

WEST BUCKLAND PARISH COUNCIL

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The Minutes of a Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 4th January 2022 at 7.30pm in the Committee Room, West Buckland Village Hall.

Present: Cllr's C Silverlight, D Lacey, S Bellamy, Ms S Drury, D Mitton and J Nutt.

In attendance: County Cllr J Thorne, District Cllr R Habgood and the Clerk, Mrs J Larcombe.

126/01/22. To accept apologies for absence. There were no apologies.

127/01/22. Disclosure of interest in items on the agenda. There were no disclosures.

128/01/22. To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 06/12/21 as an accurate record.
The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and they were duly signed by the Chair.

129/01/22. Matters arising from the minutes not covered by the agenda. To clarify the accuracy of the wording in item 121/12/21 Cllr Mitton said it is the landowner's responsibility not to block a footpath. The condition of the floor/surface of a footpath is the responsibility of SCC.

130/01/22. Democratic Period. There were no members of the public present.

131/01/22. Update on broadband issues. Cllr Ms Drury reported that she had emailed Rebecca Pow MP again because of the worsening situation regarding broadband at Ruggin. She reported on the situation as she had emailed it to the MP. Cllr Ms Drury, Mike Threlfall and Steve Loveridge met with the MP last summer, and following that meeting they did meet with Matt Barrow from CDS last August as arranged. He promised to keep in touch with them but emails they have sent to him have subsequently been completely unanswered. Following a presentation to West Buckland Parish Council and residents by Lynda Sudlow, Community Liaison Executive for Airband, in October 2021, Cllr Ms Drury contacted her regarding the Airband plans for Ruggin. She was told they had no knowledge of her property at all and she discovered that Airband work on roads, not telephone exchanges, therefore if your house is not on a road then as far as they are concerned you don't exist. Lynda Sudlow had Ms Drury's details and several other properties added to the planned scheme for the area via the C14 project team as a result. She followed this up with them and on

15/10/21 had an email from Liz McCusker at the CDS team saying Matt Barrow was already trying to resolve this and would get back to her. He didn't get back to her and despite Mr Threfall, Mr Loveridge and Cllr Ms Drury trying numerous times in recent months to get a response, nothing has been forthcoming. Lynda Sudlow has now left Airband and her replacement in Community Liaison has no records at all as to what has gone on so far. The organisation appears to be hopelessly disorganised.

BT Openreach are actively decommissioning copper cables with a target date of 2025 for them all being taken out. Copper is the only option for some rural residents. It appears fibre will never be laid to their premises- they are in the too difficult box.

Following criminal damage to a line at Hill Farm where the line was shot at, Openreach have informed the resident that copper overhead wires will only be repaired at the customer's expense in the future. This time they were able to repair as there was one last pair left on the pole. If that's damaged again then it will be very expensive to repair and the cost will fall to the customer. Another neighbour at Hazelbrook has had no phone or Internet since 23rd December. Openreach came out and said it was fixed but it wasn't and BT are not assisting them at all to get a repair done. BT sent them a 4G hub as a backup but as they have no 4G signal it is useless. Numerous calls and texts to BT by them have gone unanswered. This potentially leaves rural customers with nothing other than 4G as an option and the 4G signal is atrocious.

Councillors agreed that broadband is now an essential utility. Where 4G fails, a land line is the only form of contact for emergencies. When people have no close neighbours they are very vulnerable as a result.

Cllr Ms Drury is totally disgusted with CDS and Airband and said they have failed them at every turn. Apart from erratic 4G no one seems interested in helping. They have spent huge amounts personally to get a basic/erratic 4G signal.

Openreach seem to be systematically abandoning rural customers. This is part of a recent report into the 'future' of landlines "Since 1891, this impenetrable jungle of messy copper cables has allowed people to dial a unique number to connect to anyone anywhere in the world, without the need for a human operator. The cables are the veins of Britain's Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), an analogue jumble connecting any landline to a sprawling mesh of wires, undersea cables and satellites, cabinets and street poles. In three years' time, most of these lines will go silent". Help is needed and organisations need to be charged with the upkeep and supply of vital telephone and broadband services and have to include them in plans and maintain services. At the moment they feel abandoned.

As of 4th January 2021, 25% of the Ruggin hamlet was reported to have no phone or Internet service at all and hadn't had this since before Christmas.

At the end of December 2025 traditional telephony, including fixed lines and services in the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) will be switched off and withdrawn from service and broadband will be required to make a call from a landline. Cllr Ms Drury has identified 25 properties where 4G is not viable.

Councillors were concerned that nothing was being done and there is a real risk that these properties will be left with no phone or broadband access. It was suggested that that there was a legal obligation for them to have access to phone and broadband.

Cllr Thorne said CDS would know about the problems at Ruggin but he was not surprised that Airband didn't. The Government has allocated £30million of funding

for hard to reach properties and it should be being used. Cllr Habgood said that in four years he hadn't heard a statement on what was happening on the ground. Councillors agreed that the Clerk would write to Rebecca Pow MP to support Cllr Ms Drury's emails and to ask her what is being done to ensure that something is done to make sure that the 25 properties do not lose their service. A copy of the letter will also be sent to Pat Flaherty, Chief Executive SCC and Cllr David Hall, SCC Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure, who is on the CDS Board. It was agreed to join the Blackdown Hills Parish Network who are campaigning to improve rural broadband. They meet with Rebecca Pow MP and Neil Parish MP for Tiverton and Honiton, on a regular basis. The Clerk is still waiting to hear what the membership fee will be.

