

MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of NETTLECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL
FOLLOWING THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
Held on TUESDAY 14th MAY 2024 – 7.45 pm

PRESENT: Cllrs Robin Wichard (Chair), Oliver Reynolds, Iain Mackie, Marilyn Crothers, Liz Scott, Somerset Cllrs Christine Lawrence, Clerk – Carol Juffs.

IN ATTENDANCE: There were no Residents present

DECLARATION OF INTEREST:

None declared

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Justin Nichols and Cllr Marcus Kravis

2. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Chair: Iain Mackie chaired this part of the meeting as vice-chair. Oliver Reynolds proposed that Robin Wichard should be re-elected to the post, seconded by Iain Mackie. Robin Wichard accepted the post.

Vice-Chair: Iain Mackie was proposed by Robin Wichard and seconded by Liz Scott.

Other Committee Responsibilities: Highways - Marilyn Crothers, proposed by Oliver Reynolds and seconded by Robin Wichard.

Planning – Shelagh Laver, proposed by Iain Mackie, seconded Oliver Reynolds

Footpaths – Robin Wichard, proposed by Oliver Reynolds, seconded by Iain Mackie

West Somerset Flood Group representative – Justin Nichols, proposed by Robin Wichard, seconded Oliver Reynolds.

3. CO-OPTION OF NEW COUNCILLORS

There were none appointed. Councillors will actively ask residents for their interest to become a Councillor to fill the current vacancy

4. ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE FORMS

These were completed by the Councillors during the meeting.

5. REVIEW

Subscriptions

It was agreed to continue with the subscription to SALC to remain affiliated.

Churchyard Maintenance

It was agreed to continue the contract with Daren Grellier, Garden Care & Creation, for the closed church yard around the church, and the embankment of the overflow ditch in Woodford. His quotation for 10 x cuts at £100, was received by email ahead of our November meeting and the setting of the Precept requirements.

Yearly Charity Donations

It was agreed to defer support of Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance and the Exmoor Search and Rescue charities until the Autumn when we have a better understanding of the year's expenditure ahead.

6. SUMMARY REPORTS April 2023 – March 2024 Chairman's Report for the Year (as detailed in the Annual Parish Meeting)

The Chairman began by welcoming the return of Somerset Councillor Christine Lawrence following her serious illness, and wished her well as she eases back in to her role.

The Chairman personally thanked all his fellow Councillors for their support and work behind the scenes over the past year to support the Parish. He thanked the Parish clerk, Carol Juffs, for ensuring we are all well prepared for each meeting and that the affairs of the council are always in order and with timely submissions.

The Chairman also recorded his thanks, on behalf of the Council, to Martin Dewdney who served the Parish for some five years and will be missed for his local knowledge and input to meetings. We wish him well in his future ventures.

Although the past year has been relatively uneventful for the Parish, the County Council has been in turmoil reporting projected losses, which will have a knock-on effect to services provided in the future, and potentially more onus placed on the parishes through the Local Community Networks - LCNs. The difficult financial situation facing the Somerset Council means that more and more responsibilities are being devolved to parishes which puts great pressure on sparsely populated, rural parishes like ours and potentially threatens their long term viability.

The introduction of Local Community Networks came about following the amalgamation of Somerset into a Unitary Authority from April 2023. Nettlecombe falls into Area 13 from Minehead through to Williton, and out towards Crowcombe, encompassing many local Parishes, to provide local representation to the County Council. There have been quarterly meetings, but as yet their effectiveness for small Parishes like Nettlecombe to have a voice, remains to be seen.

The Council has continued to be represented on the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum (although the issues discussed rarely impact on Nettlecombe Parish given that we have few amenities and urban centres), and on the West Somerset Flood Group. There is also representation on the Watchet area LCN focusing on Highways specifically.

In previous years the Council has done much to try and alleviate the worst causes of flooding in the parish and continues to monitor drainage and potential issues. As a result of work previously undertaken there were no real issues during the very high rainfall experienced this winter, although we cannot be complacent and will continue to monitor and react to potential threats. Councillors continue to clear drain covers and culverts local to them to keep the surface water drainage systems flowing.

Highways within the Parish continue to be a concern. As the size of vehicles increases, the damage to the banks similarly increases and this has been an issue through the year. We continually monitor this and report all such concerns to County Highways department along with the potholes. County has generally responded well through their portal on the website, which now has a direct link from the Parish website. It is hoped that residents will feel able to report local problems readily through the Parish website.

There has been a steady flow of planning applications received but these have been largely uncontentious and considered individually by the council, making review visits where necessary.

We continue to meet our obligations to mow the lawns around the Parish church, and prune the ivy on the church boundary wall with the contractor Garden Care and Creation.

On-going concerns within the Parish include access to fast broadband (or any in places) and the return of the post-box in Yarde. These are long-term issues but we continue to agitate in the hope that some improvement can be made.

