

WINSFORD PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Winsford Parish Council Held on Monday 29th January 2024, at 19.00pm in Winsford Village Hall

PRESENT: Councillors: Colin Wilkins (CW) – Chair, Kevin Connell (KC), Mel Mileham (MM), Sarah Little (SL), Bryany Neal (BN), Mike Hillier (MH) and Clerk Jennifer Yates (JY). Somerset Councillors Frances Nicholson (FN) and Steven Pugsley (SP) attended for part of the meeting. One member of the public was in attendance.

CW opened the meeting at 19.01pm.

68.1 Public Question Time: Expression of interest in point 9 on the agenda.

68.2 Apologies for non-attendance: Councillor Ian Brooks (IB)

68.3 Declaration of Interests: None

68.4 To agree the Minutes of the Ordinary Council Meeting held 25th September, and any outstanding actions: The minutes were approved, Proposed BN, seconded by KC and approved by all.

68.5 To consider planning matters:

a) **GDO 23/13 – Location: HALSE FARM, WINSFORD, MINEHEAD, TA24 7JL**

Proposal: Prior notification for Relocation of 3 no. Emergency Services Network antennas and MHAs to a new slimline antenna mount increasing the height of the structure to 17.4m, installation of 3 no. new Shared Rural Network antennas and 5 no. ground-based equipment together with the installation of remote radio units, mast head amplifiers, GPS nodes and associated apparatus and ancillary works.

It was agreed that the Parish Council support this application. CW explained that this will enable mobile companies to bid in order to use the aerial to provide a phone signal to the area, possibly by June 2025 improving safety and communication for parishioners.

b) **WTCA 24/02 – Location: OLD TYTHE, WINSFORD, MINEHEAD, TA24 7JE**
Proposal: Works to trees in a conservation area: Crown reduction of 2no Damson trees by 30% and shape.

It was agreed that the Parish Council support this application. The trees cannot be viewed from the road. The work will promote the health and longevity of the tree life.

c) **6/40/24/001 – Location: GREAT NURCOTT FARM, WINSFORD, MINEHEAD, TA24 7HR**

Proposal: Proposed installation of solar panels on agricultural barn roof.

It was agreed that the Parish Council support this application. It cannot be viewed from the road and it has been planned to follow ENPA guidance and protocols.

68.6 Reports from Somerset Councillors – FN reported that the ongoing budget planning is causing concern, particularly with regard to the withdrawal of services which are not statutory. The proposed closure of the recycling sites at Dulverton and Williton is under discussion at Somerset County. A public consultation meeting will be held in Dulverton on 27th February, time to be confirmed, and it is hoped a representative from the parish will be able to attend. It is unsure how the decision has been reached as the details of tonnage and usage show that Dulverton is a well used site.

Also, it would result in people having to drive a long distance which goes against the climate protection policies. For some the nearest replacement site would be in Devon which they may not be able access as Somerset residents. A further concern would be the likely increase in fly-tipping and bonfires. FN will continue liaising with the central team and working on this area. She is also actively pursuing what can be done with regard to the proposed cuts to bus services to colleges in Taunton for some students.

SP reported that the Exford Road works are progressing well and are on time, with pilings going in during the next week. Highways officers are checking on the works and the effects on the diversion routes on a regular basis. IB has identified some damage raised by the additional use and SP/FN will follow up on any issues raised and these issues should be rectified as part of the work completion.

68.7 Update re Somerset County Financial Emergency – Somerset County are facing a budget deficit of approximately £100,000,000 and as a result have agreed several ways forward. They intend to enter a program of cuts to services, activities and staffing They will make the request to the government that they are allowed to exceed the cap of 5% increase to council tax and instead apply a 9.9% increase this year. They also propose to use some of their reserves and to borrow some money. They will also sell off some assets to local councils where it is possible to do so, eg public toilets. These actions mimic what would be put in place should an external body come in to take over in the event of the County declaring themselves bankrupt under a section 114 notice. They will also be carrying out a boundary review to reduce the number of County Councillors and associated costs.

The cuts to services will have the greatest impact on Parish Councils as all non-statutory services are likely to be ceased. These include highways services including a reduction in gully and drain clearances, verge trimming and the provision of salt bags/bins, all of which have potential safety implications for the parish. It is expected that local Councils will now take on some of these responsibilities, although there are currently no details or costings available to help Councils budget. The local LCN (Local Community Network) may be able to source contractors for the parishes to use, as organising it as a group would reduce costs, however due to the lateness of this all happening the Parish Council will need to agree their budget before this is all in place as it is just a proposal at present. Somerset Highways have been asked to produce costs for the three main highways services above but have failed to do so at present. SP advised that some local parishes have costed what it would cost to provide the services themselves and it would appear that each would be likely to be around £1000 with an additional cost of £500 for administration/contingency. It is hoped that by working together those costs could be lower. The LCN could potentially also support in coordinating work from a Highway Steward program, but the cost would appear to be too large for one LCN so SP is opening discussions with other LCNs with a view to sharing one Steward. If the LCN do support by coordinating the provision of some highway services they are exploring the option of dividing costs using a formula to make it fair for parishes with lower populations, however this is in discussion only at present. SP reported that parishes are using a range of approaches when budgeting including using reserves and increasing their precepts by varying amounts. It was noted that this is not a one year issue which should be considered when budget setting.

68.8 Winsford Village Car Park – MM has found historical papers showing this land appears to have been bought by Dulverton Rural District Council in the past as part

of the highways compulsory purchase scheme for road widening. However, it has not appeared on the asset list issued by Somerset County for devolution of asset sales. JY has contacted them but has not had a response. SP and FN advised that the transfer of the car park to the Parish Council as an asset is likely to take a long time, particularly as it does not appear to be listed, but would support with this. It was agreed to formally agree to proceed with gaining the ownership of that land. Proposed by KC, seconded by MM and agreed by all.

68.9 Discussion re Helicopter landings in the Parish – There is a proposition for helicopters associated with a local shoot to be allowed to land on the Recreation Field during the shooting season, something that has been allowed to happen in the past. It was agreed that as the landowners the Parish Council have no objection to this, subject to review following monitoring of frequency and disruption. It is understood that the Winsford Recreation Association would make the decisions regarding permissions and be responsible for all relevant paperwork and arrangements. CW will write to the WRA to confirm.

68.10 To consider Highways Matters;

a) **Yellowcombe Leat** – FN did ensure that the Chief Executive viewed this on his recent visit but now that there are such financial pressures at County level it is unlikely that further work will proceed while the sandbags are working.

b) **Other Highways Matters** – As previously mentioned there will need to be some ‘making good’ works after the roadworks on Exford Road are completed.

MM pointed out that the process to bid for SRA funding through the District has now been discontinued and the flood group are exploring how this will work going forward.

SP and FN left the meeting at 8.14pm

68.11 Finance

a) **To agree the annual precept amount** – In discussion with SP and FN it was noted that the current local council tax precept contribution is low in comparison to neighbouring parishes and CW confirmed the Parish Council has tried hard to keep it low over a long period of time. FN and SP shared that other parishes were making a range of budgeting decisions to meet the new challenges of providing services taking into account the level of their reserves and whether they wished to provide the mentioned highway services being discontinued by the County. It was also noted that the Parish Council does have some reserves and predicts a carry forward amount this year, however it had been budgeted for carry forward to be used to add to the reserves due to them being below the recommended 50%.

JY and five Councillors had met on 25th January to set the basic budget based on the same budget lines as previous years. This would rise by 3.6% to £7,770. Debate then took place during this meeting with regard to the devolved highway services which the Parish Council will be responsible for providing. It was agreed that the budgeting must take into account that the County’s financial emergency is not a one year issue, so even if the costs for the new responsibilities were met entirely from reserves and carry forward this year the precept would have to go up by a lot next year to replace the reserves and continue to provide the new services. It was agreed that the most prudent and financially responsible decision would be to raise the

precept this year to meet the new costs using some new precept and some reserves, with the aim that next year it would not need to go up by such a large amount, bearing in mind that next year the costs of the services purchased during this financial year would provide a known cost going forward, something not available this year. It was agreed to add £2,000 to the precept to put towards the costs of the verge trimming, salt bins and bags and gully clearance. This would raise the precept by 30.27% and raise the band D contribution from £45.05 to £59.66, a difference of £14.61. This remains lower than local parishes. This was proposed by BN and seconded by MH and agreed by all. It was agreed that JY will add an extra line to the budget planner to reflect the highways costs.

- b) **To receive a financial report and agree to pay amounts due** – JY had circulated budget papers prior to the budget meeting. It was agreed to pay SLCC £80 and Mr Atkins £90 for the Christmas Tree. JY has failed to contact the Exmoor Youth Club as the provided email address is not working so will defer the payment until the next meeting.

68.12 Discuss and agree criteria for charity donations – KC kindly agreed to prepare notes for this to be further discussed at the next meeting.

68.13 Discuss and agree arrangements re the village defibrillator, upkeep and monitoring – It was agreed that BN and SL will liaise and hand over the ongoing responsibility to BN as SL has heavy work and training commitments.

68.14 Winsford Charitable Trust

- a) **Maintenance of the Village Green** – It was agreed to seek quotes for support with this work going forward. It was agreed that MM and MH who have coordinated this work previously would put together a list of what be needed prior to contacting potential contractors. It was suggested that one good clearance a year would be sufficient, including clearance of a section of the river.
- b) **Financial Report:** CAFCash = £4,823.68 (including £4,000 grant money), payment to be agreed; Wooden Slats £698.40. Payment agreed, proposed MM, seconded SL. CAFGold = £2,235.60. Aegon = £24,116.30. It was mentioned that the money invested in the Aegon account could be making more money elsewhere and it should be moved, it was agreed to seek alternative arrangements. MH will look at the options for new benches to be purchased using the grant funds and liaise with JY.
- c) **Wooden Slats on Bridge:** The 33 oak slats have been delivered and MH will commence work shortly. The bridge will be closed for a few days.
- d) **Update re Risdon Hosegood work:** CW has not received any updates from Risdon Hosegood. It was agreed it is necessary to move forward with ensuring the name of the Trust is consistent across all accounts and papers and the Charity Commission.
- e) **AOB:** JY and CW to liaise with CW to update asset register to ensure the Trust owned items are separate and include the new bench from Mrs Gill.

68.15 Correspondence and Emails received: PC Michelle Haines is to visit the village this weekend to carry out bike marking and registration. She would be willing to attend the Annual Assembly to talk about fraud and online safety. CW will liaise with her to confirm.

68.16 Reports from Councillors on meetings attended: MM has circulated notes from her Flood Group meeting. There is concern about the lack of ability to bid for funds going forward, and also the Somerset River Authority may lose their grant from the

Council going forward, dependent on their statutory duties. CW and JY attended the LCN meeting, the majority of the meeting was spent discussing the County Financial Emergency and how this will impact upon the Parish Councils going forward.

68.17 Any Other Business: None

68.18 Items for Next Agenda: Village car park, discuss and agree criteria for charity donations, Trust funds, empty property in Ash Lane.

68.19 Date of Next meeting: 26th February 2024 at 7.00 in Winsford Village Hall

There being no further business CW thanked all who attended and closed the meeting at 21.34.