

Parish Council of Coleford

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Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held Wednesday 8th November 2023

Present Cllr Ham (Chairman presiding) Allen, Banks, Barrett, Drescher, Douglas-Burke, Evans, Paterson, Pearce, Townsend and West

In attendance: 1 members of the public present.
The Clerk, Vickie Watts taking the minutes

1. Public Forum

1.1 There is a pothole near to the Vobster village sign which needs to be reported.

Action: Cllr Townsend to report

1.2 It was asked if there had been any progress on the Gladman development at Lipyeate. The Parish Council was not aware of any further action. It was noted that the application had been approved 21st October 2021 which was 2 years ago.

1.3 The work is almost complete outside the new shop on Anchor Road.

1.4 There is a bus timetable missing from the shelter near to the Temperance Hall. This will be reported to Peter Travis of the Somerset Bus Partnership.

Action: Clerk to report

1.5 It was reported that the bridge wall on Vobster Hill, which was recently hit by a car appears to have damage which needs addressing.

Action: Cllr Townsend to report

1.6 It was asked what the arrangements were for Remembrance Day. Cllr Banks will lay a wreath on behalf of the Parish Council on Sunday 12th November at the Royal British Legion at 3pm

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Bell and Moulding, which were accepted by the Chair.

3. Declaration of Interest and Dispensations granted since last meeting

There were none.

4. Agree the minutes

The minutes from the Parish Council meetings held on the 11th and 25th October 2023 had been circulated to all Councillors. It was agreed that they accurately reflected the meetings and should be approved.

Vote: 11 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstentions

Action: Clerk to upload to the website

5. Actions from the minutes

All actions had been completed or would be discussed as an agenda item during the meeting apart from:

- It was asked why the bin outside the Church Hall had been taped up to prevent use. The Clerk confirmed that she had not been made aware that this had been done but would speak with Idverde.

Action: Clerk to investigate

- It was noted that the notice board outside the piano shop was no longer as visible as it was when parishioners were visiting the post office and shop. It was agreed that the new co-op would be approached to establish if they would consider a new noticeboard outside the store.

Action: Clerk to write to the store manager at the earliest opportunity

- There has been no response from Mr Devanny on accident records and highway safety on Charmborough Lane after many months. Councillors agreed that this should be elevated to the next level for a response.

Action: Clerk to escalate for a response from Mr Devanny

- Two Councillors had said that they were unhappy about the way that the PCSO had managed two different incidents in the village. It was agreed that the Clerk would write to highlight concern

Action: Clerk to write to PCSO

6. Reports

6.1 Somerset Council

Somerset Cllr Philip Ham gave the following report:

2023/4 Financial Position: As at the end of Month5 (September 2023) Somerset Council predicts an end of year overspend of £27.3 million including £14.9m in Adult's and £12m in Children's. Although these figures may be reduced the accepted position is that the budget cannot be achieved, and reserves will have to be used to plug the gap.

2024/5 Financial Position: The current expected budget gap for next year is £100m which represents 20% of the total budget. Of these over £70m is within Social Care. This situation has been described by the Finance Director as being 'stark and challenging'. He wrote to the Government in September setting out the dire straight of the Council budget if no changes are made. With General Reserves at £48.9m some of which will be needed to plug 2023/24 then there is insufficient cover to meet the £100m shortfall. As a consequence and unless something drastic changes then a Section 114 notice will be issued. Whilst the Government may allow some capitalisation of revenue costs this will be at an additional 1% above loan rate and will require a comprehensive and approved plan for the future.

What has gone wrong?: The loss of momentum, expertise and focus after the election in delivering the Unitary transformation by the new administration, has meant that costs have not been removed and duplication of roles continues. As of 1st October of the 330 planned redundancies 29 have been announced and significant numbers of employees remain on interim contracts. In addition rising costs in Adults and Children's Social Care plus the lack of delivery on cost savings planned as part of the budget means that a s114 is looking more and more likely.

