

MINUTES of the MEETING of NETTLECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL
held on MONDAY 9th November 2020 via Zoom video conferencing – 8.00 pm

During these extraordinary times of a global pandemic, the meeting was conducted remotely via video conferencing.

PRESENT: Cllrs Marilyn Crothers (Chair), Martin Dewdney, Oliver Reynolds, Iain Mackie, Robin Wichard, Elizabeth Scott, Somerset Cllr Christine Lawrence and SW&T Cllr Marcus Kravis and Carol Juffs – Clerk.

IN ATTENDANCE: No residents had requested to join the meeting remotely.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Cllrs Ben Lintott and Peter Pilkington, PC Sue Thompson

2. MINUTES of the Meeting on August 10th 2020

These were signed as a true record of the meeting, proposed by Cllr Reynolds and seconded by Cllr Wichard.

3. OPEN FORUM – no residents present.

4. POLICE REPORT – none received

5. SOMERSET AND SOMERSET WEST & TAUNTON COUNCILLOR'S REPORTS

Somerset West & Taunton

Cllr Kravis reported that despite the limitations of COVID 19 the Council had been busy.

Cllr Pilkington's Climate Change Action Plan went through Council.

Large project managed the Homeless off the streets in to safe accommodation - 30 positive 'move-ons'. Still some people need to be helped - maybe refuse to come inside, or perhaps with safety issues for others concerned.

West Somerset issues - Watchet the wall is nearly complete; Minehead creation of more employment space as businesses relocate to new accommodation. Consultants to be employed to review where other sites of potential employment can be created and ways to retain expanding businesses from moving out of the area as they grow.

Grant of £500k was allocated to local High Street businesses struggling out of COVID lockdown phase 1. Allocated to Taunton, Minehead and Wellington initially, with smaller grants to Porlock, Dulverton, Dunster and Watchet.

Two units at Seaward Way to Let, employment prospects for local people. New tenant found for Blenheim Gardens Café to take it on in its run-down state.

Range of Business Grants to be allocated from the Government shortly for this second pandemic lockdown e.g. if a business is closed for 28 days and rateable value is less than £15,000 grant applied will be £1300, rising to £3000 if RV over £50k. Will certainly support small businesses, some discretionary grants will be available.

Question: Cllr Reynolds – there is a Roadwater homeless person, ex Richmond, Surrey who then moved to Bristol, and has recently arrived in Roadwater. Cllr Kravis advised contacting the Council's Homelessness team to help him.

Question: Cllr Dewdney – Progress on the Shuttering for the Marina Wall at Watchet – all approved in Budget last year, but no apparent progress. Cllr Kravis reported that procurement has been more challenging as most people do not want the job – Chris Hall is on the case. Dredging of the outer harbour had commenced.

Question: Cllr Mackie – Any progress on the Unitary Authority proposal? Cllr Kravis strongly in favour of two authorities in Somerset, but was not aware of recent progress details - waiting for response from the Government to the Business Proposals put forward.

Somerset Cllr Lawrence reported on the rise of COVID 19 numbers, increasing faster than hoped for, with 211 deaths in Somerset. The R rate is about 1.2 – 1.4 and this needs to be brought down swiftly. Vital to support the

hospitals, where other vital operations and treatment get affected. The COVID support telephone number is **0300 790 6275** – dealt with in excess of 7000 calls to date. Extremely grateful to the village agents for their supportive work during this pandemic, huge amount of work being carried out – 53,449 calls to date and followed up over this large area. Over 3074 food parcels have been delivered with volunteers helping from local councils.

Cllr Lawrence reiterated the importance of staying safe, keeping socially distanced, even more than in the past, as getting quite dangerous.

Winter gritting schedules and maps circulated with 23 gritters in place, and salt bins re-filled in the Parishes.

The Climate Change Strategy plan has been circulated to district and local councils for consultation, dealing with the Climate emergency through future years. Falling second place to COVID 19 at present. Local projects at Carhampton and Dunster for solar panel installations to save electricity costs longer term. Applications can still be made to support parish projects.

Cllr Lawrence supports ONE Somerset and the Government's response to the Business strategy will be known in due course. Currently one adult social care at present looking after the entire county, keeping people at home for care and returning from hospital more swiftly to be cared for in the community. Education is also dealt with across the entire county, and complications arise if they are split up, to two or three tier systems. Simple strategy to adopt ONE Somerset and maintain continuity in these important areas.

Cllr Mackie added that there had been a recent upgrade to the Government's website supporting COVID 19 - can review this specific area for updates on the local status in the pandemic.

Question: Cllr Dewdney to both County Councillors – referring to the major towns locally in West Somerset – Watchet, Williton, Minehead/Allcombe with a large precept to cover the staffing and Councillors supporting the community, whereas Parishes undertake low key roles locally to where they live voluntarily, and other roles in their parishes. With ONE Somerset - how much work will be devolved to the communities and what financial support will come to cover the additional workloads? Many parish councils are below strength with vacancies, whereas towns draw on thousands of people to fill roles. How much work will be devolved with the unitary authority, whatever configuration it may have, and how much financial support will come with that to cover the added administration, and the increased workload?

Cllr Lawrence responded - larger town councils would be invited to take on additional responsibility with devolved finances to cover the additional responsibility. Large parishes like Williton, Watchet and Old Cleeve already taken on additional responsibilities. There will be local community networks looked after by full-time paid officers, to assist with additional devolved work - recognised that parish councils are run by volunteers who cannot take on yet more work. If Nettlecombe wishes to remain as it is that will be possible, nothing will be enforced.

Cllr Mackie commented that potential savings in creating a unitary authority, in whatever form, are simply gained by passing the work downwards to local Councils that have to recover the expenditure by increasing the rates. It is not convincing in the County Council documents that the savings will actually be achieved. In a similar move when SW&T was created any savings disappeared! It appears to be moving one budget to another.

Cllr Lawrence - Business plan had to prove that the savings would be achieved, it has been considered appropriately and is available to view on-line.

Cllr Kravis - there is duplication of some workloads and by merging, savings can be made in some areas. It is recognised, as discussed in another meeting recently that Parish Councils are volunteers. Where is the next generation of parish councillors coming from and who will have time to put the effort in voluntarily? Councillors are well aware of that.

6. **CORRESPONDENCE**

6.1 Sandra Smith from Spark Somerset had written requesting a financial donation, as supporters of community

led groups during COVID 19. The Councillors were invited to review their website www.sparksomerset.org.uk with a view to consider supporting them with a donation at the next meeting.

6.2 We have been advised of a change to the booking secretary at the EMN Hall. For the time being the Hall is out action during the second lockdown. Sonya Bethune may be contacted via email :emnhaldiary@gmail.com

6.3 The Chairman had received a comprehensive report from Forum 21 on Environmental issues locally. She had a chance to discuss work that had been carried out in the Parish recently, which was felt to be on track for a small Parish such as this in particular flood mitigation work carried out by Ben Lintott.

7. MATTERS OF REPORT

We are still unable to meet as a Parish Council since the February meeting, due to the pandemic and lockdown for the second time.

Cllr Reynolds reported the damage to both banks on the road from Egypt to Vempletts Cross, and work needs to be carried out to clear up the mud which is potentially dangerous. Cllr Lawrence will report that on our behalf.

8. REPORTS

Chairman's Report

The Chairman has received an update from Nettlecombe Court Field centre that they are continuing to receive bookings, for both adults and children but with strict guidelines in place for COVID 19 prevention.

It is unlikely that there will be the annual Parish supper early in the new year under the current circumstances of social distancing during the pandemic.

Residents at Fair Cross have commented on the increase of heavy traffic on the B3190 to Raleigh's Cross – but the height of the bridges near Bishops Lydeard means this route is the only option to reach south towards Tiverton. Also recent roadworks in the area have sent diversions via this route.

The Chairman has received Minutes from both Dunster Panel and Exmoor National Park, although she had not attended the recent Zoom meetings.

The Parish Church has been open for Services, which were poorly attended. However, although it is open in this second lockdown period there are no Services. The Churchyard is looking neat and up together thanks to Derek Quartly.

There has been no official communication on the progress from Alex Ashworth in relation to Lang's farm barns, since the open air meeting on August 15th. It is understood he has communicated with a number of residents via email in response to their concerns.

Pathways, the local magazine for the Benefice is back in production and being distributed locally.

Highways

The drainage work on Slade Lane has been completed and it is understood that there are plans to re-surface it.

Nettlecombe Park lane is deteriorating and needs to be repaired, due to the high rate of traffic using it.

Footpaths

All local footpaths seemed to be in good condition and nothing has been reported at the moment.

Planning

1. Only one application that came in for Higher Barn Farm and the erection of polytunnels. They did not actually need to apply and received a letter from Exmoor National Park to that effect.

2. It was reported that the Blade Mill had undergone clearance of boundary vegetation. Possibly proceeding with the existing valid planning consent granted for the property back in 2014. Nothing official has been submitted to the authority.
3. Lang Farm's barns scheme from Alex Ashworth has gone quiet, and nothing has been received officially. Some research has been carried out on the internet and to the records office to establish whether accommodation was ever built on the site. Higher House used to exist and in the 1700s it had been knocked down, but nothing is clear where it was sited. A letter was sent to the Exmoor National Park expressing no opinion but making them aware of the meeting that took place.
4. White Horse Pub on the parish boundary has applied to change the use of the skittle alley to accommodation.
5. There is a small shed within 5 metres of the boundary with posts in the ground, indicating permanency, appearing in the corner of the garden of Berryman's Cottage, Beggearn Huish. This lies in the grounds of the National Park.

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

somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning/planning-weekly-list/

EMN Hall

There has been a change to the Bookings secretary Sonya Bethune, and she is contactable via email on: emnhalldiary@gmail.com. Guidelines for the use of the Hall in regard to COVID 19 were circulated, but with the second lockdown the Hall is not in use. We have not received a report from the Hall committee.

West Somerset Flood Group

Cllr Reynolds reported that Teresa had stepped down and Brenda Maitland Walker has been asked to create an interim committee.

Other Parish Matters

The 'market garden' at Woodford is progressing with cutting down large poplar trees and breaking fences adjacent to Cllr Scott's property. The owner travels from his residence in Chippenham, Wiltshire during the lockdowns. The owner is unhelpful and neither Exmoor National Park nor the Forestry Commission can do anything about it. Cllr Lawrence suggested contacting Citizen's advice in the first instance before consulting Solicitors, over boundary matters.

Finance

1. Black Computers sent an invoice for 1.5 hours work at £60 – proposed by Cllr Dewdney and seconded by Cllr Scott
2. Please note that there is an outstanding cost for mowing from Derek Quartly for this season, as attempts to contact him for an invoice, even via the PCC, have proved in vain to date.
3. Review of the Clerk's salary following the National Pay Awards received recently, dated April 2020. Previous rate of pay was £9.77 per hour increasing to £10.04 per hour (+£0.29 per hour). Proposed by Cllr Dewdney and seconded by Cllr Wichard.
4. Salary cheque for October -December would include backdated pay of £14.04, total payment £275.08. Approved by Cllr Dewdney and Seconded by Cllr Reynolds.

9. FUTURE BUSINESS/MATTERS FOR MEMBERS' INFORMATION

There was nothing to report during this second lockdown.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday February 8th 2021 at 8pm at the EMN Hall, social distancing regulations permitting.

In the event of no venue option, the meeting will be held via Zoom video conferencing again. (Details of this Zoom meeting will be circulated nearer the time)