

Parish Council of Coleford

Gallant Hill Farm, Foxcote, Radstock, BA3 5YB
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Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held Wednesday 13th December 2023

Present Cllr Ham (Chairman presiding) Allen, Banks, Barrett, Drescher, Evans, Pearce, Moulding (Part) and West

In attendance: 2 members of the public present.
The Clerk, Vickie Watts taking the minutes

1. **Public Forum**

There were no points raised.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Bell, Douglas-Burke, Paterson and Townsend, which were accepted by the Chair.

3. **Declaration of Interest and Dispensations granted since last meeting**

Cllr Evans declared an interest in Agenda item 11.4 – Payments

Cllr Drescher declared an interest in Agenda item 11.2 – Consider grant for new initiative within the village- Table Tennis Club.

4. **Agree the minutes from the meeting held on 8th and 22nd November 2023**

The minutes from the Parish Council meetings held on the 8th and 22nd November 2023 had been circulated to all Councilors. The Clerk had been unable to print a hard copy prior to the meeting so it was agreed that these would be signed at the January meeting.

Action: Agenda item for January

5. **Actions from the minutes**

All actions had been completed or would be dealt with 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

- 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
- 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
- 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.
- **Review Cemetery rules**
The Clerk confirmed that the memorial inspection was due to be completed which would be an opportunity to undertake a thorough inspections 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.
- **Discuss and agree the charge to Coleford Athletic Football Club for use of Highbury Changing Rooms for 2023-24**
Action: January Agenda
- **Correspondence**
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
- Consider Budget and Precept for 2024/25 – A first draft had been shared with all Councillors for consideration. Further work needs to be done to refine the forecast ahead of the next meeting but all Councillors were encouraged to consider funding requirements for the 2024/25 financial year.
Action: Clerk to continue to work on the budget document. Agenda item for January
- **Update on the Allotments**
Cllrs Drescher and Ham were to pass contact details to the Clerk for quotes to be sought for the ground work to create the car park.
Action: Cllrs Drescher and Ham to provide contact numbers for groundwork

6. Consider the request from Coleford Conservation Volunteers for support for the Tree nursery project

The Chair agreed to bring forward agenda item 12.1 to be allow a representative of the Coleford Conservation Volunteers (CCV) to speak on the nursery project.

The representative explained that some of the CCV’s had visited Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council who have set up a tree nursery, with a view to replicating the same scheme in Coleford.

During the autumn a small amount of tree seeds have been gathered to plant. It will take time to establish the different requirements for germinating each species and get a better idea of how hard they are to get going. This will be done in volunteers gardens.

Next year the volunteers hope to:

- Understand the admin involved. If they want to donate their saplings they should record where the seeds were collected and get permission to collect seed. It would also be useful

to record what is done with the seed, so they can repeat successes and avoid repeating mistakes.

- Collect more seed. More will be needed if a good range of tree species is to be obtained.
- Start growing more plants from seed. This could be done in gardens or at a site they will use for growing on.
- Find a site to grow seeds on, so they have bare root trees to offer for autumn 2026 (or earlier with Hazel). This should be vermin proof for the germination stage and a deer and rabbit proof area for the growing on stage.

The representative asked if the Parish Council could help in the following ways:

- By giving permission to collect seed from council owned land.
- Through the small grants scheme to enable the group to buy some growing medium, plant trays / pots and wire mesh to protect the trays from mouse and squirrel raids.
- Helping to find a place to grow the saplings on. Somewhere inside the deer and rabbit fence at the new allotment site would be ideal.

All Councillors agreed for the group to collect seeds from Council owned land. Cllr Ham said that the Council would consider if there was sufficient space within the deer fenced area at the new allotments for the trees to grow on. Once this has been established the Council would let them know.

Action: Consider location for Tree Nursery – Agenda item for January.

