

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF NETTLECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD AT THE EMN HALL, MONKSILVER
TUESDAY 13th FEBRUARY 2024 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.

In attendance: Justin Nichols, residents Richard and Wendy Parry, and Anna Thomas

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Somerset Cllr Christine Lawrence

2. **MINUTES of the Meeting Held on November 7th 2023**

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

3. **OPEN FORUM – FOR ALL RESIDENTS**

Concerns were raised over the recent building works at The Blade Mill and the addition of a window on the roadside, which is smaller than the original proposal where permission was not granted. The window does differ from a 2022 Permission but is thought to be a better option than the original he had permission for. The residents were reassured that activities there are being closely monitored by the Councillors responsible for Planning.

The B3190 sign at the crossroads on the main road has been turned the wrong way. Cllr Crothers will report this to Highways.

If Monksilver can successfully get a 20mph speed limit imposed for their village, could this also be applied to Yarde, and even extended right through to include Woodford. Progress on this will be monitored, and Cllr Kravis offered to assist via email. It is likely there would be a cost implication, which could prevent this going ahead.

The Yarde Noticeboard needs re-instating. A replacement has been sourced, and is waiting to be erected.

The historic case of the missing letterbox at Yarde continues, and it is uncertain whether the original box is still stored at Williton post office. When the original telegraph pole was removed at change of ownership some six years ago, it lay in the verge and then the post office collected it. But it still needs to be erected on its own pillar. We will try and follow up what has happened to the postbox, as it is illegal to remove it.

The internet provision is dire in Yarde, which is still being pursued.

The potential closure of the recycling depot in Williton is a major concern and the residents attended a 100+ strong meeting to hear the Somerset Council's views. The Chairman has also attended a subsequent meeting and will report later.

There is concern for an in-accurate Environment Agency map showing an active river running beneath properties in Woodford, whereas it is a capped off Leat that supplied the Mill in historic times. It is clearly a disused brook – as identified by the architect in a current Planning Application for a house extension in Woodford. This does not assist potential house sales in the area and the map needs updating for this major inaccuracy. Cllr Kravis supplied his email address in order that the matter could be passed on to colleagues working for the EA.

Cllr Mackie also confirmed he had recently written to the Exmoor National Park about the Planning Application having an incorrect EA flood map attached, showing the dis-used leat as an active river. He requested that ENPA ask the Environment Agency to attend the site with a view to altering the map. A response is awaited.

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 did not have a printed report to offer to the meeting. There is a budget meeting on 20th February to finalise the Somerset Council's costs. The Government did not agree to an increase of Council Tax, so savings will have to be made elsewhere. There is a budget waiting to be balanced, which also involves voluntary redundancies and shorter working weeks.

Adult Social Care and Children's services are a drain on the expenditure. It is quite shocking the high costs of care provision run by large companies. Not just an issue for this Council but across the country.

Bus services will be reduced by making some routes run less frequently. This does not help workers that depend on the service for their employment, or pupils trying to access colleges.

The original plan for a unitary authority should have resulted in an £18m saving not the £100m gap currently being experienced.

The extension of the cycle track from Dunster to Carhampton has begun and is funded by Active Travel government grants, not Somerset Council's funding.

5. MATTERS of REPORT from November 7th meeting

Caroline Moore has resigned from the Council with immediate effect due to other commitments, and the Chairman thanked her for her support.

The Woodford resident with multiple dogs at their home has now moved some of them to Elworthy and the matter is now resolved.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence to report other than a letter from Williton Parish Council re the recycling situation which will be covered later in the meeting.

7. REPORTS

Chairman's Report

Local Community Network LCN

RW

One of the main items discussed at the meeting was the proposed closure of the Williton Recycling Centre.

There was also a public meeting attended by over 100 people, and more recently last week a meeting for Parish Council Chairs in the area, to formulate a response. A joint venture of one letter would go out signed by all the participating Parish Councils, for greater impact.

The Chairman read out the letter to the meeting the bullet points are as follows:

We implore you to withstand the temptation to close the Williton facility and list just a few of the reasons why this plan lacks any real financial or environmental credibility.

- For those who do not know West Somerset, may we remind you that our road network is already exhausted and not fit for purpose and any thought that Williton and surrounding parishes residents would drive to Minehead for their recycling is dangerous for the environment and unrealistic.*
- Again, for those ignorant of our geography whatever goes to Minehead from Williton, and surrounding parishes must then be trucked out on the very same roads adding to the pollution and congestion on this poorly designed and poorly maintained highway winding through narrow villages. That combined with Butlins "changeover" days (Monday and Friday) makes those roads near impassable and chaotic particularly in the summer which also happens to coincide with significant garden waste destined for recycling.*
- Williton and Watchet are likely to see upwards of 1000 new houses in the near future and not only will that put more pressure on the regional road infrastructure, but it also points to the Williton recycling facility becoming even more strategically important and essential.*
- Why did West Somerset District Council choose Williton to build its Council offices? Because Williton is the centre of West Somerset and has a larger share of West Somerset's population surrounding it than does Minehead. It is also the junction for Taunton and Bridgwater traffic.*
- The district is already plagued by fly tipping, and this will only grow exponentially if Williton was closed. Residents of Williton and the surrounding area will not drive to Minehead to recycle and already there is a demand, for Williton to have the capability to recycle asbestos as Minehead is poorly designed, very badly located and traffic management dysfunctional.*
- Somerset Council have a statutory duty to retrieve and pick up fly tipping as soon as it is reported, and we understand that alone costs Somerset Council £1000 per fly-tip. There will be a major increase in fly tipping making the closure of Williton a false economy. Last week we asked your representatives who would police fly tipping and who would bear the cost of bringing charges against those proven to have fly tipped? The question was not answered.*
- At last week's meeting many people commented on the cooperation, help and courtesy of the Williton staff compared with the rudeness and lack of assistance of the Minehead recycling staff.*
- Disabled members of the public avoid going to Minehead not only because of the staffing issues but more importantly the lack of ramps and accessibility. Somerset Council has a statutory obligation and duty under the Equalities Act 2010, to provide appropriate facilities to meet the requirements of disabled members of the public. May we remind you that does not mean providing able bodied staff who may or may not offer to help such an individual.*
- What you are proposing to do will: - o Increase the number of people, all over Somerset, burning timber, garden waste and other burnable items, on their properties by open fires or incinerators, causing significant adverse environmental pollution and confrontation from neighbours. Furthermore, it will increase, in the summer, the risk of grass and tree fires causing fire service call outs. Cause garden waste to end up in streams and rivers which will contribute to future flooding. As was pointed out last week household waste bins will be used for waste never intended for acceptance by the rubbish bin collector, including concrete and small appliances.*
- The recycling facility in Williton is better designed and is significantly larger than Minehead, it sits adjacent to the home recycling truck depot and is also, for the future, adjacent to the West Somerset railway line. A modest sum of money spent on Williton will increase its capabilities significantly.*

The meeting last week had every right to expect that a Liberal Democrat led Council, supposedly proud of its environmental credentials, notwithstanding financial funding from Central Government, would be investing in future proofing the responsible processing of waste rather than proposing a blatant contradiction of their own principles. We were also reminded by a member of the public of the upcoming election. West Somerset desperately requires bigger and better recycling facilities, not closures and reductions.

A copy of the letter is being released to the media

The Councillors agreed a formal ratification of the letter, proposed by Oliver Reynolds and seconded by Liz Scott

The Chairman will contact Williton Parish Council to be included in the letter.

The criticism levelled at the LCN so far has been that they are simply a talking shop and this will be a good opportunity to see if the LCN 'has any teeth', as a show of hands showed a unanimous support to not see the recycling centre closed.

Another issue arising is the initiative from Highways to introduce a Highways Steward as an individual with a van. A single operative able to carry out any work that a Parish might require doing on a small scale. The work will be funded by the Parish Councils, who struggle as it is to afford things with their existing precepts. The proposal would be to raise the precept to a more realistic level to cover these small road and verge repairs. This initiative would penalize small parishes, and also the operative would be covering a vast area of the LCN 13.

It also raised the question as to how viable a small Parish like Nettlecombe will be in the future and should be a matter for discussion at our next meeting. Perhaps amalgamating with a neighbouring Parish/Parishes for a greater budget.

Highways

MC

Main problem is that with less maintenance it will lead to more claims. The worst road at the moment is the one leading from above Vempletts Cross to Wood Advent through the wooded area which has deteriorated badly. Nettlecombe Park road is still poor but in not such a dire condition. Unfortunately the economic climate is limiting the work schedules for highways.

Dire conditions at the lower end of Clitsome Lane where the field access on to Simon Williams' land has been badly eroded and mud carried out on to the road. The drainage has been affected and the roadway became impassable last week, certainly to pedestrians, cyclists, and smaller cars. Then on Thursday hay was delivered to the junction with Slade Lane and the livestock broke out, scattering the hay across the roadway and making Slade Lane impassable.

There are concerns too for the welfare of the livestock in the field. Allegedly they had failed a recent TB test and cannot be moved, but also the sheep have not been sheared recently. They frequently break out as the perimeter fences are not stock proof, causing unnecessary workload and hassle to the neighbouring farmer, who has long term health issues.

Next week there will be a road diversion in place, for works to the main road, re-routing traffic from Roadwater up Slade Lane or Clitsome Lane. A letter will be sent to Mr Williams asking him to clear the roadway urgently before the diversion is in place. Also to confirm the welfare of the livestock.

RW/OR/ECJ

The relatively new drains in Slade Lane are generally blocked by leaves and this needs reporting to Highways. **MC**

Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum

Nothing to report to the committee for this period.

Planning

IM

The Blade Mill window has given cause for concern, but is smaller than the one that was given consent for. Only there still exists a bricked-up space for a second window, in the original garage, which will be monitored closely.

A Planning Application 6/24/24/001 for an Extension to Brook Lea at Woodford was not clear from the plans so Councillors Mackie and Laver went to view the property. Anne Thomas, resident of Woodford house, had also expressed concern about the disused Leat that runs under the properties at Woodford. A steel frame will span the leat, to support the extension. They also spoke to the neighbour who has no objection to the proposals. There is additional work being done involving the garden at the rear down to the old market garden site which is not subject to planning but a good improvement of the area.

The Environment Agency Plan attached to the application shows a main river bizarrely going right through the site. Cllr Mackie has written to Exmoor National Park advising of the ludicrous error on the map, which needs updating.

3/24/24/001 2 Torre House application, a Grade II Listed property dating from the 16th century, for a straight forward change of use of an adjacent outbuilding to living space for a utility room. Also to replace some of the older deteriorated windows which will improve the property. The front door will also be changed using all materials appropriate to its Grade II listed status. The foot print will be roughly the same size and the work will not be seen as it is all to the rear of the property.

Footpaths

RW

The footpath from Egypt junction across the field of Huish Barton farm will be re-routed to the marginal headland, avoiding the pheasant cover crop on the far side. The land is out of the Stewardship scheme now and the farmer Justin Nichols confirmed he will re-route walkers around the edge of the field in future which will be a much better solution for everyone concerned.

West Somerset Flood Group

A powerpoint presentation from the Somerset Rivers Authority was forwarded from the last meeting, highlighting the success of recent projects like Carhampton flood control, and other local community projects.

With the wet winters recently certainly the flood prevention work locally has saved any serious issues being reported.

A new representative for the Flood Group will be needed following Caroline Moore leaving. **

Clerk - Finance

ECJ

A spreadsheet was circulated prior to the meeting showing the current financial position and a bank reconciliation. The balance in hand is **£1318.01**.

The following payments were agreed retrospectively – proposed Oliver Reynolds and seconded by Robin Wichard.

EMN Hall hire for 2023 (charged in arrears) – 4 meetings £60 (paid Dec 15th)

Daren Grelier – culvert clearance £75 (paid Dec 15th)

SALC Training x 1 £25 (paid Dec 15th)

There will be two more payments due for SALC training before the end of this financial year – the 2nd New Councillor training and Planning Training.

There will also be an invoice due from Black Cat Computers before the end of the financial year.

Finally, the

Clerk's salary – January to March 2024 £270.92 gross, was agreed and paid.

The Clerk has received confirmation that the Precept application has been received by Somerset Council.

8. COUNCILLOR TRAINING AND INDUCTION

Cllr Laver has recently attended two training sessions for new Councillors, and in March is enrolled for the Planning training session with SALC.

9. CO-OPTION OF NEW COUNCILLOR

The Chairman asked Mr Justin Nichols, who had attended the meeting, if he felt able to take on the role of a Parish Councillor, to which he agreed. The Chairman then proposed he was co-opted to the Committee which was unanimously agreed, seconded by Oliver Reynolds.

** Justin Nichols also offered to become the representative for the Council at the West Somerset Flood Group meetings and report back to the committee.

10. FUTURE BUSINESS MATTERS FOR MEMBER'S INFORMATION

The Parish Supper is being held at Nettlecombe Court on Friday 23rd February.

The Nettlecombe Fete is planned for Saturday June 1st.

Dates for the Diary:

AGM Tuesday May 14th

Tuesday August 13th at 7.30 and

Tuesday November 12th at 7.30

11. Date of Next AGM Meeting - Tuesday 14th May 2024

The meeting closed at 21.07 pm