

ENMORE PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3rd January 2023
starting at 7.30pm in Enmore Memorial Hall

Attendance: Cllr. Cole, Cllr. Hopkins, Cllr Comley, Cllr Huckler, Cllr Jackson, Cllr Caswell.

Clerk: D McIlroy, RFO: A Stoye, A Hubbard (Footpaths Officer)

1. Apologies had been given by Cllr Bolt and Cllr Pay. Cllr. Nicholson's letter of resignation, taking immediate effect, was reported to the Parish Council, and accepted with regret.
2. No Declaration of Interests on agenda.
3. Minutes of last meeting approved and duly signed.
4. There were no public comments on Agenda Items.
5. There were no new planning applications to consider.
6. Actions arising from minutes of previous meeting.

A) Task allocation

Cllr Comley requested it be noted in the minutes that he did not wish to take on the responsibility of Signage & Flooding from the previous meeting. He would, however, continue to be responsible for the monitoring of the SIDs and the installation of the poles and fourth SID; with the conversion from battery to solar power in due course.

A Stoye suggested that contact information could be placed on the Parish Council website for members of the public to report problems on issues such as signage and flooding to Somerset County Council directly.

ACTION: D McIlroy to locate relevant links on Somerset County website to send to A Stoye, who will update the website content appropriately.

B) Tenders for work to the new cemetery.

Cllr Cole presented the tenders for work to the new cemetery. Four firms had been asked to tender for the work. One declined to quote, and the other three figures (including VAT, which would be reclaimable by the Council) were £32,400 (not confirmed in writing), £44,460 and £24,252.

Regret was expressed that information about the tenders had not been circulated to Councillors before the Parish Council meeting in order to give more time for consideration of the significant financial decisions required and to enable more progress to be made at the January meeting.

The lowest tender, by some margin, came from S Bowditch but that was still substantially more than the previous estimate quoted at the last meeting. Cllr Cole suggested that some of the figures didn't appear correct and that he was happy to speak to Mr Bowditch to ascertain if the price quoted could be reduced and whether the work could be phased over a period rather than completed this year. It was therefore agreed that Mr Bowditch was the favoured contractor but that Cllr Cole together with other members of the Parish Council (Cllrs Huckler and Jackson) should hold further talks with him and report back to the full Council before any decisions could be made regarding the project. This course of action was agreed unanimously. Accordingly, a meeting will be arranged as early as possible.

ACTION: Cllr Cole to arrange meeting and report to Councillors.

C) SID and traffic management update.

An up-to-date report on the SIDs had been circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. Cllr Comley highlighted the main points: two thick poles were due to be installed during the week beginning 9th January 2023 to support the SIDs using solar panels, located by the Enmore Inn and near Sally Tottle's house. Thus, by the end of January 2023, the parish would have four SIDs in operation, two using solar power and two using rechargeable batteries.

Cllr Comley requested that funds be made available and included in the 2023/2024 budget to allow for the purchase of extra poles to support SIDs plus solar panels and for the conversion of the battery SID to solar power. This would be less time-consuming and easier for him as maintenance (principally battery charging) would be needed less frequently. He confirmed that the proposed siting of the new poles took into account the need to generate sufficient solar power.

The Headmaster of Enmore School was supportive of all the speed management initiatives and would welcome a flashing hazard light system outside the school at certain periods during the school day. However, Cllr Cole remarked that there are many obstacles and legislation to overcome in obtaining the lights and changing the speed limit. Cllr Comley noted that Somerset County Council are very reluctant to change speed limits without extensive data. However, it was felt that the Parish Council should communicate in writing to the County Council our concerns regarding road safety throughout the whole of Enmore village, and the current 40 mph area in particular. Cllr Jackson volunteered to contact them on behalf of the Parish Council.

ACTION: Cllr Jackson to write to Somerset County Council.

7. Financial report

A financial briefing note had been provided with the meeting agenda, and updated year-to-date accounts had subsequently been circulated (allowing for December payroll and end December interest income).

All payments authorised at the November meeting had been made, and the list of payments of £100 or more (available on the website) had been updated. In addition, the Clerk's November and December payroll had been run, with net payments to the Clerk and tax deductions remitted to HMRC.

Cllr Comley expressed his disagreement with the way in which the year-to-date accounts had been presented and asked that this be minuted. The accounts show income received towards specific expenditure with/offsetting that expenditure rather than as "free income". Cllr Comley objected to the labels for the total lines, pointing out that they were not true total income or expenditure given the treatment of the grants and VAT refunds in the accounts. A Stoye agreed to alter the wording of the total lines, assured him that the figures were accurate and that the approach taken was acceptable accounting practice, with full disclosure, and that, in her opinion, showing the figures in this way allowed readers of the accounts to see the relevant items (Jubilee and SIDs) in context. Cllr Caswell noted that the internal audit and end-of-year returns would be scrutinised and any irregularities would come to light.

A Stoye also reported that she had submitted a second VAT reclaim (for £420) but this had not yet been paid.

8. Approval of payments

A Stoye asked for formal approval of expenditure of £30 for her to attend a SALC course on S126 VAT reclaims (to be held remotely on 19 January). She had made this request informally by email before booking. This expenditure was approved.

In addition, the Clerk's January and February pay will be due before the next meeting. This is an obligation rather than discretionary spending. Any unusual or unexpectedly large payments will be reported to Councillors before they are paid.

A Stoye reminded Councillors that the bill for the installation of two new posts (for the SIDs) is expected at some stage and this may have to be paid before the March meeting. This expenditure had been agreed earlier in the year.

9. Discuss and approve precept for the 2023/24 financial year

A Stoye noted that she had updated the budget originally discussed at the November meeting so that the current year figures (the starting point for estimating routine expenditure for next year) were as helpful as possible (two more months' actual expenditure and two fewer months' estimated expenditure). She expressed her disappointment and concern that information about the costs of work at the future civil cemetery had not been provided in advance of the meeting, particularly since it was clear that the cost could not be met in full from the Council's reserves (which had been expected on the basis of earlier estimates).

Cllr Comley asked for more funds in order to upgrade one of the SIDs to solar power and install at least one extra post. The sums involved were more than the provisional allowance included in the circulated draft.

Cllr Cole suggested that the precept be increased on a regular basis to allow for cemetery work. A number of other suggestions were discussed, including a 40%/£2,000 increase in precept (but this level of increase was deemed to be unacceptable).

It was suggested that, once the 2023/24 precept had been received, the Council would hold sufficient funds to carry out the work, after allowing for the VAT to be reclaimed. However, the VAT has to be paid even though it will subsequently be refunded, and this affects cash flow. Furthermore, the Council should maintain a prudent reserve for contingencies and in order to carry out its statutory duties, so the full amount of capital held by the Council is not available for spending.

Cllr Jackson reminded the meeting that possible full or partial repayment of the Public Works Loan should be kept under review. It was agreed that no decision could be made on this until the capital requirement for cemetery work was known.

It was agreed that work on the cemetery could not be done in a single phase, and that the Council should look at ways of mitigating the cost for later phases.

Cllr Cole proposed a 5% increase in precept and this was approved by all Councillors.

ACTION: A Stoye will draft an article for inclusion in the Enmore & Goathurst Magazine covering the increase in precept and will submit the request for an increased precept (£5,253) to Sedgemoor.

10. Councillor vacancy.

Cllr Cole asked if any councillors had heard any expressions of interest and reminded the council that there was a maximum number of co-opted councillors: two in one year. A reminder about the vacancy will be included in the February issue of the Enmore & Goathurst magazine. Cllr Cole requested that details of anyone showing an interest in becoming a councillor be passed to him.

11. Footpath Officer/ Somerset Bus Partnership report.

A Hubbard reported on both parish footpaths and bus services.

She highlighted the new bus schemes in Taunton but again emphasised that it was still only the Slinky

bus which served Enmore, and that only with very restricted timing and journey options.

Again she raised concerns about the right of way through Enmore Park Golf Club but, as no communication has been received from the Golf Club, there was nothing new to report. The Sedgemoor Ramblers had volunteered to trim the overgrown area by Enmore School which has been highlighted previously as a problem.

On a personal note A Hubbard also raised the issue of the overflowing gully along Enmore Road from the Tynte Arms to Castle House which has resulted in flooding down the road and into the courtyard at Castle House. The Parish Council will inform Somerset County Council of this issue on behalf of the residents.

It was also noted that there are missing signs (Enmore village sign and a warning sign of double bends) approaching Enmore from the Barford/Spaxton turning.

The Parish Council will notify Somerset County Council of these also.

ACTION: D McIlroy to inform Somerset County Council.

12. Broadband provision.

Cllr Comley's report on this subject was circulated to the Parish Council prior to the meeting.

Due to the lack of activity of Airband in the area in the foreseeable future, Cllr Comley had researched other internet providers. A Fibre Community Partnership is one which provides a broadband service with Open Reach to areas not currently using fibre broadband connection. They work with the local community to arrange a customised installation plan - whether it's installing new fibre for the first time, or to upgrade existing connections. There are three ways of funding a Fibre Community: either voucher funded (via Government funding), Community funded (co-operation between Open Reach and the community) or Community and voucher funded (combination of all ways). However, due to the scheme's popularity, it has temporarily paused new community registrations.

Cllr Comley considered that it was an avenue worth exploring for the village of Enmore, so suggested trying to encourage each household to register an interest. He offered to submit a page of information about the scheme to be circulated with the magazine.

ACTION: Cllr Comley to arrange leaflet for distribution with Enmore & Goathurst magazine.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.00 pm.

NEXT MEETING 7th March 2023 at 7.30 pm in Enmore Memorial Hall

Signed:Date:
Chairman of Council