

CHAFFCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council held in the Village Hall on Monday 20th November 2023 at 7.30 p.m.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Those present:	Apologies	In Attendance
Mrs M Butler (Chair)	Mr Tony Gray (PPLO)	2 Members of the public
Mrs G Wills (Vice Chair)	Mrs V Keitch (Somerset	
Mr R Bale	Councillor)	
Mr D Bracher	PCSO Wesley Ashbrook	
Mr S Robinson		
Mrs S Osborne (Somerset		
Councillor)		
Mrs S Morley (Clerk)		

2. Public Voice - there were no issues raised by the public.

3. Report by Somerset Councillor

Cllr Osborne's report was emailed to all councillors. Cllr Osborne highlighted the financial problems at Somerset Council which is currently facing a £40m+ budget deficit for 2023 / 24. It is likely that the Council will have to issue a s114 notice which is the equivalent of bankruptcy. If this happens the government can send in Commissioners who would have the power to increase council tax in excess of that which local councils have had the power to do themselves.

Much of reason why there is a deficit is due to soaring costs of adult and child social care. The new Somerset Council has taken over the local District Councils and their assets, including their commercial assets which are not very liquid and which will now be sold. Many of these assets were financed with short-term borrowing which must be re-financed at much higher interest rates.

A question was asked about the money Somerset County Council lost in the Iceland banking collapse some years ago. The Council did get the money back eventually but not the interest.

Another question was asked about the savings that going unitary were supposed to make. This will take some time to be felt but it will not be enough to cover the deficit.

In order to try to minimise the deficit the Council is looking at asset and service devolution and have sent out an extensive list of the services provided by the Council, asking local councils to consider which services they may be able to take over. Anything which is currently provided free of charge is likely to be charged for in the future.

No decisions have yet been taken as to which services will be cut. There is a meeting in January when some decisions will be taken which parishes and towns can consider before setting their precepts.

4. Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council held on Mon 21/08/23

The minutes were approved and were signed by the Chair.

5. Planning Applications

- (a) App No 23/02824/HOU
Location: Tolleys House, Tolleys Lane, Chaffcombe TA20 4AB
Proposal: Erection of timber garden studio
- (b) App No 23/02825/HOU
Location: Tolleys House, Tolleys Lane, Chaffcombe TA20 4AB
Proposal: Listed Building Consent

Chaffcombe Parish Council considered the applications above and had no objections to the proposal.

6. Highway matters.

- (a) 30 mph speed limit in village

This was raised by a resident. It was noted that several years ago Highways inspectors and the Police considered a request to have a 30 mph speed limit in Chaffcombe. The road was monitored for two days after which the Police reported very little speeding in the village and both the Police and Highways concluded that they would not support a 30 mph limit. They also concluded that enforcement would be difficult. White lines along the side of the road to narrow the road were offered

but refused by the Parish Council at the time. Welcome signs were installed to remind drivers that they are entering a residential area. Councillors remarked that they see very little evidence of speeding which seems to mostly be by delivery vans.

(b) Potholes

There are several large potholes in the village which have been reported. Residents were reminded that anyone can report a pothole.

7. Footpaths

(a) Footpath CH4/16 Diversion Avishays Estate

The objection period passed with no objections and the footpath diversion is now open.

(b) Footpaths CH4/20 and CH4/21 (South of the A30)

There are two broken stiles which have not been repaired. In the light of the recent list from Somerset Council it was suggested that the Parish Council pays for the repairs which can be done by volunteers. The costs would be for materials only. Mr Bale will contact one of the farmers who may be able to repair the footpath on his land. Councillors agreed to pay for the costs of materials.

(c) Footpath CH5/40 Mill House

The gates are tied up making the footpath difficult to walk. The Parish PPLO has reported this to Somerset Council Rights of Way, and he walks the path regularly to keep it open.

(d) The Somerset County Council (No.5) Modification Order 2015 - Whitemoor Hill CH 4/22

The order was dated 14th July 2023 allowing for objections. Consideration of the Order will take the form of a hearing to be held at The Auditorium, The Guildhall, Chard, Somerset, TA20 1PH on Tuesday 21 November 2023 at 10.00am. Chaffcombe Parish Council considered the report on Whitemoor Hill in 2015 which recommended that the path remain as it is and be officially changed from a footpath to a restricted byway. It is minuted that at a Parish Council meeting on 17th August 2023 the Parish Council supported the conclusion and had no objections to the Report.

