

CULMSTOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held on 12th June 2024 at 7.15pm in Culmstock Village Hall

Present: Cllrs. Mrs J Zebedee, Dr C Bass, Mrs R Balchin, C Kay, T Platel, Sarah Leppard, Mrs J Saunders, MDDC Cllrs. Natasha Bradshaw and S Clist - and the Clerk. The P3 Footpath Co-ordinator was present leaving after item 14. *In the absence of the Chairman Cllr. Miss Jones, the Vice-Chairman Cllr. Mrs Zebedee took the meeting.*

85. Democratic Period: None.
86. Apologies: Cllr. Miss Jones and DCC Cllr. Ray Radford.
87. Declarations of Interest: None.
88. The Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 15/05/24 were approved and duly signed by the Chairman.
89. Matters Arising: None.
90. **Planning and Planning Correspondence/Information.**
- 90.1 Applications considered:
24/00778/FULL Replace window on side of property and one window and one door at rear of property. Mypremcoach, Old Wesleyan Chapel, Millmoor, Culmstock. EX15 3HA. No objections.
24/00755/HOUSE Erection of first floor extension above existing ground floor extension. Tuckaway Cottage, Burlescombe. EX16 7JZ. No objections.
- 90.2 Results from Mid Devon District Council: None received.
- 90.3 It was agreed to take item 6.3 at the end of the meeting, see minute 99 - Kingacre Developments Ltd.; feedback following informal fact finding meeting.
- 90.4 Any other Planning Matters: Cllr. Dr Bass will submit details to MDDC Enforcement of earthworks being undertaken at a property within the Parish.
91. **Culmstock Play Area and Pavilion.**
- 91.1 Anti-social behaviour including damage to picnic bench: Anti-social behaviour continues to be a problem with a picnic bench recently being damaged but still usable to a certain extent - the unfortunate damage has resulted in the table being wheelchair accessible.
- 91.2 Any other matters - some councillors will meet informally to discuss the possibility of a pitch for Petanque and report at a future meeting. The Clerk will make enquiries with an electrician regarding the possibility of a USB port on site.
92. **Reports.**
- 92.1 The Chairman/Vice-Chairman: None.
- 92.2 The Clerk: The Clerk reported on a recent tour of the MDDC Waste and Recycling Depot - a summary will be put into a future issue of The Culmstock News. Drop in surgeries are being held for any Parishes that are facing challenges and issues in relation to waste and recycling.
- 92.3 P3/Footpaths and/or Access: The Clerk reported that DCC had just confirmed a grant of £400 for 2024/25. Report from P3 Footpath Co-ordinator - FP1A, repeat drainage around top of boardwalk, and some gravel put in steps below gate. FP6, repairs to fence at bottom of short lane. FP9, repeat drainage cottage end and in lane, also strim around stiles etc. FP12A, located and released water from blocked/broken drainpipe under path. The pipe has tree roots etc., inside, further work will be required. The broken gate has been removed for repair. Footpaths in general are being strimmed/mowed as required. FP22, the water flooding the bottom of the track on Whiteball Hill would appear to be a spring. SWW say there are no leaks there. There are ongoing parking issues at Hunkin Wood.
- 92.4 Any other reports including reports from DCC & MDDC Councillors: Cllr. Natasha Bradshaw - details were given of the Net Zero Advisory Group. Mid Devon's waste and recycling is ranking at an all-time high being in the top 10% of council areas nationally. Cllr. Natasha Bradshaw is keen to explore the possibility of a cycle track along the old railway track. MDDC Cllr. Clist - Homelessness is an issue, every council house that becomes available has around 100 applications. Cllr. Clist recently attended the Housing Ombudsman Event and Smart Rent Exeter. The Cabinet is looking at investments.

Reports continued:

DCC Cllr. Radford submitted a report which was circulated to all, details include -

There are changes within the Leadership of DCC - John Hart is retiring from being Leader for 15 years from the next annual meeting, this will then enable him to be the Chairman of the Council, in his last year as a member. James McInnes, will now become the new Leader, his deputy will be Andrea Davies.

Outline of some of the budgets - highways maintenance, will be much more than other years at £72m. As well as road maintenance this also covers bridge repairs, streetlight replacement and upgrading, road safety improvements, and maintenance of public rights of way and multi-use trails.

