

PITMINSTER PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Parish Council Meeting (virtual by Zoom) on Thursday 16th December 2021 at 1900 (7PM).

Present

Cllr Burnett (Chair), Whatmore, Neale, Chapman, Threlfall, Cordier and Garland
Mr. R Tyzack (Clerk to the Parish Council).

Members of public None

Planning Officer None

Cllr Thorne Apologised

Cllr Wakefield Apologised

Cllr Dawn Johnson Apologised

1. Apologies

Cllr Lee (Birthday) approved.

2. Declarations

None

3. Delegated planning applications to be RESOLVED

- **30/21/0042.** Due virtual meeting this application handed back to SWAT.

4. Planning applications for OBSERVATION

- None

5. Matters arising

None.

6. Minutes

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 25th November 2021 at 1900, already distributed were approved and signed after the meeting. Due to short meeting this item will be on next Agenda.

7. Budget.

Councillors authorised the Clerk to fill out the form for a figure of £9000.00 and the Chair will sign. Clerk to forward to SWAT.

8. Meeting dates for 2022

Clerk had sent to Cllrs a schedule of meetings. Clerk authorized to distribute.

9. AOR List

On next Agenda.

10. S107 payments

On next Agenda.

11. Website update

Clerk Reported he was adding photographs and it was hoped to go live in two weeks.

12. To receive latest CiL figures

On next Agenda.

13. Cllrs AOR reports

On next Agenda.

14. Agenda items

On next Agenda.

15. Bank balance

Reported 01/12/2021 £30166.87

16. Resolve payments

RESOLVED to pay the invoices as written in the Agenda. Clerk to have cheques signed by Cllr Burnett and Whatmore.

17. Close meeting

There being no further business the meeting closed in 1940

Signed

Date Thursday 20th January 2022

Cllr Wakefield and Thorne had circulated reports prior to meeting. Attached below:

Cllr John Thorne

• **Covid stats** – Infection rates in Somerset had begun to come down again but we have just seen another spike in numbers and by the weekend the rate was 449.5/100k. Somerset is now below the South West's 579.1/100k for the first time in several weeks and also below England's 501.7/100k, both of which are on the rise. The latest R number range for the South West by the weekend was 0.9-1.1 which is on a par with most of the rest of the country. Somerset West and Taunton district has the lowest rate of the four districts in the county and has done for several weeks now. Somerset continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with nearly 92 per cent of the eligible 18+ population having at least one vaccination and 89 per cent have been double jabbed (these figures are a little below the ones I have previously reported to you but are from a written Covid update rather than verbal as before). Almost 50 per cent of 12-15-year-olds have been vaccinated. Fifty-six per cent of over 50s have had a booster jab and demand is beginning to outstrip supply. More than 1.12 million jabs have been delivered and 163,000 booster jabs. There have now been more than 73,000 cases in Somerset and 952 deaths attributed to Covid since the start of the pandemic. Most of those who currently need hospital care, just over 40 cases, are people who have not had a vaccination.

• **Covid vaccinations** – The Omicron variant of Covid has now been confirmed as being present in Somerset although I do not know how many cases have been identified. The key message for everyone is: 'Vaccination remains the best form of defence against covid'. Extra walk-in clinics have been held at weekends to help boost the number of vaccinations being given in Somerset,

including some pop-up clinics. The large drive-through vaccination centre now operating at the Firepool site, in Taunton, seems to be working well and is administering around 2,000 jabs a day. From Monday (20th) the centre is expanding its opening hours to 7.30 am to 10 pm as it steps up the number of doses per day to help meet the Government's enhanced targets. More info on vaccination centres is here <https://www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/health/local-services/health-services-during-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccinations-in-somerset>.

- **Somerset Coronavirus helpline** – Please keep promoting the Coronavirus one-stop helpline number 0300 790 6275 but be aware that demand has increased recently and it may take a little while to get through. The service is open from 8 am to 6 pm every day of the week and has just passed 17,000 calls received since it opened in April of last year.

- **Democracy** – With the Government announcement of 'Plan B' the county is again encouraging all staff who can work from home to do so and again taking online all meetings which do not have to be held physically. Those staff who need to be in the office will have to follow social distancing and other rules again, and any office 'gatherings' around Christmas will have to be kept small. We are also identifying staff who may be needed to help the NHS with an accelerated roll out of the booster vaccines. This tomorrow's (Friday) meeting of the county's pensions committee, of which I am chairman, has been postponed until 7th January, not because of Plan B but because my funds and investment manager has tested positive for Covid and we were also experiencing some IT issues which would have meant moving the meeting to Sedgemoor District Council's officers in Bridgwater and producing the hundreds of pages of reports on paper rather than electronically.

- **Local Government Reorganisation 1** – We now know that elections to the new unitary council will be held in May 2022. Parish council elections are being brought forward a year to be held at the same time and I believe you will be asked to meet half the costs of the elections here. Councillors on both parish and unitary councils will be elected for five years, taking you through to 2027 when the usual cycle of parish elections continues. Next year's unitary elections will be on existing divisional boundaries with two councillors being returned from each division, so the total number of councillors doubles from 55 to 110. The number will be brought down to 85 by 2027 after a boundary commission review to redraw the divisions which will then be called wards. The draft Structural Changes Order will be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State in January and should be passed in early March. The unitary will be a 'continuing authority' which means SCC effectively continues under a new name and absorbs the district authorities making it easier for staff to transfer and contracts to be moved across.

- **Local Government Reorganisation 2** – The joint advisory committee created to work on the design of local community networks (LCNs) was due to meet in Stoke St Gregory tomorrow (Friday) but this has now been moved online via Microsoft Teams and was being held today (Thursday) from 3.30 pm to 5.30 pm. One of the topics being discussed is the role of unitary councillors, or how their 'job description' should read. A lengthy report (14 A4 pages) has been prepared comparing and contrasting what happens in other unitary councils in Cornwall, Dorset, Buckinghamshire, and Shropshire. To my mind, it's not rocket science and this sort of bureaucracy is not what we need when creating a new council.

- **Rural broadband** – The recent 'red' rating for the Connecting Devon and Somerset ultrafast broadband fibre delivery project has been explained to me in terms which could have been applied when Gigaclear was at the stage that Airband is now, yet for some reason that was not done at the time. Essentially, because it is a new contract and there is lots of planning to do before things get moving on the ground, and because it is a 'complex engineering project' it is considered to be 'at risk' and therefore justifies a 'red' key performance indicator. Nothing appears to actually be planned to help move the project to a 'green' rating as it seems this should happen naturally as we see progress with it. I consider the explanation unsatisfactory and will continue to press my point.

It does not bode well that the county council has just prosecuted one of the CDS contractors, Truespeed, for not getting proper consent and putting up proper signage before digging up roads in a village in the Mendips resulting in the firm being fined £8,000, nor that CDS has just 'celebrated' another contractor, Wessex Internet, connecting its first property. It has only taken nearly 12 months to do it!

- **A358** – National Highways is now consulting on its statutory consultation, asking people what they thought of the process. There is an online survey available here https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=LIQf3rUIdkKqXUx1eQwXZod-UWJ3bh5Fm3hG1_Mtb1FUNkEwOEUXODAYNEQ4T0NOSU9EOEZQWjNVTy4u until 4th January. All the responses to the statutory consultation are currently being analysed as NH is required to do before it can submit its application for a Development Control Order which is still expected to happen in the summer of 2022.

- **Holman Clavel crossroads** – There has been renewed concern about safety at this junction with a report by a resident of two more accidents in a month. County highways are sending somebody to inspect the junction and check the signs and lines before deciding if further action is needed. I have queried the accidents statistics we hold as they may be needed to help justify any work.

- **Chillander crossroads** – Detailed design work has now started on the improvement scheme for the crossroads at the top of Corfe Hill following consultations. I have asked if any changes are being made as a result of the feedback but the design team have yet to agree on what is feasible and will report back to me once they do.

- **Road defects reporting** – Online reporting of road defects has been enhanced and you can now report 21 different issues via www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road. You take a photo of the defect if it is safe and legal to do so, upload it to the site and mark it on an interactive map. An engineer will be pinged on his/her mobile phone and they have three days to visit it and assess it. The fault will then be either repaired within 28 days (quicker if it is an emergency), or added to a works programme, or monitored. You get an email confirmation that the report has been received and a link which allows you to track the progress of the job and an email confirmation when the repair has been completed. The issues which can be reported are potholes/road damage, blocked drain/gully, damaged pavement/cycle path, damaged signage/bollard, overgrown vegetation, problem with crossings, signal fault, bridge/wall damage, damaged drain covers, flooding, hazards, mud, problems with markings, pavement/road obstruction, weeds on pavement, snow/ice, problem with roadworks, flyposting/graffiti, parking issues, problem with road closures. There is no longer any need to email or phone the council to report these issues.

- **Bus services** – The bus service improvement plan (BSIP) bid for £163 million has now gone to the Government. There will be a further round of consultation coming up because while the outcome of the funding bid is awaited, work has started on developing the legal mechanisms which will help deliver the BSIP plans such as an Enhanced Partnership between the council and the bus companies, and feedback will be sought by the consultants who are working with county on this. The BSIP is available here <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/transport-strategy>.

- **Bus station** – As part of the BSIP a feasibility study was conducted to see if there was a need for either a replacement bus station or a mobility hub/interchange in Taunton and if so, where would be the most suitable location. The results showed there was a need for a bus station that the former site would be the most suitable location. You will know that the former site was bought by the district council. Discussions between county and district have been held to explore how the initiative might be moved forward. A bid for funding to undertake the necessary work to re-open

the previous bus station and undertake any improvement works forms part of the BSIP and as mentioned above a decision on the funding bid is awaited. If the bus station is reopened, it will be for all bus operators and not just First Bus as it was previously. The bid also includes mobility hubs for a number of communities across Somerset.

• **Recycle More** – We are now a month into the expanded recycling services in Taunton Deane by Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP). Although, considerable confusion was expected during the early days because more than half of Taunton Deane residents have seen their collection days change, about 55,000 households I believe, SWP is claiming that about 98 per cent of residents are putting out material on the right days and in the right containers. Despite that claim, I have been hearing of quite a few missed collections across our county division. Be aware some collection days may change over the festive period. Anybody who wants to recycle their Christmas tree can do so either by taking it to the household waste recycling centres in Taunton and Wellington, or by booking a collection from a charity such as St Margaret's Hospice Care, or by putting it out for a kerbside collection if they are a garden waste subscriber.

Cllr Sarah Wakefield

1. At Full Council on 7 December SWT Council, after consultation, we adopted two important new design guides. These are the SWT Districtwide Design Guide and the Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town. These design guides are important additional tools for planning officers and residents in seeking to require higher and better standards of design particularly in large developments such as Orchard Grove (Comeytrowe Urban Extension). As I may have mentioned previously because the planning system has been loosened over recent years it is important for Councils to bolster the strength of their local plans and requirements particularly in order to force developers to upgrade and update their layouts and building design. It is to be hoped that these new powers will produce a better standard of design moving forwards. The Council has also agreed to continue the existing council tax support programme with no changes. This is an income-related local discount scheme that helps people on low incomes to pay their council tax.
2. Cllrs may be aware that work has started on the design of the institutions of the new unitary authority – to be known as Somerset Council. It has been announced that elections for the new authority will take place in May 2022 but it is likely, though not yet certain, that elections for parish and town councils will now take place in May 2023. The Local Government Re-organisation Joint Committee – made up of 4 district leaders and the leader of SCC and 4 other members of the cabinet has started meeting with a second meeting due to take place on 17 December (though now postponed due to Covid). SWT Council has now agreed to the setting up of a LGR Scrutiny Committee with 2 members from each district and 8 from SCC chosen on the basis of the political balance of each council. SWT will have one Lib Dem and one Independent Group member and meetings are likely to start in the new year.
3. Trull Parish, local to Pitminster, will need to decide what if any changes it would like to be made to its boundaries in connection with the setting up of the new Taunton Town Council. The first consultation closes on 12 January 2022 after which the council working group will review the input and make recommendations about the new Town Council boundaries. Account will be taken of the views of PCs, who are representatives of their communities, as well as individual representations. A proposal will then be made and a further consultation with parishes affected will take place before the Council makes a final decision. Much of the Orchard Grove development is in fact immediately adjacent to the Comeytrowe Parish area

rather than to Trull itself. Whatever decision is made regarding its final shape and extent Trull PC together with Pitminster PC will both become part of one of the new Local Community Networks (tasked with providing some additional local services over a wider area through links with adjoining parishes).

4. By way of information only, a small 6m part of the stone wall along Trull Road near Gatchell Oaks will be removed by the developer between now and next summer in order to implement the permission to demolish much of it in connection with the construction of the new roundabout at the Trull end of the spine road. There will be a short term (a week we think) restriction of the road to one lane with lights) and the land behind the wall will be scraped back and some trees and vegetation removed. A post and rail fence will be erected. Whilst this is regrettable at least the work on the roundabout and other demolition and removal of trees, after representations made by us as ward councillors, will not take place until the development moves much closer to Trull itself (some years away).

Cllrs Sarah Wakefield and Dawn Johnson