7. Reports

7.1 Somerset Council

Somerset Cllr Philip Ham gave the following report:

Council's Financial Position: Latest budget papers, published ahead of the Council's Executive meeting on 6 December, show the in-year overspend for 2023/24 has reduced from £27m to £19m, while the budget gap for 2024/25 has reduced from £100m to £87m. However, in order to close the gap and balance the budget next year a series of service reductions, efficiency savings, and increases to fees and charges, including Council Tax are being considered. Proposals include:

- Increases to parking, planning fees, harbour fees, registrations ceremonies and green waste collections
- Reduction in library services, leisure provision, theatres, visitor centres and heritage services
- Reduction or cessation of CCTV provision
- Reduction in maintenance of ditches, grips, drains, gullies, grass and hedge cutting, weed treatment, road markings, signs and paths.
- Reduction in funding for active travel, bus services and highways safety schemes including school crossing patrols.
- Reduction in the number of Household Waste Recycling centres.

There is also a warning that even that may not be enough to fully close the gap, and a planned transformation programme will need to be accelerated and broadened to reduce the size of the council in future.

Closure of A Block, County Hall: Customers who need to talk to Somerset Council staff face to face about enquiries that cannot be dealt with online or by phone will need to visit Deane House from December. The reception desk at A Block, County Hall, closed on 30 November as the building will be closed off in response to the financial emergency to reduce costs.

Changes to waste collection days: Recycling and rubbish collection days will be changing for more than 120,000 homes in Somerset in February next year. The new routes will make rounds more efficient, more manageable for crews whilst reducing mileage and carbon emissions. The changes come at no cost to the council. In February 2024, recycling and rubbish collection day schedules will change for around 85% of homes in the west of the county. Changes to routes and collection days for the rest of the county are expected to be introduced in June 2024. It is important that residents know their new collection days as crews will not be able to come back

for either recycling or refuse for missed collections. Garden Waste collection dates are unaffected.

The M5 Willow Man: A plan to revive the once-iconic Willow Man sculpture has received a funding boost from National Highways, the company responsible for England's motorways and major A roads. The Willow Man, close to Bridgwater, Junction 23 M5 has deteriorated in recent years and is now barely recognisable. Created by artist Serena De la Hay and unveiled in 2000, the sculpture was commissioned by South West Arts to mark the millennium. Somerset Council has been granted £35,000 of funding from National Highways' Designated Funding programme for an initial feasibility looking at the possibility of repairing/enhancing and relocating the Willow Man. A future scheme could see the sculpture rebuilt using more robust materials. Have your say at: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/communities/willow-man-feasibilitystudy/>

National Landscapes: From November all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales became National Landscapes, including Somerset's Mendip Hills, Quantock Hills, and Blackdown Hills National Landscapes. The new name looks to reflect their national importance whilst also creating greater understanding and awareness for the work that they do.

Bridgwater Town Deal: Residents are invited to have their say on proposals to restore and regenerate Bridgwater Docks, as part of the government's Levelling Up programme to transform Bridgwater Town Centre. The first of a series of public consultations will take place on Wednesday, 13 December at the Bridgwater Sea Cadets Hall, Seaward Drive, Bridgwater, TA6 3FJ, from 3:30pm-6:30pm, and all are welcome to attend. In total £23.2m of government funding has been secured to 'level up' this historical part of the county, through 11 projects which form the Bridgwater Town Deal.

Tone Works and Tone Dale Project: The Government has awarded nearly £20 million for Tone Works and Tone Dale project. The award will provide an opportunity to transform and regenerate the nationally significant heritage site at Tone Works and enhance associated land for community use.

Recycling: Each January the amount of cardboard collected rises as much as an extra 682 tonnes – a staggering 44% increase. This rise not only means more waste to recycle, but it fills the trucks more quickly meaning extra trips to the depot. As the festive season nears, Somerset Council is asking shoppers if they could cut the cardboard by buying gifts that don't need boxes and by shopping on the High Street to cut out the extra packaging that comes with online delivery.

