

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CHEDZOY PARISH COUNCIL HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 20TH NOVEMBER 2023 AT 7.30 PM.

Present: - Cllrs. Graham Bentley, Mary Clothier, Marion Dethier (Chair), Russell Harmes, Simon Howes and Rodney Young.

Also present: - Cllr Andy Dingwall (SC).

In attendance: - The Clerk (Chris Fry) and six members of the public.

1. **Apologies:** - Cllr. Diogo Rodrigues.
2. **Minutes of the last meeting of 16th October 2023** were taken as read, agreed and signed.
3. **Matters arising from the minutes.**

a. Footpath Officer's activity.

No report this month.

b. CCCP project update – Grass cutting at the playing field.

The Clerk and the Chair reported on a recent meeting between the Chair, Mary Clothier and the Clerk with a local gardening contractor who is interested in carrying out the periodic maintenance of the CCCP elements within the playing field. This would be the area in and around the 'pump track' and keeping 'down' the area at the base of the Willow Dome. It was agreed that maintenance of the Willow Dome was a specialist job to be undertaken in spring, possibly by the installers.

Agreement for an initial visit was reached and it will take place before Christmas at an hourly labour rate of £25. The cuttings will be deposited in the corner of the field, where a composting heap has already been started. The Clerk will keep the playing field committee up-dated.

c. Chedzoy Village Design Statement – update – the Clerk's review of the minutes.

The Clerk has reviewed the minutes back in 2017 when Chedzoy and a large group of other villages were re-classified by Sedgemoor planners from an "unsustainable" tier to "Tier 4 sustainable" for development purposes. He has drawn up notes which were passed to the sub-committee Chair who distributed them to the sub-committee members.

d. Speed watch team update.

The Clerk reported that he continues to press the "Streetwise" section of Somerset highways department, about the road signage up-dating and installation (where necessary) in Chedzoy Lane, that will enable progress to be made in the Speed watch team set-up.

e. Parish Council vacancy.

The Clerk up-dated the meeting by saying three candidates had come forward to fill the vacancy, and that the sub-committee of the Chair and Vice-Chair has met with one to date, with the other two to be seen tomorrow (Tuesday 21st November), following which the candidate considered to be most suitable will be selected. It is hoped to complete the process shortly.

f. Cycle Track extension at the Chedzoy Lane/A39 junction.

Improvements to the cycle track entrance are now complete, and photographs of it will be published in the Polden Post shortly.

g. LCN meeting – report of the 13th September 2023 meeting.

The Chair attended the recent LCN meeting and she has distributed a comprehensive account of the meeting, the agenda for which was dominated by the current dire state of Somerset Council's financial position.

See the County councilor's report (below) for more details.

4. County Councilor's report – Andy Dingwall reported as follows: -

His report concentrates on the perilous state of Somerset Council's financial position which continues to deteriorate.

As at the end of September (month 5), the estimated overspend for the financial year to date stood at £27.3 million, £15 million on adult and £12.3 million on children's social care, which together represent by far the greatest expense of the council. As the council struggles to make savings the overspend could reduce a little, but the estimated overspend as at the 2024/2025-year end is expected to be approximately £100 million.

It therefore appears to be just a matter of time before a section 114 will have to be lodged, possibly as early as Feb or March 2024, which would trigger the appointment of Government Commissioners who would oversee all of Somerset Council's spending, ensuring the only vital services continue to be funded. All non-vital services will be cut.

We understand that it will be open to Town and Parish Council's to opt to have services devolved down to them, together with the funding of the services. It is unclear at the moment which services might be devolved, or costings levels. Hints have been made to Parish Councils that it is prudent to build up their reserves (the amount of precepts that PCs may raise are uncapped) in readiness for any future increase in spending commitments.

Bearing in mind the lack of any details, Parish Councils are in an impossible position regarding the Precept level they should apply for, which for 2024/2025, needs to be set in December at the latest. We should not forget that any significant increase in the precept would need to be explained to parishioners (who will see the demands on their 2024/2025 council tax bills).

Andy Dingwall has agreed to meet with PC representatives (via zoom if necessary) to go through the list of services to be cut, when he has been advised of more details.

Somerset Council will begin selling off assets in an attempt to reduce the shortfall.

Commissioner's fees and expenses, estimated to be in the region of £1200 per day plus expenses, must be met by SC.

5. PLANNING.

Reference: - 18/23/00002.

Applicant: - Mr. H Meadows.

Location: - Land to the south of Parchey View, Ward Lane, Chedzoy Bridgwater TA7.

Proposal: - Retrospective application for the mixed use of the site as B2 general industrial classification and B8 storage.

Comments invited by 22nd November 2023.

The Chair opened the discussion by saying that the over-riding concern of the Parish Council was traffic travelling through the village to access the site. The Clerk was asked to read aloud the comments submitted by the Parish Council in respect of the previous application (reference 18/23/00003) when these concerns were clearly voiced.

It appears from the Highways submission to the latest application that they have major concerns over access and drainage at the site.

The Clerk was asked to draw up a suitable submission, liaising with the Chair, to send to the Planning North department, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

6. Correspondence.

a. Citizen's advice Somerset.

The Clerk read aloud an email outlining the recent amalgamation of the former district council-based CABs, into citizen's advice Somerset, whilst maintaining its centres as before to serve the residents. A request for grant aid has been made and after a discussion it was agreed to leave the matter for the time being.

b. Clerks' and Councils' Direct magazine.

The current issue has been received.

7. Matters arising from the correspondence: - none.

8. Finance.

Balances after due allowance for any outstanding items: -

Lloyds bank current account: - £11596.19 (PC £10275.35 CCCP £1320.84)

“ “ deposit “ : -£2.48.

Cambridge BS EA account: -£10322.17 (earmarked funds).

Two cheques to issue:

No 857 £451.40 payee CN Fry (November net salary and back-pay).

No 858 £50.75 “ “ (expenses).

NALC pay award – The Clerk reported that an “across the board” pay increase had been agreed for parish Clerks’ – amounting to £1 per hour, back dated to April 2023.

Precept-setting preparation 2024/2025 – The Clerk reported that he had received assessments from CVHA (£293) and Chedzoy churchyard (£1200), of the amount of amenity grant aid they would be seeking for 2024/2025. He had not as yet heard back from CPFA and he will follow it up.

The Clerk was asked to circulate a double columned income and expenditure forecast for 2024/2025 to all councillors ahead of the December meeting.

9. Any other business.

a. Taunton recycling site.

The Taunton recycling centre has now re-opened and the Bridgwater and Wellington site

have reverted to their normal opening hours.

b. Planning application reference number 18/23/00007 – Westfield Farm.

This application was received just last week and comments are invited by 9th December 2023 and so a special planning meeting will be held on Monday 27th November to consider it.

c. Levels and Moors LCN – “Wellbeing” working group.

A request for a volunteer to join this group has been received. The Clerk circulated the request to all councillors.

d. Beyond the bruises - Somerset’s new fight against non-physical domestic abuse.

A new campaign to raise the profile of lesser-known types of domestic abuse, and to encourage those who may not realise they are being abused, to come forward for support and advice, has been launched by Somerset council.

A series of 12 short films which shine the spot-light on these forms of abuse are available to view on: -

<https://bit.ly/12DACF> and help is available on: -

0800 69 49 999.

e. The current precarious financial position.

The Vice-Chairman advised that, with all the pressures and issues surrounding the future of Parish Council funding, the Clerk and all parish councillors should ensure that they give no indication about the future levels of amenity grants.

f. Localised flooding issues.

There is a current feeling that localised flooding events throughout the village appear to be increasing and the Clerk was asked to contact Andy Dingwall to request information on the level of preparedness of the Somerset flood defences to cope in an emergency situation.

Date of next meeting Monday 18th December 2023.

(Special planning meeting Monday 27th November 2023)

There being no other business the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.40 pm

