

# ENMORE PARISH COUNCIL

## DRAFT

### Minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at 6.30pm in Enmore Memorial Hall

Attendance: Cllr Hopkins (Chairman), Cllr Jackson, Cllr Comley, Cllr Fergusson, Cllr Hubbard, Cllr Hucker, RFO and temporary Acting Clerk: A Stoye, Cllr Caswell and members of the public.

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and wished them a Happy New Year.

1. Apologies were received from the Clerk, D McIlroy.
2. There were no declarations of interest on agenda items.
3. The minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> November were approved and duly signed by the Chairman. The minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November (and the resulting Parish Council response to Enmore Park Golf Club's appeal against refusal of planning permission) were then discussed. Cllr Comley noted his disagreement with the course of action taken and did not wish to be associated with the response sent. A discussion followed on the distinction between the Parish Council acting on a majority decision and aiming to represent the views of residents, and the freedom of action of individuals, including councillors, to make separate and different representations on their own account. An amendment to the minutes was made, stating that Cllr Comley wished to be disassociated from this response. The Parish Council response, which has been submitted, will be attached to the 22 November minutes for inclusion in the records.
4. It was regretted that Anne Shilton, Local Community Network links officer for our area, who had been expected to attend the meeting, was not present. The meeting continued with other agenda items in the hope that she had merely been delayed. In the Clerk's absence it was thought possible that she had sent her apologies and that it had not proved possible to relay them to the Parish Council before the meeting.
5. The Chairman asked for any public comments on agenda items and questions on matters of concern. T Searle indicated that she would like to speak when the question of road signage, in particular horse warning signs, was discussed (6.2 below).
6. Matters and actions arising from the previous meeting:

#### 6.1 Speed management and SID update

Cllr Comley reported that there had been a 1-2% improvement in adherence to the speed limit at Stone Hall Lane but no discernable change for the other SIDs. He hoped that the improvement was a result of the change of speed limit. Although the majority of motorists drive within the limit (or not much in excess), about 1% of drivers' speeds are excessive (over 50 mph).

#### 6.2 Costings for completed work and additional horse and wildlife signs

Cllr Jackson reported on recent correspondence with K Tyson (Somerset Highways). Line painting is imminent, and hopefully so is the repair of the sign by the school. The installation of flashing lights is organised nationally rather than locally so she is less able to provide a timescale for the work (but K Tyson will issue a reminder).

Comments were made that the placement of poles is generally too near the road, making them vulnerable to damage from large lorries and agricultural machinery.

Additional warning signs to alert motorists to the likelihood of horses and wildlife would be charged at £50 per sign if on an existing pole (ie £100 per pole if double-sided), with additional costs if new poles have to be installed. After discussion, it was agreed that the Parish Council will finance 5 horse and 2 wildlife signs at a cost of £350 and a formal request for this signage is to be sent to K Tyson. Enmore horse riders have been consulted about the best placement for these signs and these suggestions for their siting are being forwarded to K Tyson. It was noted that further signs could be added at a later stage if thought necessary, particularly if extra funding can be found, for example from riders.

In the context of road safety for vulnerable users, concern was expressed about crossing the main road from Frog Lane (installing a mirror was one suggestion) and about the varied height of speed limit and other road signs. The use of the SID screens to give road safety messages was another suggestion and Cllr Comley will look into this possibility.

### 6.3 Broadband update

Most properties in Upper Enmore now have super-fast fibre broadband (which has *not* worked perfectly since its installation) or the option to upgrade to this. The improvement in broadband to the school appears to have been the catalyst for this upgrade in the surrounding area. However, many properties in Lower Enmore still suffer from poor broadband with slow speeds. Devon & Somerset Councils' contract with Airband has now been cancelled and Cllr Comley has been investigating the Universal Service Obligation (at least 10 Megabits/second download speed) and how to register for improved service. It appears that the cost of the project would be at least £100,000 but each household affected would receive a subsidy of £3,400. On this basis, if enough households committed to this, the costs might be affordable. However, Starlink is proving a good solution for some properties in the area. Cllr Comley will keep residents informed via the parish magazine.

