

CHAFFCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Public Meeting at Chaffcombe Village Hall held on Monday 19th August 2024 at 6.00 p.m.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Those present:

Mrs M Butler (Chair Parish Council)
Mrs G Wills (Vice Chair Parish Council)
Mr R Bale (Parish Councillor)
Mr D Bracher (Parish Councillor)
Mr S Robinson (Parish Councillor)
Mrs S Morley (Parish Clerk)

Apologies

In Attendance

Kerry King (Somerset Council)
Sean Papworth (Somerset Council)
24 Members of the public

The meeting was arranged by the Parish Council so that Somerset Council could update the Parish on the proposed works at the Reservoir.

1. Presentation by Somerset Council

Somerset Council took over management of the Reservoir and Nature Reserve from South Somerset District Council (SSDC) following the transition to a unitary Somerset authority. Recommendations for safety work had already been made by SSDC working with the Environment Agency.

All reservoirs are regulated by the Environment Agency on behalf of DEFRA and certain work falls into the mandatory category and must be carried out, and this includes the proposed work on the dam at the Reservoir. Planning permission is not needed for this work because it is carried out under lawful development and is mandatory safety work.

The work is necessary to prevent the consequences of dam failure which would be catastrophic and result in extensive flooding with risk to life and enormous damage. If the dam fails the water would follow the River Isle and cause flooding over a wide area. The proposed work will take the reservoir out of the risk zone.

The proposed works were then explained in more detail. They include building a wall along the road adjoining the existing dam which will become an earth bund before phasing out, reinforcing and stabilising the bank, blocking some culverts and some hedge and tree clearance. All tree and hedge work will be done with advice from an independent ecologist along with an impact assessment on wildlife. Many of the ash trees on the bank are infected with ash die-back and many are self-seeded sycamores. The only trees to be removed will be those which are diseased or are affected by the new wall. The wall will be one meter from the road edge and one meter high.

2. Questions and Answers

A number of questions were asked:

What is the storm event this work is designed to protect? Ans: A 1 in 5,000 year storm event.

Why block some of the culverts? Ans: To slow the flow and water and manage the flood risk in Chard.

In a flooding event the water will go around the wall so why build the wall? Ans: If water is released too quickly into the Isle it will flood Donyatt. This is designed to slow the flow.

Is this the right solution? Is the wall the right solution?

Comment from a resident: If there is a wall people will have to walk along the road to get to the Nature Reserve. At the moment there is a path. Leaving a verge is not helpful to people with a push-chair or a mobility buggy. The footpath has been there for 25 years. People will climb over the wall or walk along it. The wall is the problem.

Ans: A gate cannot be put in the wall because it could not be closed quickly enough in the event of a flood risk.

Much discussion and comment followed regarding the wall and the dangers to pedestrians accessing the Nature Reserve if the footpath is removed and replaced by a wall. Several residents said the project needs to be challenged and asked if Somerset Council can go back to the engineers and ask questions and get proper answers about the viability and need for the wall. Residents asked if an expert can come and speak to the Parish about the need for the wall.

The answer was that there is not yet a contractor to do the work. Somerset Council are liaising with the Environment Agency regarding the date and timetable for the work. They have engineers who have worked on the dam for some time. There is still an opportunity to look at the work.

A question was asked about the impact on trees. The answer is that they will remove only those which are diseased or which have to be removed to enable the work to proceed. There will be a drop-in event at the Reservoir to look at the trees and the impact of their removal.

Cllr Butler thanked Kerry and Sean for coming along to do the presentation.

Meeting finished at 7.15 p.m.