WEST HATCH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting of the West Hatch Parish Council held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 24th January 2024

**23/71 Attendance and apologies**

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

**Public: Cllr S Wakefield (Somerset Council), D Kerr (WHVH),2 parishioners**

**Apologies: Mrs S Read (Tree Warden)**

**23/72 Declarations of Interests and Dispensations**

No declarations of interests were made.

**23/73 Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council meeting held on 29th November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**23/74 Matters arising from the minutes.**

* **Responsibility for trees adjacent to Griffin Lane (23/65)**

Somerset Council are carrying out further investigations regarding the ownership of the land and trees and the Clerk is still waiting a response.

* **Update on meeting with National Highways (NH) re A358 (23/59)**

The Parish Council has responded to NH’s draft report of the meeting and is in the process of submitting a reply to NH following their further response. National Highways has since announced that the submission of the Development Consent Order has been delayed and that they are working with the government on the way forward.

**23/75 Parishioners’ Forum**

A parishioner queried the ownership and responsibility for track leading up to the Village Hall as this is deteriorating. The Village Hall committee is looking to improve the surface by laying crushed limestone, which will require permission. The Clerk will endeavour to ascertain who is responsible for the track. Mapping information from Somerset Highways indicates that the track is not their responsibility.

**23/76 To receive reports from County Councillors (if present)**

Cllr Wakefield highlighted the financial difficulties that Somerset Council were facing and that it had approached the government for permission to increase the precept above the national cap and is looking for a 10% increase. The final decision on the precept and service cuts will be taken at the end of February.

**23/77 To discuss Parish Emergency Plan**

The draft Parish Emergency Plan was discussed, and it was agreed that the initiative would be raised at the Annual Parish Meeting, so that parishioners could give their input into the plan.

**23/78 LCN Update**

At the latest meeting of the LCN, it was agreed to focus on two priorities – roads and transport, and environment and conservation. Working parties are being established to address these issues. In addition, the LCNs have been asked by Somerset Council to consider what role they may have in the devolution of assets and services that may occur as a result of Somerset Council’s financial difficulties.

**23/79 To discuss and agree the Parish Council’s budget and precept for 2024/25**

Due to its financial difficulties, it is likely that Somerset Council may reduce or curtail the services that it currently provides and is looking at Town & Parish Councils to either take on the services or provide a financial contribution. In view of this, the Parish Council has proposed that the Band D precept should be increased by £10 p.a, resulting in an annual precept of £35 per Band D property. This would provide a total precept for the Parish of £4700, an increase of £1350 from 2023/24. This increase would be used to create a Parish Service fund which would be used to help maintain services, such as verge cutting and drain clearance. The Burial Ground Grant currently received from Somerset Council will cease and the Parish Council is considering whether to fund it in future.

It was **agreed** to accept the proposed budget and levy a precept of £4700 for the forthcoming year.

**23/80 To agree a date for the Annual Parish Meeting 2024**

It was agreed to hold a separate meeting for the Annual Parish Meeting, in the hope of attracting a greater attendance and it was agreed that the meeting should be held on **Friday 15th March 2024.**

**23/81 Formal Expenditure Approval**

It was resolved to make the following payments:

1. Clerk’s Salary £325.00
2. West Hatch VH - rent £ 150.00
3. LCN Renewals - Website renewal £ 105.60

**23/82 Planning – to consider any planning matters arising.**

No new planning applications have been received since the last meeting. The owners of Perrington Lodge have advised the Council that they have sought pre application advice with a view to submitting an application in due course.

**23/83 Reports of Parish Council Working Parties**

* 1. **Report from Footpath leader**

Cllr Haskins has successfully completed the application process to become the Parish Path Liaison Officer and is due to meet John Melrose, the Area ROW Warden at the end of February. The Restricted Byway sign at the end of Prey Lane is broken and has been raised as an issue.

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

Nothing to report.

* 1. **Report on Highway matters**

No new issues raised.

d. **Report from SALC representative**

Cllr Sullivan attended the SALC AGM on 2nd December, at which new committee members and officials were elected. The Leader of Somerset Council talked about the financial difficulties and how Parish and Town Councils could help.

**23/84 Correspondence and matters of report.**

* **Request from Brewhouse Theatre for funding**

The Parish Council has been approached by the Brewhouse Theatre for financial assistance towards the community works that it undertakes and previously partially funded by a grant from Somerset Council. The Parish Council, historically, has not given grants to organisations outside the Parish and it was agreed that the Parish Council was that it was unable to support the Brewhouse Theatre at this time.

* **Airband Update**

There have been several road closures locally to enable Airband to erect additional poles. However, there is no information on when the service will be available.

**23/85 To agree date of next meeting.**

Friday 15th March – Annual Parish Meeting

Wednesday 27th March at 7.30pm – Ordinary Parish Council Meeting

The meeting closed at 9.15pm