Highways:

Marilyn Crothers reported that the Highways department had responded through the year to the several reports of potholes that needed repair. The extreme rainfall through the year has caused erosion to the banks and road surfaces. Everyone is encouraged to use the link on the Parish website through to the Somerset. The main access lane to Beggearn Huish lifted after severe rain and the response time was very swift after registering it on the website. Clitsome lane has suffered badly through the winter with excess mud from the fields near the junction with Slade Lane. The livestock have now gone and so access through the winter months may not be so frequent. Also supermarket delivery vehicles access Roadwater from Beggearn Huish which contributes to the deterioration of the verges and road surface.

Cllr Lawrence recommended telephoning the Somerset Council on **0300 123 2224** for contacting Street Sense about road signage, or indeed the Help Centre can be used for logging any query and accessing the correct department.

Planning:

There have been a number of Planning Applications considered by the Councillors through the year, but it has been generally quieter.

The application for dog kennels in Woodford caused some debate and consideration. While there continues to be noise issues this becomes an Environment Issue – re noise abatement. It was suggested to offer the Help Centre at Somerset Council on **0300 123 2224** in order

The Guernsey Cottage application for a field shelter does not appear to have gone ahead, despite being granted permission. It may be a cost issue as the project would have incurred a considerable cost.

Listed building applications were received in relation to windows at Torre House and renovations to the farmhouse at Huish Barton farm. Mainly internal works and the demolition of a more recent rear extension and building an orangerie to enhance the property.

The Brook Lea cottage extension at Woodford has still not been decided by ENPA where there was a concern over a dried up leet recorded by the Environment Agency as functional as a main river! The proposal is for the extension to straddle the leet, and remains undecided as of today.

Work continues very slowly at The Blade Mill and remains a project to monitor.

It was also agreed to monitor the situation at the Beggearn Huish small agricultural development following the family's bereavement, and circumstances now beyond their control to meet the planning criteria placed on the business.

If anyone wants to check on the progress of any application please refer to the website:

somerset.gov.uk/planning/planning-weekly-list/ and there is also a direct link from the Parish website.

More details of the current application will be considered in 14 below.

Footpaths:

It has been a quiet year with the majority of footpaths being maintained by ENP. Robin has maintained a couple of areas with a strimmer recently, but the combination of rain and recent sunny periods has meant vigorous growth and he has contacted Exmoor National Park again to maintain specific areas.

There is currently development of double height fencing at Wood Advent farm and it will be necessary to ensure the integrity of the footpath there is maintained.

Also the footpath accessed from Egypt junction across Huish Barton farm has been re-routed around the headland as opposed to across the crop. This will need verification with ENP and extra signage within the field. It is hoped that Justin Nichols will contact ENP to arrange the signage etc. and maintain the footpath around the field perimeter.

West Somerset Flood Group

This will be reported at the next meeting.

7. DATES OF PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS FROM MAY 2024 - MAY 2025

On the second Tuesday of every third month

Tuesday August 13th 2024 at 7.30 pm

Tuesday November 12th 2024 at 7.30 pm

Tuesday February 11th 2025 at 7.30 pm

Tuesday May 13th 2025 Annual Parish Meeting 7.15 and 7.45 AGM

The dates and times were all agreed for the year ahead and will be confirmed with the EMN Hall.

8. ANY MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ABOVE

No matters were raised

9. OPEN FORUM – FOR ALL RESIDENTS

There were no residents present to contribute to the meeting.

10. MINUTES of the Meeting on February 14th 2024 (already circulated)

The Minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting.

11. MATTERS OF REPORT from 14th February 2024

There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

12. SOMERSET COUNCILLOR'S REPORTS

Cllr Christine Lawrence reported that following the wettest and long winter for many years a great number of trees have been lost in the area.

Suez waste collection contract has reported significant losses on its £24m a year contract. They have made a number of contractual claims seeking adjustment to their payment, and while these are in dispute it will be important that Suez does not exit their contract, which has another 6 years to run. Re-routing of collections has helped to make savings making routes more efficient, reducing mileage and carbon emissions. Further changes across the Mendip and South Somerset will come into effect in June.

Roadside cutting, where safe to do so will be reduced, to save costs, although visibility and safety remain paramount. Please check where there are crossroads that visibility is maintained and report to the Help Centre where there are concerns **0300 123 2224**.

Share the number too with people if anyone has concerns for their neighbour not coping in this economic climate.

There are subsidised bus services in Taunton and we are encouraged to make use of the buses to make them sustainable.

The Children and Young Peoples Plan CYPP for Somerset sets out the Council's aims for 2024-30 including how services and communities are accountable for children and young people, and how they will work together to ensure the ambitions of the plan.

Only today 49 redundancies have been announced at County Hall which will give longer term savings of £40m.

The Chairman thanked her for her report and reiterated how nice it was to see Christine back in the role.

13. CORRESPONDENCE

The Clerk received the formal resignation from Councillor Martin Dewdney and confirmation that the Precept payment of £2415 has been paid to the bank account on 24th April 2024.

14. REPORTS - CURRENT

Chairman's Report and LCN

Covered in Minute 6 above.