What is a Section 114: Somerset Council is required by law to have balanced budgets – this means the council's income has to match its projected spending. If the council cannot find a way to finance its budget, then a section 114 notice must be issued. The issuing of a section 114 notice prohibits all new spending with the exception of protecting:

- vulnerable people
- statutory services (although some are left vague in definition)
- pre-existing spending commitments

If a section 114 notice is issued, it means Somerset Council has to stop spending, and cannot enter into new agreements. However all existing grant agreements will be honoured, and care packages will continue to be paid. Once a section 114 notice is issued, Somerset would have 21 days from the date of the notice to hold a meeting to consider the section 114 report, decide if it agrees with the views contained in the report, and what action to take in consequence of it. A final step would be the appointment by Government of 3 Commissioners at an annual cost of approx. £1m.

New and Expectant Parents Policy: The Councils updated New and Expectant Parents Policy (HS17) has attracted considerable national attention by deleting any reference to mothers. In a statement the Council advised that it was changed to ‘be inclusive for all employees who are pregnant, have given birth in the last 6 months and those breastfeeding including transgender or non-binary people’.

Highways Contract: Somerset Council has signed a new eight-year contract with Kier Transportation Ltd to deliver core maintenance across its road network. The £225m agreement covers key maintenance works – including road repairs, drainage, verge cutting and winter service, such as gritting and other emergency functions in adverse weather. The current contract with Milestone Infrastructure comes to an end at the end of March 2024. Three other multi-million-pound contracts covering resurfacing, surface dressing, and new assets will also be awarded in due course.

Demolition work at Priorswood recycling centre: Demolition work has started on the Taunton Recycling site following the major fire which has closed the site since early October. The Material Recovery Facility (MRF) adjacent to the public recycling area is beyond repair and the recycling site is not safe to open until it is demolished. It is not yet known how long it will take to complete the demolition, but it is likely to be up to two weeks. The site in Priorswood will remain closed until demolition is complete.

Recycling: Nearly half the content of the average Somerset bin could have been recycled, Somerset Council revealed. The 48% figure found this year is an impressive 11% decrease on 2018 – the last time the ‘composition analysis’ was carried out in the county. The contents of some 550 households refuse bins were emptied, sorted and weighed, with a representation from across the county. Of the contents that should have been recycled:

- 14% recyclable at the kerbside (e.g. cardboard or drinks cans)
- 21% food waste, recyclable in the food waste bin
- 7% garden waste and pet bedding
- 7% recyclable at a recycling site (e.g. wood and metal)

The 11% reduction on 2018 figure is thought to have been driven by the expanded Recycle More collections, with less plastic pots tubs and trays being put in the refuse.

Somerset Gritters: Somerset’s fleet of 23 gritters are ready to be mobilised across 900 miles of road as soon as the temperature drops below zero this winter. Last year the gritter fleet went out on 67 occasions when freezing temperatures were forecast.

6.2 PCSO

No report had been received.

7. **Planning Applications**

2023/2106/HSE - Proposed side extensions and loft conversion with dormers

Hovan Bungalow Harris Vale Coleford

All Councillors had the opportunity to consider the application prior to the meeting. After discussion it was proposed by Cllr Banks that the application should be recommended for approval which was seconded by Cllr Patterson as the extension did not breach planning reasons.

Vote: 10 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstention (Somerset Councillor)

Action: Clerk to notify the planning officer

8. Planning updates including enforcement issues

There were none.

9. Emergency planning in Coleford including:

9.1 Registering a building as a 'Safe Place' with Somerset Prepared.

Cllr Ham confirmed that the Hub Committee agreed to register the Hub as a 'Safe Place' via the Somerset Council website.

Action: Cllr Ham to complete the registration

9.2 Creating an Emergency Plan for Coleford

All Councillors agreed that an Emergency Plan would be useful. Cllr Allen, Douglas-Burke and West would complete the template and bring back to the January meeting.

Action: Agenda item for January

10. Highways including:

10.1 Councillor update

Cllr Townsend provided the following updates:

- The 3-way lights on Anchor Rd have twice failed with all lights on red. Cllr Townsend reported to Sunbelt Rentals and on both occasions, they came out to fix within 3 hours.
- Bristol Water responded quickly to the request for urgent action on safety hazard caused by the water cover on the pavement outside the Temperance Hall, helped no doubt by the photograph showing it flipped up.
- The inconsistencies of the 20mph signage by the school have been pointed out to Sara Davis of Somerset Highways. Response awaited.

10.2 Report of any new issues to be reported

- Potholes/edge erosion developing at the Anchor Rd turn into Brewery Lane then up the nearside of Brewery Lane.
- We have issues in neighbouring parishes, i.e., Mells and Holcombe. Edge erosion on the road between the Allotments and Vobster Cross, and in the middle of the road in Holcombe just beyond the playing field car park entrance.

Action: Cllr Townsend to report to Somerset Highways.

- Concern was raised that the narrow piece of grass which runs parallel to the entrance to Preachers Vale next to the new fencing is not being cut by Somerset Council.

Action: Clerk to write to Somerset Council to ask them to ensure it is included in the next years contract.

- It was asked if there was any update on whether the footpath between Mendip Vale and Farley Dell could be improved. The Clerk explained that both Somerset Rights of Way and Somerset Highways said that it was not part of their responsibility. It was asked who installed the safety barriers? It was agreed that photos of the path would be sent to the Clerk who would follow this up.

Action: Cllr Allen or Drescher to send a photo of the barrier to the Clerk to use to establish who is responsible for the path.

11. Finance

11.1 Agree Bank Reconciliation

The bank reconciliation to be checked before the next meeting.

Action: Agenda item for the next meeting

- 11.2 Agree bank transfer of £35,058.00 to Sports Surfacing Solutions for MUGA Fence
The fence had been completed and the invoice received with payment terms of 14 days. It was agreed that the bank transfer for the full amount should be made immediately.

Action: Clerk to ensure signatories sign letter agreeing to the payment and visit the bank

- 11.3 Consider providing a grant to the Citizens Advice Somerset
It was agreed that this would be discussed as part of the 2024/25 budget/precept discussion.

- 11.4 Review small grant applications
Cllrs Banks, Pearce and Evans met to consider the grant applications. Cllr Banks declared an interest in the application submitted by the Hub and Cllr Pearce an interest in Knit and Natter. The following recommendations were made:

Name of Group	Amount Req'd	Description	Sub-Com Recommendation
	£		£
@ The Hub	£500.00	Hot water for the bathrooms	£500.00
Huckyduck Carnival Club	£239.99	Mitre Saw	£60.00*
Coleford Climate Action Group	£120.00	1st year set up costs for a website (Hosting & Domain registration)	£120.00
Tuesday Afternoon Club	£300.00	Grant to go towards guest speakers, hall hire and visits	£300.00
Coleford Conservation Volunteers	£50.00	Restock planters at Church Street Garden	£50.00
1st Coleford Scout Group	£350.00	Insulation for the kitchen	£350.00
Knit & Natter	£50.00	Balls of yarn	£50.00
Coleford Theatre Group	£500.00	Pyrotechnic machine and new microphones plus costumes as have had to hire	£500.00
Amount requested:	£2,109.99	Total	£1,930.00

* Net after return of unspent grant from 2022

It was proposed by Cllr Allen that amounts recommended by the working party should be granted which was seconded by Cllr Barrett. All Councillors voted in favour of granting the amounts however, Cllr Ham, Banks and Townsend declared an interest in the application received from @ the Hub and did not vote on that application and Cllr Pearce declared an interest in the application received from Knit and Natter and did not vote on that application.

- 11.5 Accounts approved for payments:

The following invoices were presented for payment:

HMRC - National Insurance	£122.02
V Watts - Clerks Expenses	£ 35.00
LSJ Gardening Services – VAT for grass cutting	£207.62
SALC – Training	£ 35.00

Small Grants:

@ The Hub	£500.00
Huckyduck Carnival Club	£ 60.00
Coleford Climate Action Group	£120.00
Tuesday Afternoon Club	£300.00
Coleford Conservation Volunteers	£ 50.00
1st Coleford Scout Group	£350.00
Knit & Natter	£ 50.00
Coleford Theatre Group	£500.00

It was agreed that all of the payments should be approved. Cheques were signed by Cllr Ham, Townsend and the Clerk.

Vote: 11 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention

12. Allotments:

12.1 Update on the review of all village allotments

Cllr Pearce proposed a working party meeting to discuss and bring back to the meeting on the 22nd November 2023.

