**M I N U T E S**

**Of Witham Friary Parish Council**

**Held on Tuesday 12th December at Witham Friary Village Hall 7.30pm**

**Present:** Chair W Sheppard, Cllrs J Knowles, Ferrari, Coate, Sewell

**Also Present:** Somerset Councillor B Clarke**,** J Gregory Proper Officer plus 3 members of the public

**Public Participation**

**Topics covered**

Julia from Heal Rewilding was in attendance who gave some background to herself and the role at Heal. She also asked if the Council could help with facilitating feedback on the Village Fields (discussed fully later in the meeting)

**12.23/24.01 Apologies for absence**

County Councillor Clark gave apologies our meeting was a clash with another parish and it was their turn for his attendance.

**12.23/24.02 Declarations of interest**

Cllr Ferrari gave a declaration of interest in that her husband had quoted for works to the Dovecote and therefore would abstain from any voting if appropriate.

**Resolved: Declaration noted and action endorsed.**

**12.23/24.03 Minutes of the previous meeting held**

To agree minutes from the previous meeting held on 14th November paragraph 3 of Reports should be “pooling rather than pulling”.

**Resolved: Agreed. Copies of minutes were signed in the presence of the meeting with an amendment advised as above.**

**12.23/24.04 Planning Applications for consideration**

Nothing to report

**12.23/24.05 Finance**

1. To receive financial statement

Cashbook figure at the end of November was 31908.27

1. To agree schedule of payments as indicated below for payment submission

J Gregory Clerk Salary £ 279.96

Kelvin Day Hedge Cutting £ 45.00

Steve Orr Lengthsman Duties £ 185.00 (received 12.12)

R & G Sheppard July/Aug Playpatch Cut £ 39.60

**Resolved: The above payment schedule was agreed**

1. Budgets

Budgets were considered in detail with the precept set for £12,000 this was an increase of approximately £1800. There would be a release of 5k reserves to held pay for any works to the Dovecote and the Clerk had not accounted for any Dovecote rent as the aim would be to plough this back into any works.

**Resolved: Cllr Knowles seconded by Cllr Sewell agreed the Precept at £12,000 with the Clerk making the necessary application to Somerset by the January 16th deadline.**

**12.23.24.07 Reports**

1. **To receive County Councillor B Clarke’s report**

Not in attendance no report made.

1. **Chairman’s Report**

The former Chair Hugo Brooke had moved to Nunney, Cllr Sheppard felt that this was a great opportunity to thank Hugo for his time and contribution to the Parish Council and of community life.

The Christmas Fayre was a huge success, very diverse and well supported.

There was a number of opportunities at Church for carol singing over the coming few weeks

The Community Café would be holding their first coffee morning / café session tomorrow for anyone interested.

1. **Cllr Nicholls report on Highways**

Cllr Nicholls reported a number of potholes opening up on Strap Lane but with the weather and holes full of water there was little point in reporting as maintenance couldn’t be carried out until weather improved.

Cllr Ferrari reported on the status of the gullies and drains and stated that this would be part of planned maintenance and following an inspection was not deemed urgent.

Two street lights not working had been reported. One of which was now on all the time and Yew Close appeared to be working normally.

1. **To receive report on Communications**

Cllr Ferrari had nothing to report.

1. **To receive Cllr Sheppard/Knowles report on the Recreation Ground**

Nothing to report other than Cllr Sheppard had dealt with the timing of the car park lighting.

Cllr Sewell asked why were the wooden poles flat to the ground. Cllr Sheppard stated that he had done so and would need to collect.

With maintenance contracts needing to be considered Cllr Sheppard would follow up actions with Tom Hyde of the Cricket club as to their intentions regarding mowing options.

The litter pick was a success, although perhaps that’s not the comment we are really looking for but lots of litter was collected and those who participated were thanked for their efforts.

1. **To receive Cllr Knowles report on the Play Patch**

Nothing to report – regular inspections taking place. Play patch having less use at this time of year due to weather.

1. **To receive Cllr Sewell report on Footpaths**

Thanks expressed to the Estate for their clearing of the tree in Hicks wood. Cllr Ferrari stated that there was a dead tree fallen at Long Ham by the 2nd kissing gate although Cllr Sewell had walked this and felt that it might have been cleared.

Help would be sourced from the Ramblers regarding the culvert by the Fishing Lakes, Cllr Sheppard as landowner was happy with this.

1. **Biodiversity**

Covered previously in public forum however the PC, after some lengthy discussions felt that perception and communication was key with aiding any feedback required. It was felt that the PC could signpost Heal to any groups within the village and events that may be happening however it would be down to them to source that feedback without intervention from the PC. All councillors were mindful of the diverse views regarding the village field and anxious to keep a relative distance.

**12.23/24.09 Dovecote**

Fire alarms to be chased by Cllr Coate.

The Clerk reported that we were now having regular bills for electricity by Ecotricity. On the heating front Cllrs Ferrari and Knowles stated that they had performed a heating test and recorded units to give some view of costs. There was the option of the wood burner but due to illness the contractor to look at the flue would now attend 4th January.

Internet was investigated and based on high quality need BT offered full fibre with a 12 month contract being £61 per month. There was a clause for early contract withdraw but uncertain of the cost. This appeared irrelevant as the potential licence holders would be replaced if they decided not to continue.

**Resolved: Proposed by Cllr Sewell and seconded by Cllr Ferrari to proceed with installation of internet by BT**

Discussion next centred on the licence and costs. It was suggested to set a fee cost (including electricity and internet of £500 per month) this would be shared by the licence holders. If after the 3 month period a review takes place parties can ascertain if the financial element is enough and those with the licence can decide suitability.

**Resolved: Proposed Cllr Sewell and seconded by Cllr Coate to have licences drawn up at a licence fee of £500 per month.**

**12.23/24.10 Matters referred to the meeting / Clerk**

The Clerk had tendered her resignation with last day 11th January 2024. Thanks was expressed for her time in role and she stated she was looking forward to new challenges. It was agreed to advertise. Clerk to circulate a potential draft advertisement and use what free methods were available (contacting local clerks “clerk club”, website, facebook etc along with contacting SALC.

The Clerk was happy to provide a handover to the new incumbent at an appropriate time.

**12.23/24.11 Dates of Further Meetings**

The next meeting was discussed. With the Dovecote almost serviceable a small saving could be had by holding meetings there. There was the ongoing problem of band practice which made meetings slightly difficult and unprofessional. The Clerk would advise the Village Hall Clerk of intentions on a trial basis. The meeting venue would be monitored for several months.

Cllr Nicholls tendered his apologies in advance for the January meeting.

Meeting closed at 9.10pm

A signed copy of the minutes can be viewed by arrangement via the Parish Clerk.