



Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held via Zoom

Wednesday 1st July 2020

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| Present | Sue Isherwood, Chair | Ros Wyke, Councillor |
| | Sue Reece, Councillor | Peter Bright, Councillor |
| | Jo Tucker, Councillor | Guy Timson, Councillor |
| | John Millbank, Councillor | |
| In attendance | Mark Smith, Website Administrator | |
| | Chris Harris, Clerk | |

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Graham Noel, Somerset County Councillor.

Cllr Timson had notified the Council that he would arrive late to the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

2a Declarations of interest from Councillors on items on the agenda

Cllr Wyke, as a Member involved in the consideration and determination of planning applications by Mendip District Council, declares that the views expressed by her at Parish Council meetings on any particular proposal are based on the evidence available to her at the time, and is provisional only. Cllr Wyke will not be bound by any recommendation made by the Parish Council on any proposal, and will consider any matter afresh in connection with any application which comes before her in her capacity as a Member of Mendip District Council, taking all further evidence into account.

No other declarations or written requests were received.

3. Minutes of the meetings held on 6th May and 3rd June 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th May 2020 were reviewed following previous corrections, and the minutes of the meeting of 3rd June were reviewed. Both were agreed as correct records.

4. Website Update

4a Mark Smith presented the following update:

- The Accessibility Statement agreed at the 3rd June meeting has been published.
- Tickbox Marketing has installed the CivicUK Cookie Controller on a WsM test website where it has been acceptance tested. The Cookie Controller went live on 26th June.
- The Friendly Society has been given webpages development support.
- The WsM Strawberry Line group has been given webpage development support.
- A website Zoom workshop for village website Editors was held on 23rd June.
- Parish Council documents (minutes, agenda, calendar events) have been published.
- Website visit stats show a drop-off in June; as the Covid-19 situation has stabilised this is not unexpected, and it is gratifying to see that visitor numbers are still considerably higher than before the current situation. Cookie options may alter recordable numbers going forward.
- There appears to be an appetite for further training sessions – Mark will investigate further and co-ordinate another session if numbers warrant it.

Councillors thanked Mr Smith for his continuing efforts and support for the website and the community at large.

5. Emergency Planning Committee Update

Cllr Reece gave her regular update on EPC activity.

- It is now 14 weeks since the Emergency Planning Committee (EPC) issued its first communication to the village in relation to the coronavirus pandemic.
- All the help lines remain live, despite some having less use than initially envisaged. This may change as personal circumstances change with the easing of lockdown, ongoing job insecurity and other related factors.
- The availability of the Westbury Friendly Society grant continues to be publicised. Two have been awarded so far but again there is potential for this to become a valuable source of help as personal circumstances change.
- Government advice continues to be reviewed on a daily basis plus information to include in our updates from local government and members of the community. However, the publication of new information is slowing down and the EPC feels that, with the support of the Parish Council, newsletter updates can be reduced to weekly on Mondays, although if there is an urgent or important announcement an extra newsletter can be issued.
- Overall, the EPC has been very impressed with the huge effort the community has made to stay safe and support each other – the hope is that this level of community spirit will become a permanent feature of village life going forward.

Members agreed with the decision to reduce publication of the newsletter to once a week. There was some discussion regarding including a broader range of topics in the newsletter, but agreed that it would remain focussed on the ongoing coronavirus situation, particularly as the PEW will be back in paper publication by September. Members thanked Cllr Reece for her report and once again expressed their support, thanks and admiration for all those involved in the EPC and its services.

6. Update on impact of Coronavirus pandemic on Parish Council business

Councillors discussed the current situation on the following matters.

Village Hall: The Chair reported that further information will be available from the Hall Committee after their meeting later in the week.

Community Shop: Cllr Reece presented an update from the Chair of the shop committee, Simon Reece.

- In the last two weeks, the shop has been gradually relaxing its access restrictions in line with regulations. There is now a new layout making access to the Post Office easier. It also allows customers to scan the shelves much more easily although they are not yet allowed to wander freely.
- Sales have eased off a little in May but remain significantly higher than they were in 2019: indeed last Friday (26th June) was possibly the best day ever. We remain immensely grateful for the support of the village and hope it is sustained going forward. Fruit and vegetable trade is strong, and regular meat orders are growing too. Payment can now be made by card removing the need for cash completely.
- The ordering and delivery service created so effectively and so rapidly by the Parish Council at the beginning of lockdown is now being gradually brought under the direct control of the shop. We intend that it is sustained as the team of volunteers that run it start to move back into their regular employment and commitments. Getting this system to work effectively and efficiently is the task for July. As this team from the PC and their volunteers begin to hand over, it would be appropriate to acknowledge the huge amount that they have achieved for the Village and the Shop. We are immensely grateful to them all.

At this point connectivity issues occurred as Cllr Timson attempted to join the meeting. Once restored, Cllr Timson was able to join the meeting but Cllr Wyke remained offline.

Robert Glanville Playing Field Trust: Cllr Timson reported that preparations were well underway to get the field ready for reopening on Sunday 5th July, in line with government guidelines. This includes appropriate signage, hand sanitiser and various changes to equipment but not regular cleaning due to lack of staff and funds, all to be used as the public's own risk.

8. Reports from the Somerset County Councillor and Mendip District Councillor

Cllr Noel, the Somerset County Councillor, had provided a written report, as follows:

- **Corona Virus Update:** Whilst every death is undoubtedly an absolute tragedy, the situation in

Somerset has been relatively quiet compared to the rest of the country. As at 26th June, the number of confirmed cases in Somerset was 795 and the number of Covid-attributed deaths 195. At 0.6, the R Value for the South West was the lowest of all English regions, with the national average being 0.7-1.0. Of Somerset's 200 Care Homes, only one currently has any Covid19 cases within it.

- **Outbreak Management Plan:** Somerset's Outbreak Management Plan has been developed, agreed and will shortly be posted onto the SCC website. The Plan outlines the measure in place and the actions which will be taken should a local outbreak of Covid19 occur in the County including Test and Trace. Public Health England rated Somerset's plan as exemplary and it will be used as a benchmark nationally.
- **SCC Financial outcome for 2019/20:** Positive financial results and a major boost to reserves have put Somerset County Council in a strong position. In the last financial year, SCC increased its reserves to £76.2m across the board and delivered efficiencies that enabled a £6.4m underspend on the total budget.
- **SCC Covid19 Finances:** SCC estimates additional costs of around £47m to help communities deal with coronavirus. To date the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group have reimbursed approx. £6 million and the government has allocated an additional £26m to Somerset. It is expected that a further Government award to help close the small shortfall will be made shortly.
- **Climate Change:** SCC have become founding Members of a new network which been established by UK100 to campaign on climate change. The 21 councils involved in the Network represent 14.3 million people in total, a quarter of the population (25%) and two fifths (41%) of England by area. The network is to focus on rural communities who face unfair barriers in trying to decarbonise – it is often harder to attract funding for projects which don't fit traditional cost/benefit analyses and which often favour urban concentrations with less overall carbon reduction impact.
- **One Somerset:** The business case to move to a Single Unitary authority across Somerset will be available on www.onesomerset.org.uk from 7th July. The business case will pass through SCC's Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet before being considered at Full Council on the 29th July. Engagement and consultation activities will continue through July and into the Summer.
- **Registration Services:** Birth registrations are now making a phased return in Somerset following the gradual easing of coronavirus restrictions. Parents can now book appointments to register the birth of babies born before 31 March 2020. The number of appointments will be limited at first; there is a large number of births to be registered and parents of babies born after 1 April are asked to stay patient for now until more offices are open. Further updates will follow – please check www.somerset.gov.uk/births-ceremonies-and-deaths/register-birth
- **Library Services:** Somerset Libraries are planning the phased re-opening of library buildings with the aim to start welcoming people back in July. Social distancing measures will be in place and a 'personal shopper' service will be available as customers will not initially be able to browse. Staff will be available to select items for customers based on popular titles, specific interests and favourite authors. Full details will be available soon the Somerset Libraries website (www.somersetlibraries.co.uk) Importantly there will be no overdue charges as a result of items borrowed just before buildings closed on the 19th March.
- **Commonplace:** A new interactive online mapping tool has been launched to enable members of the community to flag up areas of concern in a specific locations where changes to walking, cycling and travel could make a positive difference. This is building on a number of temporary measures, including pedestrianised high streets, which have already been introduced to encourage social distancing and positively support the safe movement of pedestrians and cyclists. The map can be accessed at <https://somersetcovidactivettravel.commonplace.is/>. An indicative figure of £482,000 for Somerset has also been published from the second tranche of funding where further new schemes will be considered.

Councillors noted the contents of the report with interest.

Cllr Wyke was able to reconnect to the meeting at this point.

The Mendip District Councillor gave a brief summary of ongoing actions.

- Covid-19 activities are still ongoing, with outbreak plans being put in place and further support for those still shielding or coming out of shielding.

- £30 million in business grants have so far been awarded.
- Discretionary awards are currently oversubscribed, as furloughed staff are increasingly being made redundant. A reduction in council tax for those affected is being considered.
- Recent government announcements regarding planning development have been received with some concern, particularly with regard to the protection of rural areas. They will be closely scrutinised as more details become available.
- Improvements in infrastructure are continuing, with the potential for a train station at Shepton Mallet on the viability list. More cycle paths are being considered across the district, and various suggestions for pedestrianisation are being implemented or adjusted to meet local need. Wells High Street will remain a one-way system with a small section at the southern end closed off.
- The council is continuing to review the issue of homelessness across the district and consider alternative remedies.
- In line with its Green Agenda, drivers are to be encouraged to turn off their engines while waiting at traffic lights, etc, particularly delivery drivers in the area. Rewilding plans continue, to include no use of weedkiller in town centres.

Councillors thanked the District Councillor for her report.

Mark Smith left the meeting at this point.

10. Local Government Reorganisation

Cllr Wyke declared an interest in this matter.

Councillors discussed in some detail the recently presented executive summary of planned local government reorganisation. Cllr Wyke felt that while good in parts, the self-selected committee from which it arose did not have full representation across all districts within Somerset – including MDC – and that a number of wider issues pertaining particularly to rural areas were not fully addressed. In addition, the business plan has not been published and while there appears to be a move towards more powers at local/parish level, there is no extra funding to cover the additional workload these will create. A number of inconsistencies were noted by councillors and some areas of obfuscation. It was agreed that the Chair would draft a response in consultation with councillors expressing the Council's areas of concern. The matter will be discussed further at the next meeting.

Action: Chair

10. Clerk's Report

There was no report from the Clerk as all current matters were covered under various other Items.

10. Planning

10a Planning Applications

There were no planning applications to be considered.

10b MDC Decisions

There were no MDC decisions to be noted.

10c For general consideration/monitoring:

i) 2019/1549/FUL Agricultural Buildings, Top Road, amended application and Planning Officer's decision

The Chair, accompanied by members of the community, attended the Planning Board meeting at which this application was discussed. The application was rejected on the Board Chair's vote and there will be an appeal. She reported that it was a difficult meeting with a number of contentious issues arising including summary dismissal of evidence presented by objectors (including a short video presentation), and the apparent disregard of the site's position within the AONB and conservation area. The Chair made a formal written complaint to Stuart Brown, Chief Executive of MDC regarding a number of points of concern and had received a detailed reply in which several failings in procedural matters were admitted. The Chair to draft a response.

Action: Chair

The Council thanked the Chair, Mick Fletcher and Andrew Buchanan for their efforts prior to and attendance at the meeting.

ii) 2019/2336/FUL Shamrock Stables, amended application and any developments

Again, there had been no news of when this application would be heard by the Planning Board at MDC.

Enforcement has apparently been involved recently and Cllr Wyke reported that there were an increasing number of complaints of noise from the neighbouring parish of Rodney Stoke. Councillors noted that there had been a significant increase in traffic, both human and vehicular, at the site in recent weeks, that the noise from dogs barking is back to pre-lockdown levels or worse, and that effluent is continuing to run down Lynch Lane and into the village. Affected members of the public are urged to continue to report issues to the Enforcement Officer directly, NOT via the Parish Council as second-hand reports are disregarded.