Action: Cllr Ham to consider agenda items

12.2 Consider quotes for a generator for pumping water at the allotments

Cllr Ham confirmed he had researched prices of generators which would cost in the region of £400 which would be covered by the Climate Emergency grant. It was suggested that as the generator was not required to pump water again until the spring the purchase should be made in February /March 2024 when the prices would be cheaper as demand would be less.

12.3 Consider quotes for a secure external housing for generator at the allotments

The size of the generator would be required to ensure that it fits in the housing. It was agreed that the purchase would be made at the same time as the generator or the housing could be made to measure.

12.4 Consider quotes for compostable toilet

This would be discussed at the working party meeting on the 22nd November 2023.

13. Review Cemetery rules

The Clerk confirmed that the memorial inspection was due to be completed which would be an opportunity to undertake a thorough inspection of the cemetery. The Clerk will agree a date for the working party to meet and conduct the inspection.

Action: Agenda item for a future meeting.

14. Discuss whether the host a warm space this winter

Cllr Ham reported that the Hub committee had agreed to host a warm space over the winter and would apply for funding.

15. Consider supporting a Christmas Lights switch on at Highbury Playing Field

There had been interest from a village group about hosting a Christmas light switch on event but due to implications of cost and insurance they are not going to proceed. Cllr Ham said that if the Parish Council was to host the event new lights would be required. The Clerk had sought quotes for commercial outdoor lights which would last longer than cheaper household lights and for the recommended number of lights it would cost in the region of £600 to decorate the large tree at the bottom of Highbury Playing Field. It was agreed that further investigation should be completed before a decision on whether to proceed at the planning meeting on 22nd November

Action: Agenda item for the next meeting

16. Review annual inspection report of the Playing Fields and Play Equipment

The working party responsible for the playing fields had considered the annual inspection reports and said that there were no major issues identified. The Clerk should continue with the ongoing weekly inspections to monitor some small low risk items to ensure any deterioration is picked up before becoming a problem.

17. Discuss and review quotes to address the electric supply at Highbury changing rooms

The Clerk reported that a quote had been received to install a hot water cylinder to run all of the showers at the changing rooms, including the installation of new showers which would be required for such a system. The cost would be £7590 plus VAT.

After discussion it was proposed by Cllr Ham and seconded by Cllr Drescher that the 3-phase electricity should be installed by AF Denning and National Grid to ensure the building is able to supply hot water to all of the showers on demand at a total cost of £4939 + VAT

All Councillors expressed frustration that the work was only required after the installation of the smart meter in the changing rooms.

Action: Clerk to place the order with the contractors

18. Discuss and agree the charge to Coleford Athletic Football Club for use of Highbury Changing Rooms for 2023-24

It was agreed that this would be considered after the work on the electricity supply has been completed.

19. Meetings to attend or attended

14/11/23 @ 3 til 5pm Finance working party meeting. Cllr Townsend, Pearch, Ham, Bell & Clerk to attend

14/11/23 @ 5 – 6.30pm Allotment working party meeting. Cllr Pearce, Drescher, Ham, Allen, Moulding & the Clerk to attend

24/11/23 - CPRE AGM @ Stoke St Gregory. Cllr Townsend to attend

02/12/23 10 til 3pm SALC AGM @ Edgar Hall, Somerton– Cllr Evans to attend if possible

11/01/24– Shepton Mallet Local Community Network. SHAPE Mendip or virtually on Teams. Cllr Ham is chairing the meeting and Cllr Pearce to attend on behalf of Coleford Parish Council.

20. Correspondence

Biodiversity in Planning consultation – Clerk to circulate to all

Email from Frome Town Council regarding the disposal of assets policy which had been agreed by the Somerset Council executive group that day

Mells Parish Council emailed to raise question about the installation of the allotment car park. Clerk to respond and offer to meet with Mells Parish Councillors at the site.

Health & Well Being grant – Clerk and Cllr Ham to meet with Ann Diment to discuss what is required for the large grant applications.

Action: Clerk to progress

21. Matters of Urgency – at the Chairman’s Discretion

There were none.

22. Date of Next Meetings:

22nd November 2023 – Planning meeting

13th December 2023 - Parish Council meeting

The meeting finished at 21.45hrs