

## BISHOPS LYDEARD & COTHELSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Parish Council (PC) meeting held in the Village Hall, Bishops Lydeard on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

**Present:** Cllrs Allen (GA), Bainbridge (PB), Bletcher (JB), Lewin-Harris (JL), Martin (CM), Orr (MO), Pattenmore (AP) and Warmington (from 7:30pm) (JW) supported by Neal Gossage (Clerk)

**Apologies:** Cllr Hunt (CH)

### **001/24 Election of Cllr Orr**

MO was welcomed to the meeting and signed the 'Declaration of Acceptance of Office' and 'Register of Members' Interests.

### **002/24 Declarations of Interest relating to matters on the agenda**

There were no Declarations of Interest

### **003/24 Adoption of minutes of the PC meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

Due to a technical IT matter in finalising the minutes, the Chair asked for this item to be deferred until the next PC meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024. It was agreed to defer the matter until the next meeting.

### **004/24 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

### **005/24 Clerk's Report**

The Clerk's Report which had been previously circulated was noted.

JL queried what it would cost to have council email addresses for all councillors and referred to previous advice received from SALC.

The Clerk explained that a quote had been obtained from Somerset Web Services for new email addresses and a change of domain name for the Council. The Clerk agreed to seek further advice from SALC on the matter.

It was agreed that the change of domain name and any changes to email addresses would be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

### **006/24 Chairman's Report**

It has been established that Somerset Open Spaces has responsibility for maintenance of the water course adjacent to Lydeard Mead and work has recently been carried out in the area. CM has reported back to the resident concerned.

Work on the public toilets leak has been progressing. It appears that there was a problem with the water meter and it remains to be seen as to whether there is a leak at the toilets themselves.

CM attended the Delta Rise event on 10<sup>th</sup> January to explain the implications for the Delta Rise road closure later in January but felt that the event had not been properly advertised. The Somerset Highways Team and the Contractor explained the road closure plans and the necessary works. It is likely that the closure will be for 10 weeks.

MR stated that the road sign that had been incorrectly placed will be moved on 11th January 2024.

GA explained that a map of the closure and diversions will be displayed at the Village Hall and PB asked for a similar map to be displayed at Darby Way.

CM carried out an 'induction' session with MO.

### **007/24 Lengthsman's Report**

The report was noted.

JL asked what type of weed killer will be used this year. The Lengthsman explained that organic weed killer will cost around £32 per tank compared with £8 per tank for the current non-organic weed killer. PB asked for further information on the organic weed killer which the Lengthsman agreed to provide.

After some discussion, it was agreed that the organic weed killer will be trialled this year.

The Lengthsman also explained that a new machine is available for clearing weeds. The machine costs around £6,500 to buy but could be rented.

The Lengthsman reported that one of the grit bins in the village had been damaged and another grit bin was needed. The bins need to be filled.

The Clerk agreed to follow this up with Somerset Council.

There is rubbish in the car park which needs to be collected.

The Clerk agreed to follow this up.

The Lengthsman also report that the drains on the A358 need to be cleaned as there is a risk of flooding.

The Clerk agreed to follow this up.

AP reported that the Whiskey Trail footpath is currently underwater and needs to be filled with stone. The PC has previously agreed to pay for the stone.

The Clerk agreed to follow this up.

### **008/24 Planning Applications**

*06/23/0036 Alterations to the dental practice*

AP expressed concern about street parking becoming a problem.

JB suggested that the PC should support this local business and MR said that the parking issue mainly relates to staff parking.

It was agreed that the PC should support the application giving planning reasons about the benefit to the village of the practice but should raise the issue of car parking.

#### *06/23/0037T Felling of an ash tree*

It was agreed that this matter would be referred to the Tree Officer

#### *06/23/0038/LB Installation of internal structural steel at Sandhill Park*

JB suggested that no comment should be made on this application and that was agreed.

#### **009/24 Quantock Vale Surgery dispensing service**

It is understood that the village pharmacy will be closing so the GP surgery has applied for permission to dispense medicines.

It was agreed that the PC should support this initiative.

#### **010/24 Police Report**

The report was noted.

JL indicated that the report is of little use and MR would like to know what happened in relation to the various incidents reported.

The Clerk agreed to contact the PCSO to see if further information can be provided.

#### **011/24 Somerset Gazette for the library**

This can be provided at a cost of £85 for a year.

This was proposed by MR and seconded by AP.

It was supported by all but PB asked for the Gazette to be delivered from the village paper shop.

#### **012/24 AGAR update on Public Rights**

CM reported that the PC needs to respond to the queries by the end of February 2024. External accountants have been appointed to carry out the investigation at a cost of £355 per hour. So far, 45 minutes have been expended to investigate the matter but costs will rise steeply if the investigation progresses.

The budget for 2024/25 makes provision for £10,000 to be spent on these fees. The charges are set at £1,985 per day.

CM set out three possible outcomes:

- The complainants could withdraw their complaints
- The work could progress at a cost estimated to be around £10,000
- A Statutory Notice could be issued but this is thought to be unlikely. A warning could be issued in relation to future AGARs.

JB felt that spending this money would provide no benefit to parishioners and the cost of this exercise is the biggest increase in costs in the 2024/25 budget. This has the effect of increasing the precept for 2024/25.

JB asked if the complainants would consider withdrawing the complaint to save a significant amount of money.

PB asked whether the PC should admit to errors in the AGAR for 2022/23.

MO indicated that his understanding of the matter was that it related to procedural issues and there was no suggestion of any fraud or misappropriation of funds.

MR felt that it was possible to name the complainants but said he would check on that.

JL said that the PC should explain to the complainants the improvements that have been made since the complaint was made.

