

MINUTES OF NETTLECOMBE PARISH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

At EMN HALL, MONKSILVER

TUESDAY 14TH MAY 2024 at 7.15 pm

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

IN ATTENDANCE: There were no Residents present

Apologies for absence: Justin Nichols and Cllr Marcus Kravis

**1. Welcome and report of the work of the Parish Council during the past year
by Robin Wichard, the Parish Council Chairman**

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.

2. The Clerk's report on the finances of the Parish Council during 2023-24

The new Parish website was launched in the summer with more local parish information and it attracts a good footfall of visitors to the site. This attributed to the increase in expenditure of

£2798 (2022/3 £2341) and staff costs £1084 – this did not include the November 2022 pay award which will be paid retrospectively.

Expenditure was much as anticipated through the year - grounds maintenance contract £875 (£900 budget); charitable donations to Exmoor Search and Rescue, Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance and Quantock Foodbank amounted to £150; IT support and building of new website £1450; training £50; Zurich insurance premium and other costs £273.

In the autumn the Councillors took the decision to increase the Precept application by 4% to £2415 to match inflation, and begin to rebuild our reserves against rising costs.

Two people received training from on-line courses run by SALC through the year, and we will continue to pay subscriptions to SALC to remain members.

3. Any other business

There were no further matters to discuss.

The meeting closed at 19.45 pm.