

Hinton St George Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 15th January 2024, At St. Georges Village Hall, Hinton St. George

Present: Cllrs R. Lewin (RL) P. Reynolds (PR) F. Voss (FV), A. Barber (AB) and S. Ashton (SA).

Somerset Councillor J Roundell- Greene

The Clerk and Parish Path Liaison Officer

Members of the Public: None

865. Open Forum.

No members of the public present.

The meeting started at 7.15 p.m. with Cllr R. Lewin as the Chair.

866. Apologies for Absence: Cllrs: P. Lanham and M. Herbert – both personal – apologies accepted.

867. Declarations of Interest: No declarations of interest.

868. Minutes of last Meeting: The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 20th November 2023 and the extraordinary meeting held on Thursday 21st December 2023 were approved and signed by the Chair.

869. Somerset Councillor Report: - Cllr. Jo Roundell- Green said the Executive had met earlier that day to discuss the proposed budget but they did not vote as it will go to Scrutiny and back to Executive in February for a decision. She mentioned some of the proposed cuts and confirmed that sadly there would be an impact on everyone. She outlined the position with regard to closure of recycling centres and the impact of closing smaller ones, which would mean people may have to travel a considerable distance to the larger centres, and stressed that Somerset Council was working very hard to identify savings and to close the gap in the budget for 2024/25.

The Chair enquired about the proposed precept increase and additional borrowing to close the budget gap and asked if a 114 notice was likely to be requested. Cllr. Roundell – Greene said the proposed measures were what Government would do if they took control, and savings have been made to most budget areas, but children’s and adult social care services have risen so much it is having a significant impact on the budget. Councillors discussed the issues further and Cllr A Barber enquired about those care staff on minimum wage, who had now been given an agreed pay increase. Cllr Roundell- Greene said the Government had agreed a 9% increase, but the Council did not receive that level of financial support to cover this. She said the predicted savings of moving to a Unitary Authority were impacted by higher energy costs and the Council has done all it can, so she felt the situation was not due to bad management. The Chair enquired when the list with costings for devolved services would be available and she it would not be available before the Executive meeting on 20th February. The Chair expressed frustration with the lack of information around costs as the Parish Council had to agree a budget for 2024/25 by the end of January without all the necessary financial information. He expressed the Councils thanks to Cllr Roundell- Greene for her in depth update and acknowledged it was a very difficult task for her to convey such unwelcome news.

Cllr Roundell – Greene left the meeting.

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870. Matters arising:

a) Flooding at Teakettle Lane – the Clerk had no update to offer, and the Chair requested she write again, including both Somerset Councillors making it clear that progress must be made on this issue.

b) A30 Junction- hedges – The Chair reported the hedge had been cut and visibility was improved. Cllr. Voss felt a little more hedge should be cut back and the Clerk was asked to write to express the Parish Councils thanks, but to request further cutting to improve visibility towards Crewkerne.

c) to note response to devolved services has been sent to Somerset Council – Councillors noted the replies and discussed the lack of information with regard to devolving the assets, not just the services. The Chair requested the Clerk pursue the matter with Somerset Council and undertake research into ownership of assets within the village.

d) Clerks email – Council discussed the cost of hosting the email and requested that gov.uk email and website be added to the next Agenda.

871. Highways and footpaths updates:

a) Parish Path Liaison report – the PPLO enquired about the damaged boardwalk and asked if it would be removed as discussed. The Chair confirmed that recent drainage works were working well, but more works are planned around that area and it would be wise to retain the boardwalk until those works were complete and the drainage was monitored for a period of time. Councillors discussed the proposed works and the issues following the recent heavy storms and it was agreed that the boardwalk should be repaired. The Parish Path Liaison kindly offered to complete the works as he already had suitable materials.

He reported there was also an issue with standing water in the field beyond Jubilee Steps, although it was now drying out. The Chair confirmed work was being done to restore ditches so this may have a knock effect and suggested the PPLO may want to meet with the gentleman undertaking all the drainage works.

The PPLO also reported the small tree lying along the footpath at Jubilee Path has been removed and one rotting post on the kissing gate will be replaced.

There was a question if budget cuts would impact on Parish Wardens and Councillors thanked him for his report.

b) to note response re: Bridleway at Castle Hill – Councillors noted the obstruction had been reported and Rights of Way were aware of the issues, and that the bridleway sits in West Crewkerne Parish.

c) to consider actions re: lighting at Teakettle Lane – the Clerk confirmed she had spoken to a Heritage Lighting Consultant and he had suggested it might be possible to “ tune the new lighting” to reduce the level or add an adjustment filter as the lights are probably on a blue spectrum and the older ones on a warmer scale – The Chair felt this was most helpful and Council agreed the Clerk should contact him to confirm the cost of a visit to the village to discuss possible actions.

d) Parking in the village – the Clerk confirmed she had written to the Poulett Arms but had not received a reply – Council requested she send the email to the owner. Devon and Somerset Fire Services had acknowledged the correspondence and have directed it to Crewkerne Fire Station to respond.

It was noted that several cars had been reported to relevant authorities and it was agreed to
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contact the owner of one property with regard to untaxed vehicles in the road.

The Clerk mentioned that the lengthsman would resume grass cutting shortly and it may be necessary to contact some homeowners before starting the refurbishment of the Heritage lighting.

872. Planning applications to review:

None.

Decisions to note:

23/02996/HOU – Abbey House, Abbey Street, Hinton St. George – proposed garage to the garden area of the main dwelling. **Approved – with conditions.**

873. Planning matters:

a) to receive update on Conservation Area appraisal: Councillors had received a copy of the first detailed street survey, and this will be sent to the Heritage Consultant for his review, before further street surveys are undertaken.

874. Finance:

a) review of the current receipts and payments schedule and verify bank reconciliations. – Councillors noted the refund from National Grid had been received.

b) Invoices for payment to be considered and approved by Councillors prior to payment –

I.	Clerks' salary – December	£ 562.50
II.	Clerks' reimbursement	£ 30.60
III.	Citizens Advice Somerset – donation	£ 100.00
IV.	Home and Garden Services	£ 770.00
V.	Clerks' salary – January	£ 402.02
VI.	SSE – electricity	£ 19.35

c) to receive update on interest rates and agree transfer to deposit account- Councillors noted that the current offer was only 1.4% and agreed not to transfer at this time.

d) to agree 2024/25 Budget and finalise and agree precept for 2024/25 to include signing the precept request– Councillors discussed the proposed cuts from County, but expressed concern that residents could be hit by two increases, County and Parish, and felt it was prudent to monitor the situation at County and the possible devolved services for a year rather than make significant increases to the precept for 2024/25. After further discussion they agreed the 2024/25 budget and

Cllr R Lewin (The Chair) proposed an increase of 10% to the precept, on the assumption that the Parish Council will, in the coming year, have to increase its expenditure to maintain the services that the County has indicated it will be forced to cut. It is not possible at this early stage to quantify the likely costs involved but the council has sufficient reserves to meet additional expenses in the coming year should they exceed the increase in the precept. Next year the amount of these additional costs should be clearer, and the precept will then be recalibrated to take them fully into account.

Seconded by Cllr. S Ashton and agreed unanimously.

The Chair signed the precept request in the meeting.

Cllr S Ashton mentioned that the proposed closure of the Yeovil stroke unit will be agreed this week.

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875. Defibrillators update: Cllr Barber reported that he had contacted the Department of Education with regard to the cost of replacement pads and battery for the defibrillator at the Primary School and they had replied that would not cover the cost and the school would be directed to the preferred supplier. He enquired if the Parish Council should cover the cost and confirmed that school battery is 5 yearly renewals.

The Clerk will add this to the February agenda.

876. to agree copy for the Hinton Hound – Councillors agreed the suggested article.

877. to agree date for the Annual Parish Meeting – Councillors agreed to hold the meeting on the same day as the Parish Council Annual Meeting as usual and noted that it will be Monday 20th May 2024.

878. to receive Parish Councillors reports

FV – none

AB – expressed concern at a broken “stay wire” on a telecoms and power pole on Gas Lane outside Phoenix House. As he was concerned about possible disruption to power and telephone he contacted National Grid, who said it was telecom. They arranged a visit, but were no longer on site at the agreed time, so he has started another report, as the pole does lean and the “stay wire” is now just the yellow sheaf.

RL – none

PR – raised the correspondence with regard to the Pelota Wall and after discussion Councillors requested the Clerk contact the Stonemason for further review of the wall at his convenience, so they can agree the correct course of action and respond accordingly to the correspondence. This will be discussed further in the February meeting.

SA – no further update beyond the financial emergency and proposed closure of stroke unit.

879. To note correspondence received and agree response to SALC. – Councillors noted the correspondence with regard to devolved services and felt there was no need to respond.

The Clerk confirmed that a model Biodiversity Policy was available, and this would be on the February Agenda for approval.

880. Public Forum – no public in attendance

881. Next meeting date: The next meeting will be held on Monday 19th February 2024, in St. Georges Hall.

The meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.

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