The Clerk to contact Mrs Laws and Mr Langdon and keep them informed of the Planning Board date.

Action: Clerk

iii) Land at Lynchcombe Lane, unauthorised occupancy and any developments

The owner of the site had wanted to attend the meeting but unfortunately had connectivity issues. He had been approached directly regarding financial aspects but had not responded. The site was once again discussed as a potential site for allotments but access continues to be a significant issue. There was some discussion about alternative sites – see Item 15 below.

11. Finance

11a Payments to Note

The following payment from the coronavirus emergency fund was noted:

- Mark Smith, additional website services £361.00

The following payments were noted:

- Tickbox Marketing for cookie controller installation and subscription £107.94
- Came & Company PC annual insurance premium £387.26

11b Payments to Approve

The following payments were approved:

- Chris Harris, Zoom subscription (May and June) £28.72
- Tickbox Marketing for Website Security Licence £108.00

11c The following account balances as at 01/07/20 were noted:

- Treasurer's Account £841.00
- Business Bank Account £24,000.99

11d Internal Audit 2019-20

The Clerk reported that she had hoped to have the audit figures ready to present to Council for approval but first needs to update the asset register and recheck with the internal auditor before this can be done. This will be moved forward to the next meeting.

Action: Clerk

12. Tree Strategy Group

Cllr Timson reported that developments were progressing well. More people have joined and the constitution is nearing completion. A potential tree nursery is planned for Court House and Buffy Fletcher has had discussions with Haley Warren, MDC's Tree Officer. Cllr Tucker reported that she is continuing to gather information relating to farming, and is pleased to note that there will be no requirement to change land maps when replanting. Once lockdown restrictions are relaxed further, some tree walks are planned which will highlight areas of concern and areas of potential. Overall, developments were very positive and Councillors were delighted with progress made to date.

13 The State of Parish Roadways

The increase in the amount of litter and mess in and around the village was discussed. It was agreed that the Clerk formally write to the Leader of MDC regarding these concerns and requesting action.

Action: Clerk

14. Traffic and Speeding Through the Village

Councillors requested clarity on the extent of the 20mph limit around the school, discussed at an SCC board meeting in February, and whether it could be extended to various other roads in the village, most notably Old Ditch, Back Lane and Station Road. The Clerk to contact Mike Pullin, portfolio holder with responsibility for minor roads. Longstanding Councillors recalled that there had been discussion of a 'village gateway,' similar to Draycott's, discussed several years previously; the Clerk to investigate. The position of the bus stop was discussed again – the Clerk drew attention to previous discussions on this matter.

Action: Clerk

15. Interest in allotments

The Chair noted that a recent Facebook notice had elicited 12 expressions of interest in allotments in the village thus there appears to be an appetite for them. The possibilities of the site in Lynchcombe Lane was discussed above in Item 10iii. Cllr Reece noted that a group has been formed by members of the community in Roughmoor Lane; one of their suggestions is of allotments in the land adjacent to the lane. Awareness of the group was limited, but will be discussed at the next meeting.

16. Resignation of Cllr Bright and Councillor recruitment process

The Clerk reported on the process that has to be followed concerning recruitment: once the Monitoring Officer at MDC confirmed that no requests for election had been received from members of the community, the usual procedure for co-option would be put in train.

Action: Clerk

Covering Cllr Bright's responsibilities was not addressed and will be discussed at the next meeting.

16. Resignation of Clerk

The Clerk reported that, due to a significant change in personal circumstances, she was no longer able to continue in the role and will be resigning as of 31st August. The process for recruitment will be put in train as soon as practicable.

Action: Clerk

18. Notices

There were no notices.

19. Items for Next Agenda

There were no additional items for the next agenda.

20. Date of next meeting – an additional meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 5th August 2020 @ 7.30 p.m. as a virtual meeting via online conferencing facilities.

Signed electronically:  Chair of the Parish Council

Date: