

MONKSILVER PARISH COUNCIL,

**Minutes of the quarterly Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 12th August 2024
at 7.30 p.m.in the EMN Hall, Monksilver**

Present:

Mervyn Orchard-Lisle, Chairman, Councillors Lydia Appleton, Paul Appleton, John Stace
Somerset Councillor Christine Lawrence (part attendance)
In attendance Mary Jacobs (clerk)

Public Gallery (part attendance)

Paul Brandwood, Bryony Gray, Zoe Freeman, Lisa Kane-Walker, Stuart Tudor-Jackman,
Wendy Tudor-Jackman, Kevin Walker

- 1, **The Chairman** welcomed everyone to the meeting and reported that Christopher Hill had tendered his resignation, as he has been transferred to Dubai to work for the next four years. Consequently, there is a vacancy for a councillor and he invited everyone to consider the role. Mervyn stated, that to facilitate the members of the public attending the meeting, the running order, for the meeting, will differ from the published agenda.
2. **Apologies for absence** were received from Councillors Dan Cotterill and Andrew Howe, Somerset Councillor Marcus Kravis and Christopher Hill.
3. **The minutes of the quarterly meeting held on the 13th May 2024** were approved and signed by the chairman.

Matters arising: Update on the Notley Inn community asset renewal.

Mervyn stated that it is the duty of parish councillors to represent all members of the Community, including both the publicans Simon and Caroline and their customers from the village. He updated the meeting on Somerset Council's decision. There is no right of appeal. Although the Notley Inn sits within the Exmoor National Park, it is Somerset Council which has the responsibility for approving community assets. Mervyn reported that if the community shop had been opened, then it is likely that consent would have been granted by Somerset Council. Some members of the public stated that they will be willing to volunteer in the shop if it is ever opened.

John read out an article from the West Somerset Free Press, published 9th August, 2024 which referred to an Exmoor pub facing a possible change of use. Rachel Gilmour, our new MP will be raising the plight of Exmoor pubs in Parliament.

Somerset Councillor, Christine Lawrence recommended that MPC arrange to meet with the ENP to discuss the planning consent conditions and she has asked to be informed of the outcome. She will also ask Somerset Council for their policy on rural pubs. Resulting from Christine's recommendation, Mervyn will arrange a meeting

with the EMN planners; Kevin volunteered and agreed to attend the meeting with Mervyn.

Everyone attending the meeting, both councillors and the public wished to reassure Simon and Caroline that they were not trying to dictate how to run their business. Nevertheless, the statistics that they had put to Somerset Council indicating that only about 18% of the pub's income was derived from their non-residential trade was extremely worrying.

At the time of the original planning application, it was acknowledged by most people in the village that the pub would not survive without accommodation to support the vitality of the pub.

Concern was expressed at the meeting that comments have been made that the locals do not support the pub. The villagers and councillors vociferously expressed this is not the case and wish to support and protect the pub's future for the benefit of all the local community. A conversation between Simon and Caroline and the villagers about ideas for the pub would be warmly welcomed. For example, consistent opening hours and services in line with the website would assist further patronage by villagers and non-villagers. It was noted that following recent promotion of the village boules event, this was well attended.

4. **Flooding and drainage update.**

Bryony, owner of Wisteria Cottage, reported that the storm drain at Beech Tree Hill is once again blocked to the half-way level. There is a lot of straw on the road, which will wash down at the first rainfall. The drains were cleared at Elworthy and Woodford recently, but Monksilver seems to have been ignored. Bryony stated that the storm drains are a prototype. They worked perfectly at first, but they have not been cleaned for several years now and the stones and silt are building up again. The threat of flooding is having a detrimental effect on her health and wellbeing. When rain is forecast, Bryony cannot sleep at night for the fear of further flooding. She said that she fully understood the flood risk from the stream, but all the recent floods to her house had been caused by storm drainage failing due to the lack of maintenance and consequential negligence by Somerset. She cannot insure her house. It will therefore be difficult to sell her property should she wish to do so.

John stated that the village is low lying and that the Victorian 4" pipes which run through the village are cracked. The drains need replacing but Somerset Council cannot afford to undertake this. The solution is to blow a plastic sleeve inside the existing pipework to form a seal. The downside is that this narrows the drains further.

Christine asked John and Paul to write an urgent strongly worded letter, copying her in and she has asked to be kept informed of the progress and conversations. She requires a plan of action from Somerset Council. It is responsible for maintaining the drains. Bryony is supplying photographic evidence to support the letter.

Paul's telephone number will be added to the Telemetry reader alert messaging, so that hopefully either John or Paul will be able to respond in an emergency.

5. **Somerset Council report.**

Christine stated that many officers are applying for early retirement. As these tend to be the more experienced personnel, a lot of knowledge will be lost. Redundancies are also ongoing. This, combined with staff working from home, has created spare office space at County Hall. Staff will be moved from the district offices into CH and the spare space let commercially. Fortunately for West Somerset, the offices at Williton are fully utilised, with the Police sharing the space. Although finance remains tight, there is not the overspend as last year. This was no-one's fault. We are all living longer.

Christine encouraged MPC to attend the Local Community Network meetings. She has not received news on the Williton recycling centre, but she thinks this is secure for the moment. She congratulated the Monksilver community and MPC for achieving so much for a small village.

6. **Improvements and refurbishments to the E.M.N. Hall**

Paul (Brandwood) gave a summary of the plans for the hall. The hall opened in 1991. It was funded through the lottery and community fundraising and the land was donated. If the hall ceases to operate, the land and buildings return to the farmer. Now 30 years later, the building is in need of refurbishment. The heating costs are the main issue and for the last two years the hall has made a slight loss. Some clubs and societies did not return after the covid lockdown. Mervyn has made some suggestions on how to improve the building by lowering the ceiling and improving the insulation. Paul is working with the Community Council for Somerset. The work will be undertaken in phases, to enable different grant applications to be made, including Hinkley Point. The hall will be installing an EV charging point. This is supported by The Notley, as it may encourage more visitors to the village.

It is hoped to repaint the outside of the hall in 2025. Christine suggested that the hall approaches a local paint distributor for support.

Crowcombe and Williton halls offer equivalent or better facilities. However, it is hoped that as the hall has parking for 50 cars and a large kitchen, that it will be competitive when refurbished.

The response to the survey (appended) has been positive with suggestions for more offerings. A community coffee hub was the most popular. Some members of the community asked if the hall could offer a pop-up pub when the Notley was not open. Paul confirmed that this is possible but that it will need volunteers to run the events.

Mervyn congratulated Paul and the EMN Committee on what they are doing. Christine also extended her congratulations.

Resolution that Paul and Mervyn will provide letters of support on behalf of MPC as and when required.

Proposed by John and Seconded by Lydia.

All agreed, with no dissensions.

7. **Highways including 7.5T weight limit and speed limitation update.**

John reported that recently a large lorry jammed the road for nine hours at the sharp bend by Liz Pryce's house.

Katherine Tyson, Somerset Council Highways, has been extremely helpful. She will support a maximum 7.5 tonne weight limit between Elworthy and Fair Cross. Katherine told John that this will need to be self-funded at a cost of no more than £3K. Residents from Nettlecombe, Yarde and Monksilver have suggested that this will not be a problem.

The weight limit change will not affect emergency vehicles, or trucks making deliveries within the length of the road or to buses going into Nettlecombe Court. It will have no bearings on vehicles delivering farm supplies.

Somerset Councillor, Christine Lawrence, supports the changes and stated that this will show on the lorries' tachographs, so most drivers will adhere to the weight limit.

Kier have been confirmed as the speed control contractor. They plan on undertaking the work during September or October 2024.

8. **West Somerset Free Press article published 28th June 2024** re possible merger with Nettlecombe Parish Council. The meeting decided to take no further action, although MPC will consider collaborative working when this benefits Monksilver.
9. **Creating a communication strategy.** Paul stated that this queries if or when the village WhatsApp should be used by MPC. He is not in favour of using social media. Mary had undertaken training to ascertain what MPC must do, as opposed what will be nice to do when communicating with residents. MPC must have a communication strategy in place which takes into account the requirements of the Somerset Code of Conduct and the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010. These state that MPC must also send an annual questionnaire asking for feedback on important matters including precepts when possible, taking into account the clerk's time and the financial implications; these also advise that emailed newsletters are an affordable way for small rural parishes to proceed as residents can easily opt in and out.

It was resolved:

- a) **That Paul will write a letter/questionnaire to every household in the village asking them how they preferred to obtain information.**
- b) **Paul and Mary will write a communication strategy and submit to the November meeting:
Proposed by John and seconded by Mervyn.**

The choices will be:

To continue to read updates posted on the village noticeboard

Sign up to email updates

Receive information via the website

In order to be sustainable and to comply with Somerset Greener Councils' policy only the housebound will receive a hand delivered copy.

WhatsApp will not be used, other than for emergency notifications e.g. the stuck lorry.

Social media will not be an option.

10. **Matters outside of Monksilver.**

- a) Williton Parish Council / Wyndham Estates
- b) Williton Parish Council / Closure of Cleeve Hill

The meeting noted the correspondence from Williton Parish Council but did not think it significantly impacted on Monksilver. The meeting noted the new Government's announcement on solar farms being erected on agricultural land.

11. **Finance:**

The meeting approved the raising of cheques, which were signed by Mervyn but require counter signature from Andrew to:-

- Paul Appleton. Reimbursement of defibrillator pads purchased - £79.08.
- Somerset Association Local Councils re Councillor Training £29.
- Somerset Association Local Councils re affiliation fee to SALC - £35
- David Sykes (Black Cat Computers) re website uploads - £75

The spreadsheet showing the income and expenditure, bank statement reconciliation and the movement on the reserve accounts for the period 1st April 2024 – 30th June 2024 had been previously circulated. Carol Juffs, the previous clerk is still showing as the third signatory and the bank is still posting correspondence to her. This has data protection and legal implications.

12. **Neighbourhood Watch update.**

Lydia hopes that the neighbourhood watch will be operational by the next meeting. It is hoped that MPC will be able to provide swift updates to the residents in the future.

16. **Defibrillator.**

One of the batteries will need replacing in November 2024. As from 2025/2026 it will be necessary to precept the operational and replacement costs.

17. **Planning applications.** None had been received.

18. **Local Community Network.** The discussion is held over until the November meeting. Earlier in the meeting Christine Lawrence had suggested that some of the matters discussed today were common to other parishes, and that therefore a presence at the next meeting might be beneficial.

18. **Rights of Way, pathways and deer management update.** In Dan's absence, this item is held over until the November meeting.

19. **Adoption of the Somerset Code of Conduct** is held over until the November meeting.

19. **Any other business.**

- a) A possible letter of introduction to Rachel Gilmour MP is held over until the November meeting.

- b) The Somerset Prepared Day at the E.M.N Hall 7th October 2024. Residents will be invited to attend in the afternoon
 - c) The internet speed has slowed considerably throughout the village. This causes problems for people working from home. John will approach BT Openreach, on behalf of MPC, to try and ascertain when the copper will be replaced by fibre.
20. The date of the next meeting is 25th November 2024 at 7.30 p.m. at the E.M.N. Hall, Monksilver. The 2025-2026 budget will need to be approved at this meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 09.50 p.m.