Fight against Domestic Abuse: A new campaign aims to raise the profile of lesser known types of domestic abuse and encourage those who may not realise they are being abused to come forward for support and advice. Somerset Council has commissioned 12 short films to shine the report has spotlight on non-physical types of domestic abuse. The films direct anyone who is experiencing these forms of abuse to www.somersetdomesticabuse.org.uk, where they can get more information, support and advice or by contacting the service on 0800 69 49 999

7.2 PCSO

A report showing crime statistics for the village had been received and circulated to all Councillors. The Clerk explained that PCSO William Mortimer has joined the area to cover for PCSO Robert Nell who is currently not working. Will has asked if there is a room in the village which could be used as a base for a couple of hours each week to allow members of the parish the opportunity to discuss their concerns. Cllr Ham said that the back room at the Hub could be made available. The Clerk to liaise with Will to see if this can be set up.

Action: *Clerk to liaise with PCSO and the Hub committee to progress*

8. **Planning**

There were none.

9. **Planning updates**

The Clerk will provide a full update on outstanding planning applications at the next meeting.

Action: *Agenda item for next meeting*

10. Discuss Somerset Councils disposal of assets including land at Stockhill Court

A letter had been received from Somerset Council regarding their intentions for disposing of assets to help address the financial situation. The Clerk also read out the letter sent by Coleford Parish Council to Somerset Council in response to their plans to auction land adjacent to the bungalows at number of 11 and 12 at Stockhill. The Parish Council has highlighted the reasons why this should not take place and publicised on social media inviting Parishioners to get in touch with suggestions on how this should be dealt with. 2 emails had been received from concerned members of the community. After discussion it was agreed that a response would be prepared for Somerset Council asking if the asset could be transferred to Coleford Parish Council rather than purchased. The deadline for response is 31st January 2024.

Action: Cllr Ham and the Clerk to draft a response. Agenda item for January meeting

11 Highways including:

11.1 Councillor update

Cllr Townsend confirmed that the following items reported to Somerset Highways:

Flooding at junction of Charity Lane and Mells Road - cleared Edge erosion between Allotments and old bridge Impact damage to old canal bridge at Vobster Edge erosion and potholes Vobster Inn to Stockhill.

Potholes at Lipyeate Cross - some patching done; more may be needed.

Charity Lane flooding

Potholes in middle by exit to Holcombe Playing field - fixed, more emerging Stoke Bottom, flooding, edge erosion and rubble.

Part fixed: Croscombe to Shepton - dangerous dropped drain.

Fixed: Kilmersdon Ames Lane - potholes dangerous to TiP runners

Extensive drainage works done 200 yards down Cherry Gardens Lane after previous report of flooding and potholes, success to be monitored.

11.2 Report of any new issues to be reported

There were no new reports.

12 Finance

12.1 Agree Bank Reconciliation

The Clerk has completed the bank reconciliation but was unable to print. To be checked before the next meeting.

Action: Agenda item for the next meeting

12.2 Consider a grant for a new initiative within the village – Table Tennis Club

The table tennis club is a new group which has grown in popularity but has been unable to extend the membership as they only have one table. It was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Banks that a grant of £250 should be awarded to help purchase a second table to further expand the group.

Vote: 8 For, Against and 1 Abstention

Cllr Drescher declared an interest so did not take part in the vote.

Action: Clerk to notify the club

12.3 Agree to update the standing orders for Clerk Salary and Pension payments

The Clerk had been unable to print the documents. These will be signed at the January meeting.

Action: Clerk to print for signatories to sign at the next meeting

12.4 Accounts approved for payments:

The following invoices were presented for payment:

V Watts - Clerks Expenses	£ 65.63
Darren Haines - Printing	£ 108.20
Isaac Gregory – Butterfly Bank Tree Work	£1644.00
RJP Electrics Ltd – Outside light at the Changing rooms	£ 84.00
Keith Evans – Mileage and expenses	£ 26.59

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

Vote: 8 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstention

Cllr Evans declared an interest and did not take part in the vote

13. Allotments:

13.1 Consider applying for a grant from Halecombe Quarry Community Fund towards the cost of compostable toilet

Cllr Pearce explained that a budget total of £1500 had been allocated to cover the cost of purchasing the compostable toilet which had been received as part of the Somerset Climate Emergency Grant. If a fully accessible toilet was going to be purchased, then the cost was likely to be double. Cllr Pearce suggested that a grant application should be submitted to Halecombe Quarry Community Fund for £1500 towards the costs. All Councillors agreed that an application should be submitted.

