

## WEST BUCKLAND PARISH COUNCIL

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**The minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 30th January 2024 at 7.30pm in the Committee Room, at West Buckland Village Hall.**

**Present:** Cllr's C Silverlight (Chair), S Bellamy, Mrs B Moore, J Nutt and A Paul.  
**In attendance:** Somerset Cllr S Wakefield and the Clerk, Mrs J Larcombe

- 136/01/24. To receive apologies for absence.** Apologies were accepted from Cllr Ms S Drury and Cllr M Wilson. Apologies were received from Cllr R Henley, Somerset Council.
- 137/01/24. Disclosure of interest in items on the agenda.** There were no disclosures.
- 138/01/24. To agree the minutes of the meetings held on 09/01/24 as accurate records of the meetings.** The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and duly signed by the Chair.
- 139/01/24. Matters arising from the minutes not covered by the agenda (for information only).** No matters arising.
- 140/01/24. Reports: Somerset Council Report.** A written report for January was circulated by email earlier in the month. Cllr Wakefield said it was difficult to justify what is going on in lots of ways. Until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 there were 5 councils providing services across Somerset and now they are trying to run the new unitary council whilst reshaping. The £18million saving from becoming a unitary authority isn't enough to cover increasing costs. Budgeting properly for adult social care (ASC) is the main cause of increased expenditure. The lockdown made some older people frailer. Weekly care costs have increased by a third. Increases to the minimum wage/living wage has increased costs by £5million. Having to set a balanced budget this year while having to catch up on underestimated ASC costs from the previous administration has proved harder than she expected. She feels that SCC knew the cost of ASC was going to go up a lot. SC budgeted for the fair costs of care and thought additional funding was going to be available from the Government for this but the scheme has been delayed. If SC can get through 2024-25 they will be on a more even keel next year. They are being open and honest about it even if people don't like it. The government is putting more onto councils but are not giving them any more money. It is not just Somerset. The Government is saying some councils are crying wolf too soon. This year SC will

try and meet the deficit and will start working on the 2025-26 budget in September. She was asked what their cap on increasing council tax is and was told 2.99% plus 2% for social care. SC has asked the government for permission to increase council tax by 10% but so far only councils who are bankrupt have been allowed an additional increase. They were hopeful in the beginning that the Government would think that Somerset was a special case but she doesn't think they will. If SC was to go bankrupt the Government would take over and cut services. £18million of income is being held up because phosphate mitigation issues are holding up planning applications. Surplus assets will be sold in a sensible way over the next two to three years. There is concern that other councils will be doing the same, which will reduce the price.

There are 8,500 people receiving ASC and 50% of them need full support financially. People are living longer but often have complex needs and want to live at home. Children in Care now have to be looked at until they are 25 instead of until they leave care at 18. They are trying to keep CiC in houses in Somerset. A lot of agencies are now foreign owned. They need to buy housing for asylum seekers but the government are not giving them enough funding.

Cllr Bellamy noted that sometimes you have to let the wheel fall off to get something done but he didn't want it to happen in this case. He asked when it would impact if there wasn't enough. It would be when the S144 notice is issued but that doesn't do what is needed.

After doing a lot of asking Cllr Wakefield has found out about ditches. If they belong to highways they are already done every one to two years. Any ditch which has a verge in front is likely to belong to the landowner. If SC doesn't own the ditch they will not clean it. They should still do as much to this going forward. They are also looking at setting up a Highways Steward scheme.

Cllr Wakefield left the meeting at 7.55pm.

**141/01/23. Democratic Period.** No members of the public present.

**142/01/23. Planning:**

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

**46/23/0021.** Change of use of garage to cafe and retail area at Blackbird Inn, Wellington Road, West Buckland (retention of part works already undertaken). Comment: no objections.

**b) To receive decisions from planning applications determined by Somerset Council.**

**46/23/0019/A** Display of 4 No. non-illuminated advertisement/sponsorship signs on Chelston Roundabout, Wellington, A38/205. Decision: conditional approval granted. While there was concern that the signs would detract from the appearance of the roundabout it was recognised that the sponsorship pays for the upkeep of the roundabout.

**c) Any other planning matters.** No other planning matters.

**143/01/24. Update on broadband issues.** The Clerk reported that Matt Barrow CDS Stakeholder Engagement Officer has agreed to attend the meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February instead of this meeting. It is not known how many members of the public are likely to attend and the Clerk will check to see if it is possible to use the

main hall instead of the committee room.

**144/01/24. Update on carrying out a Housing Needs Survey with Somerset Council.**

The Clerk has informed Amy Green, Development Enabling Specialist, that the Parish Council would like to go ahead with the survey and preparations are being made.

**145/01/24. Highways.**

**a) To note any required work to be reported to SC.** There is a big pothole on Gerbestone Lane. Cllr Paul will report this online.