132/01/22. Planning:

a) To consider any planning applications received by the Parish Council prior to the meeting.

46/21/0036 Erection of an agricultural building to serve as a seed and fertiliser store with construction of a water storage tank and associated operational development to include the creation of a consolidated yard area on land at Hamlands, Chelston.

Comment: West Buckland Parish Council supports this application because of the business need. Storing everything under one roof will minimise agricultural traffic.

b) To receive decisions from planning applications determined by SWT Council

46/20/0016 Erection of two storey and single storey extensions to the rear of Highwood Barn, Sawyers Hill, West Buckland (in accordance with amended plans received on 11 November 2021). Decision: condition approval granted.

46/21/0030 Erection of a single storey extension to the rear of 20 Dyers Close, West Buckland. Decision: conditional approval granted.

c) Any other planning matters. There were no other planning matters.

133/01/22. Highways.

a) To note any required work to be reported to SCC. The 'Slow' marking on the road surface just as the road enters the 30mph area has been obliterated. Cllr Ms Drury said this road marking had no legal standing and was just a reminder. However, the fact that it was marked onto the road surface means it was needed. Cllr Habgood said he had reported the same problem on the road to the monument.

b) To receive an update on any outstanding highways work. Now there is a hole in the kerb there is no longer a flooding problem at Frogs Lane when there is heavy rain. The sign in France Lane has still not been replaced.

c) Update on requests to Highways for a speed check and 40 mph speed limit request. There is still no update and the Clerk will continue to chase. Cllr Thorne said other Parish Councils were having trouble trying to communicate

with Highways officers and are not getting anywhere.

d) Any other highways matters. There were no other highways matters.

134/01/22. To note any reports from:

a) County Cllr. A written report from Cllr Thorne had been circulated by email. The 2022-23 budget is being consulted on and will go to Full Council on 23rd February. There have been improvements to the SCC online highways faults reporting system

b) District Cllr. Cllr Habgood said it felt like Somerset West and Taunton Council was in its last throes and appeared to be spending all the money before the new unitary council takes over. The public consultation to see whether people support a proposed new town council for Taunton continues. Residents will also be asked whether the new council should include neighbouring Parish Councils five year land supply is running out, partly because of the Phosphate issue. There is no recognition of the planning applications that are waiting to be decided. They are trying to solve this but are not getting anywhere. £3million of parking charges have been lost which is putting a big dent in income and is having to be taken from reserves. Cllr Habgood felt that off street parking (SWT) and on street parking (SCC) should be linked. The Park and Ride service is also free at the moment and that isn't helping.

c) Police. No report.

d) Somerset Council Action Plan Meeting. This was referred to in Cllr Thorne's written report. Cllr Mitton reported that the job description for councillors was discussed at the last meeting. He said the LCN's can only work on the basis of a consensual approach and will not work if councillors follow their own projects. Each town or parish council will have one councillor who can vote. This is following a pattern that hasn't worked in Wiltshire and councillors need to be able to share representation across their council to spread the load. SALC is holding a meeting with the parishes who are involved in the consultation about being added to the new Taunton Town Council. Cllr Habgood didn't feel this would go away as there is a core group of district councillors who will want to go ahead with plans to take these parishes.

e) Any other reports. There were no other reports.

Cllr Habgood and Cllr Thorne left the meeting.

135/01/22. Finance:

a) To agree and authorise any payments. It was resolved to make the following payment: West Buckland Village Hall Trust - £16.00 (Payment reference 2122/35).

b) To note any receipts and the bank account balances. Bank interest of £1.34 has been received. The Current Account balance is £4,676.70 and the Instant Access balance is £21,668.32.

c) To note the bank reconciliation checks by Cllr Mitton. Cllr Mitton reported that he had checked and signed the bank reconciliations. There were no issues.

136/01/22. Playing Field:

a) Any points to note from the regular inspection. Cllr Lacey will grease the roundabout as it is making more noise when it is turned. The bench by the village hall has been damaged.

b) Tree update. An online survey has been set up to ask residents if they support the planting of a seven tree orchard in a group in the lower corner of the playing field for communal use. If they answer yes, they can give their preference for the types of fruit trees they would like to see.

Mrs Blogg has agreed to take part in the ceremony to plant the Platinum Jubilee tree.

137/01/22. Footpaths: to discuss any footpath matters. There are new residents at Higher Ruggin and the bridleway is now being subjected to a lot more wear. One hundred tonnes of scalpings were put in when Wessex Water restored the bridleway but this has all gone now and it is in a really bad condition.

138/01/22. Correspondence. Cllr Bellamy has circulated a draft copy of a flyer about the planned cycle ride on Sunday 20th March which is part of the campaign for the new Somerset Unitary Authority to prioritise the creation of a Wellington to Taunton Cycle Path along the A38 as a transport priority by 2025. Cllr Silverlight will circulate information on calculating your carbon footprint. The land at Old Lake Cottage has been put up for sale. There was no further correspondence.

139/01/22. Any urgent business at the Chairman's discretions. It was agreed to apply to the Opening Up Safely and Reconnecting Communities Fund (Stage 3) for funding for two benches for the playing field. The new benches, which would be made from recycled plastic, are to encourage people to meet and engage at the playing field.

140/01/22. Date and arrangements for the next meeting. The next meeting will be on 25th January 2022 at 7.30pm.