Action: The Clerk and Cllr Pearce to complete the application by the 31st January 2024

12.4 Update on the review of all village allotments

It was agreed that notice would be given to all village allotment holders that as of January 2025 there would be a 10% increase in rent. The last increase was implemented in 2021. It was also agreed that concessionary rates would be applied to Goodeaves allotments in the same manner as those at the new Coleford Allotments at Vobster.

This would be sent at the same time as the invoice for the next 12 months, payable 15th January 2024.

Vote: 9 For, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions

Action: Clerk to notify all allotment holders of the increase and invoice by 15th

Clerk to establish who will benefit from the concessionary rates at Goodeaves allotments

14. Consider quotes received for Grass and Hedge cutting contracts 2024-26

The Clerk confirmed that despite approaching 12 contractors, only one quote has been received in a sealed envelope. The Clerk said that she felt at least one other contractor would quote however had not had sufficient time to submit before the deadline. All Councillors agreed that the Clerk should try to gather more quotes for review at the January meeting.

Action: Agenda item for January meeting.

15. Meetings to attend or attended

24/11/23 - CPRE AGM @ Stoke St Gregory. Cllr Townsend attended and gave the following report:

The meeting was led by the Somerset President Mariella Frostrup who introduced 5 speakers from the national organisation. Good to see at least 3 Somerset Councillors in the audience. The main theme was a Rooftop Revolution to publicise opposition to solar ‘farms’ being created on valuable real farmland when significant opportunities existed to use commercial and domestic buildings. The loss of food growing capacity is obvious. Tenant farmers are at risk of losing their farms to landlords solar profit-making. Objectors should be alert to unsubstantiated claims from applicants that there will be a net gain to bio diversity. Applicants frequently claimed that there would be continued agricultural use with sheep grazing beneath the panels. None of the 60

attendees had ever seen this happen. The visual intrusion in the open countryside is an obvious Harmat

Local authorities should be encouraged to include policies in Local Plans to make rooftop solar mandatory on all new buildings. Cllr Townsend made the point that our Local Plan was out of date as it didn't show a forward 5-year housing land supply and was not scheduled to be rectified until March 2028. The only saving grace is that the imminent re-issue of the NPPF could reclassify the annual housing targets as 'advisory' rather than mandatory"

CPRE now has a small fund to assist with the restoration of the traditional Somerset finger posts with the pyramid finial – Could this be an opportunity for Coleford?

02/12/23 10 til 3pm SALC AGM @ Edgar Hall, Somerton– Cllr Evans and the Clerk attended the meeting. A presentation was given by Bill Revans the Leader of Somerset Council on the Financial emergency and devolution of assets, although it was not clear how things would be progressed at this point in time. During the afternoon there was a presentation on Health and Well-being in Somerset. Minutes and further information will be circulated once received.

03/01/24 @ 1pm Finance working party meeting. Cllr Townsend, Pearce, Ham, Bell & Clerk to attend to discuss the 3rd Quarter budget review for 2023-24 and discuss budget figures for 2024-25

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.

16. Correspondence

- Somerset Council – Confirmation that Precept deadline be extended to 2nd February
- 27/11/23 - Email received from a Year 5 student who lives in the village . She has suggested a project to create leaves for the dead tree close to Highbury Playing Field. Parishioners would be invited to write something special they like about Coleford on a coloured paper leaf which would then be laminated and hung on the tree.

All Councillors thought this was a lovely idea although the decision would not be down to the Parish Council as the tree was not on Council owned land. The Clerk to write to the student to explain that we will contact the landowner to discuss and get back to them.

Action: The Clerk to write to the student to explain that the Council will contact the landowner to discuss and get back to them.

- Somerset Rivers Authority – Council is invited to comment on the Somerset Rivers Authority's draft Strategy and Flood Action Plan (2024-34). Deadline for the consultation is 14th January 2024

17. Matters of Urgency – at the Chairman's Discretion

There were none.

18. Date of Next Meetings:

10th January 2024 - Parish Council meeting
24th January 2024 – Planning meeting

The meeting finished at 21.10hrs