



Minutes of the Parish Council meeting
held on December 11th 2023

Please note that these are DRAFT minutes and will be considered for possible amendment and subsequent approval at the next meeting.

[A] Apologies and attendance: Apologies were received from Councillor Howes and PCSO Hill. County Councillor Mansell was present

[B] There were no members of the public present

Item 1: There were no disclosures of interest by members on agenda items

Item 2: The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record. Please note that draft minutes are sent out as soon as possible after the meeting to those who request them and are marked accordingly. The clerk requests that these minutes are not passed on to others until they are approved at the subsequent council meeting. Anyone wishing to receive draft minutes must contact the clerk in the first instance.

Item 3: Matters arising from the previous minutes

[a] Devolution of services to Parish Councils and associated costs. Somerset Council faces an £87 million budget shortfall in 2024 to 2025 and a section 114 notice declaring bankruptcy may be issued. There was much discussion over (eg) devolving hedge trimming, roadside clearance etc and it was clear that there could be complications. Parish councils have been asked to take on the ownership and management of some of these services and hence cover those costs from parish precepts. The list is quite considerable and yet provides no guidance to costs, either practical or managerial.

Councillor Mansell very clearly outlined the issues facing Somerset Council and responded to questions from the councillors. County grants eg "burial grant" will almost certainly be withdrawn from today. Somerset Council is taking all necessary and appropriate action to address the issue, but it is possible that even when all actions have been undertaken it may not be enough to avoid insolvency. Reserves will be used as far as minimum levels allow. Social care costs have escalated eg £70m for adult social care which was due partly to referrals from elsewhere. The sale of capital assets may temporarily assist but this action cannot clearly be repeated. The council may face some restructuring as part of the process and it is possible that a minimum level of service covering only that which is statutory may be undertaken. It is difficult to raise the Capital Tax as this is capped by Central Government; eg the cap in 2022/23 was 5% with inflation at 10%. Small parishes, such as Wellington Without, also face difficulties in how much cash can be raised should it be necessary, for example to undertake any devolution of services. Any reduction in costs, although necessarily painful, would be preferable to insolvency and indeed should section 114 be undertaken there will be costs to be covered for the commissioners. It may be that only statutory duties would be undertaken, but this may mean significant job cuts, for a smaller, leaner Somerset Council.

Thanks were expressed to Councillor Mansell for such clarification of the issues.

[c] Defibrillator. Councillor Frear discussed a recent local tragic event and requested that the council consider the installation of a defibrillator within easy access. Some local residents have

Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Date:

Chairman

Wellington Without Parish Council

offered their properties as suitable locations. After some debate it was agreed that should a defibrillator be installed the council would cover the costs of electricity to the unit. Various locations were discussed, including Holywell Lake and the Monument Car Park.

ACTION: The clerk will investigate costs of purchase and installation with providers, including the British Heart Foundation who has offered to consider a unit at no cost except installation.
OUTCOME: The clerk submitted an application on the 19th December for a decision by March
ACTION: The Chairman will discuss the issue with the National Trust

Item 4: Police Liaison

There was no police report

Item 5: Planning, Infrastructure and Development

[a] The “Willow Man”. National Highways are funding a feasibility to replace the iconic “Willow Man” on the M5. It is implicit for funding availability that the study will be complete by the end of February.

[b] The highways work on the A38 near Holywell Lake is progressing and the 50mph speed limit has been well received. Some work at junctions still remains.

Item 6: Financial Issues

[a] There were no items of expenditure over £100 excluding salary payments

[b] It was agreed to sign the appropriate transaction sheets for the clerk’s third quarter salary and administration allowance and accompanying payment to HMRC.

[c] The audited accounts and contemporary balance including salary payments above were discussed. It was agreed that the present balance is healthy but the costs of service devolution could be significant. A summary of the audited accounts will be placed on the website.

ACTION: Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer to forward copy to chairman for inclusion.

DONE: 12th December

[d] The precept was discussed and it will be finalised at the January meeting and the request returned to the County well in advance of the deadline of February 2nd. The present precept is modest and any necessary rise it is hoped will be similarly modest. This however may be impacted by the financial issues facing the county and requested service devolution.

Item 7: County, District and Unitary Authority Councillors

Please see above

Item 8: Any other urgent business

[a] Thanks were expressed to the Manager and staff of the Beambridge Inn for the hosting of all meetings at no cost to the parish. A letter of thanks and a “Christmas Box” for the staff in lieu of such charges were presented. It was agreed to reimburse the clerk for the cash payment

[b] The signpost at Briscoe Lane, damaged in an accident, has been restored by the chairman. A signpost at Stallards has also been placed incorrectly and is not perfectly visible to road users.

[c] Councillor Hasell identified areas with significant floodwater after the recent rains including the bridge over the M5. The authority has been notified.

The next meeting will be on **January 8th** at the Beambridge Inn starting at 7.00pm:

Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Date:

Chairman