CM said that in the absence of any further action by the complainants, a draft report would be prepared in line with the end of February deadline. **Action: Chair and Clerk.**

#### **013/24 Casual Vacancy**

CM explained that a casual vacancy will be declared for a councillor following the resignation of Cllr Ball

MR queried the cost of an election. The election, if contested, will cost around £4,000 and poll cards will be used as for the December 2023 poll. **Action: Clerk to contact Election Services**

#### **014/24 Streamside Update**

CM reported that a meeting of residents had been conducted in December 2023 and that contractors will provide a cost estimate for the work for the PC to consider. It is understood that CIL funding can be used for this project.

#### **015/24 EV project**

It is recommended that two 7-11kw chargers are installed at the 'pharmacy car park' pending any consents required.

Commercial operators are to be approached by the Chair to establish whether high speed chargers can be installed at any other site in the village. **Action: Chair**

Lamppost charging does not appear to be an option at present because of an inadequate supply of electricity to the lampposts.

LEVI funding may be available to fund chargers from April 2024 pending a bid from Somerset Council for part of a national funding programme.

#### **016/24 Road closure Delta Rise/Darby Way**

This was discussed as part of the Chairman's report

Residents and councillors are able to attend a meeting on 22nd January 2024 to discuss the plans with the contractor. The road cannot be opened at night or at weekends because of the nature of the type of machinery used for the works.

JW questioned whether pedestrian access could be provided whilst the works are progressing. Unfortunately, that is not possible.

#### **017/24 CIL funding for the school**

The expenditure approved at the PC meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023 can be funded from CIL under clauses 59 CA and 59 CB. This will bring a classroom back into full use.

**Action: CM to write to the school to confirm the funding.**

#### **018/24 Somerset Council matters**

MR announced that he had resigned from his position of Executive Councillor and that Richard Williams will be taking over the role.

MR also outlined:

The financial emergency facing Somerset Council with very large increases in the cost of social care. Social care now accounts for 62.7% of Council expenditure and that is set to rise to around 90% in 2024/25. There has been an increase in both demand for and complexity of social care.

The 'gap' of around £100m in the county budget for next year will be 'filled' by:

- Increases in revenue including council tax
- Significant cuts in services
- The use of reserves

Around £9m has been saved in six months following the change to a unitary authority and the council is on track to deliver the savings set out in the business case.

'Missing miles' on the bus services have been reduced from 6% to just under 1% at present. The 28 service is now being used more and it is understood that the service should be secure for the foreseeable future. There are plans to develop a new bus station in Taunton on the site of the old bus station.

AP enquired as to whether there is any news on the development of the site on Taunton Road for a new Coop. There is no news at present.

GA stated that travellers are still in place at Westridge Way. **MR agreed to follow this up.**

GA asked what was the current position in relation to the Woodland Walk. CM explained that the matter had stalled on the issue of whether this would be sold to the PC for £1 (our understanding of the transfer) or whether there would be a long lease arrangement (as they had more recently suggested).

**Clerk to revive the issue with Somerset Council.**

JL queried what Live West/DWH were doing about the drainage issue. It is understood that there are some technical issues that need to be resolved.

#### **019/24 Councillor representative on Village Hall Management Committee**

GA offered to fulfil this role. **That was proposed by MR and seconded by MO and was unanimously accepted.**

#### **020/24 Clerk's additional hours worked**

The Clerk's salary for the month was agreed. **It was proposed by JB and seconded by JL and received unanimous support.**

#### **021/24 Finance**

The schedule of payments for approval previously circulated was discussed. Acceptance was proposed by JB and seconded by JW. **This was agreed by all councillors except Cllr Bainbridge who voted against acceptance. PB asked for the vote to be recorded.**

PB questioned whether there was a quote for the SID poles to 'enforce' the 20mph speed limit. CM explained that a quotation was obtained around 3 years ago for around £6,000. The invoice now being presented for payment is the final payment after a deposit was paid in 2022/23.

JL asked whether a pole can be placed on Cothelstone Road and in Taunton Road. Somerset Council has confirmed that these will be placed there in due course. **CM to follow up.**

#### **022/24 Budget 2024/25**

The budget was discussed.

MR enquired whether election costs should be £9,000. CM explained that it is likely that there could be two elections in 2024/25, or one election and a parish pollard the costs were estimated to be £8-9,000.

PB questioned what was included in Admin Costs. The Clerk explained that the figure for 2023/24 included recruitment costs, village hall rental and some stationery.

PB questioned whether the Lengthsman is carrying out work that should be carried out by Somerset Council. MR reiterated that Somerset Council is cutting services in 2024/25 and it is unlikely that work currently carried out by the Lengthsman will be undertaken by Somerset Council.

PB suggested that the PC should 'keep an eye' on expenditure and GA suggested that the Lengthsman should not incur costs of more than the budgeted amount and that more information on what funds have been spent on in the monthly report. **CM agreed to contact the Lengthsman to confirm this.**

Somerset Council will cease to contribute to Burial Ground maintenance in 2024/25 but it was agreed that the PC will continue to make a contribution to the churches for this maintenance.

MR suggested that the current level of reserves should be maintained due to the uncertainty over Somerset Council services for 2024/25 and beyond.

JL proposed that the budget be accepted and that was seconded by MR. **The vote was unanimous except for PB who voted against acceptance of the budget. PB asked for the vote to be recorded.**

The precept was discussed. The budget includes an increase of 21.9% in the parish precept and an increase of 17.4% for a Band D property.

JL proposed that the precept be adopted and that was seconded by JB. **The vote was unanimous except for PB who voted against the precept. PB asked for the vote to be recorded.**

**023/24 Any Other Business**

PB suggested that the PC refers to SALC who could assist in the development of a biodiversity plan for the community. Chair agreed that this issue should be on the February agenda.

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