WEST HATCH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting of the West Hatch Parish Council held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 27th March 2024

**23/86 Attendance and apologies**

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

**Public: Cllr S Wakefield (Somerset Council), D Kerr (WHVH),1 parishioner**

**Apologies: Cllrs Finlayson and Walters, Mrs S Read (Tree Warden)**

**23/87 Declarations of Interests and Dispensations**

No declarations of interests were made.

**23/88 Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council meeting held on 24th January 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**23/89 Matters arising from the minutes.**

* **Ownership and responsibility for track to Village Hall (23/75)**

The clerk has not been successful in establishing who has ownership and responsibility of the track (Victoria Path) leading to the Village Hall. Footpath 31/26 runs along the track. It was agreed to take no further action at present.

**23/90 Parishioners’ Forum**

The issue of fly tipping was raised as there has been an increase in these incidents recently. Parishioners are encouraged to report any incident by using the Somerset Council online reporting form so that the rubbish can be promptly removed. Links to the reporting form are also on the Parish website.

The Village Hall Committee is arranging a commemorative beacon as part of the 80th anniversary of the D Day landings on June 6th. The Beacon will be situated in the field at the top of Griffin Lane.

A parishioner advised the Council that given the ongoing delays with Airband and the provision of superfast broadband, he has applied to BT under its Universal Service Obligation. He will keep the Council informed on any progress.

**23/91 To receive reports from County Councillors (if present)**

Cllr Wakefield confirmed that Somerset Council were able to agree a balanced budget for the forthcoming financial year. She has been appointed as the Executive lead for Adult and Children’s Social Care and the path going forward is to provide more care at home, which will be more cost effective than residential care.

Members of the Council highlighted various highway issues within the Parish and Cllr Wakefield will take this forward on behalf of the Parish Council.

**23/92 To discuss Parish Emergency Plan**

The second draft Parish Emergency Plan was discussed, following input from the meeting, it was agreed that it would be useful to cover specific scenarios eg widespread outage of power and utilities, extreme weather event, major traffic incident etc.

The plan will be further refined to include these scenarios and then will be publicised throughout the Parish to ask for final comments.

**23/93 LCN Update**

The two working groups have now been established, Spud Middleton is a member of the Highways group and Sheila Read (Tree warden) a member of the Environment group. Both working parties will need resources to deliver their objectives, including greater representation from other Parishes.

**23/94 To discuss the way forward with Parish website.**

Unfortunately, the parishioner who carries out the technical website management of the Parish website is unable to continue in this role and alternative arrangements need to be made.

A company (Parish Online) specialising in Parish Council websites has been identified and has quoted a similar sized Parish in the locality a fee of approx. £280 per annum, to maintain and develop a website.

It was agreed that the Clerk would contact Parish Online to explore the issue further.

The Parish Council placed on record its thanks to Robert Wheatley for the work that he has undertaken over the past 9 years in establishing and maintaining the Parish website.

**23/95 To progress Community Litter Pick**

Several parishioners recently undertook a litter pick around the Parish to clear the verges and allow the flora and fauna to flourish.

The Parish Council would like this to become a regular event and will arrange a further pick up within the next three months. It is understood that id verde would collect the bags of rubbish, free of charge and that litter picking equipment may be available from Somerset Council.

**23/96 Report from Annual Parish Meeting**

The Annual Parish Meeting held on 15th March was deemed to be successful with approx. 20 parishioners in attendance.

Updates from the Parish Council, Village Hall and Forestry England were given, and parishioners had the opportunity to raise issues of concern.

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting are available on the website although the minutes will not be formally approved until the 2025 meeting.

**23/96 To consider how the Parish Improvement Fund will be used.**

Uses of the Parish Improvement Fund were discussed, and it was agreed that priority would be given to road signage, eg. continuing with Twenty is Plenty signs, refurbishment of fingerposts.

It is possible that specific highway projects could be undertaken in the future in conjunction with the LCN and Cllr Wakefield recommended that the Council undertakes an audit of the problems that regular occur, to ensure that the Council can best address these issues.

The Clerk will contact Somerset Highways to obtain up to date locations of the drains and gullies in the Parish.

**23/97 Formal Expenditure Approval**

It was resolved to make the following payments:

1. Clerk’s Salary £325.00
2. Clerk’s Expenses (Oct-Mar) £ 28.50
3. APM Expenses £ 17.00

**23/98 Planning – to consider any planning matters arising.**

The Council has received notification of the following application:

47/24/0003: Replacement of conservatory with the erection of a single storey extension at Crown Cottage, West Hatch.

It was agreed that the Parish Council has no objections to this application.

**23/99 Reports of Parish Council Working Parties**

* 1. **Report from Footpath leader**

Ben Haskins has recently met with John Melrose, the Area ROW warden for the Parish.

The financial emergency of Somerset Council is likely to adversely affect the ROW team, with a possible staffing reduction of up to 25%. Any contracted cuts of the paths in the Parish are at risk and the ROW team would be looking at Parish Councils or volunteers to assist with maintenance etc. There is only one ROW in the Parish which is subject to a cut from a contractor.

There have not been many issues reported on the website for West Hatch and the ROW team are keen to encourage parishioners to use the Explore Somerset information website to report any issues online.

The situation regarding Prey Lane was discussed and there appears to be two options available:

1. Obtain external funding to restore the ROW to its restricted Byway status, although ongoing maintenance would be required to maintain this status. John Melrose will investigate this.
2. Look to divert the ROW but any diversion would need to be to the standard of a restricted byway. The Parish Council discussed the possibility of downgrading the ROW to footpath status and then obtaining a diversion and Ben Haskins will take this suggestion forward.
   1. **Report from Trees/Conservation leader.**

Nothing to report.

* 1. **Report on Highway matters.**

There has been standing water on Higher West Hatch Lane near to the junction of the A358, for several days and it is not draining away. This issue will be reported to Highways as it is likely that the soakaway or drain is blocked.

* 1. **Report from SALC representative.**

Nothing to report.

**23/100 Correspondence and matters of report.**

* **Free portrait of the King.**

The Parish Council has been offered a free portrait of King Charles III, and in conjunction with the Village Hall committee, it will be hung in the Village Hall.

* **Update on provision of sandbags.**

Following the establishment of the Somerset Unitary Council, and its subsequent financial emergency, the provision of free sandbags to residents at risk of flooding will no longer take place.

**23/101 To agree date of next meeting.**

The Annual Parish Council meeting will take place on Wednesday 29th May at 7.30pm

The meeting closed at 9.25pm