WEST HATCH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting of the West Hatch Parish Council held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 29th November 2023

**23/54 Attendance and apologies**

**Councillors: Read (Chairman), Finlayson, Knight, Middleton, Sullivan, and Walters**

**Public: D Kerr (WHVH, 3 parishioners)**

**Apologies: Cllr Haskins, Cllrs Wakefield and Henley (Somerset Council), Mrs S Read (Tree Warden)**

**23/55 Declarations of Interests and Dispensations**

No declarations of interests were made.

**23/56 Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council meeting held on 4th October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**23/57 Matters arising from the minutes.**

* **Update on remedial highways work required following work undertaken by Connor Utilities (23/46)**

The remedial work is due to take place in January. The advance notice signs of road closures have been erected.

* **Update on dog waste at Thurlbear Woods (23/34)**

A Forestry Commission sign has now been erected at the entrance to Thurlbear Woods. The new Community Ranger has been invited to attend a future Parish Council meeting.

**23/57 Parishioners’ Forum**

A parishioner commented that he reported an issue with the drains online and it was attended to very quickly. It appears that the drainage pipe near to Crinkle Birr was damaged when a trench was dug in the road and is now awaiting repair.

Repairs to the noticeboard have now been carried out and a lock fitted to prevent interference to the board. The Clerk and Chair of the Village Hall Committee have the keys. The council thanked Mr Wheatley for his work on this issue.

**23/58 To receive reports from County Councillors (if present)**

Due to prior commitments, neither Somerset Councillor was able to attend the meeting.

**23/59 A358 Update – report on recent meeting held with National Highways**

Cllrs Read, Middleton and Sullivan attended a meeting with National Highways to discuss a joint position statement. No new information was forthcoming from National Highways and there is no change in its position. A report of the meeting has been received from National Highways, this will be checked for accuracy and a response submitted in due course.

The Community of Parishes has asked all parishes to share their position statements so that all local parishes are fully informed. The Community of Parishes has asked National Highways for a meeting with their technical experts to answer some of the technical issues raised.

**23/60 To discuss Parish Emergency Plan**

Cllr Finlayson has produced a draft plan which will be circulated to the members for comment. The Village Hall committee is willing to be a party to the plan.

**23/61 LCN Update**

Following the latest meeting, it was agreed to consider establishing two or more working groups from four areas suggested at the meeting; these might focus on Roads and Transport, Environment, Conservation and Biodiversity, Youth Provision and Social Issues and Planning matters (policy, health, local plans etc.). It is hoped that sufficient stakeholders and their constituents will volunteer for the working groups so that they can agreed upon and put in place at the next meeting in January.

A letter will shortly be sent to stakeholders within the LCN encouraging their participation in the working groups and providing the agenda for the next meeting.

**23/62 To discuss the Parish Council’s response to Somerset Council’s letter on Asset and Service Devolution and the implications on West Hatch PC’s budget.**

Following the announcement of Somerset Council’s financial emergency, the leader of Somerset Council has asked all parishes to consider what discretionary services they wish to take on to ensure that the service continues. It is likely that some discretionary services will no longer be provided by Somerset Council and there may be a reduction in the level of service provided for statutory services.

The Parish Council will agree its budget at the January meeting, when it is hoped that there will be a clearer picture of what services Somerset Council will be able to provide, and it may be that the Parish Council will need to contribute financially to ensure continuation of some services. A meeting of the Finance Working Group will take place on January 18th.

**23/63 Implementation of Local Government Services Pay agreement wef 1/04/23.**

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services has reached agreement on rates of pay applicable from 1st April 2023, resulting in an increase to the Clerk’s salary of £1 per hour.

**23/64 Formal Expenditure Approval**

It was resolved to make the following payments:

1. Clerk’s Salary (inc arrears) £425.00
2. Remembrance Wreath £ 20.00
3. SALC – Training £ 50.00
4. Notice Board Repairs £ 17.00
5. West Hatch PCC £ 210.00

**23/65 To consider request from Somerset Highways to take responsibility for an area of unregistered land adjacent to Griffin Lane.**

Following a request to Somerset Council Highways to attend to the diseased and dying poplar trees on land adjacent to Griffin Lane, the Council investigated the reported problem and said that ***'it was not big enough for them to plan work in to fix it at this time. They will continue to monitor the problem, but it may be an extended time before they are able to fix it.'*** They have been advised that the land is not owned or maintained by Somerset Highways and that there is no liability on Somerset Council if harm or damages occur from trees on that land. The Parish Council has been asked whether it would take ownership of the land.

The Parish Council does not have the resources to take on land ownership and believes that the land does belong to Somerset Highways. It was agreed that the Parish Council would respond to Somerset Highways in this vein. **If the problem gets worse Somerset Council advise it be re-reported on their 'Report a problem on their road page.'**

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**23/66 To consider how more effective communication within the Parish can be achieved.**

The Parish Council is keen to engage with more people within the Parish and discussed how this could be achieved. Approximately 70 parishioners have signed up to the Parish email network, but this does not reach those without internet access.

The Clerk suggested that the Parish Council considers arranging an event in the Spring (possibly during a weekend) to foster community involvement, inviting parishioners to meet the Councillors and find out what initiatives parishioners could become involved in. This will be pursued further at a later meeting.

**23/67 Planning – to consider any planning matters arising.**

No new planning applications have been received since the last meeting.

**23/68 Reports of Parish Council Working Parties**

* 1. **Report from Footpath leader**

No issues raised.

* 1. **Report from Trees/Conservation leader**

The Tree Warden re-iterated her concern regarding the health of the poplars on the land adjacent to Griffin Lane.

* 1. **Report on Highway matters**

No new issues raised.

d. **Report from SALC representative**

Cllr Sullivan will be attending the SALC AGM on December 2nd.

**23/69 Correspondence and matters of report.**

* **Burial Ground Grant**

The Burial Ground Grant of £210 has been received and forwarded to the PCC. Following its formation, Somerset Council is looking to standardise its service within the previous District Authority areas, and it is unlikely that the Burial Ground Grant will continue in future years.

* **Change of leadership at SALC and request for feedback.**

The CEO of SALC will be leaving the position and as part of the recruitment process for the replacement, Councils have been requested to provide feedback on the service that SALC provides and if there are further services that it could provide.

The Clerk will respond on behalf of the Council.

**23/70 To agree date of next meeting.**

Wednesday 24th January 2024

The meeting closed at 9.10pm