue with the role of Internal Auditor. **Resolved.** **The Clerk and Chair thanked Neil for his support throughout the year.**
- 24/1179** **ROI and Elected Office Forms for Councillors including: 1. Review of Registration Form and 2. Acceptance of Office, to be returned to Clerk within 28 days of the meeting. These will be published on the Somerset Council website.**
- 24/1180** **Chairman’s Address: Summary of Address:** The Chair explained that it had been an uncertain year for the Parish Council due to the financial challenges Somerset Council were and are, facing. The lack of clarity and u-turns in decision making had made precept planning incredibly difficult; however the Chair was confident that the Parish Council had taken prudent decisions. The Parish Council had predicted and foreseen the financial challenges facing Somerset Council 3 years ago and had already started to plan for a move towards what would be the devolution of some services. The focus for the Parish Council moving forward was to help strengthen our community and to help support village resilience. A starting point for this was the Annual Parish Meeting, which the Parish Council is supporting to help bring groups, organisations and residents together on 27th May 2024. The Chair thanked all of the Parish Councillors for their support throughout the year and expressed his gratitude for a full contingent of active and knowledgeable Councillors. The Chair also thanked Neil Cochran, acting as the Parish Councils’ internal auditor, and the Clerk.
- 24/1181** **Public Forum: **DECISION TO LOCK RECREATION GROUND NOW WITHDRAWN.**** A discussion was held regarding reports of heightened risk of overnight camping activity in the south Somerset area on private land and the pros and cons of locking the gate at the recreation ground, as a preventative measure in the short term. A vote was taken on whether to keep the carpark entrance gate open or locked and whether a combination number lock or padlock with key lock would be appropriate.

A vote was taken to put a combination number chain lock on the gate and monitor the situation over the next 4 weeks until the next Parish Council meeting. **Proposed: Cllr Partridge, seconded Cllr Ashton, 6 to 1 in favour. Resolved.** **Action: Cllr Cawley to source a combination number chain lock and put it on to the gate. The Clerk and Neil Cochran to give the code to those who need to use it. Clerk to communicate to residents via FB and email regarding impending lock fitting. Gate to remain locked at all times unless being used for a specific activity. Those who open it will be advised that they should close it after it has been used.**

24/1182 **Apologies for Absence:** None

24/1183 **Declarations of Interest:** i) Cllr Cawley, Allotments. ii) Cllr Bennett, Community Playground Committee. iii) 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.

24/1184 **To Approve and Sign as Correct the Minutes from the Parish Council Meeting, 10th April 2024 Resolved.** All in Favour.

24/1185 **Matters Arising Not on Agenda:** None

24/1186 **Core Policies Review:** Updated policies previously circulated. **All in favour of adoption of updated policies. Resolved.** Details available on Community website.

24/1187 **Supplementary Policies Review:** Updated supplementary policies previously circulated. **All in favour of adoption of updated policies. Resolved.** Details available on Community website.

24/1188 **Review of Annual Attendance:** All Cllrs have a good attendance record.

24/1189 **Somerset Council, Councillors Report:** Ward Councillors did not attend. No apologies received. A written report had been previously been received and circulated. There was nothing specific to West & Middle Chinnock. Cllr Ashton explained that there maybe issues relating to the SUEZ waste contract in Somerset due to SUEZ having significant financial difficulties. Negotiations are on-going with Somerset Council.

24/1190 **Asset Register: Previously circulated: All in favour. Resolved.** Proposed Cllr Griffiths, seconded Cllr Partridge. It was agreed that the equipment at the community play area at the school is under the legal ownership of the Community Playground association and not the school or the Parish Council and that it was covered under the schools insurance. (TBA). **Action: To consider re-evaluation of land value at recreation ground, valuation of the Knapp and legal status of recreation ground pavilion.**

24/1192 **Risk Assessment: Previously circulated: All in favour. Resolved.** Now that the Parish Council has a full complement of Parish Councillors, the level of risk for a number of factors has reduced.

24/1193 **Planning:**

a. **Applications:**

- i) **Fortunes Well 22/00724/FUL, Higher Street, West Chinnock:** The Clerk confirmed that Cllr Patrick had been in contact with the planning team to arrange a meeting to discuss a number of outstanding queries. The meeting had not yet taken place. **Action: After discussion it was agreed that the Parish Council would like to also have an on-site meeting with the planners, but that this was probably unlikely due to the current work pressure on the planners. It was agreed the Clerk would contact Cllr Patrick to arrange and meeting with Cllr Griffiths, and the Clerk to discuss outstanding issues and the PC would re-submit its original concerns which have not yet been addressed. Cllr Ashton advised that it would be appropriate to submit another response, despite the consultation being closed and to check if there was a date for the application to go to committee.**

It was reiterated that the Parish Council had serious concerns that a planning officer had not visited the site and that there may be an impending change in lead planning officer.

- b. **Determinations:** None
- c. **Planning Enforcement:**
 - i) **Hollowell Hill: C/F. No further update.**
 - ii) **Smith's Hill:** The Clerk has been taking regular pictures of the site which are being sent to the enforcement officer. **Action: Clerk to ask the Enforcement Officer again which plans are being reinstated as there is significant confusion as to what plans the contractors are implementing.**

24/1194

Finance:

- a. **To formally note receipt of the Parish Precept: Noted.** The Clerk explained that payment had been received on the 29th April, when it is usually paid in early April. This had been the same for all precept payments across Somerset.
- b. **To agree Qtr4, financial year-end 23/24 accounts:** The internal auditor, Neil Cochran approved the accounts. A comment was made regarding the non-publication of the Clerk's salary. The Clerk explained that under the financial regulations salaries of paid employees are not to be published in the Minutes, however can be made available to individuals who make a request. The Qtr. 4 accounts had previously been circulated to Parish Councillors for approval. **Resolved. All in favour.**
- c. **To receive the report from the internal auditor.** The Internal auditor confirmed he was satisfied with the presentation of the accounts.
- d. **Limited assurance review, external audit and overview:** The Clerk explained that now the Parish Council has exceeded the income and expenditure limit of £25k, it would be subject to an external audit called a limited assurance review. This means that the forms that have to be filled in are different, however are not too onerous.
- e. **Approval of the Annual Governance Statement (AGAR Form 3, 23/24):** The Clerk read the Annual Governance Statement to the Parish Council. **Resolved and signed. All in favour.**
- f. **Approval of the Annual Accounting Statement (AGAR Form 3, 23/24):** **Resolved and signed. All in favour.**
- g. **To formally approve the 24/25 Parish Council budget – Final:** **Resolved, with no changes.**
- h. **Renewal of Parish Council Annual Insurance:** The Clerk explained that the insurance quote was higher than last year and that she was seeking alternative quotes. **Action: Clerk to circulate new quotes when they arrive.**
- i. **To Pay Any Routine or Previously Agreed Invoices:**
 - i) **SLL. March Invoice 34446 previously discussed at the April meeting.** The Clerk confirmed that she had received confirmation that all of the dates for mowing matched the invoice. SLL confirmed that they had, had to come back and cut the grass twice because of the poor weather. £166.94 to pay. **All in favour. Action: Clerk to check hedge cutting at the Allotments and to circulate current contract to Members.**
- j. **Delegated Powers Payments and Previously Agreed Invoices: None.**
- k. **To Pay Routine or Previously Agreed Invoices: None.**

24/1195

Allotments:

- a. **Inspection:** planned for Saturday 8th June 2024. **Action: Clerk to circulate date to allotment holders.**
- b. **Plot Vacancies:** Plot 20d vacant. Plot 4b may become vacant. Still waiting for confirmation. Tenant from plot 4a has requested to take on plot 4b, if it becomes vacant.

- c. There had been a request to give further information relating to the proposed increase in prices in 2025. **The Clerk in liaison with Cllr Partridge, has responded.**

24/1196

Matters arising from 10th April 2024 meeting:

- a. **Youth Shelter:** To be discussed at the next meeting. **Action: Cllr James volunteered to lead a team of volunteers to do a clean up, including some maintenance.**
- b. **Dangerous parking on Scotts Way:** No reported issues again. C/F
- c. **Community Play Area:** No further update, waiting for confirmation from Jamie Caswell regarding suitability of the proposal for a gate locking system. It was confirmed that notice had already been given by Neil Cochran to Jamie Caswell, that the Parish Council will no longer financially be able to support the caretaker after April 2024. **Action: Cllr Bennett to measure up the gate for the lock.**
- d. **Annual Parish Meeting 27th May 2024:** Cllr James explained that personal invitations will go out to local clubs and organisations and the event will also be promoted to residents via posters and social media. The APM will start at 5pm with a BBQ and drinks and at 6pm there will be an opportunity for groups and organisations from the villages to say a few words if they would like, the aim being to celebrate our local community. Cllr James confirmed a number of organisations/groups had already said they would like to attend.
- e. **Tender, Grass Cutting C/F**
- f. **Tree Maintenance Tender:** The Clerk confirmed she was gathering expressions of interest. Cllr Cawley confirmed that Mr Honeybun had given the PC permission to enter his land when the tree maintenance is carried out. **Action: The Chair explained that he did not believe that any heavy lifting or digging equipment would be required. Clerk to let companies tendering know.**
- g. **Payroll Company Review C/F**

24/1197

Reports & Correspondence:

- a. **Somerset Council Devolution Update:** None
- b. **Local Community Networks:** The Clerk confirmed she had attended a Clerks briefing where it had been explained that an audit had taken place on the work that had been undertaken by the LCNs thus far. The conclusion was that some were doing well and that some were not.
- c. **Play Equipment Inspection Sovereign:** An annual check is due. The Clerk is liaising with Sovereign and Councillor Bennett in order to set up the inspection.
- d. **Clerk Report by Exception 11th April – 8th May 2024:** The works on Scotts Way cannot commence until the Environment Agency has confirmed the end of the salmon spawning season at the end of June. The works should be commissioned from June/July. Ditch maintenance will also take place at the same time. Two trees which are impacting the ditches will also be removed once the ditches have dried out. Highways will be inspecting the roads in Middle Chinnock once the ground has dried out. The Clerk has been informed that no major Highways maintenance can take place due to budget restraints and any further work will be based on patching of holes. Parish Councillors felt this decision lacked foresight and would not be cost effective in the long term, but understood the financial challenges that Somerset Council is facing. The drain, which is blocked with scale on Smiths Hill, has been re-commissioned for cleaning.
- e. **Use of Recreation Ground by a Private Business:** This was discussed by Members and it was agreed the PC would write to the owner of the business to ask them to cease trading on the Recreation Ground.
- f. **Footpaths Update:** Parish Councils have been asked to respond to a consultation regarding devolution of footpath services from the Council to Parish Councils. **Action: It was agreed Cllr Cockrem would send back an expression of interest, however with no commitment to proceed.**

- g. **Drains, Potholes and Hedges:** Foxwell Lane had been marked up; however the rain has washed it away. **Action: Clerk to contact Highways to see if it is still on their list for maintenance.**

24/1198

Correspondence & Matters for Wednesday 12th June 2024 Agenda.

- a. **Agenda items, including Members Reports:** To be forwarded to the Clerk before Friday 7th June 2024.

Meeting closed 8.20pm

Next Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 12th June 2024

7.30pm, Village Hall, West Chinnock