

CHAFFCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council held in the Village Hall on Monday 20th May 2024 at 7.30 p.m.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Those present:

Mrs M Butler (Chair)
Mrs G Wills (Vice Chair)
Mr D Bracher
Mr S Robinson
Mrs S Osborne (Somerset Councillor)
Mrs S Morley (Clerk)

Apologies

Mr R Bale
Mr Tony Gray (PPLO)
Mrs V Keitch (Somerset
Councillor)
PCSO Wesley Ashbrook

In Attendance

7 Members of the public

2. Election of the Chair of the Parish Council

Mr Robinson proposed Mrs Butler as Chair, seconded by Mrs Wills. All councillors were in favour and Mrs Butler was duly elected as Chair of the Parish Council.

3. Declaration of acceptance of office by the Chair

Mrs Butler signed the declaration of acceptance of office.

4. Election of the Vice Chair of the Parish Council

Mrs Butler nominated Mrs Wills as Vice Chair, seconded by Mr Robinson. All councillors were in favour and Mrs Wills was duly elected as Vice Chair of the Parish Council.

5. Report by Somerset Councillor

The Council's waste contractor, SUEZ, has disclosed figures showing significant annual losses on its £ 24 million a year contract. It has made a number of contractual claims seeking adjustment to payment and while these are in dispute, without an increase in payments there is a risk that SUEZ may exit the contract, to limit its losses over the contract's remaining six years. A report to the Council's Executive Committee meeting recommends giving the Council's Chief Executive a mandate to negotiate with SUEZ to broker a deal which would stop SUEZ exiting the contract. The ongoing rerouting of collections is helping make rounds more efficient and as cost effective as possible, but even with this SUEZ considers the contract unviable.

From May 2024, where safe to do so, mowing routines across managed highway verges, open spaces, country parks and council property grounds will be reduced although safety and visibility around verges and public spaces such as play areas will be cut more regularly. On wider verges, only a 1-meter swathe is mowed, leaving the rest untouched to maintain biodiversity.

The new Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) for Somerset sets out the Council's aims for 2024-2030 including how services and communities are accountable for children and young people and how they will work together to ensure the ambitions of the plan are achieved.

Since Covid-19 the numbers of volunteer drivers in Somerset has reduced by about 67 per cent. These dedicated drivers play a pivotal role in the community, providing essential transportation services to residents so the Council are calling out for new volunteers. Many residents who need the service live in rural areas with little or no access to public transport and are unable to drive. If you are working part-time, a parent, retired or just have some spare time on your hands and you have a car and at least half a day to a day to offer then you can get involved and make a positive impact on people's lives. Volunteer drivers receive training and are reimbursed expenses at 45p per mile (or 50p per mile with passengers).

6. Report by Reservoir Warden

Hannah Stanton apologised for not attending the meeting and sent a report on the Reservoir as follows:

"Ecological surveys of the proposed site of the new wall being erected at Chard Reservoir have included dormouse, bird, flora and reptile surveys. A ranger of the countryside team, a licensed dormouse surveyor - carried out checks for both dormouse and bird nests before work was commenced to remove the hedgerow on the western side of the site. No new evidence was found nor any live animals so work could continue. Reptile mats have been placed out along the path on the embankment of the current dam at intervals to cover the proposed site area - these surveys will continue to be done over the next month at least. Floral surveys were carried out by our biodiversity officer for the council and efforts were made to translocate any plants - including primrose - that might be lost in the process of the construction of the wall. These were translocated further down the embankment where they will not be affected by the proposed works.

Further monitoring will continue to be carried out as the work progresses to ensure that the Council are covering these ecological bases.

Other updates over the site include:

- much progress has been made with the bird viewing area project that the proceeds of the Chaffcombe coffee morning went towards (we are just about finished with the foundations and the next stage is to put the cladding on for the actual screen part);
- we have had a couple of sessions with Action Aid volunteers, who have enthusiastically helped to weed and remove guards from our more mature saplings;
- we are gaining more followers on social media - which is at the moment still proving to be our best out reach platform;
- we have had 2 successful events over Easter - our Easter Egg trail (with thanks to Chard Tesco) was the first one of it's kind here at the reservoir, in which we provided an educational activity with treats provided by Tesco at the end as a reward, and our Countryside Crafts day - a chance for kids to come along and learn some bushcraft skills - both of which were well attended despite not brilliant weather conditions!;
- the angling club have been renovating swims and carrying out maintenance work to better the fishing environment for both regular and new anglers, and have also been going on teaching courses with the aim to get juniors involved in fishing at the reservoir at some stage in the future;
- we have gained a volunteer who has offered to now open/lock hide on the weekends making it more accessible to everyone - this still hopefully prevents the anti-social behaviour that we were seeing when the hide was open 24/7."

