

WEST BUCKLAND PARISH COUNCIL

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The minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 31st October 2023 at 7.30pm in the Committee Room, at West Buckland Village Hall.

Present: Cllr's C Silverlight (Chair), Ms S Drury, S Bellamy, Mrs B Moore, J Nutt, A Paul and M Wilson.

In attendance: Somerset Cllr's S Wakefield and R Henley, one member of the public and the Clerk, Mrs J Larcombe.

84/10/23. To receive apologies for absence. There were no apologies.

85/10/23. Disclosure of interest in items on the agenda. No disclosures.

86/10/23. To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 26/09/23 as an accurate record of the meeting. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and they were duly signed by the chair.

87/10/23. Matters arising from the minutes not covered by the agenda (for information only). No matters arising.

88/10/23. Co-option of councillors. Two applications for co-option had been received and details were circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. It was unanimously agreed to co-opt Beverley Moore (Proposed by Cllr Silverlight and seconded by Cllr Ms Drury) and Mark Wilson (Proposed by Cllr Bellamy and seconded by Cllr Nutt).

89/10/23. Reports

a) Somerset Council Report. The monthly written report from Cllr Wakefield was circulated by email earlier in the month. She noted the following points: 100% of the plastic Somerset Council collected from households and via the recycling sites last year was recycled in the UK. The Government are now trying to standardise recycling collections, hopefully there will not be too much change as that will incur costs. There are likely to be collection day changes for about 80% of households in Somerset.

She reported that Somerset Council is in a difficult place financially. Changing to a unitary council at this time was one of the worst times to do it. The rising cost of adult social care is one of the reasons for the financial difficulties. SCC were budgeting £500 - £600 per care home place when the cost is now about £900. If funding had been available from the Fair Costs of Care Fund it would have helped.

People are living longer and their savings are dropping below £26,000, at which point all their needs must be met by SC. The point will soon be reached when adult social care and childrens' social care will take up 95% of the budget. For 6 years SCC has only been able to raise its share of the Council tax by 3% which has left very little room for manoeuvre. Steps are being taken to reduce costs so SC doesn't go into administration.

Cllr Paul asked what share of the Council Tax increase is for adult social care and he was told 2%. Care must be provided for people. Childrens' care homes are privately owned and they are expensive. SC is looking at buying some care homes to bring this back in house.

Cllr Henley said the local government system is broken and there needs to be a new relationship between central and local government. His view was that unitary was sold on the falsehood of large savings and that doesn't exist. Local government saved more money during austerity than any other government department.

Cllr Wakefield said SC has reserves of £50million and needs reserves of between £50million and £100million. SCC wasn't accurately working out the yearly increase for adult social care. SC will not know what funding they will receive from the government for 2024-25 until Christmas.

Cllr Henley apologised for not attending the public meeting with Simon Collier and the online meeting to discuss the proposed development at Chelston. Both he and Cllr Wakefield are on the planning committee and will have a vote if the applications come to committee.

The emails regarding alleged speeding on the A38 near the Blackbird B & B and the reports of graffiti under the MS at Junction 26 were noted. Both SC and Highways England are claiming that removing the graffiti is not their responsibility. Cllr Nutt will forward emails about the graffiti to Cllr Wakefield.

Travellers are living in caravans at Coombelands Farm and this has been reported to enforcement. The travellers have been given time to submit an application. It was reported that the pub signs and diversion sign are blocking visibility at the Worlds End A38 junction.

Cllr Ms Drury asked for Cllr Wakefield and Cllr Henley's help to get a response from Matt Barrow to the emails she has sent him.

b) LCN Report (Cllr Bellamy). To discuss items below, prioritise and come up with suggestions as to how councils can tackle these to gain positive change.

i. Safer walking and cycling routes (including horse riding).

ii. Speeding and 20 mile an hour zones.

iii, Public and Community transport routes.

iv, Highways maintenance and Lengthsman scheme.

v, Flooding

Cllr Bellamy reported on the second LCN meeting held on 12th October and said Cllr Henley had chaired it well. Kate from Spark Somerset joined the meeting online to present information about the organisation and their contacts.

There was a presentation from Highways. The following captures some highlights:

- In March they will change from a single contractor to provide all highways support, to several based on traffic themes, road dressings, potholes, hedges etc. so that the contract is awarded to theme based on experts the theme rather than good all-rounder contractor.

