

MINUTES OF ST CUTHBERT (OUT) PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT EASTON VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 5th AUGUST 2024, 7PM.

PRESENT: Cllrs J Baker; F Brown; P Blatchford; M Cooke; T Hathway; S Johns; J Joseph; M Mitchell; G Pettitt; Cllr Reeves & Cllr Zorab (Chair).

IN ATTENDANCE: Lisa Pool (Parish Clerk); Somerset Council Cllr H Shearer & 2 members of the public. Somerset Cllr Tony Robbins sent apologies.

01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO CONSIDER THE REASONS GIVEN

Councillors Hayden, Hoogesteger, Humphreys and Danson sent their apologies for a combination of holiday, work and personal reasons.

RESOLVED: To accept the reasons offered for absence.

02. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Cooke & Zorab declared a personal interest in Item 8 as varied expenses were reconciled.

03. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items that excluded the press and public. Item 18 was intended to be discussed with press & public excluded but residents had attended to listen and contribute to the item. It was decided there was nothing contentious enough to be discussed without press and public present.

04. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair began her announcements with a presentation of flowers to Cllr Jenny Baker who after several years has resigned from the council. The Chair noted what a succinct and supportive role Cllr Baker had had on the parish council and would be greatly missed. Cllr Zorab also reminded all councillors raise their hands to speak and to be mindful of timings and the requirement to conduct the meeting within two hours, as per Standing Orders.

05. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Cllr Reeves raised concerns at the road closure methods arising from a serious accident on the A39 at Polsham. The closure and subsequent diversion were poorly signed, badly organised and resulted in a dangerous weight of traffic on narrow lanes and caused confusion to Coxley residents as the signage was placed close to wells without identifying that the road was closed in Polsham, possibly 2 miles westwards. The Clerk agreed to draft an email to the police but it was also pointed out that, with such incidents, police had personnel stretched and needed to act quickly.

Cllr Blatchford also raised concern at a road closure on Roemead Road.

06. LOCAL AUTHORITY REPORTS

Cllr Heather Shearer relayed that Somerset Council was continuing to work on restructuring and resizing. Cllr Shearer also highlighted the recent information sent to the Clerk regarding the vital work of, and need for more, foster families to help a growing number of children in Somerset Council's care. There were some 630 children involved for whom fostering was the immediate best option. She made a plea for councillors to share information with anyone who may be interested and also referenced a Stepping Stones programme which could encourage older people with space to contribute to children in

need of a reliable and safe environment. The Clerk had circulated the information within the council and will include it in the Community Sheet this week. Lastly, Cllr Shearer reassured the council that Somerset Council was keeping a watchful eye on the unrest and rioting that had blighted several cities during the past week.

07. MINUTES OF ST CUTHBERT (OUT) PARISH COUNCIL ON MONDAY 24TH JUNE 2024

RESOLVED: to confirm and sign as a correct record the minutes of the Council held on Monday 24TH June 2024.

08. AUDIT 2023-24

Cllrs Reeves and Hathway had checked the payments, receipts and reconciliations before the meeting began.

RESOLVED: To accept the receipts, payments and bank reconciliation as checked prior to the meeting by Cllrs Reeves & Hathway.

09. WELLS & RURAL LCN

Cllr Hathway outlined the changes that arose from the AGM of Wells & Rural LCN: Cllr Hobbs (Chair) and Cllr Hathway (Vice-Chair) had stepped down and Cllr Tony Robbins had been elected as the new Chair. The Vice-Chair remained vacant and Cllr Hathway encouraged anyone interested to have a chat with him. Cllr Hathway told the council that it was a positive experience and that ideally wider representation from neighbouring parishes was required. The Active Travel Group had found momentum, enthusiastic members and valuable themes to work on, and both a Highways Group and Flooding Group had had initial meetings. Cllr Hathway encouraged interested councillors to chat to him about membership of these groups. A fuller discussion about the LCN would follow at the next Full Council meeting in September. Cllr Cooke thanked Cllr Hathway for his work and effort as Vice-Chair in the LCN's inaugural year.

10. ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP

Cllr Pettitt updated the Council on various projects. She was happy to let the council know a Greener Villages sign had now been installed in Dinder and thanked Cllr Cooke for his help. The signs are to highlight where Council funding for environmental projects have been awarded. The Strawberry Line Pond was developing and a planning application was ready for submitting at a cost of £216.50. There was still much detail to work on such as insurance and future responsibility (a Strawberry Line group of volunteers). There was discussion about the exact location and costs: Cllr Shearer suggested contacting Cllr Ros Wyke regarding permission as the land was owned by Somerset Council; Cllr Wyke may be able to actively contribute towards the project and there may be a process that avoids planning applications. Cllr Pettitt agreed to pass details on to both Somerset Councillors. Updates on other projects were also offered: Dark Skies was progressing, the Biodiversity Survey was now live on the website and further promotion of Greener Village Grants was being carried out. Cllr Joseph informed the Council about the LandAlive Conference of 22-23rd November 2024, which was a huge development for the area and urged St Cuthbert (Out) to have representation at the Conference.

RESOLVED: to approve the concept and scoping plans of the Environment Working Group for the pond project.

RESOLVED: to approve a budget of £300.00 to support scoping tasks such as planning applications, if required.

11. COUNCILLOR EXPENSES

The Chair explained how and to whom expenses were paid to Councillors: Cllr Hayden for SID installation journeys and Cllr Cooke for play area weekly inspections. The Clerk relayed that this decision was minuted from Finance & Scrutiny Committee on 14th December 2022 (double-check the year).

12. VE DAY 80 COMMEMORATION, MAY 2025

The Chair recalled that VE75 commemorations in 2020 were hampered by the pandemic and that the number of those with living memory of VE Day in 1945 is dwindling. Cllr Zorab also pointed out that the annual mayoral changes in Wells City Council has previously inhibited one mayor organising an event and then transferring it to their successor but currently, as was the case for D-Day80, Wells City Council are interested in working with this Council for VE Day 80. Various sites were discussed and the Clerk informed them that a schedule for 8th May 2025 had now been released: beacon-lighting was to take place at 9.30pm, a tribute had been written and a raft of events identified. It was agreed that more details should be developed in coming months, a budget agreed, a location determined and councillors interested in contributing identified. The scale of any event would be determined by councillor interest and availability. The Clerk & Chair are to initiate early discussions with Wells City Council. A deputy Beacon Master is also sought amongst councillors.

RESOLVED: to approve that this Council participates in the commemoration and explores collaboration with Wells City Council.

13. WIDER SHARING OF PARISH CONTACTS

The Clerk explained that there was more that could be done to publicise how to get in touch with the Parish Council, particularly for those digitally excluded residents. Better use of parish noticeboards, village hall, library and other venues to display permanent posters was agreed. Phone contact was discussed including a dedicated enquiry line phone, forwarding enquiries to specific clerks' phones and realigning voicemail messages to reassure callers they had reached the correct place: clerk availability was not consistent throughout the week. The Clerk is to advance the publicity. It was also pointed out that including a postal address on the 'how to contact us' poster would be positive.

14. COMMUNITY SHEET REVAMP

The Clerk explained that the Community Sheet in its current form was unwieldy and not user-friendly, and this was supported by some earlier councillor feedback. It is not known which links are most looked at. Cllr Pettitt suggested investigating MailChimp and Cllr Blatchford suggested one link to the website, where a menu of new links would be available. This would remove the need of sending a physical attachment. The resources required for any development of the Community Sheet should also be considered. The Clerk is to continue to investigate.

15. REQUEST FOR SUPPORT: LITHIUM BATTERY SAFETY

It was agreed that the council would not support this campaign with a formal response. The expertise involved in understanding the technicalities, as well as the topic being beyond the remit of the parish council and the potential to receive much more lobbying communication in future, helped to inform this decision. Councillors were encouraged to make contact as individuals, but not as representatives of the parish council position.

RESOLVED: to decline to respond to this campaign as a Council.

16. MISCELLANEOUS UPDATES

Bin Collection: the Clerk updated the Council on a letter received from Somerset Council regarding the cessation of free waste collection by their contactors, of bins not owned by Somerset Council, from 1st April 2025. The options given for parish council-owned waste bins was to a) pay Somerset Council to continue (charges not yet finalised but pre-Unitary in South Somerset the charge was £7.82 per bin, per collection); b) for the parish council to organise waste collection independently, or c) for Somerset Council to remove the bins. It was noted that the parish council had installed waste bins recently on the understanding that collection would be undertaken by the Unitary Authority. The parish council own 8 dog waste and 9 litter bins. A suggestion was made to investigate what facilities, costs and capacity Wells City Council have, amongst other possible contractors.

Verge-cutting: the task of identifying verges in the parish that would benefit from a delayed cut to later summer had begun and 11 residents have contributed so far. The objective is to lobby Somerset Council and Highways sub-contractors well in advance for the cutting schedule of 2025. Somerset Council does not yet have a list of those sub-contractors but are hoping to be able to forward to the Council soon. Somerset Council have also alluded to a parish price list being created regarding verge-cutting and maintenance but the information is currently vague and as a result the Council were unable to discuss in much detail.

RESOLVED: The Clerk is to begin fact-finding and gathering quotes on waste collection for the next Full Council meeting.

17. PARISH COUNCIL ADMINISTRATION

a) Confirmation of the date of 2025 Annual General Meeting: this could not be resolved on as the Clerk had booked a Friday. The Clerk is to provide the correct date at the next Full Council meeting.

b) Jenny Baker membership of the Environment Working Group as a resident

RESOLVED: to approve Jenny Baker's membership of the working group.

c) East Ward Councillor Vacancy: this was duly noted and Vacancy posters are to be displayed.

d) Gov.UK email accounts: the clerk thanked Councillors who had struggled and overcome difficulties in changing to the gov.uk accounts. A deadline for transition for all councillors would be discussed at the next Full Council meeting.

e) Planning Committee Terms of Reference: Cllr Reeves raised the query that the Terms of Reference explicitly state that "No representatives or members from outside organisations shall be on the Committee". This appears to prevent councillors who belong to other organisations from being members of standing committees. Cllr Pettitt said that members of the public were entitled to belong to committees and it was a St Cuthbert (Out) anomaly that most Council Terms of Reference make this condition.

RESOLVED: the Clerk was to i) investigate the legality of committee membership, b) revise Terms of Reference accordingly if necessary.

f) Green Village Grants: the grant application form has been amended to include a condition of grant awards being the displaying, if practical, of Greener Village signs.

RESOLVED: To approve the amendment to the Green Villages grant form.

18. BOWRING CLOSE

Cllr Zorab explained that at this point the Council are being asked to consider *possible* next moves regarding the Village Green application.

There were no trigger points preventing the application hence Somerset Council, as the Registration Authority, have proceeded with a consultation period where both support and objections can be lodged. This is due to end in late August, after which the Council will receive the comments and have a period of time to respond. Once counter comments have been received, legal advice is sought from the County Solicitor and/or specialist legal

advice from counsel. If there is a serious dispute, it will normally result in a non-statutory public enquiry.

Cllr Joseph asked for clarification that the buyer of the plots was aware of the village green application; St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council, without reservation, know that the application was referenced in the auction legal packs. It was also asked whether the new owner could make planning applications whilst the application was in process: it was felt that an application in progress (as well as successful application) prevented any development of the sites. The application had not been determined at the time of purchase but was underway, and officially acknowledged.

Cllr Mitchell asked what resident opinion was and the evidence for this. Some 35 resident statements about their use of the plots was submitted with the application. Subsequently, Somerset Council has written to some residents, and a wider number given the contact details to send comments. (This was done with confirmation from Somerset Council that supporting comments as well as objections, were invited.) The overriding opinion was that the land needed protection because there was nowhere else as communal open space in the locality. This Council has also submitted further comments in the consultation period.

In the event of the Council requiring expert advice, it was agreed that it was prudent to put funds aside for consultancy fees, should we need to put our case forward further. The Clerk is to return with some estimates from planning consultants.

RESOLVED: to approve that the Council continue to fight in favour of village green registration.

RESOLVED: to nominate delegated authority in the event of emergency action being needed between Full Council meetings. Those to receive delegated authority are the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairman, the Chairman of the Finance & Scrutiny Committee, the Responsible Financial Officer and the Parish Clerk. Any emergency action or decisions taken must, even retrospectively, be circulated to all councillors regardless.

29. REPORTS OR WARD ACTIVITIES

East Ward: Cllr Baker asked if there was any follow-up regarding the crossing at Horrington School. The Clerk relayed that one parent had been in touch and would try and lobby more and the school secretary had included the plea for support in newsletters but no further support was forthcoming. The clerk is to revisit.

East Ward: Cllr Blatchford explained that a section at the western end of Bennetts Lane where visibility onto Roemead Road was vital, had not been cut by Highways whilst Bennetts Lane itself had been cut. Cllr Blatchford was to report to Somerset Council.

29. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 09TH September 2024 at **7pm (Dinder)**.