

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CORFE PARISH COUNCIL**  
**HELD AT CORFE VILLAGE HALL, TUESDAY 21st SEPTEMBER 2021.**

Present: Cllr J. Harrison, Cllr B. Lenthall, Cllr C. Brown, Cllr D. Bradbeer, Cllr J. Jackson, Cllr G. Alexander, Cllr, A. Butler.

TDBC Cllr. D Johnson, Cllr J. Thorne SCC, and four members of the public were present.

Chairman Cllr J. Harrison opened the meeting at 6pm, welcoming all.

**41/09: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

TDBC S. Wakefield

**42/09: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

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

**43/09: MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021.**

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

**44/09: MATTERS ARISING FROM THOSE MINUTES.**

Matters arising from those minutes were discussed briefly nothing further to add.

**45/09: REPORTS OF COUNTY AND BOROUGH COUNCILLORS.**

- Cllr J. Thorne, SCC has presented a detailed report for viewing (see appendix 1 below) and highlighted significant parts to those present. All Parishioners are encouraged to read the submission.
- Cllr D. Johnson, TDBC has presented a detailed report (see appendix 2 below). She also highlighted significant articles from within. Parishioners are encouraged to read the submission.

Both Cllr J. Thorne and Cllr D. Johnson discussed briefly the bus situation within Somerset and highlighted Somerset has the worse bus usage per capita of population in England. The Bus Back Better programme, which now has £3bn of Government funding to distribute nationally, aims to boost the number of people traveling by bus. The Parish Council has submitted its view on how we can improve the current bus service, taking into account responses from Corfe residents. Cllr. C. Brown recently represented Corfe at the latest

Zoom presentation by the Somerset Bus Partnership. He reported that those seeking a better bus service were now being encouraged to write or email their MP to lobby for improved bus services within their local area. They also felt that local area Champions could perhaps be identified to act as focal points for these views. If you feel you could be one of these champions please inform one of your Local Parish Councillors, who can then forward your details on to those campaigning for a Better Bus Service.

#### **46/09: REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS.**

- Planning: Cllr J. Harrison reported that no applications had been received.
- Highways: Cllr B. Lenthall. Reported his disappointment at the recent road closures at the top of Corfe Hill and the confusion it had caused. He reported this back to those concerned. He had no other actions to report.
- Rights of Way: Cllr D. Bradbeer. Nothing to report.
- Website: Cllr J. Jackson. Nothing to report.
- Village Hall: Cllr C. Brown reported the proposal to have a villager 'meet your neighbour' gathering finally took place in the Village Hall and in Queens Acre. It was deemed to be a great success. Our thanks go out to Barbara Coombs and those associated with her for putting together this event.

We are slowly making progress towards installing a Commercial Dishwasher having identified an approved electrician to upgrade the ageing circuits within the hall and await these works before commissioning the device with an approved company. Clubs and parties are now re-establishing themselves and the hall was now being sanitised to a high degree to keep all hall users as safe as is possible using current Government guidelines.

- Green Portfolio: Cllr G. Alexander reported that recycling was now in a transitional position having attended a zoom meeting on the subject. Blue Bag Recycling is coming and a trial will soon be underway within Corfe and other Taunton areas before full implementation takes place in November replacing the existing two-weekly black bin collections with a three-weekly collection. Other areas have reported that the process has been working well and that more items can now be recycled than ever. A leaflet detailing this will soon be coming through your letter boxes, so you are encouraged to read it before you recycle it. Those worried about the size of their current black bin can approach the council for a slightly larger bin.

Cllr G. Alexander then asked if an item could be added to the November agenda to decide on a focus for 2022 in terms of sustainability. GA suggested transport and reducing car journeys to and from the village to fit in with the bus initiative, but also suggested growing food, addressing flooding, tree planting, etc. Other suggestions were put forward from the council for focusing on our energy use, given the current situation with rising costs of gas and electricity. Those present were supportive of this.

#### **47/09: FINANCES.**

Cllr. J. Harrison reported that our current cash position is £24,999 as of 21/09/2021.

However, £7500 of this total, including £5000 recently received as a Police Road Safety Charity Grant, can only be used for purchasing a SID

£3327 has already been earmarked previously for the Corfe Gateway project

This leaves £14,172.00 funds available for Parish use.

A legacy gift of £1,000 was also reported to have been given to the Parish. It was agreed by those present that £500 of this should be donated to the Church as the donation was from a church worshipper.