6.1 Wall at the Reservoir

Concern was expressed at the Annual Parish Meeting in April that works are set to begin to remove trees and build a wall at the Reservoir. Chaffcombe Parish Council has not been informed or consulted about these works. Mrs Butler wrote to Somerset Council to request more information and received an email reply in April. Summary as follows:

Somerset Council became the owner of Chard Reservoir following the creation of the new unitary authority. In the latest independent reservoir safety audit, which is required to be carried out under the Reservoir Safety Act, recommendations were made for improvements. Most of these improvements have been enacted by the previous Council, however the final piece of work is due to take place this summer 2024 approximately.

Following a detailed flood study to assess the chance of the dam overtopping at Chaffcombe Road, a flood defence wall (which will roughly correspond with the line of the existing fence and will not require excavations of the road) has been recommended as the most effective and best value option by an appointed Panel AR Engineer. This will adjoin the existing dam wall on the crest of the dam next to the road as well as further upgrades to the back of the stilling basin wall and low spots on the far side of the dam. This work is a mandatory statutory requirement to mitigate flood risk. Somerset Rivers Authority have agreed to provide some funding to help enhance the solution for the community. The project team are working closely with the Ranger on site and the Countryside Manager who have been instrumental in the ecological work undertaken to mitigate the impact of the proposed improvements. Somerset Council are working closely with the specialist engineers who are designing the scheme at the moment before we look to bring onboard a contractor to undertake the works.

The numbered trees along the crest of the dam are due to be removed entirely or reduced. The trees that are to be removed are unfortunately in the line of the new wall that is to be built. The line of the wall cannot be altered to accommodate the trees as the working area is limited between the edge of the highway and the downward slope of the dam crest. The roots of the trees would also cause instability of the new wall structure. Some of the trees that are marked up away from the fence line are due to be reduced due to ash dieback. The Ranger, external ecologists and arborists have assessed the trees for their ecological impacts and a bat search will be carried out on the appropriate trees before any work is carried out. The rangers plant approximately 400 new trees on site each year, either as standing trees or hedgerows and this work will continue where we can find space. We are unable to plant trees along the dam crest due to the vitally important structural role that the dam crest provides in holding the water in Chard Reservoir.

Chaffcombe Parish Council is at the top of our list of consultees once the project design has been drawn up and we have more of an idea on timescales for delivery.

Following the reading of the email, a great deal of discussion followed with questions:

- whether the footpath along the Reservoir will be reduced;
- will all the trees be removed;
- how long and how high is the wall;

- whether the integrity of the dam will be undermined if trees are removed which could cause the dam to leak;
- why it is necessary given that the level of the water in the Reservoir is well below the level of the road.

It was agreed that the Parish Council would like a meeting to answer these questions. A representative from Somerset Council agreed to come to the meeting in August. This was felt to be too late because we are told that contractors are ready to start removing trees in the summer.

Councillors were very concerned that work on this scale is set to begin before any consultation had taken place with the local parishes. Adjoining parishes also need to be informed of the proposals.

Cllr Osborne will contact Somerset Council to find out the current situation and ask why work is due to begin before any consultation had taken place.

7. Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council held on Mon 19/02/24

The minutes were approved and were signed by the Chair.

8. Review Insurance cover and inventory of land and assets.

Insurance cover is with BHIB Insurance who are now known as Clear Councils Insurance. A slightly reduced premium was offered for a 3 year fixed rate which it was agreed to accept. There have been no changes to the assets held by the Parish Council.

9. Review Financial Regulations and Risk Assessment - No changes were proposed.

10. Review Membership of external organisations.

Currently the Council is a member of SALC and also pays an annual fee to the information Commissioner (ICO) by direct debit. No changes were proposed.

11. Dates and times of ordinary Council meetings for year ahead.

It was agreed to continue with meetings every 3 months on the third Monday of the month, Dates for the year ahead are:

- 19th August 2024
- 18th November 2024
- 17th February 2025
- 19th May 2025
- Parish Meeting on Monday 14th April 2025 (this is the second Monday because of Easter).

12. Planning Applications

| | |
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| App No | 24/0169.HOU |
| Proposal | Two storey side extension |
| Location | 2 Beech Cottages, Chaffcombe |

Councillors considered the above application and had no objections to the proposal.

13. Footpaths

(a) Chaffcombe Parish Council Footpaths PPLO Report May 2024 summary is as follows:

'We carried out a monthly walk south of the village this month mainly to check footpath CH4/20 (A30 to Wreath Farm) where 5 defects were noted in this section alone, including the non-reinstatement of a footpath through a growing crop by the landowner. All 5 faults have been reported to Somerset Rights of Way and are logged on the system.'

(b) Restricted byway CH5/71 - Paintmoor Lane

Closure of part of this restricted byway until at least October due to a dangerous bridge. There is currently a dispute over who is responsible for the costs of repair.

(c) CH4/22 - Whitemoor Hill

Somerset County Council (No 5) Modification Order 2015 to upgrade part of public footpath CH 4/22 Whitemoor Hill to a restricted byway came into force on 5 March 2024.

14. Highway matters.

(a) Temporary structure on bridge

This is on the list of work to be completed by Highways this year.

(b) Pot hole in Knapps Lane

Photos and measurements were sent to Highways.

15. Flooding - Details of drains which need attention have been sent to Highways.

16. LCN Meetings

Mrs Wills reported that she was unable to attend the last LCN meeting in March which included a presentation on emergency response planning by parish councils, with the main concern in our LCN being on flooding.

Another current topic is Active Travel but the only local scheme (the sustrans pathway to Ilminster) is outside our parish boundaries.

Mrs Wills also reported that she attended a smaller meeting to ask about the training and insurance cover required for parishioners wishing to carry out voluntary maintenance in the village, eg litter picking, cleaning of village signs etc. It would seem that our current provision is adequate for the purpose.

The next LCN meeting is on 20th June.

17. Somerset Council Asset and Service Devolution

There was nothing further to report.

18. Presentation and approval of accounts to year end 31/03/2024

Accounts to 31/3/2024 were distributed by email and approved by Councillors and signed by the Chair

19. Accounts payments and receipts

(a) The balance at the bank as at 31/04/2024 - £11,587.26

(b) The precept of £3,000 has been received.

(c) The following cheques were raised:

000430 - £156.85 - Salary and expenses

000431 - £ 37.40 - HMRC - paye - Cheque cancelled and payment made online

000432 - Cheque Cancelled (I Butler - to be paid online)

000433 - Cheque Cancelled (Clear Insurance - reduced premium accepted)

000434 - £399.91 - Clear Insurance Management Ltd, Insurance

20. Internet Banking

Currently the Clerk has online access to the bank accounts. An application has been made for the three signatories, Mary Butler, Stan Robinson and Rob Bale to be added. Payments will then be set up by the Clerk and approved by one of the signatories.

21. Approval of Certificate of Exemption from a limited assurance review

The income and expenditure did not exceed £25,000 so the Council can declare itself exempt from a limited assurance review. Councillors were in agreement and the Certificate of Exemption was signed by the Chair.

22. Annual Governance Review - This was approved and signed by the Chair.

23. Approval of Annual Accounting Statements to year end 31/03/2024

This was approved and signed by the Chair.

24. Internal Audit - The Internal Audit will be done in the next few weeks.

25. Matters and Items to Report

Councillors expressed their thanks to John Puddock who maintains the grounds of the Churchyard, the Orchard Plot and War Memorial and the Pound. The results of his skills in hedge laying are beginning to show and the hedges are looking very healthy and well maintained. John has now said he would like help with the Pound and the Council will need to find another volunteer or a private contractor to do the work.

ACTION - Agenda Item August

26. Date of next ordinary meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council

The next Ordinary meeting of Chaffcombe Parish Council will be on Monday 19th August 2024 at 7.30 p.m. at Chaffcombe Village Hall.

The meeting finished at 9.15 p.m.

Mary Butler - Chair Chaffcombe Parish Council-