Although the overall DCC revenue budget this year of DCC is £743.382, the Integrated Adult Social budget is £360.748m,(increase of 6%), and the Children and Young People budget is £227.785m (increase of 10.4%), this only leaves £154.849m for all the other services to be supplied which includes the highways £72m. Details were given of surface dressing on Hunters Hill recently - this is the largest preventative maintenance programme that is carried out in Devon and comprises 100+ sites every year. A preventative maintenance approach does not always select the repair of the worst roads first as a “worst first” approach & has been demonstrated to be more costly in the long run and it would allow roads in a reasonable condition, or roads that can be bought to a reasonable condition with some pre patching, to deteriorate further to the stage where they would need prohibitively costly resurfacing or full reconstruction. The surface dressing will restore the surface texture and seal the road improving skid resistance and slowing water penetration thus prolonging the life of the asset. In preparation for surface dressing the road will be assessed for patching of the worst areas, and areas unsuitable for dressing such as junctions. This is an essential step in the surface dressing process to provide a smooth surface onto which to tar and chip. If we were to not seal in these patches the rest of the road would deteriorate further, and the joints between the patches and the existing surface would create a “failure point” into which water could penetrate and cause deterioration.

Regarding concerns about dressing on a steep hill it must be appreciated that Devon is a very hilly county and therefore dressing takes place on steep hills regularly. In experience, the dressing seems to hold and does what is expected which is to seal the road. Some stripping of the chippings may be noted however as long as the majority of the carriageway underneath is covered and sealed the treatment will prolong the life of the asset.

Following surface dressing, and a period to allow embedment of the chippings via vehicle traffic, sweeping will occur to remove the majority of loose chippings. There will always be a small amount left and there will be a noticeable difference between areas which are trafficked most and those areas trafficked least such as the middle of the carriageway. In experience there may be a small number of chippings which end up in gullies however this is usually negligible and is not enough to cause a blockage. It can however look like a gully is full of chippings because of how the chippings may rest on top of the material which is already in the gully. Where gullies have become blocked by an excessive number of loose chippings this will be raised with the surface dressing contractor for remedial action.

Any wet sections missed are noted by the surface dressing contractor for attendance at a later date when the road is hopefully dry. As has been stated by MDDC Cllr. Natasha Bradshaw, this is a wet road and is therefore imperative that it is sealed to prevent the ingress of water and further deterioration. While there may be some chipping loss in wet areas, as above as long as the majority of the surface is covered and sealed against the water ingress this will prolong the life of the road.

Road maintenance and finance is the most topical discussion within Parishes. The proposal to inject an extra £10 million into repairing Devon's roads went before the county council recently – in response to recent budget discussions for additional investment in highways, including drainage.

The council received a better-than-expected settlement from the government last month to help tackle its overspend on education for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The council is now in a position to make extra money available for road repairs and drainage and will be looking to invest another £10 million into the highway maintenance budget.

Report from DCC Cllr. Radford continued:

The proposed additional £10 million funding will be spent across the county with £7.25 million on extensive patching repairs targeting issues identified by highways officers, county councillors, town and parish councils and communities. It will also pay for £2 million of drainage improvements and £750,000 will be added to the ongoing road marking replacement programme.

Throughout the budget setting process the need to invest more in roads was recognised and DCC is now in a position to potentially invest an extra £10 million in the highway network. The extremely wet weather over the past year has inflicted a huge amount of damage on the roads so this proposed funding is very much needed and will help prevent further decline in its condition.

The additional county council funding is on top of the £59.486 million of funding Devon’s receiving from the Department for Transport (DfT) for its highway maintenance programme this year, which includes £23.4 million from the government’s Pothole Fund and £6.663 million from the government’s Network North funding.

This year has seen dire warnings about local authorities “going bankrupt”, slashing services and imposing double digit council tax increases. A new report by the Director of Finance, Angie Sinclair, predicts that the revenue budget of just under £700 million will effectively break even in April with a small overspend of £291,000 currently being forecast which can be managed and will end up with a balanced budget. The report covers the current financial year to the end of January with two more months to go.

- 93. Collier’s Bridge Project** - To discuss whether to pursue the project or to look at the possibility of the re-allocation of funds to an alternative project at a future meeting: It was agreed that several years on, for a number of reasons, including difficulties in obtaining extra finance/grant funding together with climate change (the area is extremely wet now for many months of the year) that the project will be abandoned. The Clerk has made enquiries with the district council regarding the re-allocation of S106 funds which it is hoped will be possible - the Parish Council will have to decide on an alternative project to allocate the funds towards together with the funds held in reserve. The matter will be discussed at a future meeting and a letter will be drafted to the district council for discussion with the developer with whom the S106 agreement was made.
- 94. Finance.**
- 94.1** Finance report: A report was given and the bank balance was noted as at 31/05/24 as £59,885.10. Credits: £2384.59 VAT refund 2022/23 30/05, £38 banking error credit 29/05. Direct Debits: Nest 98.63 taken on both 31/05 & 07/05.
- 94.2 Payments were resolved:**
- Chq 1935 £ 21.94 SMA Services. Payroll provider.
 - Chq 1936 £ 858.43 Countrywide Grounds Maintenance Ltd. Maintenance contract.
 - Chq 1937 £ 832.89 Clerk - salary & expenses.
 - Chq 1938 £ 152.77 Parish warden - salary & expenses.
 - Chq 1939 £ 146.65 M Barrow. Footpath P3 Co-ordinator expenses.
 - Chq 1940 £ 120.00 S Aldworth. Re: Internal examination prior to external audit.
 - Chq 1941 £ spoilt cheque - noted on the agenda originally, 1947 issued below.
 - Chq 1942 £ 1152.00 T K Play Ltd. Repairs and maintenance work at play and pavilion area.
 - Chq 1943 £ 2036.00 Culmstock Village Hall. Room hire £36, annual grant £2000.
 - Chq 1944 £ 161.26 Vision ICT Ltd. Website hosting & support 2024/25.
 - Chq 1945 £ 168.00 Microshade Business Consultants Ltd. DPO Service 2024/25.
 - Chq 1947 £ 277.38 Eagle Plant. Portable toilet and fencing hire.
- The following two cheques were raised as below, see 94.7:
- Chq 1948 £ 100.00 ICCM. Subscription.
 - Chq 1949 £ 38.00 Culmstock Village Hall. Hall hire
- 94.3** Quotation from Marmax Products Ltd., for replacement picnic bench - a quotation of £739 was noted. It was agreed not to proceed for the time being.
- 94.4** Annual grants – cheques were issued for the annual grants as agreed at the precept meeting: Culmstock Village Hall £2000 (Included with Cq 1943 = £2036), Culmstock Beacon of Lights (Cq 1946 £500).

Finance Continued.

- 94.5** Parish Council Printer - the Clerk reported that the printer will shortly be in need of replacement and a new printer will be purchased via Kentisbeare Parish Council with printing expenses shared.
- 94.6 Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) & Audit 2023/24.**
- 94.6.1** Internal audit – the internal audit report was noted. No matters of concern.
- 94.6.2** Section 1 – The Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 was approved.
- 94.6.3** Section 2 - The Accounting Statements for 2023/24. (i) The Accounting Statements were considered. (ii) The Accounting Statements were approved. (iii) The Accounting Statements were signed by the Chairman of the meeting.
- 94.7** Any other financial matters: To raise the following two cheques as expected/due payments:
-Chq 1948 £ 100.00 ICCM. Subscription.
-Chq 1949 £ 38.00 Culmstock Village Hall. Hall hire, to replace cheque 1931 due to a banking error (see credit received on 29/05)
- 95.** Highways. (i) Application for community disabled bay - ENQ241696488, Fore Street, Culmstock. Details via DCC of an application via the Parochial Church Council - the application is on behalf of the church goers, some of whom have mobility issues. The Parish Council felt that a fully protected disabled space is not necessary for the level of usage and would be unhelpful for regular users such as residents, visiting walkers and shop patrons. Several Fore Street residents have no off road parking and the turnover of vehicles is regular and constant. It was suggested that a 2 or 3 car zone be identified at The Cleeve entrance (with level access) for intermittent use by disabled church goers with an alert to locals and other visitors of the need for consideration. (ii) Any other matters - a meeting will be arranged with the NHO in the autumn.
- 96. Culmstock Cemetery:** None
- 97. Correspondence & Any Consultations.** CPRE Members Guide.
- 98. Items for information, future agenda items, and future meeting dates.** Next meeting - date tbc.
The P3 Co-ordinator left the meeting.
- 99.** It was agreed to take item 6.3 here - Kingacre Developments Ltd, feedback following informal fact finding meeting: The council went into Part 2 following information given prior to the start of the meeting at an information gathering exercise regarding a potential development. No evidence was brought forward of a plan but a potential scheme was discussed. The Clerk was requested to make enquiries with MDDC as to possible next steps.