#### **48/09: CORRESPONDENCE.**

- Email detailing the kind legacy gift of £1,000 to Corfe parish was received.
- Letter detailing the generous offer of a £5,000 grant cheque from the Avon and Somerset Police Community Trust has been received. This award has been given to us to help maintain our continuing efforts to reduce traffic speeds within Corfe. Our thanks go out to all those who volunteer their time with speedwatch duties to make Corfe a safer place for all of us.

#### **49/09: ANY OTHER BUSINESS.**

- Cllr G. Alexander asked if conformation of attendance could be confirmed for the forthcoming Highways England A358 Improvement proposal forum at Taunton Rugby and Football Clubs. It was confirmed that interested parties who have asked to represent the interests of Corfe residents have indeed been informed. A proposal to have a deputy to cover for them on occasions was proposed and accepted by those present.

**Date of Next meeting: Tuesday 2nd November 2021 at 6pm – details to be confirmed.**

## **Appendix 1 – Report from John Thorne (SCC)**

• **Covid stats** – Somerset's infection rate recently hit its highest ever level and was one of the highest in the whole country at 480.8/100k. However, the number has started to fall again and by the weekend it was 273.7/100k which was higher than the South West's 256.2/100k but once again below the figure for England (295.8/100k), both of which have seen a similar pattern. The latest R number range for the South West by the weekend was 0.9-1.1, which is the same as most of the rest of England. Within the county, Sedgemoor, and in particular Bridgwater, has had one of the top three rates in England (was 744.5/100k but thankfully now back down 162.4/100k). More than two-thirds of cases were in 15-34 year olds, those who have either not yet had a jab or have had only one. As a result, Somerset was placed on a national watchlist along with Cornwall and Torbay in case the Government needed to deploy national resources to help our hospitals cope and to bring down the infection rate. While we are among the highest rates in the country, Somerset also continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country and 94.5 per cent of the eligible 18+ population have now had at least one vaccination and 84.6 per cent have also had their second jab.

• **Covid vaccinations** – A number of walk-in vaccination centres have been organised, including at Taunton Racecourse for first and second doses of both the AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines, and at Boots Pharmacy and Taunton Tourist Information Centre for first and second Pfizer doses. In case you know of anybody in any of the priority groups who for whatever reason has not had their jab, then please let them know that it is not too late and they still can book a jab. More info on vaccination centres is here <https://www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/health/local-services/health-services-during-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccinations-in-somerset>. The racecourse centre is being relocated next month to a site being prepared at Firepool, in Taunton. They have so far given more than 150,000 vaccinations.

• **Covid working** – Now that restrictions have been lifted, county has reopened the reception in County Hall A Block on reduced hours of 9 am to 3 pm while demand is assessed. People are, however, still being asked to use online facilities wherever possible for the time being. Wearing masks is still mandatory for staff and visitors in County Hall, except for when sitting at their desks or eating in a breakout area. Meetings can be held but social distancing and hand sanitising still has to be observed. The QR codes at entrances should still be scanned, and people should not arrive more than five minutes early. An 'ebb and flow' system is in use for staff working from the offices, where one group arrive and then leave before another group arrives, so that desk space is only 50 per cent occupied.

• **Somerset Coronavirus helpline** – Please keep promoting the Coronavirus support helpline as a one-stop number for queries during the pandemic. It is still open 8 am-6 pm every day of the week. The number is 0300 790 6275. They can help with accessing food or medicines, signposting emotional and financial support, employment, housing, and business advice. Nearly 15,000 calls have been taken by staff manning the lines and in turn they have made nearly 140,000 calls to find help for people and booked tens of thousands of appointments for vaccine jabs.

• **Mindline help** – Remember, the mental health charity Mindline still operate their 24-hour support line on 01823 276892 for anybody who may be feeling anxious. Or, you can visit the website <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/coronavirus/tips-to-cope-with-anxiety-lockdown-lifting>.

• **Local Government Reorganisation** – The One Somerset branding has been dropped and we now refer to the 'new Somerset council'. A fresh website has been launched with all the detail here [www.newsomersetcouncil.org.uk](http://www.newsomersetcouncil.org.uk). A parish council conference is being arranged for some time in October to talk more about the reorganisation. You will be aware that the Secretary of State is considering how to align parish council elections with those for the unitary council and it is being suggested that the 2023 elections could be brought forward to May 2022. Although the Secretary of State approved the One Somerset business case in general, he has not approved the bit which put the number of unitary councillors at 100. Instead, he wants a maximum of 85, in line with Cornwall, where numbers were reduced at this year's elections from 123 to 87. It could even be as low as 70 for Somerset. As a result, the boundaries for the unitary divisions have to be redrawn and work has started on doing this and should be complete by the end of October. However, we will not know for sure what the boundaries will be until January or February.

• **Crossroad improvements** – As you may know, I have been pressing hard for road safety improvements at some of the crossroads nearby on the Blackdowns and for the most part seem to have just been banging my head against the wall. However, I have had one success where officers have now conceded the accident statistics support intervention. So, a design has been drawn up for improvements to Chillander Cross, better known as Corfe Hill crossroads. Signs and road markings will be upgraded, a high-friction road surface laid, and new kerbing installed, as well as vegetation clearance. The plans can be viewed here [www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/small-improvement-schemes-directory](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/small-improvement-schemes-directory). County is also looking at extending the 40 mph limit on the B3170 up Corfe Hill to approximately 300 metres south of the junction. Any feedback needs to be given to Richard Mills by Friday 24<sup>th</sup> September using [RMills@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:RMills@somerset.gov.uk). I will continue to press for more to be done at the Culmhead Crossroads as well.

• **A358** – You may be aware of the survey work that has been going on in recent weeks involving the closure one at a time of access roads onto the A358. Highways England has now been renamed National Highways. They met in person with county and district councillors last week – well, they were all invited but I was the only Cllr to attend along with two county cabinet members - to go through their preferred route and the latest with the detailed design which is being prepared ahead of their statutory consultation later this year before there is a public inquiry into the application for a Development Control Order. I was able to raise issues of concern for the different parish councils, including the mitigation measures drawn up by the grouping of eight parishes. The main message to come out of the event was how poor communications have been between National Highways/SCC and the parishes. I was particularly surprised to discover how close is the relationship between SCC and NH. You may have heard that eight parishes have been working together to put forward some proposed mitigation works and I was previously told by their representatives that NH had adopted several of them. This turns out to be not quite accurate as NH say they agree the proposals have merit but have yet to test them out. Meetings are being held this week between parishes along the route and NH and SCC to look in more detail at the process for going forward.

• **Gateway Park and Ride** – The new contract for P&R services let to Buses of Somerset is on a 'cost basis' rather than county providing a subsidy. This means the council pays a fee to the bus company for running the service and any fare income comes back to the council. So, the county council will be setting the price of tickets from now on, and I am pleased that a radical initiative has now been agreed where the P&R service from both the Gateway and Silk Mills sites has been free to use since 9<sup>th</sup> August until further notice. This includes the Saturday service which resumed on 14<sup>th</sup> August. This is being done both to encourage use of the park and ride service in support of the climate change agenda by promoting an alternative to car use and to help travellers during the work to upgrade the Creech Castle junction on the Toneway, which is inevitably causing major disruption on the town's roads until completion next summer.

• **Rural broadband 1** – Rather unusually, I have recently found myself in agreement with Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS). I am not changing my opinion that CDS is an incompetent and failing organisation which needs to be disbanded and replaced asap for the sake of the rural communities it is supposed to be serving. But they have proven themselves correct in my opinion in their response to Government consultation on the subject of 'very hard to reach premises' (VHTRPs), of which there are around 41,000 in Devon and Somerset. These are the premises which will not benefit from superfast broadband even after the delivery of a rural full fibre network is completed by the end of 2024 (if that actually happens) because they are too remote to reach. CDS has warned Government that VHTRPs are at risk of being left behind and becoming impossible to reach premises (ITRPs) without a 'strategic approach to addressing them now'. CDS highlighted an increasingly urgent need to address VHTRPs now because the cost of connecting them would only rise over time. Technologies such as 4G and satellite were considered stop-gap solutions only. It called for a flexible approach from Government and a mix of measures to address the issue but said all the evidence pointed to an increasing need for Government and wider public sector investment in digital connectivity in rural areas. So, in that respect, I agree with them. Let's now see if the Government listens to them.

• **Rural broadband 2** – Rather unsurprisingly, the roll-out in Taunton Deane of full fibre broadband by Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) contractors Airband has already failed to meet its first target. Work which was due to start in several parishes in July is instead not starting until this month, with consequent

delays for other phases. Airband says, of course, that the localised delays will not affect the overall completion of the contract, which is scheduled to be the end of 2024. Design work for the Neroche area is due to start this month and Airband says it has taken on additional resources to ensure it will not be affected by the earlier delays. The Blackdown cluster, from Bishopswood down to the M5, is not due to be started until sometime between July and September of 2023. Airband's community liaison executive is Lynda Sudlow who can be contacted on 07399 050349 or by email to [lynda.sudlow@airband.co.uk](mailto:lynda.sudlow@airband.co.uk).

• **Reopening community facilities** – A new £500k fund has been launched by SCC to help parishes reopen community facilities safely and bring people back together. County is working in partnership with Somerset Association of Local Councils to help parishes open up village halls, meeting rooms, and other facilities in a Covid-secure way. Grants of up to £1,500 will be available to support people to feel safe and confident as Covid restrictions ease after lockdown and to encourage people to use their village halls and facilities to meet and re-establish support groups and activities in a measured and responsible way. Safe reopening will reassure people that they can reconnect with their communities after months of isolation and remove some of the anxieties they may have around social mixing. County is allocating the money from Contain Outbreak Management Funding provided by the Department for Health and Social Care to support public health activities directly related to the Covid-19 response. Applications will close on 30th September. SALC should by now have sent further details to parish councils. Examples of things the fund will cover include provision of increased cleaning and cleaning equipment, hand sanitiser, Covid-19 signage and posters, or other resources needed to support infection control measures; or projects to support and promote safe social interaction at community level, like coffee mornings, outdoor activities, and small-scale community events.

• **Afghan refugees** – The county council is committed to help a scheme to house Afghans who supported the UK military and to resettle interpreters and translators and their families. People across Somerset have been stepping forward to help support Afghan refugees as the crisis being played out in the international spotlight deepens. The council anticipates the Government will fund a number of places for refugees with strict rules on the types and locations of suitable accommodation. Anybody who would like to help in any way should contact [resettlement@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:resettlement@somerset.gov.uk). Most of the resettled Afghans will be housed in town centres where they can access specific foods, medicines, and transport links.

• **Carbon Reduction** – More than half of street lighting in Somerset is now eco-friendly and playing an important role helping the county work towards its 2030 carbon neutral target. The county's highway lighting team has started to reduce its carbon footprint in the past five years thanks to the installation of LED lanterns in 56 per cent of street lighting stock. The LED replacements have seen a reduction in the carbon produced per year, down from 9,522 tonnes in 2015/16 to 3,278 tonnes in 2020/21, a reduction of 6,244 tonnes of Co2 and resulting in a 31.75 per cent energy saving, equal to £950,00 per year.

• **Care leavers interviews** – As part of the county council's commitment to support care leavers, the council has agreed to extend its Care Leaver Guaranteed Interview Scheme to anybody who was in care as a child, wherever that was, and whatever their age now. This means people who have been in the care of a local authority for a significant period before the age of 16 and apply for a job with Somerset County Council will be guaranteed a job interview - provided they meet the essential job criteria.

• **Bus services** – Public consultation has closed for the bus service improvement plan (BSIP) being prepared by the county council as part of the Government's national bus strategy 'Bus Back Better'. But there is a long way to go before the plan is published so I would still urge parish councils to send in their views on current bus services and what is needed to improve them. The person to email would be Tim Reynolds at the council's consultants WSP here [Tim.Reynolds2@wsp.com](mailto:Tim.Reynolds2@wsp.com). They were holding a second round of engagement with county councillors on Monday but Microsoft Teams kept cutting me off so I don't yet know what came from it. A final version of the BSIP is due to be considered by the council's cabinet on Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> October. Somerset has the fourth lowest bus usage per head of any county in England.

• **Bus passes** – The use of concessionary bus passes went back to pre-pandemic terms from last week so they now cannot be used for free travel before 9.30 am as they were when restrictions were temporarily lifted as part of the response to Covid-19. The change comes as bus services are now almost back to their previous levels and from this week we have students and pupils returning to colleges and schools.

- **Recycle More** – Expanded recycling services are starting in Taunton Deane from the beginning of November. All residents will be written to twice before the service starts, with the first letter this week. Somerset Waste Partnership is also organising several Facebook Q&A sessions for local residents as follows: Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 7-8 am, Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October 7-8 pm, and Friday 5<sup>th</sup> November 7-8 am. They are also working with the Community Council for Somerset to attend Talking Cafés in the GWR Hotel at Taunton Train Station from 10 am to 12 pm on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> September and Monday 11<sup>th</sup> October. I understand that more than half of residents will have a different collection day, so I anticipate there will be teething problems when the service is introduced.
- **SCC Business Plan** – The county council's business plan for 2021-23 which was approved at our July meeting now has a dedicated website for anybody who would like to read all about it. The plan sets out the strategic thinking behind tackling issues such as coronavirus and climate change, and many others. The site is here <https://digital.somerset.gov.uk/business-plan>. The business plan is only for two years because, of course, a new unitary council will succeed the county council in 2023.
- **Somerset Medal** – A second reception was organised at Taunton Rugby Club last week for the presentation of medals to those who were unable to attend the first event in July. The award is for people who have given exceptional service to their community during the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Somerset Trails** – An exciting new mobile app called Somerset Trails has been launched. The app, which is free to download here <https://www.adaptingthelevels.com/somerset-trails> has been cleverly designed to explore the impacts of climate change and bring to life the different ways nature can help Somerset adapt to climate change. It combines walking maps with video-guided tours, including a section specially designed for kids. Whilst on the trail, video content, that was filmed on location is triggered and the trails talk about landscape features, climate change, and how nature-based solutions can be used to help us adapt.

## **Appendix 2 – Report from Cllr. Dawn Johnson (SWT Ward Councillor for Trull, Pitminster and Corfe).**

- The Prime Minister has set out the government's plan to manage COVID-19 throughout the autumn and winter. The main message is that boosters, testing and refreshed public health advice will help keep the virus under control in the coming months. A Plan B is prepared to protect the NHS if necessary and the PM continues to warn that the pandemic is not over and public need to remain vigilant.
- The vaccination centre will be moving from Taunton Racecourse to a new site at Firepool in Taunton in early October. Pre-booked vaccination appointments and walk-ins will continue to run seven days a week until the new Firepool site is ready to open.
- SWT'S Business Partner team have been highly commended for their work on neurodiversity and inclusion in the workplace at the Municipal Journal Achievement Awards ceremony in London last Friday.
- The first in person Full Council meeting in a while was held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021. A motion brought forward criticising the proposed new planning laws by Sarah Wakefield was passed. The Council resolved to write to and lobby both of the Districts Members of Parliament, urging them to strongly oppose the White Paper "Planning for the Future" proposals and to publish the replies received by them. The Council further resolved to highlight its concerns over these proposals with the public and local residents who will be affected. Over the next couple of weeks there will be an Audit Committee meeting on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> September and a Community Scrutiny on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September.
- By-elections are being held on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> October for vacant seats on SWT Council and Somerset County Council following the death of long-standing Councillor Alan Wedderkopp. A statement of persons nominated has now been published.
- Meeting halls at SWT Sheltered Housing are now reopening to enable tenants to meet and take part in activities and connect

with others. SWT are promoting on-going COVID-19 safety measures with regular health and safety checks, cleaning and access to bacterial hand gel and wipes provided.

- SWT is once again offering free trees to town and parish councils, including unparished areas, supporting SWT's commitment towards becoming a carbon- neutral district by 2030. The timing of the scheme enables civil and unparished areas to participate in the UK's largest annual tree celebration known as National Tree Week, taking place from Saturday 27th November- Sunday 5th December 2021. This will bring people together in a nationwide tree planting event. Those wishing to take part can order bare root trees completely free of charge up to the value of £50 as per the listed guide on SWT's "Free Trees" webpage, closing date Friday 22nd October 2021.
- Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) garden waste collections resumed from Monday 13<sup>th</sup> after a six-week suspension. The suspension allowed staff to be redeployed and minimise disruption to recycling collection over a very tough period caused primarily by driver shortages-SWP are grateful for everyone's patience. All subscribers have had their subscriptions extended by eight weeks- the extra two weeks in recognition of the disruption.
- With regard to the speeding bulker lorry traffic SCC Highways have issued the Fulwood Farm site with a Planning Contravention Notice requiring provision of information. The site has 3 weeks to provide the information. There is CEMP ( Construction Environmental Management Plan) that states the site is permitted 7 visits a day, 45 journeys were recorded, tabled and passed to SCC over a three hour period. SCC surprisingly did not consider there was sufficient environmental impact to pursue a stop notice to the site. This despite reports of excessive noise, shaking houses and damage to roads. They have suggested any speeding issues fall within a police remit. I will pursue this matter at the end of September.
- With regard to the setting up of a new Unitary Authority, discussions are taking place between all councils (District and County) and the government. The Liberal Democrat Group has written to confirm their preference for option 3 which is for 110 Unitary Councillors. This ensures statutory criteria are maintained for the need to secure equality of representation, to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government.
- SWP, the consultants working for SCC on the Bus Back Better government initiative, have reported the results of their survey. There were 1,500 responses, 50% from people aged 65 or under. Only 8% of respondents in Somerset were satisfied with bus services and 28% (over a quarter) were very dissatisfied. 49% of people want more frequent early morning services and 74% more evening and weekend services. These are the services that have been cut over the last years. The local authority is reliant on government grant funding. Themes were common to stakeholders and the public; additional routes, higher frequency and cheaper fares.
- On Friday 24<sup>th</sup> September the Customer Services phone lines will be closed at 12.30pm for the remainder of the day for essential staff training.