

MINUTES of the MEETING of NETTLECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL
held on TUESDAY 12th AUGUST 2025 – 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Cllrs Robin Wichard (Chair), Oliver Reynolds, Iain Mackie, Justin Nichols, Shelagh Laver, Becky Marsh, and Clerk – Carol Juffs.

IN ATTENDANCE: Wendy Perry, Sophie Wichard residents of Yarde

DECLARATION OF INTEREST:

None declared

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

No Somerset Councillors attended meeting.

2. MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING on May 13th 2025:

These were signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. OPEN FORUM – FOR ALL RESIDENTS

Wendy Perry had received a letter from the Environment Agency advising of the Withdrawal of Watercourse Maintenance on her property as the 'Riparian Owner'. It was unclear what maintenance had actually been carried out in recent years, if any. This letter gives 6 months' notice of intent to withdraw routine maintenance. She thought it was reasonable that they carried out one last survey before surrendering the maintenance contract. As it is understood this generic letter has been received by thousands of landowners across the country with property bordering local waterways, Mrs Perry wished to understand what work she was now going to be liable for. In turn, what permissions needed to be sought to carry out work on the banks if of a general nature like strimming the undergrowth, as the wording is unclear.

The Clerk will copy the letter to West Somerset Flood Group's Chairman for clarification on the matter as this is understood to have been widely received within the LCN. Need to define the areas of responsibility and the distinction between maintenance of the banks and carrying out works, for those affected,

4. SOMERSET COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

Regrettably no Councillors from the County attended the meeting in order to give us an up-to-date report of Somerset's position.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

5.1 Letter from Carhampton Parish Council referring to the re-branding by the Boundary Commission of the proposed new Somerset Council Division 'Exmoor East and Brendon Hills'. Carhampton PC preferred 'Brendon Hills and Coast' or simply 'Brendon Hills' and a second area simply known as Exmoor. They invited other Parishes to write directly to the Boundary Commission, but this falls outside of Nettlecombe Parish. The matter was considered but no further action required.

6. MATTERS OF REPORT

Nettlecombe Parish Closed Church Yard Maintenance

There had been discussion to understand how initially the Parish Council became responsible for the closed church yard and the Clerk wrote to the Parochial Church Council for clarification on the matter. A comprehensive reply was received last week with supporting documentation tracing back to 1963 when a declaration was made that the

PCC carried out the Maintenance and sent the bill to Williton Rural District Council. The costs were then recovered by a levy in the Parish Rate – now known as the Council tax. In 1970 it was declared that future expenditure was to be precepted for by Nettlecombe Parish Council. It would appear that this Parish Council did not exist pre-1970.

PCC members had carried out extensive research to establish that maintenance of the closed churchyard is to be overseen by the PCC and the Parish Council is to fund it.

We have been assured that the PCC has third party liability covering the closed churchyard. So our original concerns that should there be a slip or fall, we as the Parosh Council will not be held responsible.

However, the concept that any maintenance can be carried out and we, the Parish Council will foot the bill is a tricky one. There will have to be consultation and advance warning of twelve months in order to precept the value required. If we go back to the PCC and accept this after the research, we will have to advise the need to give plenty of advance warning with quotes in order to precept the monies required. Also a clear distinction between maintenance of the fabric of the church and its monuments as distinct from the maintenance of the grounds, for which Nettlecombe Parish Council provides the funding.

7. CURRENT REPORTS

Chairman's Report

The Chairman has been pursuing clarification over the definition of voluntary work in relation to Highways, and what is now covered by the Highways department. He received a written response that Highways will continue to fulfil their legal obligation to fill potholes, maintain the roads and whatever else is required but they encourage the local community to take on the work which will enhance the environment. However, those seeking to undertake work to enhance the environment – and we assume drain clearance etc, they require you to take a qualification and training on-line.

Local Community Network (LCN) Update

The LCN AGM was held in July with a lot of the subjects covered not having relevance to Nettlecombe Parish. The key areas of focus for the year ahead are the highways working group continuation; the coastal protection working group continuation; public transport and active travel – promotion of cycling etc; the tree maintenance programme in collaboration with Minehead Town Council; and community resilience – ensuring all Parishes complete the Community Resilience survey and work towards community resilience with the LCN advising of roadshows and workshops taking place.

ENPA.

Nothing to report.

Highways:

Becky Marsh also looked into Highways volunteering and candidates need to have read the Volunteer handbook, done the on-line training and have appropriate insurance. Need clarification as to whether this is third party or public liability insurance.

There has been an enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot Update where local parishes may choose to undertake an enhanced level of service in their area either by undertaking work themselves which are not safety related, or buying additional services through the Highways contractors. The pilot scheme started in July and encouraged Parishes to take more responsibility for their local roads and lanes, devolving expenditure from the County. One can hire the services of a 'man with a van' to those works which the Highways cannot prioritise in their workload, but it is quite expensive on a daily rate, which Nettlecombe Parish is unable to afford, at the current time.

We are still waiting for the main road from Washford Cross up past Fair Cross to be repaired. It has been marked up for several months, but no repairs as yet.

Councillors were reminded of the link on the Parish website to Somerset Highways for reporting any potholes and problems on local roads and lanes. An acknowledgement will be received by the resident after submitting a report and the follow up period is swift and efficient.

Planning:

Guernsey cottage, Woodford – the plans were followed up to establish that the erected new shed was in line with the consent granted, following a visit from the Planning department.

