

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CORFE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD AT CORFE VILLAGE HALL, TUESDAY 4th May 2021.

Present: Cllr J. Harrison, Cllr B. Lenthall, Cllr C. Brown,
Cllr D. Bradbeer, Cllr J. Jackson, TDBC Cllr. S, Wakefield and 7 members of the public were present.
Chairman Cllr J. Harrison opened the meeting at 6pm, welcoming all.

15/09: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

County Cllr J. Thorne.

16/09: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllr J. Harrison: Corfe Pitminster & Trull Almshouse Charity. Cllr C. Brown: Village Hall Committee.

17/09: MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 8th September 2020.

The Minutes having been circulated and published and were duly approved and then signed as an accurate record.

18/09: MATTERS ARISING FROM THOSE MINUTES.

Due to length of time between these minutes and the meeting now taking place as a result of COVID 19 restrictions it was agreed that any previous matters could be included within this meeting if still relevant.

19/09: REPORTS OF COUNTY AND BOROUGH COUNCILLORS.

Cllr J. Thorne, SCC although not present on the night has presented a detailed report for viewing (See Appendix).

Cllr S. Wakefield, TDBC gave a short verbal report as follows:

It's been a busy couple of months at TDBC. An AGM is due in July. A reduction of meetings discussion is currently in progress. Face to Face Covid Safe Position Meetings will begin again shortly as we come out of lockdown. The Scrutiny committee is going to be split into two bodies due to having an overworked resource. One Somerset response is being prepared and a referendum will be taking place to allow residents the opportunity to show support or rejection of the One Somerset proposal.

Dog Poo bin replacements are being offered to those who need one. Litter picking bags and a picker loan out option is also being championed.

The Comeytrowe Housing development plan as well as the local plan are being upgraded and residents are encouraged to visit the local plan website to see what areas have been given the green light for potential future housing development should the need arise and the criteria being met.

20/09: REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS.

• Planning:

Cllr J. Sanders has now stood down from the Parish Council. Thanks to Jane for her efforts.

Reported that two applications relating to one residence had been received and that no major objections had been noted. A further application on another residence within the village had attracted comments and these will be dealt with by the planning authorities in due course.

• Highways:

Cllr B. Lenthall.

Potholes in lanes and pavement repairs would be done soon.

• **Rights of Way:**

Cllr D. Bradbeer.

Nothing to report. A discussion however took place regarding some recent flooding and footpath deterioration issues around the Barton Grange footpath. It was agreed that the landowner and the farmer of that area would be approached for permission to seek possible remedies to the problem. Temporary Clerk will draft a letter in due course to the landowner.

• **Website:**

Cllr J. Jackson.

The website continues to provide up-to-date information of interest to parishioners, including COVID-19 advice, The Country Code, How to report Fly-tipping, Online Fraud Prevention, Updates from SW & Taunton and other local councils, and an Accessibility Statement.

We are currently in the process of collecting fees from the individuals/companies who advertise on our website. If you would like to advertise, please contact: corfeaparishclerk@live.com

• **Village Hall:**

Cllr C. Brown.

Village Hall Chairperson Judith Richards addressed those present at the meeting with an update on Village Hall activities and an apology for any confusion caused over the Queens Acre container removal proposal which was made in error due to mistaken ownership issues.

The Village Hall floor has been damaged since being put out of action as a result of COVID 19 restrictions due mainly to the unexpected temperature change of not being used causing undermining of the wooden tiles. Various options including expensive replacement flooring were considered resulting in a repair option being taken up as the best cost option. These repairs will begin shortly and are expected to be completed before the end of May.

The heating system in the hall will now also be upgraded to allow a timer switch to be put in place to help prevent any future temperature issues.

An approach was made to recommence a farmers' market in Corfe. At present the stallholders have either gone out of business or are reluctant to start up again until later in the year so will be approached when the time appears to be right.

The Reef and Beef take away van which was encouraged due to the village pub being out of action has proven very popular with residents and will continue. A proposal to have a villager meet your neighbour gathering over coffee once restrictions allows is to be arranged. A discussion took place over a potential extension to the Village Hall that would allow the container to be removed. The fete equipment was also mentioned as was the hope that a fete of some sort would still continue once life got back to normal.

• **Green Portfolio:**

The Corfe Village: Green initiative were offered some land to use by Duncan Leaney, but under the terms of his lease he is not be allowed to put a polytunnel on the site. Thanks to Duncan for his assistance. The team will continue to come forward with ideas for green initiatives in the village.

As a result, the team didn't apply for a grant from the Somerset Climate Emergency Community Fund. The fund was oversubscribed by more than 3.5x. A total of 136 applications were made, and only 40 were approved for any funding.

The installation of a village electric car charging point was discussed, with no conclusion reached. However, with the shift to electric cars likely to accelerate over the next decade, we expect the discussion of this issue will be ongoing.

TDBC has this year made £500K available for green projects with a further £100K available for new tree planting.

21/09: Queens Acre play area.

Inspections of the barked play area probably on a fortnightly basis would need to be made for health and safety reasons due to contractor concrete having been laid poorly when new equipment had been installed. Cllr C. Brown agreed to do this on behalf of the village and park users. Cllr B. Lenthall was thanked for his efforts in supplying new bark. Also thank you to Rick Bosson and Dave Hake for their help.

22/09: Corfe Parish Council Councillor Recruitment.

Grace Alexander offered to be co-opted on to the Parish Council as did Andrew Butler and both were voted on by the Councillors on the night and thanked for offering their services. Grace also offered to take on the role of Green Portfolio holder.

23/09: Corfe Speed Indication Device (SID) Update.

Cllr. C. Brown reported on the progress that was being made in providing Corfe with a SID to assist with reducing the speeding problem the village faces each day. At present Highways have approved the installation of a device in Corfe which we can have installed at two approved sites within the village, however posts to house the device need to be installed first and these works should happen during May once Highways works backloads have been cleared. Cllr C. Brown and Cllr. J. Harrison have been working hard to identify the most cost effective and reliable device they could on the market as well as being able to identify and achieve funding from grants towards some of the costs involved in this exciting project. Once the posts are installed, an approved solar and battery powered device will be ordered and installed by an agreed supplier. Training and the moving and installing of the SID and the recording of traffic data from it will also be given at that time.

24/09: FINANCES.

Cllr. J. Harrison reported that our current cash position is £22,987.49 as of 04/05/2021. However £2,500 of this total can only be used for purchasing a SID and £3327 has already been earmarked previously for a Corfe Gateway project leaving £17,160.49 funds available for Parish use.

25/09: CORRESPONDENCE

- Email regarding the pedestrian path repairs that still need addressing and the position of a telegraph pole were discussed. Cllr. B. Lenthall will hasten the repairs and reminded those present that BT were not likely to take any action on the pole as it was in the correct position that it was originally installed in despite its current position.
- Broadband speed was discussed. Cllr J. Harrison reported that if 50+ homes with broadband issues regarding speed could be identified that Government funding could now be made available to improve the situation.

26/09: ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

- Parish footpath improvements. Dog poo bin purchasing. Emptying of rubbish bin at Queens Acre on a more regular basis was discussed as was the increased traffic situation in Corfe due to diversions and Taunton roadworks. All will be addressed in due course.

Date of Next meeting: Tuesday 13th July 2021 at 6pm – details to be confirmed.

Appendix – Report from John Thorne (SCC)

- **COVID-19 vaccinations** – The mass vaccination centre at Taunton Racecourse has been working well with around 900 vaccinations given per day. Vaccination hubs are also at Musgrove Park Hospital and at Taunton Vale Healthcare and Boots, in Taunton, and Wellington Community Hospital. The Blackdown GP Surgery in Churchinford has been sending patients to a hub in Cullompton, Devon. Vaccination hubs are open 12 hours a day, seven days a week. At one point more than 700 county council staff were seconded to the NHS to help with the roll-out programme and some of the day to day county council work had to be paused as a result, but they have now been gradually returning to their day jobs. The NHS has a web page with fuller information about Somerset's vaccination programme which can be found here www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/covid-19-vaccinations-in-somerset. More information on the vaccines can be found here <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine>. Volunteers are still being recruited to help with the mass vaccination centre at Taunton Racecourse and you can offer to help via this link <https://www.sparkachange.org.uk/o/Somerset-NHS-Foundation-Trust/opportunities/30609>.
- **Covid stats** – The latest figures show infection rates in Somerset were plateauing for a while around the 40 per 100k population mark, which is explained by the increased amount of testing which finds more cases, but currently stands at a low of 12.6/100k, the same as for the South West as a whole, while the figure for England is 23.3/100k. The latest R number range for the South West by the weekend was 0.7-1.1. Nearly 390,000 first vaccinations have now been given in Somerset, representing around 71 per cent of the adult population. They have covered 100 per cent of all residents aged over 50 years, while 80 per cent of the over 80s have also had their second jab. I am picking up on suggestions that we may have to continue social distancing and wearing face coverings into and through the winter, as a means of reducing flu cases, although nothing firm has yet been said.
- **Covid transport** – Take up has been low for the free 30-minute shuttle bus service from Castle Way, Taunton, to the mass vaccination centre at Taunton Racecourse. I think it is unlikely to continue much longer and the Slinky bus may be used instead. It is also likely that concessionary bus pass rules will be further relaxed. Info on community transport and Slinky schemes can be found here <https://www.travelsomerset.co.uk/community-transport-services>, or people can call the Coronavirus Helpline mentioned below (0300 790 6275).
- **Coronavirus helpline** – It is still important to keep a note of the Coronavirus support helpline number 0300 790 6275 as almost a one-stop shop for all advice except medical. They have taken about 14,000 calls since starting and operates seven days a week from 8 am to 6 pm offering a range of support from help accessing food or medicines, to emotional and financial support, and employment, housing, and business advice. They have also made more than 70,000 calls and written more than 22,000 letters to check on people who have been shielding and to help with vaccination appointments.

- **Local Government Reform** – Government consultation has opened and closed on the unitary debate. As I expected, it covered only the two opposing cases presented by the county council (One Somerset) and the district councils (Stronger Somerset), which means that there will be change and the status quo cannot continue. I believe the district councils have decided to hold a belated county-wide poll of residents asking which option they favour, despite the Secretary of State expressing his displeasure at the idea. What the districts are ignoring is that the Minister will take note of the quality of the consultation responses, and it is not a matter of quantity. Unfortunately, local decisions now seem to be influenced by politics. Cllr Wakefield will no doubt disagree with me and I'm sure will want to justify to you the estimated £1.4 million cost of their poll. I have not seen the final version, but I believe the poll will ask if residents favour one or two unitary councils, which of course does not reflect the difference between the two cases, because The Stronger Somerset proposal would not only split the county into two halves but would replace the existing five councils with five new organisations made up of the two unitary authorities, plus a children's services 'alternative delivery vehicle', a shared services company for adult social care, and an overlying combined authority with an elected Mayor. As you will know, I support the One Somerset case for a single unitary council because it will end waste and duplication and confusion over who does what, and provide just one strong, modern council serving all residents.

- **Democracy** – As I had predicted, the legislation which allows for virtual meetings will not be renewed when it expires at midnight on Thursday (6th May), meaning you will have to meet physically again. The county council has brought forward its annual meeting from 19th May to tomorrow (5th May) in order to be able to hold it virtually, and many parish councils have also squeezed meetings into this week, which is the reason I cannot attend your meeting tonight. Even though councillors will have to meet in person, you will still be able to have a virtual public attendance by Zoom link if you are able to set it up.

- **Rural broadband** – The latest briefing from Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) says that in our part of Somerset, Airband UK will connect 40,154 homes and businesses to full fibre by September 2024. The briefing said they will start in Cotford St Luke, Staplegrove, and Monkton Heathfield in July, with the first properties actually connected by September. However, I recently attended a meeting where an Airband representative said they would be starting to build in Neroche parish in Q2 2021 with completion in Q2 2022. When I queried this, I was told the timetable 'has changed'. Apparently, Airband has created 60 individual community projects for its contract with CDS and will communicate with parishes as the work progresses. CDS says that currently they are in the 'preparation' stage, which involves much of the sort of work I would have expected to be carried out before the contract was let, such as double-checking what commercial companies are providing in the area. There is much talk of detailed community engagement, a phased approach to the roll-out, and surveying to identify any engineering difficulties. I remain completely cynical about the whole thing!

- **Corfe pavements** – Patching of the pavement near Brook Cottages which was delayed last year has now been scheduled to happen this summer. You will have

noticed the yellow paint markings, which had to be repainted because they were put down so long ago that the weather washed them away!

- **Grass cutting** – The first grass cut on B roads will start on 10th May and they should be completed by 4th June, with a second cut between 2nd and 27th August.
- **J25 enhancement** – The new A358 road lay-out has opened permanently. Traffic heading east from J25 will go past the Toby Carvery, while westbound traffic will use the new road via the Nexus 25 roundabout. It appears to be working well so far. The enhancement project overall remains on schedule and within budget. I have been pursuing a suggestion from a resident for wildflower seeds to be sown on the verges of the new roads and the roundabout at Nexus 25 rather than just laying it to grass as planned. However, county say that costly maintenance would be involved with wildflowers on the verges and so they are sticking with grass, but they do think it is a possibility to use wildflowers on the new roundabout because these could be sponsored to cover the cost. I have queried why it is more costly to maintain wildflowers, when I thought the concept was simply to let them grow, compared to carrying out the seasonal cuts which are required with grass. But it is clearly a fiendishly difficult question, because they have not yet been able to answer me, other than to mumble something about grass growing slower!
- **Gateway Park and Ride** – Since the start of April the county council has again been funding the park and ride service. It had been funded by district council for the past two years while county have worked on improving their financial position. County is also drawing up a procurement exercise for the park and ride service which will include plans to introduce electric buses as part of the initiative to make Somerset carbon neutral by 2030. On the subject of buses, county has submitted a bid for £100k from the Government's National Bus Strategy which would be used to develop a 'local bus service improvement plan' which in turn would support a bid to the £3 billion national fund set up by Government. There is a lot of emphasis on improving bus services in rural areas and demand responsive buses such as the Slinky service.
- **A358 Expressway** – I was unable to attend the latest Highways England community forum but I have been promised an audio recording of the event (which has not yet arrived). I understand, however, that it was acknowledged the timetable had slipped by a year with a start date now given as 2024 and completion in 2026. An independent chairman of the forum is to be appointed and I think they want to limit attendance to one rep per parish and to have two forums covering the two halves of the road. Another forum is due early in May.
- **Climate change community fund** – A while ago I took to using the word 'debacle' when talking to parish councils about this £1 million fund, which started out as a brilliant idea to help parishes deliver local projects to reduce our carbon footprint. As you know, I became more and more sceptical about it as my suggestions for the way it should operate were ignored and my questions about it went unanswered. So, we ended up with the sort of situation I predicted. The fund was oversubscribed by a factor of more than 3.5 so they could not possibly meet the demand. A total of 136 applications were made, and only 40 were approved for any funding. The rest got zilch! I'm aware some parish councillors put in hundreds of hours of work to prepared and submit their bids, all for nothing. And as if being refused was not bad

enough, there was not even a note of explanation as to why any particular project did not make the grade (although they have now started to give detailed explanations for those parishes which have complained in writing). And I have not yet mentioned my admiration for the ability of the panel members whom it seems managed in the space of just three days (possibly four at most) to read through 136 applications containing complex technical data and narrative of why projects were needed and how they would be delivered, before picking out those they were going to support and writing letters to parish clerks! I have been asking for SCC to find another £1 million in 2021-22 to support some of those projects which missed out this time around, but all I have been told so far is that they 'hope to look at helping some of the bids' which missed out.

- **Budget 2021-22** – The county council has set its budget for 2021-22. There is an extra £10 million for adult social services and an increase of almost £9 million on children's services to meet ever-increasing demand, plus an extra £7 million for economic and community infrastructure services (that is the one that carried out highways work etc). A sum of £400,000 was also found to give to CAB, which has been doing extra work because of the pandemic. There will be some savings in back office roles, but the total level of savings required to help balance the budget (£7.7 million) is the lowest in 10 years because budget setting has been helped by almost £6.6 million of underspend this past year, £6 million the previous year, and £6.5 million the year before that. It is quite an achievement given the uncertainty that we have been encountering due to the Covid-19 pandemic. If anybody wants to read the budget reports they are available here

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=901&Ver=4> under agenda item 8 'Medium Term Financial Plan 2021-22'.

- **Libraries** – Public libraries reopened on 12th April with the latest easing of lockdown and customers can again browse for books, although social distancing and face coverings are still necessary. I was surprised to learn that you can borrow up to 20 books at a time! Residents can also collect books through the 'Library Choice' service, and public access computers are again available.. More information about libraries is here www.somersetlibraries.co.uk.

- **Green business start-ups** – Free business advice for anybody who wants to start a 'Green' business is being funded jointly by the county council and district council using money from the Business Rates Retention pilot scheme. A series of 22 virtual workshops is being held up to the end of May. Full details here

<https://www.businesswest.co.uk/start-up-support-package>.

- **Mary Street/Paul Street junction** – The developer of retirement flats on the former Quantock House site next to Taunton Library has started carrying out major roadworks at this junction which will cause traffic congestion for another eight weeks. It will be single lane traffic during the work. Upgraded traffic signals are being installed and a dedicated right-hand turn lane approaching from Billetfield, while entry and exit to The Mount will become 'left in, left out', ie no right turn from Mary Street. When it is finished, there will be fewer traffic light phases so traffic should flow more smoothly than it has done previously.

- **Somerset Medal** – Nominations have now closed for the Somerset Medal which the county council launched to mark one year since the first coronavirus lockdown

started in March 2020. The medals will be a tribute to all those who have made superhuman efforts during the pandemic. They will be presented to the winners on Somerset Day – 11th May.