- The "report it system" in place is working well? - yes but communications could be better.
- £20 million to distribute across the county sounds a lot, so better communications so people can see how much things actually cost (roughly) would be good to communicate.
- In Exmoor, a sub-group (unpaid) on Traffic was created in their LCN so that they could help/focus where the community wanted action. A good example of what we can do to improve action and a point of contact locally.
- Cutting of hedges was discussed. Main point was that the hedges are the responsibility of the adjacent landowner. However the council will cut where it is for safety reasons eg twice a year, but the responsibility does still remain primarily with the land owner.
- Gully drains - were discussed...council has now reduced the routine clearance from 4 yrs to 2yrs but reacts to all priority reports.
- Road closures were discussed and highways reported that they were currently working on how to inform drivers/users of the distance, etc of the diversion.
- Traffic reported that using councils as communications route to let the local residence know to keep the parking on the road clear where the road sweeper is planned.

They were then asked about priorities and asked to discuss the five themes in the agenda item description with their council to come up with suggestions as to how they can be tackled to gain positive change. Cllr Bellamy said that bearing in mind what Cllr Wakefield had said about SC's financial difficulties he thought the Parish Council needed to put additional money in the budget for 2024-25.

The Clerk asked whether savings could be made by councils grouping together on submitting 20mph speed limit schemes. This would save on advertising costs.

It was suggested that the term vulnerable users could be used to cover pedestrians, cyclists and horses.

Cllr Bellamy will feed back the Parish Council's views either verbally or through the website.

c) Report from meeting with Chair and Vice-chair of the Village Hall

Committee. Cllr Silverlight, Cllr Nutt and the Clerk met with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Village Hall Committee on 3rd October. Much of the discussion was about the EV charging point and the charge to use it. Enquiries are being made to see what other organisations are charging. A cupboard is going to be built in the committee room and used for storage of the items on the edge of the room. Once this has been built the table will be moved around, which it is hoped will create more space in the room.

90/10/23. Democratic Period. The member of the public said that he had come to the meeting to find out what was happening about the proposed planning application for development on land off Silver Street. He is willing to keep people in the parish informed and can print handouts and arrange for them to be circulated. Cllr Ms Drury said it was phenomenal to have people in the parish who volunteer to help.

Cllr Henley and Cllr Wakefield left the meeting.

91/10/23. Update on broadband issues. Cllr Ms Drury explained to the new councillors the ongoing issues and the threat that areas in West Buckland parish that are considered to be 'hard to reach' could completely lose their phone and broadband service in the future. She has been emailing Matt Barrow, Stakeholder Engagement Officer Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS), but he has not been replying to her emails even though he has agreed to update her. Cllr Wilson offered to help Cllr Ms Drury try to get a successful resolution to the issues.

Cllr Wakefield rejoined the meeting.

92/10/23. Planning:

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

46/23/0013. Demolition of lean to the rear with erection of replacement extension at 13 Castle Cottages, Ham, Wellington. Comment: no objection.

46/23/0016 Change of use and alterations to skittle alley to create 5 No. en-suite rooms for holiday accommodation at The Merry Harriers, Blackdown Hill Road, West Buckland. Cllr Paul expressed his concerns about the heritage context of the use of the site by the Somerset Militia in the late 19th Century and the landscape context of the Leigh Hill Military Camp being lost.
Comment: West Buckland Parish Council supports the application.

b) To receive decisions from planning applications determined by Somerset Council. No decisions received

c) To note the public meeting held regarding proposed development on land at Silver Street, West Buckland and any updates. The notes from the meeting have been produced and shared on the Parish Council's Facebook page and the website.

d) Report from online meeting with Simon Fox, SC Major Projects Officer (Planning) regarding proposed housing development on land north of Taunton Road, Wellington. Cllr Nutt had attended the meeting and gave a short report on the proposals. The CIL contribution would be received by Wellington Town Council.

e) Any other planning matters. No other planning matters.

93/10/23. To discuss the Housing Needs Survey proposals. An example letter and survey form were circulated prior to the meeting. Councillors noted that residents who live north of the A38 in the parish need to be taken into consideration. Councillors felt the survey form was too long and too intrusive. The Clerk will feed that information back to Amy Green, Development Enabling Specialist, Somerset Council.

94/10/23. Highways.

a) To note any required work to be reported to SC. A retaining wall in Hockholler Lane is in danger of collapse. Cllr Ms Drury has reported it.

b) To receive an update on outstanding highways work (Kerb at Dyers Close and drainage in Silver Street). No update.

b) Update on repairs to fingerpost sign on Buckland Hill. The Clerk has been advised this will be completed next week.

d) To discuss with Somerset Councillors the negative response received when fly tipping on Buckland Hill was reported by a member of the public. A

member of the public had contacted Cllr Silverlight because of the disappointing response he had received from SC when he reported through their designated website that 10 to 12 tyres had been left along the road verge at the top of Buckland Hill. The response was 'Unfortunately we haven't been able to collect the waste because No where for disposal'. This unhelpful response will be raised with the Somerset Councillors at the next meeting.

e) Any other highways matter. The defect on the road at the top of Buckland Hill had been repaired.

Cllr Mrs Moore asked to raise an issue before she left the meeting and reported an increase in the amount of dog poo left on the playing field. Notices asking people to clean up after their dog/s will be replaced and a message will be put on Facebook and the website. Cllr Mrs Moore will investigate providing dog poo bags at the playing field.

Cllr Mrs Moore left the meeting.

95/10/23. Finance:

a) To agree and authorise any payments. It was resolved to make the following payments:

Mrs J Larcombe - £425.01 Clerk's salary and expenses for October. Additional hours agreed due to additional meetings (Payment ref: 2324/33)

Mr N Richards - £300.00 grass and hedge cutting (Payment ref: 2324/34)

Somerset Council - £730.67 grass cutting and dog bin emptying (Payment ref: 2324/35)

Citizens Advice Somerset - £100 donation (Payment ref: 2324/36)

West Buckland PCC - £1300.00 grant towards the upkeep of the Churchyard (Payment ref: 2324/37)

Somerset Association of Local Councils - £25.00 training session

H M Revenue & Customs - £37.20 PAYE for October (Payment ref: 2324/39)

A transfer will be made from the Current Account to the Instant Access Account to bring the balance back to £1,000.00.

b) To note any receipts since the last meeting and the bank account balances. Since the last meeting a grant of £1,705 has been received from Somerset Council. £800 is for upkeep of the Churchyard and will be part of the grant paid by the Parish Council to the PCC. £735 is towards the playing field and £170 towards footpath maintenance. Somerset Council are very unlikely to pay any of this grant in 2024-25 due to their financial difficulties.

The current account balance is £1,000.00 and the Instant Access Account balance is £20,259.90

c) To review budget v actual for Qtr 2 2023-24 and consider future spending plans. A report was circulated prior to the meeting.

The Clerk reminded councillors that the process of setting the budget for 2024-25 would start at the next meeting as the precept request needs to be submitted mid January. The loss of the grant funding from Somerset Council will have an impact and the precept will need to be increased. Councillors will need to decide whether to carry out a consultation about increasing the precept in the region of £14,000 for one year to cover the cost of extending the 20mph speed limit throughout the village.

Cllr Ms Drury left the meeting at this point.

96/10/23. Playing Field:

a) Any points to note from the regular inspection. There were no points to note.

b) Update on repairs to self-closing gate. The Clerk will follow this up promptly for both pedestrian self-closing gates.

97/10/23. Footpaths:

a) Update on problems on Footpath WG14/11. The footpath warden was going out to check. The Clerk will ask them for an update.

b) Any other footpath matters. Cllr Paul will report to SC PROW that Footpath WG14/21 is overgrown.

A stile on footpath WG14/23 is in a dangerous condition. SC will replace stiles on landowner boundaries, or boundaries with a rod, with kissing gates.

The Clerk will scan a copy of the parish footpath map and will circulate.

98/10/23. To discuss borrowing the thermal imaging camera from the BHPN to carry out simple heat loss surveys of parishioners' properties. This item was deferred to the next meeting.

99/10/23. To note the date of the SALC AGM and to discuss who will attend. Notice has been given that the AGM will be held on Saturday 2nd December. No one is available to attend.

100/10/23. Correspondence. There was no further correspondence.

101/10/23. Any urgent business at the Chairman's discretion (Not for Decisions). None.

102/10/23. To agree the date of the next meeting. The next meeting will be on 28th November 2023.

Signed:
Chair

Date: