

LUXBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

The Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Luxborough Parish Council held on 21 July 2021 at Luxborough Village Hall at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors D Powell (Chair), Chris Henson, Richard O'Hare, Anne Sparling (Vice Chair), Judy Tombleson, Frances Nicholson (County) Steven Pugsley (SW&T), Jeanna Grenville – Clerk. Two members of the public were present.

Public Question Time: No items were raised. The Chair opened the Parish Council Meeting at 19:30.

21/20 Apologies for absence: Cllr Duke due to illness, Cllr Yiend who was on holiday, Cllr Nicholson due to an emergency.

21/21 Declarations of interests: None.

21/22 Minutes: Cllrs resolved to accept the minutes of the Ordinary Parish Meeting held on 16 June 2021 as a true and accurate record.

21/23 Report from District Councillor: Cllr Pugsley confirmed that the Secretary of State had just announced that there will be a single unitary authority for Somerset, with a shadow authority to be established with elections likely in 2022. It is possible that there would be a judicial review. Exmoor will be included in the Local Community Network pilots which will be determining how to deliver services that meet local needs, including a pilot for Highways. Cllr Pugsley reported that Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) have returned to in-person meetings. Regarding the West Slowley emergency mast application, he had discussed with Planning the concerns raised by Luxborough Parish Council and its parishioners. The information necessary for re-consideration of the application has not yet been received.

21/24 Planning: i) 6/20/20/103 Newcombe Farm - Proposed erection of agricultural building, and associated works, partly retrospective. It was noted that there had been significant increases in deliveries to the premises and Cllrs queried whether the premises were being used as a staff office for Eastleigh Care Homes. The applicants explained that this had been the case during lockdown but was now discontinued, other than in exceptional circumstances. The address is associated with the care home business; the deliveries were for essential supplies which had been more frequent during the Covid lockdown period but were now tapering off. The office is for agricultural use and there is a separate restroom/canteen. The rest of the building is for agricultural storage. Cllrs were particularly interested in ensuring that there was appropriate screening using sympathetic planting given that the building stands out prominently in the local landscape. The applicants confirmed that planting is scheduled for the autumn, using beech trees, sycamore and other native plants, in conjunction with the re-routing of the footpath away from the farm buildings. Cllrs noted their disappointment that this was a retrospective application with the agricultural building having been moved significantly prior to gaining consent. The PC resolved to support the application by a majority vote with one Councillor voting No Objection. [Two members of the public left the meeting.] ii) 6/20/21/102 West Slowley – erection of emergency mast. AS per item 21/23, it was not possible to reconsider the application. iii) Other Planning Matters – Cllrs were concerned regarding the possibility of unauthorised construction at an outbuilding at Higher Ponds Cottage where a roof and dormer windows were being installed, and also at the pottery on the Roadwater road. The Clerk was asked to refer these to Planning Enforcement.

21/25 Finance: i) As the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO), the Clerk relayed the problems which remain ongoing with Nat West in finalising the requested changes to the bank mandate and address for statements. This had so far required three visits to the bank in person, including by Cllr Sparling. On the third visit it was discovered that the forms had been untouched since the second in May. The bank official undertook to resolve this as soon as possible and had initiated a customer complaint. The risk remains that the RFO does not have access to any information about PC finances. It is

possible that the standing order to the previous Clerk has not been stopped, despite confirmation by the bank that it would be. One payment had already been made in error and refunded by the former Clerk. ii) The Clerk noted that the AGAR process should be complete as PKF auditors had acknowledged receipt of the documents. A number of measures to strengthen governance are in hand, with the Clerk introducing a new process for quarterly review of the accounts and reserve balance, sign off of the standing order and with a risk register underway to come to the next Ordinary council meeting in September. A review of Standing Orders, Code of Conduct and Financial Regulations will also be brought to this meeting. iii) Cllrs resolved to accept the draft quarter one financial statement for 2021/22, showing Precept income of £2,500 and expenditure of £1,061. There was a projected balance of £2,162 for the end of the financial year. The statement is subject to verification upon receipt of bank statements. iv) Councillors resolved the Schedule of Payments for the year to date.

21/26 Staffing: i) There was no requirement to exclude the press or public with none in attendance. ii) Councillors agreed to review the Clerk's hours in the light of NALC recommendations during budget setting for 2022/23. The Clerk would be paid for 15 additional hours in the September payroll with a further review later in the year.

21/27 Chairman's Report: The Exmoor Panel (EP) meeting in June had been attended by a number of senior officials featuring discussions on unitary proposals, highways and drainage issues. Signage for road closures remains problematic and it was requested that completed Highways' works were subject to more rigorous scrutiny. Speed limits continued to cause concern following a number of fatalities in West Somerset. There had been limited discussion regarding how the Glover 2019 Landscapes Review will impact on unitary proposals. The Chairman expressed concern that the unitary outcome may see services devolved without the budgets to deliver. The next EP meeting is 7 September. The Travel Somerset website provides extensive travel news for the county including incidents and closures. Regarding the Affordable Housing Working Group, the Luxborough self-build site was one of those favoured, however getting a mortgage for self-build may present a problem. Cllrs discussed the impact of local interest conditions under section 106 Town and Country Planning Act (2000). These apply to all new homes, however older properties may not have such conditions attached. The West Somerset Flood Group had been looking at locations to site a wi-fi enabled water level gauge to provide early notice of rising water levels, including at the bridge adjacent to The Royal Oak. A grant may be available to fund the costs.

21/28 Correspondence and Meetings: The Clerk confirmed that she had attended training on Parish Council Finances and on the Code of Conduct. It had emerged that the PC had no power to buy flowers in recognition of the voluntary services of the internal auditor. Cllrs agreed to contribute personally for the cost of a bouquet. The parishioner who is in liaison with ENPA footpath division confirmed their initial support for the proposal to produce laminated maps for footpaths in the Parish and that a small grant may be available to meet costs. The Clerk will follow this up. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee will occur in 2022 with a programme of national celebrations; the PC will wish to consider how Luxborough commemorates this landmark and this will be put on the agenda for the next meeting. Cllrs noted the poor quality of hedge trimming this season with top growth which had been left uncut collapsing into roadways. Visibility at the junction of Whitswood Steep (past Nutcombe Bottom) with the A396 to Dunster was diminished considerably by vegetation which the Chairman will report to Highways.

21/29 Date and Agenda items for next Ordinary Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for 15 September 2021 with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, risk register and review of standing orders and regulations confirmed for the agenda.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 20:35