### 6.4 Jubilee Meadow update

With the expected start of burials still some years away, it was resolved to refer to the land as the Jubilee Meadow rather than the future cemetery, given that its current use is recreational and educational. Cllr Jackson reported that a few spring bulbs have been planted. Enmore Church is considering the remaining capacity of St Michael & All Angels' churchyard, including the possibility of re-using land with very old unmarked graves, to help the Parish Council make plans for future burials on this ground.

### 6.5 Wilder Enmore update

Cllr Jackson and Cllr Hucker had previously provided a report. Mill Farm was successful in obtaining a grant to infill hedges. Schoolchildren had visited the churchyard and National Landscapes have been clearing a section of the ancient packway at the back of the school grounds.

Another Litter Pick was proposed and, after consulting the timetable for church services, the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> February was chosen. This will be advertised in the magazine. (The Parish Council has made provision for reimbursement of refreshment costs at the Hall afterwards.)

### 6.6 Response to EPGC appeal

Cllr Comley's concerns about the Parish Council's response have been noted in section 3 above. It is understood that there is to be a site meeting as part of the consideration of the appeal. The outcome of the appeal is not yet known. Cllr Caswell explained the planning application procedure and the actions that individuals can take if they disagree with the response of the

Parish Council (which is treated as a single consultee, rather than as individual councillors). The relevant Planning Inspector may be contacted for this purpose.

7. There were no known planning applications for Enmore Parish Council to consider at this meeting.
8. Finance update and approval of payments

A written report, including year-to-date accounts, had been provided before the meeting, noting transactions since the previous report. Retrospective permission for a rental payment of £75 to Enmore Memorial Hall, agreed by Councillors by email correspondence, was reported and formally agreed.

9. Discretionary powers of payment by the Responsible Financial Officer.

Cllr Fergusson commented that he had asked for this subject to be discussed as it seemed inappropriate for Councillors to be required to approve trivial payments (such as the 78 pence overspend on the Magic Little Grant). A Stoye noted that all Council money was public money and finance decisions were supposed to be made at public meetings to enable scrutiny. All expenditure requires two authorisations so the RFO cannot spend any money unilaterally. Nevertheless, with two months between meetings, it was proposed, and agreed nem con, that payments of up to £100 may be made without prior approval by the majority of Parish Councillors, but subject to consultation with the Chairman and with reporting for ratification at the following Parish Council meeting. In particular, payments in this range for items in the Parish Council budget should not be a concern and the need to seek permission should not increase the administrative burden or fetter the efficient operation of the Council.

10. Budget for the 2025/2026 financial year and setting the precept for this period.

A Stoye reminded Councillors that the decision had to be made at this meeting as the request for payment of next year's precept must be submitted in January. Her finance report included information about the current year's budget, year-to-date and expected expenditure for the rest of the current year, to put the estimates for 2025/26 into context. These estimates had been revised as a result of the discussion at the November meeting, including provision for possible repair of SIDs once out of warranty. The report also considered capital reserves and possible one-off large costs, as well as ongoing income requirements. She did not consider that there was any justification for increasing the amount of the precept, but that residents should be alerted to the expectation that this level could not be held indefinitely in the face of increasing costs. Accordingly, maintaining the precept at its current level of £5,253 for a further year was agreed nem con, and the required forms will be submitted.

Consideration of paying back the Public Works Loan faster than the current schedule was revisited, taking into account the review of capital reserves included in the finance report. The interest rates used to calculate the early payment penalty are helpfully higher than for a while and A Stoye thought that this would be a good time to make a repayment if this was agreed in principle. One of her concerns was that the capital available for repayment was earning considerably less money than the amount of interest charged and there was no current expectation that this money would be needed by the Parish Council for unexpected expenditure or to "prime the pump" on a grant-aided project. After some discussion it was proposed and agreed that half the outstanding loan be repaid. This level of repayment would be of a similar order to the expected current year's savings of actual compared with budget expenditure. A Stoye will contact the Debt Management Office to take this forward.

Bank accounts. At the previous meeting A Stoye had been asked to investigate the possibility of moving all banking to Lloyds and opening a deposit account and/or notice accounts giving superior interest returns at Lloyds. Her research showed that NatWest deposit and notice savings accounts were currently offering higher rates of interest than the equivalent accounts at Lloyds, so she suggested that the NatWest accounts were retained for the time being and that a notice savings account be opened. However, before taking action, she will consider and report back to Councillors on cash flow

requirements and how much money might safely be put on notice for say 95 days. It may be that the sums involved would yield so little extra income that the additional complexity and work in running extra accounts and managing cash flow would outweigh the financial benefits. In principle opening a notice account at NatWest and/or savings accounts at Lloyds were agreed by Councillors, subject to a further report from the RFO.

11. Report from the Footpaths Officer

Cllr Hubbard had provided a report on this subject. She noted that the manpower available for footpaths in Somerset had been reduced significantly. She reported that improvements were being made to various local paths, for example Bridlepath BW:15/20 which, although not in Enmore Parish, will benefit local residents. Crops, especially maize, planted over footpaths were a continuing problem,

12. Report from Neighbourhood Watch

Cllr Fergusson noted that he had been reporting local incidents through the medium of the village WhatsApp group. He had no additional matters to report to the Parish Council.

13. Discuss the possibility of installing a defibrillator in upper Enmore, possibly at or near the church.

At present there is a defibrillator at the Golf Club and one at Smocombe. A power supply is needed and an accessible external position. One possibility for siting a defibrillator would be the church porch but this may require a faculty (the ecclesiastical equivalent of planning permission). It was noted that Broomfield residents had funded a defibrillator and that grants may be available to cover some of the cost. It was agreed that both costs and siting of a defibrillator should be investigated, together with the availability of grants. Cllr Fergusson undertook to take this forward and to report back to the Parish Council. It was noted that a training session on the use of defibrillars is to be organised locally.

14. Somerset Bus Partnership proposal for 2025-26 bus funding

Cllr Hubbard had submitted a report on this subject. Although new developments in North Petherton and Bridgwater are suggested for improved bus cover (despite being relatively close to existing services), many rural communities such as Enmore still have no public transport options at all. Cllr Hubbard was proposing to make personal representations on this subject and asked for Parish Council support. It was agreed that Enmore residents be asked whether they would really use a bus service if one was available. If there is genuine demand the Parish Council will take this forward. In the meantime, individuals with views on the subject may still comment on the proposals directly.

15. Somerset Rivers Authority Flood Action Plan and grants

Cllr Hubbard, who had suffered from flooding resulting from blocked drains at the side of the road and therefore might be regarded as having a conflict of interest, stated that she felt unable to take this forward herself. If Somerset is unable or unwilling to clear the drains twice a year (which appears to be necessary based on recent experience), the Parish Council could consider applying for a grant towards the cost. It was agreed that the Parish Council will first check with Mr Hackling (Somerset Council) whether they can improve the maintenance of these drains and whether there are any impediments to the Council or residents undertaking jetting and if there is any mileage in making an application for grant money for this purpose. The cost of such work is to be investigated.

It was noted, with much appreciation, that the Webber family had carried out work on ditches adjoining their land to improve drainage. A thank you letter is to be sent.

However, similar work had not yet been carried out by the Burge family on their ditches and a reminder is to be sent.

16. Somerset Community Health and Wellbeing Grants

It was not clear whether the grants could be awarded only to Parish Councils or whether the Memorial Hall (which is a charity) could apply. Cllr Hubbard was authorised to contact Fodo Higginson to ask, and to discuss possible projects. If there is a choice of applicant, the nature of the project and whether costs include VAT could determine the optimum applicant.

Cllr Hubbard had been hoping to organise some assistance, particularly for the Elderly in the Parish, to help them with IT skills, applying for attendance allowance, transport to medical appointments and preventing loneliness. The IT proposal would need the Memorial Hall to have internet, likely to involve both initial costs and ongoing expense.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025, starting at 6.30 pm.

Signed:  
Chairman of Council

Date: