

PITMINSTER PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Parish Council Meeting (virtual by Zoom) on Thursday 20th January 2022 at 1900 (7PM).

Present

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

Members of public None
Cllr Thorne Apologised
Cllr Wakefield
Cllr Dawn Johnson

1. Apologies

None

2. Declarations

None

3. Delegated planning applications to be RESOLVED

- None

4. Planning applications for OBSERVATION

- 30/21/0050 replacement garage at Pitminster Lodge Church Lane. Council supports the application.

5. Matters arising

None.

6. Minutes

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 25th November 2021 and Thursday 16th December 2021 at 1900, already distributed were approved and signed after the meeting.

7. Payments to charities S137

Clerk suggested payments to Citizens Advice Bureau and Devon and Somerset Air Ambulance.

Resolved that council in accordance with its powers under Section 137 and 139 of the LGA should incur expenditure of £30 each to The Devon and Somerset Air Ambulance and The Citizens Advice Bureau, which in the opinion of council is in the interests of the area and its inhabitants and will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure.

8. Somerset Highways email

Clerk had sent to Cllrs a copy of email. Cllr Whatmore stated he would attempt to download data from the SID. Clerk write to Mr James to update him. Place this item on next Agenda.

9. CiL report

Latest CiL figures had been passed to councillors.

10. Website update

Clerk reported there was a delay due the web designer having to wait for a new router. This was now installed. Clerk hoped to go live by next meeting.

11. AOR Latest

Cllr Peter Cordier would be added as the representative to the PFA. Cllr Whatmore listed as keeper of SID.

12. Cllrs AOR reports

Cllr Lee had information from “connecting the Culm”

Cllr Whatmore had moved the SID to new venue.

Cllr Garland reported on a footpath on Don Cozens land where there is a stile that causes difficulty for large dogs.

13. Agenda items next Agenda

Movement of 30mph signs at south end of village of Blagdon Hill.

Her Majesty Jubilee arrangements. Possible beacon. Possible mugs for young adults.

Sign finger posts.

14. Bank balance

Reported 20/12/2021

£26934.87

15. Resolve payments

Clerk to have cheques signed by Cllr Burnett and Whatmore.

16. Close meeting

There being no further business the meeting closed in 1940

Signed

Date Thursday 24th February 2022

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

Cllr John Thorne.

• **Covid stats** – Omicron is now the dominant strain across the South West and the cause of most of the new cases in Somerset. Consequently, the Somerset infection rate has gone off the chart and reached unprecedented levels, currently 1,117.2/100k, the only comfort being that this figure is below the South West's 1,191.7/100k and England's 1,591.8/100k, both of which have also shot up. However, the Somerset rate is lagging behind the London and the South East peak and it is anticipated that cases in this part of the country will not peak for around another fortnight and the rate will therefore continue to rise for some time to come. The latest R number range for the South West is 1.2-1.4. Somerset continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with nearly 96 per cent of the eligible 18+ population having at least one vaccination and just over 93 per cent have been double jabbed. Almost 51 per cent of adults in Somerset 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 99,000 cases in Somerset and 992 deaths attributed to Covid since the start of the pandemic. Most of those who currently need hospital care, around 75 cases, are people who have not had a vaccination.

- **Covid vaccinations** – Vaccination continues to be recognised as 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. It is still not too late for anybody to book their first or second jab if they have not already had them. 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. The centre has extended 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. However, I have some serious concerns about access to, and the layout of, the Firepool centre from when I visited to have my booster jab, and these are now being looked into by NHS staff. More info on vaccination centres is here

<https://www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/health/local-services/health-services-during-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccinations-in-somerset>. In the week before Christmas more than 61,000 doses were given in Somerset, double the previous week's number.

- **Covid transport** – Community transport is now available for residents who need to get a vaccine or a booster, but don't have access to a car and struggle to use public transport. You can find out more by calling the Covid Helpline on 0300 790 6275 or by visiting <https://www.travelsomerset.co.uk/community-transport-services>.

- **Somerset Coronavirus helpline** – The Coronavirus helpline continues to take a stream of calls. The 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.

- **Mindline** – Covid-19 continues to pose challenges to our community both here in the south west and across the UK, making it as important as ever that we look after our mental health, as well as our physical health. Mindline Somerset is a confidential listening service, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Their volunteers offer a friendly ear and can provide help or support with emotional health and wellbeing. The number to call is 01823 276 892.

- **Democracy** – County held an emergency full council meeting yesterday (19th) to formally stand down physical committee meetings and instead put them online as 'advisory committees'. They are finding it difficult to get enough councillors to attend physical meetings at the moment, and the pensions committee of which I am chairman was recently despite having initially been postponed for three weeks. Although legally they are required to hold physical meetings to take decisions, the way around this I am told is to have online meetings which are 'advisory' with powers delegated to officers to carry out the decisions which the councillors would otherwise be taking. I am not very much in favour of such a course of action for several reasons, not the least being that it undermines the message that vaccination is the best form of defence against the virus. But I have not been consulted on the idea and I was even told not to attend yesterday because numbers were by agreement of all the group leaders restricted to just 17 councillors! The budget setting meeting on 23rd February will be an in-person meeting and will take place at a venue in Bridgwater.

- **Budget setting** – An online consultation is being held on the last ever SCC budget, which will be agreed at the council's meeting on 23rd February. It is proposed to increase council tax by 1.99 per cent which would cost the average Band D property £26.94, or 52p a week, and a further one per cent which would be ringfenced for adult social care to support our most vulnerable adults, adding £13.53 - 26p a week - to Band D bills. The consultation runs until 28th January and can be found here <https://somerset.inconsult.uk/SCCBudget/answerQuestionnaire?qid=7662851>.

• **Local Government Reorganisation** – The joint advisory committee (JAC) created to work on the design of local community networks (LCNs) has been meeting online via Microsoft Teams because of Covid. The next JAC meeting is due on 3rd February and will again be online. A third LCN is starting in the Wincanton, Bruton, and Castle Cary area in addition to the two for Exmoor and Frome. Dr Carlton Brand, who led the work on preparing a case for a unitary council in Somerset, is retiring shortly and his local government reorganisation work will be taken on by Alyn Jones, who is currently a strategic director for highways.

• **Rural broadband** – It has been very disappointing to hear that Airband's programme has been slipping in recent weeks. I do not yet know the reasons for this but I have asked about the impact on the roll-out of superfast fibre broadband for our county council division and not yet received answers. You may already be aware that the company's community liaison officer has left and been replaced by another person who has yet to make contact to introduce themselves. I know that I often sound like a gloom monger when I report on Connecting Devon and Somerset, but once again this news does not bode well for the project.

• **A358** – Responses to National Highways' statutory consultation are being analysed, which they have to do before a Development Control Order application can be submitted. There were more than 900 responses to the consultation and 619 people attended the three events as well as 787 people visiting the virtual exhibition and 275 taking part in the nine webinar sessions. The 'Community of Parishes' continues to try to stop the scheme in its entirety and has submitted two detailed complaints, one highlighting what they see as deficiencies in the statutory consultation and the other claiming National Highways suppressed public views. You will know that my position has been to support the dualling but as a standard dual-carriageway and not to the level that National Highways proposes. I have some sympathy with several of the Community of Parishes' complaints, including the short length of the statutory consultation for a very, very complicated project involving thousands of pages of technical evidence which required 'expert' analysis to understand. The next community forum will be held online in February. National Highways are also offering one to one meetings with their project team community liaison officer Deborah Lawrence in late January/early February which can be booked by emailing A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk.

• **Crossroads improvements** – As well as the Small Improvement Scheme which is in final design stage for Chillander Crossroads, the one at the top of Corfe Hill, highways staff have confirmed they will visit the Holman Clavel crossroads and assess it this month after safety concerns have again been raised. I have not yet been told if that has already happened. The accident statistics for this junction held by the county show two slight injury accidents in 2018 and two in 2019.

• **Food resilience taskforce** – Somerset Food Resilience Taskforce, which the county council funds, has now distributed more than a million items of food since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The scheme is co-ordinated by Village Agents from the Community Council for Somerset who create veg boxes, carers respite meal packs, and Christmas meal packs. Around 15 to 20 different community groups across the county collect and deliver between 10,000 and 30,000 food items each week, as well as 100 to 600 frozen meals. Anybody who needs help with food can call 01823 331222 or visit <https://somersetagents.org/help-with-food>.

• **Healthcare equipment appeal** – Anybody with community healthcare equipment they no longer need is being asked to arrange for it to be collected by Millbrook Healthcare so that it can be reused to help others who are in need. Collections are free and contactless where possible and can be booked by calling 0333 003 2407 between 9 am and 5 pm Monday to Friday.

• **Bus services** – Now that the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has gone to Government and we await a decision on the £165 million bid for the next three years, county has prepared the

next step in the process which is to draw up an Enhanced Partnership (EP) document which shows how it will achieve what it wants to do in the BSIP. This has been consulted on with the bus operating companies and no objections have been received. A public consultation was due to start this week but has now been postponed until at least next week. I've scanned the EP document and find it very frustrating because of the lack of detail. SCC has opted to produce a 'shell' EP due to the uncertainties over funding and the effects of the pandemic on everything, as opposed to working up a 'detailed' EP. As a result, it mostly says no more than we will work together to improve as much as we can as quickly as we can! (my paraphrasing). The only detail I could find were a pledge to electrify the park and ride service at some point and a commitment to all buses accepting contactless payment for all fares no later than 1st April 2022.

• **Carers' pay boost** – Working with the NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group the county council has agreed an immediate financial boost in rates for care workers, including a nine per cent uplift to domiciliary care providers in CQC regulated settings who agree to pay all their staff a minimum of £10.50 per hour, a retention bonus of £250 for those who have been working in registered care for the past six months, and a £250 payment for new starters in domiciliary care who have not worked in care in Somerset for the preceding three months.

• **Road fatalities** – The death of an elderly motorist just 10 days before Christmas meant the number of fatal accidents on the county's roads in 2021 reached 24, the highest in six years and the number of people killed was just one short of the highest in that period at 25. The figures for 2020 of 12 accidents and 12 deaths were exceptionally low because lockdown meant people were not driving as much.

• **Reporting road incidents** – In case like me you were not aware, there is an online portal for reporting to the police incidents which occur on the county's roads. The link is here <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/report/accident-on-the-road/#/>. Using this will help the police to keep records of accidents where no injuries have been sustained and they do not attend, which in turn can be used by the county's highways team when road safety issues are raised with them.

John Thorne ENDS

District Cllr Dawn Johnson and Sarah Wakefield:

1. Full Council and other council committees - Executive and Scrutiny in particular – will shortly be considering next year's budget and how to balance it against continually rising costs, higher inflation and the desire not to make service cuts in our last year as a council. Thankfully we have a useful contribution from our commercial investments and a reasonable settlement from the government so we do expect to be able to submit a balanced budget whilst retaining sufficient reserves as is prudent. It is worth remembering that any increase in Council Tax or Council rents will be offset for the poorest by increases in housing benefit and there is also a council tax support scheme run by SWT.
2. Somerset Council: Work is continuing on the setting up of the departments and framework of the new Somerset Council with the elections set for 5 May 2022 for both this council and the parish and town councils. They will each serve 5 year terms but the new Somerset Council will not take over the functions of the districts until 1 April 2023. The leader of SCC together with the 4 district leaders and 4 members of the SCC cabinet now meet as the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Joint Board to make strategic decisions. There is also an LGR Advisory Board, which is also meeting now, and which has members taken from the Somerset Councils and Parish and Town Councils as well as other bodies (I don't

know how they were selected though). The meetings of both boards take place in open session across the county at different locations each time to lessen journey times as far as possible. I am not sure however that they are being webcast as all SWT meetings are now. A lot of work is going on in SCC itself and the relevant departments within the districts are also liaising both with SCC and with each other so that closer working relationships are being fostered ahead of the merger. There will inevitably be redundancies, economies of scale being part of the financial benefit of unitary, but as yet where and when these will happen is not known.

3. Taunton Council: The first consultation closed on 12 January 2022 so now the council working group are working on reviewing the responses received and on making recommendations about the new Town Council boundary. There will be further consultation after their proposals are published particularly with the parishes affected. Eventually SWT at Full Council will make a final decision with the first elections to the new Taunton Council taking place in 2023.
4. Local Community Networks: As yet we do not have much information as to how these groups of parishes will be linked in this area or how that linking will be decided. Pilot studies for LCNs are taking place in Frome, Wincanton and Exmoor National Park – being three contrasting local areas within Somerset. Much work needs to be done on this part of the new local governance arrangements including which powers eg planning are to be delegated more locally to LCNs. There is a conference happening in February to which your Clerk and PC (some of the members) should be invited and I hope I will soon be able to provide more detail on all of this.
5. Proposed housing development off Honiton Road and in Sweethay: Councillors may be aware of the revival of this 2015 application, known as Broadlands Twenty Twelve, which everyone thought had been withdrawn and which falls within Trull Parish. It had not been withdrawn and is now being actively pursued again for some 146 houses. The promoter – Tetra Tech Ltd – has sought to engage locally and has altered the design and layout considerably but it still includes access from the Honiton Road between Bradbeers and Canonsgrove and into Sweethay Lane. As a member of the Planning Committee (Sarah) I am not going to comment at this stage but will save my thoughts and words for the committee meeting in due course. I do however urge all or any parishioners who are concerned to look at the application 42/15/0001 online at SWT and to send in their comments to the planning department at SWT as soon as possible as the consultation period is actually scheduled to end on 20 January 2022. I note that some from Pitminster Parish have already done so.
6. SWT staff are administering a further round of government grants for hospitality businesses affected by Covid regulations. As previously our teams are working as quickly as possible to get money out to businesses as efficiently as they can.

Thank you

Cllrs Sarah Wakefield and Dawn Johnson