

**WEST & MIDDLE CHINNOCK PARISH COUNCIL**  
**Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

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

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

**Public Forum: Resident to talk on Fortunes Well when Cllr Ashton arrives**

**24/1152** **Apologies for Absence:** None, however Cllr Ashton confirmed to the Clerk he would be late as he would be at another PC meeting prior to W&MC PC meeting.

**24/1153** **Declarations of Interest: Cllr Ashton joined the meeting. 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.

**24/1154** **To Approve and Sign as Correct the Minutes from the Parish Council Meeting, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Previous Minutes Resolved. All in Favour.**

**24/1155** **Matters Arising Not on Agenda: Request to Purchase Drain Rods:** The Clerk explained that Keith & Gill Dodge regularly clear the drains on Hollowell Hill, Smiths Hill and Lower Street. In response to devolution of services and the move towards more self-reliance for some services, Mr Dodge had recommended the villages have a set of rods to enable local residents to clear their own drains and perhaps have a team of volunteers to help. By purchasing rods for the villages, residents would be able to borrow them. Mr Dodge offered to train any residents and volunteers on how to use them. Price £87.44. **Proposed Cllr Griffiths, seconded Cllr Partridge. All in Favour, Resolved**

**24/1156** **Somerset Council, Councillors Report:** Cllr Hewitson confirmed there were no specific issues impacting on the villages over and above what was being discussed. He confirmed that the capitalisation directive at Somerset Council had now been approved and this should support finances for the next year. Shortfall in funding is significant for SEND, (Special Educational Needs. & Disabilities). Crewkerne recycling centre, no decisions yet, but there is a lot of support to attempt to keep it open.

**24/1157** **Planning:**

**a. Applications:**

- i) **Fortunes Well 22/00724/FUL, Higher Street, West Chinnock:** The Clerk confirmed that she and Neil Tinkley had met with the Senior Planning Officer for a Zoom meeting. In preparation for the meeting they had re-read all of the existing 68 comments from residents, had studied the previous plans as well as the new plans and taken on board the feedback from the latest consultees including Highways, the emergency services and comments from the Parish Council. Recommendation: Objection on the following Grounds: a) Severe safety concerns regarding access and visibility at the proposed entrance to the site, lack of space for parked cars, waste removal and delivery vehicles and emergency vehicles. b) Lack of adequate turning space for emergency vehicles, lack of adoption of the roads on the site by Highways. c) Conservation issues on Higher Street, including the over prominence of some of the houses on the site. d) Sufficiency of drainage, flood risk and concerns raised by the fire brigade relating to low water pressure. e) Lack of landscape plan. The PC concluded that the standing advice made by Highways and other agencies had not taken in to account the topography of the area; the steep gradients had been ignored and the uniqueness of the

site and its access on Higher Street at a dangerous junction, had been disregarded. The PC urged the planning team to request further advice from Highways, including a site visit and to consider the wealth of knowledge and expertise from residents who understand the dangers already facing cars, vehicles and residents who use Higher Street. A Member of the public expressed their concern on the height of the properties overlooking Higher Street and reiterated that the planning officer had also previously asked for the height to be reduced. The PC supported the comments and agreed to include these in their response. **Action: Clerk and NT to work up new objection and circulate to PC for approval before the submission date of 16.03.24. It was agreed that should the application be referred to the Planning Committee, the Parish Council would attend.**

**b. Determinations:**

- i) **Eastall Farm 24/00020/HOU, Lower Street, West Chinnock. (Revised Application of 23/00260/HOU): Granted, with standing advice.**

**c. Planning Enforcement:**

- i) **Hollowell Hill: C/F from last meeting, no further update.**
- ii) **Smith's Hill:** The Planning Officer who has now taken over this case had fed back via email that he has been in discussions with the landowner (Mr Doble) and the activity that residents and others were witnessing related to the works to address the notices which had already been served. It was noted that the weather conditions have not been favourable, but that works should re-commence soon. He concluded by saying the site was being monitored.

**24/1158**

**Finance:**

- a. **To pay SLL February 24 Invoice £166.94 inc VAT. Cut checked. Resolved. All in Favour.**
- b. **HMRC decision: HMRC penalty dating back to 21/22.** The Clerk explained that she would still like to speak to HMRC to confirm this, but was finding it hard to get through via phone.
- c. **Delegated Powers Payments and Previously Agreed Invoices:**
- i) To note payment of salary to Clerk for February £475.97 & 296.37 back pay carried forward from the February 24 PC meeting. Net £617.74.
- ii) To note HMRC PAYE payment for February 2024: £156.58
- iii) To note payment for Remembrance Sunday, previously agreed at the November 23 PC meeting under item Finance 23/1124 (b).
- d. **To Pay any routine or previously agreed invoices:**
- i) **To Pay Wessex Water Bill – Allotments: £211.00. Resolved. All in Favour.**

**24/1159**

**Allotments:**

- a. **Allotment Inspection 24/25:** Will take place late spring. Date TBC. Email will be sent out giving notice of date of inspection.
- b. **Rent Review:** Cllr Partridge made a presentation and submitted a proposal for the Allotments to become cost neutral from April 2025. He explained that the allotments were an important part of our vibrant community and are well supported. Research had been undertaken looking at the average national cost per m2 price and the local south Somerset prices. W&MC rent rates was significantly lower than local and national rates. Cllr Partridge also confirmed that the W&MC plots were at least double the size of the recommended plot size. He gave examples where locally, quarter size plots were classed as full-size single plots and explained the importance of charging a price per m2. The proposed rent figure by Cllr Partridge was based on achieving cost neutrality and took into account all existing costs and future predicted costs. Currently the full W&MC plot price per m2 is £0.016 where as the national average is 13p per m2. (These figures exclude water as not all allotments in the UK provide water). An additional charge will be made for non-parish allotments holders as they do not pay in to the Parish Precept.

A refundable deposit will be introduced for any new plot holders in 24/25 which will be returned when the plot is returned in a state the same as when the Tenancy contract commenced. It was confirmed that if existing tenants give notice in 2024/25, they will still be required to leave the site in good condition, as outlined in their tenancy agreement. However, existing tenants will be required to pay a deposit from April 2025. The figures are based on full capacity at the allotments, however normally there are one or two allotments which are vacant. Concern was raised about any major costs and who would cover this. After discussion it was agreed that the growth in the sink fund could cover this. The proposal includes a sink fund of £100.00 for any unforeseen purchases; to keep the rent the same for 24/25 and introduce the new prices in April 25; increase the rent on an annual basis, at least in line with inflation and this will be included in the new tenancy agreements from April 2025. **Proposal 2025/26:** £33.00 for a full plot, £17.50 for a half plot and £10.00 for a quarter plot a year. Water, £11.00 for a full plot, half plot £6.00 and quarter plot £4.00. (Confirmed water is fixed charge with a stand pipe). **Proposed: Cllr Ashton seconded Cllr Griffiths. All in Favour, Resolved. Action: Clerk to check hedge and grass cutting invoices from SLL.**

- c. **Issue of 24/25 Tenancy Agreements:** Clerk to send out at the beginning of April to ensure that the accounting year for receipt of payments is between financial year 1.04.24 and 31.03.25.

**24/1160**

**Matters arising from 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024 meeting:**

- a. **Youth Shelter:** The review of the historic paperwork is on-going between Cllrs James and Bennett. To include checking for change of use documentation.
- b. **Core Policy Review: C/F**
- c. **Asset Register: C/F**
- d. **Dangerous Parking on Scotts Way next to school: C/F**
- e. **Community Play Area based at the school:** Meeting should be happening at end of March, but no confirmation yet. Concern raised that costs are increasing. **Action: Clerk to arrange to give notice to school for non-opening from end of April. Cllr Ashton to provide information on gate closure system.**

**24/1161**

**Reports & Correspondence:**

- a. **Proposed Price Increase SLL (Landscape and Grass cutting):** Previously circulated. It was agreed to go out to Tender, as a review of contractors had not taken place in the recommended 3 year cycle, however as Councillors were happy with the existing service from SLL, an agreed to continue contracting with them for the time being. Grass cutting at the Rec was discussed and the cost to the Parish Council in relation to the precept. It was agreed to review grass cutting at the Rec. Clerk to check Public Liability Insurance for those undertaking additional grass cutting and maintenance activities on the Rec. **SSL price increase agreed. Action: Clerk to identify companies to go out to Tender and to check public liability Insurance for others carrying out maintenance on the Rec.**
- b. **Proposed Price Increase Cox & Co Payroll:** Cox & Co have put their charges up to £25.00 per month rather than £25.00 per Qtr. Due to the previous issues with HMRC, they are not prepared to reinstate the quarterly payment. **Action: the PC requested the Clerk seek a more cost-effective payroll company.**
- c. **The Knapp, grass cutting:** Reinstated in front of Tree Cottage.
- d. **Update: Somerset Council financial challenges, devolution and implications:** Budget agreed and confirmation of Council Tax increase. Concerns still remain regarding financial viability going forward and the impact on Parish Councils' services.
- e. **Devolution update and transfer of payment of services to Parish Councils:** The Clerk confirmed there will be a price list of services that Parish Councils can buy into, including a Highways Steward. For example Kier have taken on all of the Highway services, however this has not been finalised, or published yet.

The positive side to this is that there is now a delay in when the withdrawal of some of the services will happen. i) Sandbags: no longer available. Residents will have to purchase these themselves. (However, it was noted that sandbags had not been available to W&MC residents for a number of years). ii) Salt, not being cut until at least 2026 iii) Dog Bin/mixed waste emptying, still not completely clear, however may be delayed to 2025. It was noted that there had been a lot of overflowing bins not just in W&MC, but all-over South Somerset. The bins had now been emptied. **Action: Clerk to email Cllr Patrick to ask what was the reason behind why the bins were not emptied. The Clerk confirmed she had previously contacted Cllr Oliver Patrick, and he had reported them overflowing.** iv) Verge cutting stopping, however where there are safety issues with visibility, the verges will be cut. v) Gullies still cleaned as part of the statutory responsibility; however, the proposed frequency may not be enough now due the status of W&MCs roads. As the villages are in an area prone to flooding, it was noted W&MC will move up the priority list. vi) Some reactive road maintenance may continue, however there has been no schedule published yet.

- f. **Local Community Networks:** Local highways discussions have been positive, however there is no funding in the budget for next year for LCNs to continue. Feedback has been that they have been positive for the larger towns, where they have full time Clerks who are fully funded, however Parish Councils, who rely on Volunteer Members and part time Clerks have not gained any significant benefit.
- g. **Clerk Report: By Exception:** Nothing to report, which hasn't already been covered.
- h. **Scotts Way River Bank Collapse Maintenance:** Highways has confirmed that funding has been ringfenced for maintenance to commence in the new financial year.
- i. **Cancellation of Drain Maintenance, Smiths Hill/Poop Hill:** Cancelled until new financial year by Highways, due to all spending being put on hold by Somerset Council.
- j. **Mobile Library update:** The service will continue, details on the bus notice board and also on social media. Really important residents continue to use the service, or it will be cut.
- k. **Footpaths: update:** Nothing report.
- l. **Drains, Potholes and Hedges: Nothing to report:** Residents asked to please keep reporting potholes, highways issues and flooding on the Somerset portal. Please send details to the Clerk if the portal can't be accessed or you do not have access to a computer.
- m. **Extra Item:** Annual Parish Council meeting. The Clerk explained the aim of the Annual Parish meeting was to encourage residents to come together to share what's going on the community. The Clerk proposed holding the Annual Parish Meeting on a Saturday Morning in May and inviting all organisations in the village to come along, and residents to share updates and celebrate the vibrancy of our villages. Bacon butties, tea and coffee provided by the Parish Council. **Action: Clerk to organise with Members.**

24/1162

**Correspondence & Matters for Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024 Agenda.**

- a. **Agenda items, including Members Reports:** To be forwarded to the Clerk before Friday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

Meeting closed 8.50pm

**Next Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**7.30pm, Village Hall, West Chinnock**