8. Flooding

The attenuation pond at Woodlands is proceeding with funding supplied by FWAG. This should catch water coming off the fields. When the pond is finished the risk of flooding will be much reduced.

Drains have been cleared on both sides of Knapps Lane and the new arrangements with grill and pipes are working well with hardly any water running down the road.

There are questions about the proposed attenuation pond at the Golf Course because of the amount of soil in the area where the pond is supposed to be.

9. Defibrillator

There is a new lease for 4 years. CPR training was arranged but did not go ahead as planned. Training is now booked for 4th December.

10. LCN Meetings

Mrs Wills' report was as follows:

"LCN meeting 15th November 2023

Almost all of the meeting concerned the precarious state of the finances of Somerset Council. A "pressure" (not exactly a shortfall) of about £100m is anticipated, in spite of making £84m savings. Over the following two years it could be nearer £200m. Much of the shortfall relates to the provision of adult services.

There is a probability that the Council tax will rise by as much as 40% to cover the shortfall. The Council would like local parish and town councils to share more of the financial burden where possible, and to organise their needs direct with providers rather than just calling on the council to provide services. We are asked to consider what we can fund/organise ourselves. Do we need to raise our precept to cover the extra costs?

Sue Osborne will be able to explain the situation more fully."

Mrs Wills reported that some parishes are looking at a Highways Steward and have set up a pilot scheme in Exmoor with approximately 16 parishes to have someone cut verges and fill small potholes etc. Ilminster Town Council thought that would work for them, but it might not be relevant for Chaffcombe.

Attendees were shocked by the huge black hole in the finances and asked why nothing had been done before it got to this critical stage.

11. Somerset Council Asset and Service Devolution

The things that could affect Chaffcombe are the emptying of dog waste bins, the re-filling of salt bins, maintenance of footpaths and the cutting of verges and hedges. It may be possible to join with another local council for services such as dog waste bins which will have to be done by a specialist contractor. More information will be known after the meeting in January.

12. Accounts payments and receipts

(a) The balance at the bank as at 31/10/2023 - £10,144.66

(b) The following cheques were raised:

000421	- £ 150.85	- Salary and admin expenses
000422	- £ 37.40	- HMRC, paye
000423	- £ 65.90	- SALC subscription
000424	- £ 450.00	- Chaffcombe PCC, maintenance of Churchyard
000425	- £ 375.00	- J Puddock, maintenance of War Memorial and Orchard Plot
000426	- £ 9.00	- I Butler, reimbursement of website costs

13. Precept

The precept has been set at £3,000 since 2013. There has been a slight surplus every year meaning that the unrestricted amount carried over last year was £6,912.74. The budget shows an expected underspend this financial year of £250.00. This puts Chaffcombe in a good financial position going forward. It was proposed and agreed by all councillors that the precept is kept at £3,000 for another year. However if there are developments in January which will make a difference to Chaffcombe, an Extraordinary Meeting will be called to discuss the precept.

14. Matters and Items to Report

(a) Orchard Plot Brambles

It was agreed to ask a contractor to cut the brambles in the Orchard Plot.

ACTION - Mrs Wills

(b) Reservoir

Mr Bracher attended a meeting with staff and volunteers at the reservoir who are very pleased to be associated with the village and attend coffee mornings to talk about their work. They are trying to raise the profile of the reservoir and promote the benefits to the community. They have had a Green Flag award for a number of years for their environmental impact. Mr Bracher has written to several environmentalists on their behalf and several articles have appeared in local papers.

(c) SALC

Have asked councils for comments on what services they would like to see SALC offer, particularly in the light of the recent problems with Somerset Council and the impact this will have on small local councils.

(d) The Grass Bank

This was cut recently and the grass needs to be raked up. Mr and Mrs Miles offered to rake it up.

(e) Golf Course landscaping site

There was an accident recently at the works entrance to the landscaping work on the Golf Course at the top of Knapps Lane. A lorry pulled out into the side of an oncoming car. They have accepted 100% liability and luckily no-one was injured. The entrance is blind to the road. When planning consent was granted it was a condition that there would be a system of release from the site to ensure accidents did not happen. A suggestion was a mirror on the opposite side of the road, but it was noted that Highways do not approve of mirrors.

15. Date of next ordinary meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council

The next ordinary meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council - Monday 19th February 2024 at 7.30 p.m. at Chaffcombe Village Hall

The meeting finished at 9.15 p.m.

Mary Butler - Chair Chaffcombe Parish Council