The Chairman raised his concern that the LCNs may not be as successful for us as a smaller parish, as meetings dominated by the larger parish councils who do not experience issues that we do like poor internet access etc, public transport services etc.

Also, this concept that a man with a van is hireable to repair roadside issues, small potholes etc with the cost coming out of our precepts. With a small parish like ours, limited by a small precept it is just not viable as an option. We understand the concept to devolve responsibilities down to the parishes but it is simply not practical for small parishes.

The LCN does not recognise the vast divergence between small rural parishes like ours, without a central community, as compared to towns like Williton or Watchet with only a fraction of the highways compared to Nettlecombe parish. We lose out in terms of the precept due to a small population, and unless that can be addressed it is not possible to understand how the concept will work for the small parish. By having smaller subsidiary groups, like the Highways sub-group, clubbing together, we dilute the effectiveness of the LCN further.

Highways

Nothing additional to report

Planning

Woodford Cottages – 5 on the end, has a current application for change of use to habitable accommodation for the area above the existing garage. There are three concerns – what is termed 'habitable' when the change of use is to office space/hobbies room with sky lights. Could this ultimately become sleeping accommodation? No internal height measurement of the proposed work is quoted anywhere, and from the drawings it is considered the ceiling will be very restricted

within the existing pitched roof space. There is lack of description on the drawings to show the proposed separate W.C. being connected to existing drainage. With the Dark Skies policy for ENP restrictions on emittance of light at night needs restriction. One of the accompanying reports states there is no change to the existing drainage set up, but clearly there is as a new w.c. is proposed. A letter raising these issues will be drafted in response to ENPA, focusing on the light issue because of the Dark Skies policy in ENP, and question the intended use as to whether it is actually useable with the restricted height. Also to raise concerns about the drainage, even though it is a Building Control issue.

Footpaths

All footpaths are regularly walked and checked within the Parish.

Flood Group

To be reported at the next meeting.

Finance

Three payments were approved, proposed by Oliver Reynolds and seconded by Robin Wichard. Clerk's salary for April to June 2024 at £322.92 gross, and the Pay award 2022 £104, and Pay Award 2023 £208 – noting that the tax of £144.80 had already personally been sent to HMRC by Carol Juffs.

Zurich Insurance renewal for 2024/5 at £167.44

Black Cat Computers £95 for website maintenance and the domain renewal

15. APPROVAL OF THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The completed Annual Governance Statement was agreed, proposed by Oliver Reynolds and seconded by Marilyn Crothers and signed by the Finance Officer and Chairman at the meeting.

16. ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2023 - 2024

The Accounts for the year had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Accounts were agreed, proposed by Iain Mackie and seconded by Liz Scott, and signed by the Chairman.

17. THE FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY OF NETTLECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

We need to think about our viability as an individual council and as to whether we need to think about informal partnerships with our neighbouring parish councils, given the difficulty of recruitment. Whether we need to consider a merger with a neighbouring parish like Roadwater or Monksilver for example. In the interim period some collaborative work would be the most effective. This matter was raised many years ago and lack of representation was a stumbling block. But it was clear there was duplication going on and it could be more efficient if we had joined up perhaps with Stogumber, Elworthy or even Bicknoller. There were ad hoc meetings in the year for Chairmen of about 5 parishes, and that might well be a solution going forward.

Earlier this year there was a meeting in regard to the proposed closure of Williton Reclamation site where many local Parishes were invited to attend and meet with County Councillors to express their concerns. This would be a sensible interim step and it was agreed that the Chairman should informally speak with other Chairmen to understand their positions too.

Shelagh Laver asked how we currently communicate with the 200 or so residents – via the web site or noticeboards in Yarde, Torre and Woodford and at the Parish Church. It was thought that a mail shot to each household may produce a very limited response. Data Protection prevents any data

being held about the residents. We certainly could use the website to encourage residents to come forward to stand as a councillor.

Iain Mackie had researched the legal requirements to combine with another parish and established that consent had to be sought from the electors of each parish involved, with a minimum number supporting the merger. This falls under the Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007 which makes provision for a community governance review by Somerset in response to a petition from Electors. In 2015 this was revised to a minimum of 37.5% of Electors in each parish supporting the merger, required to trigger a review.

It was agreed to begin with approaching other parishes informally at Chairman level, and to actively ask residents if they are interested to join the Parish Council.

18. A CONSIDERATION OF 20 MPH SPEED LIMIT EXTENSION IN NETTLECOMBE PARISH

Yarde is a particular concern with the speed that the blind corner is taken at, and would certainly benefit from some form of speed restriction. Ideally the flashing sign indicating the approaching car's speed would work well.

The problem is that many rural roads are unrestricted and therefore can be driven at up to 60 mph. There will probably be no real resolution for the time being.

19. FUTURE BUSINESS/MATTERS FOR MEMBERS INFORMATION

Nettlecombe Fete – Saturday June 1st

It was agreed to have a Parish Supper at the end of the year again, which is currently organised by the Church members.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – TUESDAY AUGUST 13TH AT 7.30 PM

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm

Chair:.....
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Date: