

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF NETTLECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD AT THE EMN HALL, MONKSILVER
TUESDAY 7th NOVEMBER 2023 at 7.30 pm**

Present: Cllrs Robin Wichard (Chair), Iain Mackie, Marilyn Crothers, Oliver Reynolds, Shelagh Laver and Elizabeth Scott. Somerset Councillor Marcus Kravis and Carol Juffs - Clerk.

1. Apologies for Absence

Caroline Moore, Somerset Cllr Christine Lawrence

2. MINUTES of the Meeting Held on August 8th 2023

The Minutes were reviewed and signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. OPEN FORUM – FOR ALL RESIDENTS

There were no residents present.

4. SOMERSET COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

The Councillors wish to record their best wishes and message of support to Cllr Christine Lawrence who was unable to attend the meeting.

Cllr Kravis regretted leaving his October report behind but reminded everyone to ensure they were registered to vote.

In December the Somerset Council will be making some very serious decisions in an attempt to manage the forecast loss for the year to April 2024, anticipated to be £100m – as opposed to the projected £28m losses reported to the August meeting. This is largely due to the vast costs of adult social care accounting for approx. £75m of the projected losses.

There are proposals to sell off commercial assets to generate much needed funds, but that is a short-term fix. It was questioned what happens when those assets are gone, which in turn were designed to give revenue for the Council. A pertinent email was circulated by Frome Parish Council today requesting that Parish and Town Councils were all included in the decision making process, to give discussion transparency to the proposals. Initially they are looking at commercial investments that were bought in to create revenue, but probably being sold at a loss. Somerset is not alone, as nationally there are 20 Councils in critical financial situations from different political make-ups.

In broad terms, as parishioners we are paying more and getting less continually, but Cllr Kravis suggested maybe we had been paying too little for too long. But the main cause is the specific area of the budget spiralling out of control financially, in adult social services. Also special childcare costs, with families moving in to the county, adding strain to the budgets in times of spiralling costs.

Cllr Kravis confirmed that Council tax rates are currently capped at 5%.

5. MATTERS of REPORT from August 8th meeting

There was nothing to report.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence to report.

7. REPORTS

Chairman's Report

The work carried out locally in the prevention of flooding has clearly worked, as in the recent extreme weather conditions we have not experienced the normal effects of flooding. In Yarde which often floods at the bottom had minimal water on it, and the flood prevention works have been successful locally given the extreme weather experienced locally.

The Chairman attended the ENPA meeting in October but advised that again there was nothing discussed which directly affected Nettlecombe Parish.

Local Community Network LCN

RW

Attended by some 40 people with others attending on line, divided around 6 tables. Some interesting statistics were circulated as to how Somerset compares to other areas and nationally. Also a summary from the previous LCN meeting covering the key issues - Young People, Education, Health and well-being, communication including Broadband, Planning Enforcement, Housing, Highways, Public transport, Flooding, Climate and Environment, Business and Employment.

The attendees were invited to recommend which should be prioritised to go forward, but as our Chairman pointed out they are not mutually exclusive, for example you cannot consider Young People without Education or transport. Locally Communications and Highways were considered a priority but when the summary of the meeting was made at the end, none of these local priorities were mentioned.

The Chairman has a strong concern that the critical issues for this Parish given its demographics and communities with specific requirements, will not be fairly represented going forward. When invited to go and form sub-groups to discuss particular issues, it was confirmed that there was no budget to allocate, so they simply become talking shops, with little or no power or influence. It was agreed that Dunster Panel was a far more effective body, and it remains to be seen how beneficial the LCN will actually be, which was the general view in discussions following the meeting.

Two more LCN meetings are planned for December and February. There is a sub-committee on Flooding which Cllr Moore will attend in Carhampton on our behalf.

Highways

MC

The potholes in Beggearn Huish were repaired swiftly and effectively following flood damage last month. The potholes towards Vempletts Cross from Egypt were reported on-line by ECJ and have already been reviewed, for repair within the next couple of weeks.

Reminder - MC to email Kali.martin@somerset.gov.uk to get updates on the state of previous submissions relating to Woodford, on behalf of Cllr Scott.

MC

Clerk to write to Nettlecombe Court about the size of coaches accessing the Field Centre, which are eroding the banks of the narrow lanes. Encourage the use of minibuses as opposed to large part-filled coaches. **ECJ**

Footpaths

RW

The footpath from Egypt Cottage across the field of Huish Barton Farm needs re-instating although it currently would go through the pheasant cover crop. It is presumed that the quadbike tracks around the perimeter are the preferred route to be taken.

Planning

IM

The planning application for compost storage at Higher Barn Farm was confirmed by ENPA as not required.

The retrospective application for dog kennels and runs at 2, Woodford Cottages was considered at a Planning meeting this afternoon and agreed after five and a half months of consideration, where the officers had recommended approval. The restrictions are for domestic use only and limiting to 4 dogs at any one time. It was suggested to monitor the situation going forward in regard to numbers of dogs and disturbance

Cllr Mackie advised that problems of noise are an EHO concern and would be considered separately to any planning application.

West Somerset Flood Group

CM

Nothing to report this time.

Other Parish Matters

Yarde Noticeboard has succumbed to the recent high winds. The Chairman has approached a retired carpenter to carry out repairs to this and Woodford's notice board.

Clerk - Finance

ECJ

There was retrospective approval for the SALC membership payment of £54.62, which had been received several months later than usual, and paid at the end of September.

The following cheques were agreed for payment

ECJ Postage £6.00

ECJ Salary gross £270.92. Tax paid direct to HMRC by ECJ

Garden Care and Creation invoice £400

Black Cat Computers - David Sykes £45

Signed by the Chairman and Cllr Reynolds

8. PARISH PRECEPT 2024/5

The bank reconciliation was circulated prior to the meeting, with a projected balance at March 31st 2024, in order to consider the following financial year ahead of the Precept requirements. It shows our normal annual costs to be around £2.6k as compared to the £2.3k received for our last Precept. The overspend is currently met from our reserves along with the one-off web site project.

The budget was reviewed in detail with the projected increases agreed, as proposed on the Agenda.

Clerk's Salary proposed £1125

IT Contract proposed £405

Subs for SALC proposed £56

Training budget proposed £150

Zurich Insurance proposed budget £175

Mowing Contract as per quote £950

Charitable donations will not necessarily be made in the forthcoming year to control expenditure

Audit proposed £30

Postage, printing and stationery proposed £50

Total revised budgeted expenditure will be £2941

The Precept had not been increased for a number of years and also it is recognised that there are still financial difficulties experienced by many.

It was agreed to raise the Precept request by only 5% or £115 to £2415 which was proposed by Robin Wichard and seconded by Iain Mackie. This will mean the budget over expenditure of £526 will be met from reserves.

There may be an expenditure on noticeboard repairs later in this financial year and we need to bear in mind the renewal of the laptop in future years. ECJ to approach Black Cat Computers for suggestions for upgrade costs.

9. FUTURE BUSINESS MATTERS FOR MEMBER'S INFORMATION

Parish Supper would be considered for a Friday night in February 2024, as last year.

10. Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday 13th February 2024

The meeting closed at 20.45 pm