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

**c) Any other highways matters.** Cllr Silverlight has contacted Forestry England about the damaged fencing and fly tipping at the top of Buckland Hill

**146/01/24. Finance:**

**a) To agree and authorise any payments.** It was resolved to make the following payments: Somerset Council - £268.43 1 grass cut at the playing field and dog bin emptying Quarter 3 (Payment ref: 2324/47)

Mrs J Larcombe - £426.40 Clerks salary January 2024 & additional hours December 2023 (payment ref: 2324/48)

H M Revenue & Customs - £37.60 PAYE for January (Payment ref: 2324/49)

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 balance.** Since the last meeting no payments have been received.

The current account balance is £1,092.02 and the Instant Access Account balance is £18,184.53. Payments of £114.00 and £23.40 authorised at the 9<sup>th</sup> January meeting are waiting to be authorised as the Clerk had not informed the signatories the payments were ready to be authorised.

**c) To continue discussions and agree the budget for 2024-25.** The Clerk reported that Cllr Henley and Cllr Wakefield had been very helpful in chasing up SC for information about what they would expect the Parish Council to pay for in 2024-25. There needs to be a wider piece of work to harmonise charging between the old district areas, but that's not done yet. So, for the Parish Council the status quo for last year remains. SC will continue to cut the areas of open space in the parish for 2024-25 as they have done previously. They will be working up any changes to 2025-26 rounds between now and the summer, so if there any implications, new charges or asks of the Parish Council as a result, they will be in touch in good time.' Whatever bins they charged for last year they will charge again this year, and there are no extra charges for other bins proposed for 2024-25. If this changes for 2025-26 early notice will be given. Although the Clerk had not received the quote for grass cutting and dog bin emptying from SC that she had requested Cllr Wakefield had been told it would be around £8 per collection.

The Clerk had amended the draft budget accordingly.

The PCC had supplied their 2022 accounts (the 2023 were with the accountant) and it was agreed to keep the Churchyard Grant at £1,300.00. The Parish Council will pay the £800 that it previously received as a grant. After considering the amended budget, earmarked reserves and general reserves the budget was agreed.

**d) To agree the precept for 2024-25.** It was agreed to set the precept at £11,782.00.

**147/01/24. Review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.** Following changes to the values in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (“the 2015 Regulations”) the Clerk recommended amendments to the Financial Regulations and Standing Orders.

It was agreed that paragraph 11.1 b) and f) of the Financial Regulations are changed to:

11.1 b) *Where the council intends to procure or award a public supply contract, public service contract or public works contract as defined by The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (“the Regulations”) which is valued at £30,000 or more, the council shall comply with the relevant requirements of the Regulations.*

11.1 f) *If less than three tenders are received for contracts above £30,000 or if all the tenders are identical the council may make such arrangements as it thinks fit for procuring the goods or materials or executing the works.*

and Standing Orders 18 a) v, 18 c) and 18 f) are changed to:

18 a) v *Whether contracts with an estimated value below £30,000 due to special circumstances are exempt from a tendering process or procurement exercise.*

18 c) *A public contract regulated by the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 with an estimated value in excess of £30,000 but less than the relevant thresholds in standing order 18(f) is subject to Regulations 109-114 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 which include a requirement on the Council to advertise the contract opportunity on the Contracts Finder website regardless of what other means it uses to advertise the opportunity unless it proposes to use an existing list of approved suppliers (framework agreement).*

18 f) *A public contract regulated by the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 with an estimated value in excess of £213,477 for a public service or supply contract or in excess of £5,336,967 for a public works contract (or other thresholds determined by the European Commission every two years and published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU)) shall comply with the relevant procurement procedures and other requirements in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 which include advertising the contract opportunity on the Contracts Finder website and in OJEU.*

**148/01/24. Playing Field:**

**a) Any points to note from the regular inspection.** No points to note. The Village Hall Committee has installed CCTV and one of the cameras covers the play area. Signage is in place as required.

**b) Update on repairs to self-closing gates.** The parts have now arrived and the contractor will install them as soon as possible.

**c) Any other playing field matters.** None.

**149/01/24. Footpaths:**

**a) Update on problems on Footpath WG14/11.** In an email to the Clerk John Melrose, Rights of Way Area Warden, reported that he had walked the route. He found it to be acceptable for width but, obviously, this needs to be maintained. He has written to the landowner to explain the situation and their responsibilities. He suggested cutting schedules for their benefit and will be monitoring the situation in the future. If any further issues are encountered he can be contacted.

**b) Any other footpath matters.** None.

**150/01/24. Correspondence.** There was no further correspondence.

**151/01/24. Any urgent business at the Chairman's discretion (Not for Decisions).** No urgent business.

**152/01/24. To note the date of the next meeting.** The next meeting will be held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

Signed:  
Chair

Date: