

WEST & MIDDLE CHINNOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 13th December 2023

Cllr Bennett - Chair

Cllr Cawley

Cllr Griffiths

Clerk: Kim Duller

8 Members of the General Public

Cllr Ashton

Cllr Cockrem – Deputy Chair

Cllr Partridge

Public Forum: i) JN volunteered his time to lead a Community Review project which had been discussed at the October 23 PC meeting, but would need support with administration. He was keen for the community to undertake this project and felt it would be a good mapping exercise to pull together different “strands” in the villages and would help perspective on planning issues, flooding etc and would also tie in with the Local Community Networks, which he had also attempted to volunteer for. ii) JN commented that he thought the “Road Closure” signs were a good idea and perhaps could be used when a Road is clearly impassable and thus the PC was not liable for closing the Road, however notifying that the Road is already closed, using this as the legal basis for the PC to intervene. iii) JN also mentioned the Rec signage. Cllr Bennett confirmed this had already been commissioned and has been installed at the carpark entrance and on the Pavilion. iv) JN suggested the idea of a “Community Medal”.

23/1129 **Apologies for Absence:** None.

23/1130 **Declarations of Interest:** i) Cllr Cawley, Allotments. ii) Cllr Bennett, Community Playground Committee.

23/1131 **To Approve and Sign as Correct the Minutes from the Parish Council Meeting, 8th November 2023. Previous Minutes Resolved. All in Favour.**

23/1132 **Matters Arising Not on Agenda:**

a. **Co-option of Steve Ashton to become a Parish Councillor.** As a resident and regular visitor to the Parish Council meetings, the Chair explained that Steve has contributed invaluable advice on local issues relating to Somerset Council. Steve will not take on any PC portfolios, however will continue to give advice relating to local issues relating to Somerset Council, LCNs, and other local issues. **Proposed, Cllr Griffiths, seconded, Cllr Cawley. All in Favour. Resolved.** The Chair formally welcomed Cllr Ashton. **Action: Clerk to send Cllr Ashton new Member paperwork.**

23/1133 **SCC/SSDC Councillors Report:** Previously circulated. Members agreed there were no items to discuss which were relevant to the meeting, or were not already Agenda items. It was noted that there was no attendance from elected Councillors and apologies had been given.

23/1134 **Planning:**

a. **Applications:**

- i) **Notification of intent to fell No.1 Tree within a Conservation Area: 23/03043/TCA, Manor Farm, Middle Chinnock. Tree(s) in Conservation Area.** For information only.
- ii) **23/02957/COU at Eastall Farm, Lower Street West Chinnock. Change of use of land from agricultural to C3 residential to enlarge the residential curtilage of the main dwelling.** The Clerk confirmed that an extension has been given by the Planning Officer to submit comments until 14.01.24 to enable the Parish Council to consider the applications further. The Chair confirmed that any comments made by the Parish Council will be published on the website or PC Facebook page as there would not be another PC meeting before February 2024.

The Clerk confirmed the Planning Officer is Nick Troop. **Comments from the Public:** Concerns were raised as follows: **i)** Potential to acquire rights over a period of time. (A303 Christmas tree farm given as example, with potential for out-of-town shopping site). **ii)** It was queried why development has already started on the site, therefore was this a retrospective application? **Action: Clerk to query with planners.** **iii)** The proportion of land this represents between West and Middle Chinnock should be considered within the planning response as it is a significant amount of land, and the community should have a view on this. **iv)** It was recommended that the Parish Council have a meeting with the owners to understand what the end goal of their plans for development are, as there had already been significant development on the site and also for the community to be more involved. **v)** If consent is likely to be given, conditions should be applied in terms of the principles of CIL. Development which has and will take place will significantly increase in overall value of the site and the resultant requirement for contribution to community development. **vi)** It was considered that the changes were disproportionate to the site, including issues relating to scale. It was questioned why change of use should be applied to the whole piece of land, rather than just the area determined by the plans. **Action: Clerk to take advice from planners.**

- iii) 23/02917/HOU at Eastall Farm, Lower Street West Chinnock. Erection of greenhouse in garden within conservation area.** (See also notes under item ii)23/02957/COU. Concern was raised relating to the wall. It was queried whether there was planning in place for the wall which had been built. It was again raised that the community should be encouraged to engage with this planning application. **Action: Clerk to take advice from the planners.**
- iv) Fortunes Well 22/00724/FUL, Higher Street, West Chinnock:** No further update on planning portal. Residents keen to find out what is happening. **Action: Clerk to ask SC Cllr Patrick for update and to circulate information to residents if it is received.**

b. Determinations: None.

c. Planning Enforcement:

- i) Hollowell Hill: C/F from last meeting, no further update.**
- ii) Smith's Hill: Further works commenced. Action: Clerk to ask for update from SC Cllr Patrick.**

d. Planning Queries: None

23/1135

Finance:

a. To pay any routine invoices: None.

b. Delegated powers and previously agreed invoices:

- i) To pay Clerk monthly salary net £353.44 for November and also December as there is no meeting in January 2024. Resolved.**
- ii) National pay salary award has now been announced and will be backdated to April 2023.** Increase £1.00 per hour to be backdated and paid by delegated powers. **Action: Clerk to calculate and circulate to Members for approval.**
- iii) To record receipt of annual rent for the land known as Greatfields £200.00.** The rent calculation will be discussed as part of the Parish budget 24/25. (There are 2 elements to Greatfields rent a) The Wolds, Greatfields Land, Peppercorn rent of £5.00 pa for additional garden land use and b) the old Allotments rent currently rented to Warren Farm Trust for £200.00pa).
- iv) To note standing order payment of £30.00 to Cox and Co.** This is for quarterly payroll management charge.

- v) To pay HMRC quarterly PAYE charge of £265.80. Payment due by 02.02.2024.

Resolved.

- vi) To pay Cllr Cawley Invoice £28.40 for replacement posts at Rec. Resolved.

23/1136

Allotments:

- a. **Rent Increase discussions still ongoing.** Advice been given by NATSALG and also survey of local rents taken. Discussion will be in parallel with Parish budget discussions.

23/1137

Matters arising from 11th October 2023 meeting:

- a. **Youth Shelter c/f to Feb 24 meeting due to Chair reviewing historic documentation.**
- b. **Pot Holes Recreation Ground:** All maintenance completed no further action.
- c. **Salt Bin, Lower Street:** Cllr Cawley and Keith Dodge have installed the new salt bin on Smiths Hill, next to the new development to protect residents/motor vehicles etc against ice forming, as a consequence of the hazardous constant water runoff from the site. The Chair thanked Cllr Cawley and Mr Dodge. i) **Action: Clerk to review the condition of the trees adjacent to the new salt bin with the Chairman as it was reported these are dead. Landowner to be contacted if trees need maintenance or removal.** ii) **Action: It was confirmed that there are still 20 bags of salt left. Cllrs Cawley and Bennett to confirm where the salt bags are and the overall quantity of salt remaining a.s.a.p to enable future Precept decision making on purchase of salt.**
- d. **Recreation Ground Signage:** New basic statutory signage has been placed on the gate to the carpark and the Pavilion. The Chair confirmed that the plan is to purchase a larger community-based Recreation sign in the future as part of the Recreation Ground development.
- e. **Core Policies and Standing Orders Review: c/f 14.02.2024**
- f. **Asset Register c/f 14.02.2024**
- g. **Parish Council Grants & Caretaker Costs for Opening:** A grant application had been received from the Childrens Playground Committee. The Caretaker cost for opening and closing the children's play area at the school was also discussed as a separate item as it is not part of the grant budget and had previously been a precept item.
- i) **Caretaker Costs:** A discussion was held relating to how the caretaker and volunteers open and close the play area, distinguishing between when it is opened specifically for school children and when it is open for community use. NC explained that the background to the grant for the original play area development was conditional to the school allowing the community to use it out of school time, including weekends, school holidays and the school would have sole use during term time/school hours. Originally the caretaker costs were split 3 ways and what was left over from the grant was used as costs towards the play area. This pot of money has now been diminished. The PC paid £519.45 in 22/23 and the latest request is for £640.00 which represents 2/3rd of caretakers cost. It was queried why the PC was having to pay 2/3rd of the cost, as well as also being asked to fund the grant for maintenance. The Chair reiterated the difficult situation the PC finds itself in and has to scrutinise the existing precept to see if there were any cost savings going forward due to having to take on extra services in the future. There was also discussion relating to finding innovative ways to open the play area without needing volunteers and the caretaker using IT opening and closing solutions. A leafleting campaign to encourage parents and grandparents, whose children use the play area to consider becoming volunteers, was also discussed. **Action: It was agreed that NC, as part of the Playground Committee, would have a fact-finding discussion with the school regarding its existing obligation to provide support for the community as part of the original grant conditions to develop the play area. Also to review all of the original obligations in the original paperwork relating to caretaker costs and maintenance for the play area. NC concluded by explaining that the school has**

previously taken on significant costs to support the maintenance of the play area, including the 5 a side football pitch and tennis court.

- ii) Grant for Repairs to the Childrens Play Area at the School:** An application had been received to contribute £820.00 towards a total of £970.00 to repair broken equipment, having already had committed income of £150.00 from the Playground Committee and the 5 a side Committee. The Chair confirmed that the PC is keen to use the PC grants to support “community” equipment and organisations. A discussion was held and the PC queried whether any other fundraising had taken place within the community including if there was a contribution from the school. It was confirmed that the school had responded by saying that they did not have any money to support the maintenance and neither were they able to undertake any fundraising. It was also noted that no external grant applications had been made. The Chair stressed that it was really important that organisations who submit grant applications are committed to raising some match funding through fundraising as well as providing evidence of attempting to make applications to external grant givers. The Chair explained that this is part of the written application process. NC confirmed that whilst there had been significant fundraising when the Playground was built, that the Committee was no longer a fundraising Committee and its role was to now act as PC and school representation as well as a day-to-day management and administration committee. NC explained that in the past the PFA and school had been very supportive and had refurbished the playground as well as obtaining a grant from the District Council. Discussion at the time of the grant from the District Council included the need to continue to build up funds on an annual basis to be able to maintain the playground. It was discussed whether going forward the PC should be setting this funding as part of the Precept to support health and wellbeing as this benefits the whole village. The Chair confirmed this could be part of the wider Recreation Ground Development Committee and the Health & Wellbeing agenda and agreed that it was difficult for NC and TJ to organise funding themselves as part of the Playground Committee.

At this point in the meeting the Chair was handed to the Deputy Chair Cllr Cockrem due to the already stated conflict of interest for the existing Chair as a current Member of the Playground Committee.

Decision: A vote was taken on whether the full grant should be awarded, proposed by Cllr Cockrem, however this was not supported. (3 against, 1 in favour, one abstention). After discussion a second vote was taken and it was proposed that 50% of the grant be awarded. It was confirmed by NC at this point that a safety inspection had taken place and all of the equipment was safe to use, although the inspection report has not yet been received. If the equipment is deemed unsafe the school will have to carry out maintenance. NC to go back to the school to discuss how to move forward and also hold back the funding until it has been match funded. In summary, all agreed that the Playground is vitally important to the village and partnership is required between the school and the community to move forward with a plan to sustain the playground in the future. If the school is unable to provide the funding, fundraising suggestions included Go Fund Me, writing to parents who have businesses, direct contact with parents who use the school and are residents etc. **Proposal:** Cllr Cockrem proposed a grant of £410.00, seconded by Cllr Partridge, all in favour. **Resolved.** The Chair concluded the item requesting that NC keep the PC updated on discussions with the School.

- h. **Parish Council: Councillor Vacancies:** Now that Cllr Ashton has become a Member, there is still one vacancy by Co-option.

23/1138

Reports & Correspondence:

- a. **Update on “Somerset Council” Financial Challenges and Precept setting for 24/25:** Cllr Ashton gave an overview of the current situation. The bankruptcy decision is still up in the air at the moment. Cost of redundancies is an issue because capital funding cannot be used; neither can any monies be moved across from the revenue budget without first being approved by central government. An application has been made to central government to raise council tax by up to 10%, however; so far no approval has been given. Government Commissioners can only be brought if the budget cannot be agreed. If Commissioners are appointed, council tax could be higher in order to produce a balanced budget and they also have the power to cut services. The Clerk explained that normally the Parish Council sets the draft Precept at the December Parish Council meeting. The impact on the PC with the current uncertainty around the Somerset Council Budget, potential devolution of services and lack of information regarding statutory and non statutory services has the consequence that it is incredibly difficult to set an accurate Precept now, however a number of scenarios are being considered. All Parish Councils in Somerset have been given until 2.02.2024 to submit a Precept. **Action: Further discussions will be taking place between Councillors during January 2024 as and when the Clerk receives updated information, which is currently being drip fed out from Somerset Council.** Somerset Council will not be setting its budget until the end of February, so it will be impossible to create a 100% accurate budget figure with regards to services. Additional costs that the Parish Council is expecting to pay for thus far are Dog waste bins and salt. An extraordinary meeting will be held in late January to decide the Precept. Cllr Ashton also gave an update on the progress of the Stroke Unit review, relating to the proposal to move YDH Stroke Services to Taunton Musgrove, which is not being supported by a number of Local Somerset Councillors and other professionals.
- b. **Parish Council Grants:** No other grants were applied for apart from the Children’s Play Area at the School. Previously discussed under item 23/1137g ii)
- c. **Flooding in the Villages:** The Chairman thanked the community for coming together during the recent floods, both practically by the constant clearing of drains and sand bagging, but also the high level of reporting of incidents by Parish Councillors, individual residents and the community as a whole. He also praised the Somerset Highways team for their quick response to Smiths Hill and repeat visits, despite there being enormous pressure across the whole County. It was noted that there had been further landslips on Scott’s Way and Smokey Hole Lane and thanked the farmers for clearing these again. It was also noted that there was a huge upsurge in visitors to the community Facebook page during the floods, looking for information and there had been positive feedback. **Action: Clerk to continue liaising with Highways.**
- d. **Somerset Rivers Authority draft Strategy and Flood Action Plan:** **Action: Clerk to re-circulate to Parish Councillors for comment. Clerk to re-issue advice regarding regular reporting of village flood hotspots, (with link to website) reiterating that the more reports are submitted, the more likely action will be taken to mitigate flooding at the hotspots in the future.**
- e. **Footpaths:** Nothing to report.
- f. **Drains, Potholes and Hedges:** i) Potholes on Hollowell Hill are becoming deeper. The Chair confirmed that these potholes have been reported. A resident had hit the holes and received 2 flat tyres. All residents are urged to report any potholes and accidents with potholes. It was also noted that there is guidance relating to land owners and liability relating to keeping roads safe.

Action: Clerk to re-circulate pothole reporting link and link to pothole claims, also to query if claims can only be made if a pothole has been reported. ii) Concern had been raised that the new School speed 20mph sign on Lower Street has been placed in front of a tree and it is likely that when in full leaf, the sign will be blocked. **Action: Parish Council to review in Spring/Summer.**

g. **Unitary Updates:** None.

23/1139

Correspondence & Matters for Wednesday 14.02.2024

- a. **Agenda items, including Members Reports:** To be forwarded to the Clerk before Thursday 8th February 2024.

Meeting closed 8.20pm

Next Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 14th February 2024

7.30pm, Village Hall, West Chinnock