

MINUTES OF ST CUTHBERT (OUT) PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT DINDER VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 24th JUNE 2024, 7PM.

PRESENT: Cllrs F Brown; P Blatchford; M Cooke; T Hathway (Vice-Chairman); K Hoogesteger; I Humphreys; M Mitchell; G Pettitt

IN ATTENDANCE: Lisa Pool (Parish Clerk); Simon Davies (RFO); Somerset Council Cllrs H Shearer & T Robbins.

01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO CONSIDER THE REASONS GIVEN

Councillors Zorab, Johns, Hayden, Lunnon, McCoy, Reeves & Joseph sent their apologies for a combination of holiday, work and festival commitments.

RESOLVED: To accept the reasons offered for absence.

02. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Blatchford declared a personal interest in Item 11, for the Westbury-Sub-Mendip Tree Planting Group's grant application.

03. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items that excluded the press and public.

04. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded councillors about keeping points relevant to discussion for efficiency. Cllr Hathway also referred to recent communication with Somerset Council regarding installation of new dog waste bins but anticipated a solution for the approved bin at Easton.

[It was noted that several councillors were having difficulties with their Cuttlefish accounts and were therefore not able to download, or had not accessed, information for the meeting.]

05. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

06. LOCAL AUTHORITY REPORTS

Cllr Tony Robbins explained that the monthly report was in a different format and he was open to any suggestions for improvement. Cllr Heather Shearer expanded on the Police crime statistics circulated as a member of the Avon & Somerset Police & Crime Panel: she explained that Somerset Council had been selected as an inspection area that would investigate how well the system works across multiple agencies but particularly how well children and young people were being protected from serious violent crime. The outcome of the study identified many individual strengths but also that better joined-up practice between police, schools, surgeries, community groups and other agencies would benefit. Cllr Pettitt noted how appreciative she was of the fortnightly Town & Parish Clerks Working Group run by Somerset Council. Cllr Blatchford asked if a Somerset Council contact list was possible. It was pointed out that with personnel matters and re-structuring, it was difficult to keep it up to date but a centrally monitored email account for departments would be useful. Cllr Shearer reminded Councillors that the Ward Councillors may be able to help if making contact with the Unitary Council was difficult.

07. MINUTES OF ST CUTHBERT (OUT) PARISH COUNCIL ON MONDAY 13TH MAY 2024

RESOLVED: to confirm and sign as a correct record the minutes of the Council held on Monday 13TH May 2024.

08. AUDIT 2023-24

Mr Simon Davies explained the stages and requirements of both the Internal and External Audits. The Internal Audit has been completed and the auditor has made the following recommendations, which the Council resolved to accept. The 30-day notice period for the public would run from Tuesday 25th June to Monday 5th August 2024.

RESOLVED: to receive the 'Internal Audit Checklist and approve the RFO to take action on the matters raised, reporting to the Finance & Scrutiny Committee on progress. The focus areas are:

- Council to adopt an investment strategy for Reserves
- Standing Orders and Financial Regulations to be in sync in all respects
- AGAR Minuting to be more detailed.
- The Asset register to have a higher profile and dedicated page on the website

RESOLVED: To approve the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022/23)

RESOLVED: To approve the Accounting Statements (Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022/23)

RESOLVED: To receive the 'Notice of Public Rights' and to approve the dates of the Notice from Tuesday 25th June to Monday 5th August 2024.

The Council discussed the Accounts between 14th May and 24th June 2024.

RESOLVED: To accept the receipts, payments and bank reconciliation as checked prior to the meeting by Cllrs Humphreys and Hoogesteger.

09. WELLS & RURAL LCN

Cllr Hathway explained that there was little to update the Council on, but that the revised meeting date for the next meeting would be Tuesday 23rd July 2024 in Binegar Village Hall.

10. ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP

Cllr Pettitt updated the council on various projects. The Strawberry Line pond project was working through planning requirements for a Biodiversity Assessment and progress was being affected by a lack of ecologists available. It had also emerged that the Miyawaki planting techniques were less suited to the council's rural environment. A grant awarded for the Blue School planting required recouping, as the project has not been able to proceed.

11. GREENER VILLAGES GRANTS

Applications had been brought to Full Council for further discussion as there was concern over their suitability. A firmer vetting process of applications on receipt would improve the quality of submissions and the clerks were to work on a filter checklist against criteria. It was requested that the applications themselves should also be included in the relevant Annex, as well as a summary.

Avalon Five Mile Food Project: it was felt that more clarity was needed about the criteria for community benefit. The Assistant Clerk had requested further details but these had not yet arrived.

RESOLVED: To refer the application to the Finance & Scrutiny Committee as a general community grant. The Assistant Clerk is to pursue a breakdown of what the grant would be used for.

Horrington Cricket Club: it was questioned whether the South Horrington ground could or should be maintained by the management company that residents pay service charges to. It was also debated whether funds for a strimmer fitted the Greener Villages ethos.
RESOLVED: to defer the application until the next Full Council meeting. The Assistant Clerk was to seek more information could be sought about land ownership, management company contributions and responsibilities.

Westbury-Sub-Mendip Tree Planting Group: an application to buy tools for volunteers fitted the criteria.

RESOLVED: To approve the application for a grant of £248.89

Giving Back Films: the application confirmed it would be specific to the parish and encouraged community involvement as well as being educational, but it was questioned whether the application was wholly environmental or more cultural.

RESOLVED: To refer the application to the Finance & Scrutiny Committee as a general community grant.

12. EAST HORRINGTON VILLAGE SIGNS

The complexities and process for acquiring village name signs were discussed, as was the desirability of large speed roundels above the village name to serve as reminders of the speed limit. The council reviewed 3 possible styles of gateway sign and the impact of prominent gateways with speed roundels was known to have a positive effect. The choice of sign style was one step of many and the Council felt more information was required. The Parish Clerk was in dialogue with Somerset Highways who had received council information on location, existing speed restriction measures and possible gateway styles. The Clerk is to present a more detailed report at the next Full Council.

RESOLVED: To defer the topic of village signs until the next Full Council meeting where a more rounded report would be offered.

13. YOUTH CONTRIBUTION

The Clerk explained that the YMCA were keen to open a dialogue about possible youth activities that the Council could be involved with or support; a proposed meeting was to scope what options there were. More information was requested but initially Cllrs Cooke & Blatchford expressed a tentative interest. The Clerk was waiting on more information from the Scouts and would circulate together.

14. GREENWAYS MUP – COXLEY PATH

The Council felt that comprehensive information from Greenways was required but that the draft letter was entirely appropriate and requested that thanks to Cllr Danson for his time and craft was minuted. There was no resolution to accept or amend and the Clerk explained that the letter was preparation for a meeting with Greenways. Greenways had been contacted about initiating a meeting with all interested parties.

15. COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The changes approved by the Asset Management & Finance & Scrutiny Committees were accepted as too was the clarity regarding Ex Officio committee membership.

RESOLVED: to approve the proposed changes to committee Terms Of Reference.

16. SOMERSET COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S AWARD

It was agreed that the council would not make nominations this year. It was requested that the topic was included on the agenda earlier in the year for better consideration.

RESOLVED: to decline to make nominations this year for the Chairman's Award.

17. BIODIVERSITY & VERGE-CUTTING

Cllr Blatchford explained the situation in Bennetts Lane, where a wealth of wildflowers were due to be cut imminently and unnecessarily. He sought Council action to delay the pending cuts until August. A discussion followed about the wider question of verge-cutting and a more long-term parish action plan to present to Somerset Council and contractors, that took into account safety issues at key points but that had flexibility to protect verges where safety was less challenged. Cllr Pettitt also raised the Highway Stewardship scheme as a programme that would empower the council to determine cuts themselves. There were 2 course of action resulting from the discussion. Firstly, the Clerk was to persist with contacting the contractors of Bennetts Lane to delay the imminent verge cut. Secondly, the Clerk was to create and develop a parish-wide document promote that identified verges to leave uncut and verges requiring (frequent) cuts for safety & visibility. Resident and councillor input and engagement would be sought and the timeframe for completion and collation would be the start of October 2024. This schedule would then be presented to Somerset Council and their contractors in advance of the 2025 cutting regime.

18. UPDATES

The clerk informed the Council that the Ombudsman complaint had been submitted regarding Bowring Close, and that environmental permits were all in place and erosion solution works were due to begin very soon at the River Sheppey, Coxley.

19. REPORTS OF WARD ACTIVITIES

East Ward: Cllr Blatchford reported that he had made contact with the Headteacher of Horrington Primary School and was told that they would be keen to reinstate the governor link with the council.

North Ward: Cllr Hoogesteger explained the concerns that he would represent at the appeal for the New House Farm planning application and how there were many discrepancies in The Statement Of Common Ground. Cllr Cooke suggested that it would be pertinent to collaborate with Wells City Council regarding the cemetery extension to ensure it does not return to developers in the future. Cllr Mitchell requested that members of the Asset Management Committee respond to the Assistant Clerk's request for input about plot clearance costs against a rent amnesty for new tenants at the allotments.

West Ward: Cllr Mitchell updated the Council on the recent Coxley Festival and its phenomenal fundraising for the Food Bank.

South Ward: Cllr Pettitt explained that the wildflower project in Dulcote was progressing well.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 05th August 2024 at **7pm (Easton)**.