Planning application received from Holcombe Water Farm to cover cattle yards and reduce run-off from the area. The farm is well established with a substantial number of buildings and it is considered that the application will have no significant visual impact on the surroundings.

The property at Beggearn Huish is sold Subject to Contract, so it will be a matter of time before the new owners present a planning application to justify the existing house and barn tied to a business plan. The buyer is understood to be local, son of the farrier Ben White.

The ENP are holding a Planning event in Luxborough on September 16th to give an update on reviews of planning submissions.

Post meeting note - the land below the Manor House, to the right of Clitsome Lane, Nutwall at 3.45 acres, has received some attention since the last meeting with partial clearance of the ditch, but there is still work to be achieved to assist the flooding issues.

Footpaths:

There is nothing to report of concern on local pathways

West Somerset Flood Group

Justin recently attended the WS Flood Group meeting in Carhampton but there was nothing to report that affected this Parish, and a second meeting with a presentation on flood defences and sea coasts, which is unlikely to affect Nettlecombe Parish.

Other Parish Matters

There was nothing else to report.

Clerk – Finance

7.1 We have received confirmation that the Accounts were sent to PKF Littlejohn before the submission deadline and received a Notification of Exemption – that no external Audit needs to be performed, nor report or other closure documentation issued.

7.2 Payments made since Last Meeting to be agreed

Zurich Insurance £196 – The Chairman reviewed the insurance requirements for this upcoming year from June 2025 and the annual premium of £196.00 has been sent to Zurich.

SALC Annual Membership £92.89 Despite trying to appeal this hiked cost, now based on per capita in the Parish, SALC said the membership fee was not negotiable. They claimed that becoming a Unitary Authority had generated extra workloads, despite being assured this would be a more efficient move for the County as a whole.

The following payments were approved at the meeting

Black Cat Computers for updates to the website including job advertisements and Councillor changes £75.00.

Daren Grelier – Garden Care and Creation for cutting to the end of July 2025 £720. It is noted that Daren has now become VAT registered which incurs an extra cost of 20% to his contract charges to be met,

E C Juffs final quarter's salary at £339.30 gross – the tax was paid direct to HMRC using her personal Debit Card, to give the nett effect as per the payslip.

E C Juffs annual summary of postage and stationery for the year £45.06

The payments were all approved - Proposed by Oliver Reynolds and Seconded by the Chairman.

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank Carol, as she retires from the post of Clerk and Reporting Financial Officer.

8. RECRUITMENT OF PARISH CLERK

The advertisement was circulated by the LCN in the hope of an existing Clerk wanting to add to their hours of employment, but there have been no applications received, despite one telephone enquiry. In the interim period until an applicant comes forward Sophie Wichard has agreed to step in and will receive a handover from Carol Juffs.

9. CO-OPTION OF NEW COUNCILLOR

The Chairman welcomed Wendy Perry to the meeting and she agreed to join the Parish Council. This was proposed by Oliver Reynolds and seconded by the Chairman.

10. FUTURE BUSINESS/MATTERS FOR MEMBERS INFORMATION

There were no additional matters to raise at this meeting

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is on Tuesday 11th November 2025 at the new time of 7.00 pm

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Post Meeting Matters Considered by the Parish Council 26th August 2025

12. Proposed 7.5 tonne weight Limit to be extended from Elworthy Cross via Monksilver to Fair Cross, to include Yarde and Woodford.

Monksilver passed a resolution to Classify the B3188 from Elworthy Cross to Fair Cross with a 7.5 tonne weight restriction.

This was also considered by Nettlecombe Parish Council who agreed unanimously to support this proposal, which extends from Elworthy Cross to Fair Cross, passing through Woodford and Yarde within the Nettlecombe Parish. The access will not be restricted to those with legitimate right to move within the area, agricultural and forestry vehicles included. It will only be a blanket ban for through traffic which is key.

It was agreed on the basis that there would not be an abundance of additional signage.

13. Planning Application Manor Farm, Beggearn Huish 6/24/25/003

The Councillors considered the Planning Application for a change of use of agricultural buildings at Manor Farm, Beggearn Huish, to a cycle and camping barn which would be un-manned.

It is an historic set of buildings, which if nothing is done will fall down in time, but does it justify this extensive development. The proposal lacks detail as to how the business will operate. It lacks detail of how the structure will be fully prepared and the suitability for what is actually needed. There is a lot of undecided work relying on structural engineer's recommendations.

There was understandably concern for the litter generated, noise pollution and the potential for open camp fires giving rise to fire risks.

The luxurious accommodation details provided under the Appendix relating to Bat Surveys, were considered too extravagant for the usual definition of a 'concrete tent facility' as a camping barn. People who regularly stay in camping barns of this nature would not require this level of luxury.

The Councillors were concerned that the derelict buildings were home to many bat species and barn owls and there was concern for the long term outcome.

If the proposal gains consent from Exmoor National Park Authority there must be a Condition of Occupancy Clause giving specific consent to limit the time the property is used, to avoid it becoming a dwelling/house occupation. A similar Clause exists on the Barn Conversion at Huish Farm limiting its continuous use to 4 weeks in any 12 week period.

The Councillors voted unanimously to not support the Planning Application.

The response will be drawn up and circulated in draft form to the Councillors before submitting to ENPA.

Chair:.....

Date:.....