

Minutes of the Meeting Held at 7pm on Thursday 3rd February 2022

All meetings are held at 7.00pm in the Village Hall unless stated otherwise - Phil Neve, our NSC Ward Cllr, attends when possible
There are vacancies for further Councillors - please contact a Councillor or the Clerk if you are interested in becoming involved

Present: Cllrs Lynda Redding (*Chair*), Jim Corbett, Peter Penfold, Clayton Penfold, Helen Riddell

In Attendance: Don Hill (Clerk)

Public Attendance: 9

011/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - None

012/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & DISPENSATIONS - None

013/22 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

An anonymous Parishioner has posted a Public Notice through the post boxes of some houses in Puxton with a list concerns about the Parish Council. I will address those concerns.

Community Grant.

In 2014 a Solar Park was built in Hewish and Canadian Solar were persuaded to give the Parish £41,700 as a community Grant. From 2016 the Parish Council shared their thinking with the parish about uses of the grant via the Hewish and Puxton Community News, which was distributed to households throughout the parish. When it was known we would have to find £85,000 to buy the Hall the Parish Council were asked if they would put the Community Grant towards the purchase. The Chairman at the time sought legal advice and it was eventually decided that Hewish and Puxton Village Hall Ltd would be given the £40,000 as a loan with a legal charge meaning that if at some time in the future the Village Hall was no more the £40,000 must be paid back to the Parish.

In the October 2016 edition of the Hewish and Puxton Community News it was reported that two stalwarts of the Village Hall committee were retiring. It was explained the Parish Council would 'cover' for the lack of a quorate Hall committee and asked for volunteers to come forward. The Chairman and the Clerk stayed on the Hall Committee until more committee members were recruited and were on the committee when the Hall was purchased in July 2018.

Declaration of Councillors Interests and Conflicts of Interests.

There was a complaint made to North Somerset Standards Sub-Committee about me in December 2019 concerning my duties as Chairman of the Village Hall Committee and as Parish Councillor. The decision of the Standards Committee was that there was no conflict of interest. I do not have any pecuniary interest from the Hall, nor do any committee members.

In the same complaint mention was made of the Chairman of the PC being on the Hall Committee at the time of the decision to loan the Community Grant. This was not considered by the Standards Committee as it was more than a year before the complaint. The loan was in the form of a legally constituted mortgage, and I will leave the Parish to judge if this was a conflict of interest.

All the Parish Councillors are members of Hewish and Puxton Village Hall Ltd. There are 70 members of the Village Hall, the Members have the right to vote at AGMs and so have control of the company. There is no conflict of interest between the duties of a Councillor and being a member of the Village Hall. This has been confirmed by North Somerset Council. Hewish and Puxton Village Hall Ltd is a Charity, a not-for-profit organisation.

Digital Data misconduct.

In November 2019 two complaints were made to the ICO, the Information Commissioner's Office, concerning the Village Hall's handling of data. One complaint was that an email thread was shared with other recipients when it should not have been. I was Chairman at the time and I apologised for this mistake. The other complaint was that a name had been inadequately redacted from the minutes. The person requested the redaction.

Changing Historical Parish Records.

I assume this is referring to the redaction of a name from Parish Council minutes. Following the above a name was redacted from the minutes as it was assumed that the person did not want his name published.

Parish Council Meetings at Village Hall during Lockdown 1.

On Friday May 22nd 2020 the Parish Council held the Annual and Ordinary Meeting in the car park of the Village Hall. It started at 6pm and finished at 6:15pm. At the time there were not enough Councillors able to attend zoom meetings. There was a legal requirement to sign audit papers and cheques so it seemed we had no alternative. A complaint was made to ALCA, the Avon Local Councils Association, about this meeting and the relationship between the PC and Hewish and Puxton Village Hall Ltd. ALCA replied that these were unprecedented times and mistakes might have been made (as was the case in most Local Councils) but everything was in good order and as it should be.

Conduct of councillors and Clerk and exclusion of parishioners from zoom meetings.

Complaints have been made to North Somerset Council about the conduct of councillors, being excluded from zoom meetings and a lack of reply to emails. The Clerk has received hundreds of emails of complaint about the above matters and more and has been advised by the police to block the sender's emails. Parishioners are welcome to Parish Council meetings, their contributions should be pertinent to items on the agenda, or at least to do with current matters. Parishioners are invited by the Chairman to speak but if it is to go over numerous old complaints their request will be denied. There are vacancies on the PC and new Councillors can be co-opted to join but if the Councillors feel they would be unable to work with an applicant they have the right to decline the offer.

Freedom of information refusals.

Between 23rd May 2020 and 21st October 2020 the Clerk replied in detail to 16 emails asking for information or making complaints. North Somerset Council and the Police advised him that four years of this sort of email or letter constituted harassment and advised him not to reply. From 21st October 2020 to 11th January 2022 the Clerk did not answer 50 emails from the same source.

I have received many emails (nearly thirty in December and January alone) asking for information and making complaints. The information demands are to do with police matters that were dealt with years ago. I thought that a Community Resolution in October 2021 had drawn a line under these matters. I will not reply to these emails and the Clerk does not receive them.

After these opening remarks the Chair gave details of problems with the Village Hall car park lights with which she has been involved as Chair of the management group running the Hall. The full minute appears under Councillors Reports at minute 020/22 below.

014/22 PUBLIC SESSION *15 minutes - Contributions are limited to 3 minutes: they should be concise and to the point*

- i. **Response to Chair's Opening Remarks:** The complainant at minute 013/22 above declared the Chair's opening comments at minute 013/22 above to be 'a pack of lies'. There followed some 5 minutes of openly abusive and insulting comment relating to Councillors and the Clerk to which they have become somewhat inured over recent years. The process prompted some 'unparliamentary' comments from Councillors, the Clerk and some members of the public who were appraised of the historical circumstances of this exchange - including references to ongoing police involvement. It also witnessed some calmer interventions from newer members of our population who needed to gain a context re what was clearly a long-running sore at the centre of our fundamentally happy community. Various interventions in the context of the Council and its Clerk being 'liars' formed part of the ongoing meeting.
- ii. **A370 Speeding and Flooding Issues:** There was a call for a 40mph speed limit to be introduced along the whole of this major road as it passes through the parish. In wet weather there can be a build up of curb-side water which is particularly bad on the bend outside Spring Cottage, where the gullies drain into a rhyne that can fill to the level of the road surface. The gullies at this point also have a history of becoming blocked. The NSC Area Officer monitors the gullies, but if flooding does occur it could one day cause a disastrous traffic accident. A member of the public - a former parish councillor - explained the hurdles that have been gone through in the past to get a 40mph limit and the Clerk said that national government regulations set ground rules that NSC followed when considering such proposals - the current 50mph sections of the A370 do not fulfil those ground rules. Councillors concluded that a 40mph limit was, nevertheless, a longer term objective

that should be kept as one to be pursued. The possible use of speed activation signs was also raised.

015/22 LAST MEETING MINUTES + MATTERS ARISING (January 6th 2022) were agreed and signed.

016/22 PLANNING Details at <https://planning.n-somerset.gov.uk/online-applications/>

- iii. **New: 22/P/0015/FUH Villa Farm:** 2 story rear extension. No objections; to be so reported to NSC planning.
- iv. **Decisions Due 19/P/0815/FUL Puxton Park car park. 21/P/3525/CQA Villa Farm** - conversion of 2 barns to 2 dwellings.
- v. **Approved: 21/P/2320/FUL** The Grange Glamping Cabin

017/22 FINANCE

- i. **2020-21 Accounts:** Pre-circulated with meeting papers and noted.
- ii. **2022-23 Budget:** Precept request sent to NSC on Jan 13th and receipt confirmed by NSC.
- iii. **Payments Due: Zurich Ins Annual Premium** £244.72. **APS** re Parish Maintenance £288.00. Both invoices were approved **for payment via online banking.**

018/22 HIGHWAY MATTERS

- i. **Maysgreen Lane 20mph & Cheese Factory passing space / Warning signs re blind bends / Puxton Lane/Puxton Road Junction:** Being pursued per December 2021 Meeting Minute 097/21.
- ii. **A370 Pedestrian Crossing:** Further update expected in the 2022-23 financial year.
- iii. **A370 lay-by blocked gullies:** Our NSC Area Officer confirmed that their emptying was carried out in November 2021.
- iv. **A370 Village Entry Planters:** Cllr C Penfold now hopes to have planting done by the beginning of March. **Clerk to update the resident who has been caring for the Weston-end planter.**
- v. **Puxton Lane/Puxton Road Finger Post:** Re the stolen finial, a cast aluminium replacement will cost £275 + VAT unpainted or £295 + VAT painted. The meeting agreed that the work go ahead and that our parish maintenance person - who did the original renovation of the sign in 2017 - be consulted about detail and secure fixing. *(Post meeting note: Cllr C Clayton offered to see if he could source a finial via his work contacts, so we will await the outcome that search before proceeding as appropriate).*

019/22 OTHER MATTERS

- i. **NSC Footpath initiative:** Decisions awaited. **Clerk to check on expected timetable.**
- ii. **Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2022:** Some land in Puxton Lane has been offered for Jubilee tree planting; Cllr Redding has followed this up with St Anne's School and will consult further with the landowner. St Anne's hoped that their unit at West Wick would not miss out on this opportunity, so Cllr Redding has proposed that they could become involved in a planned tree planting programme at The Grange.

It was queried whether the party being planned for Sunday June 5th should not be moved to the Saturday, given that the next following Monday would not be a bank holiday. After discussion it was agreed that the Sunday date should be kept to.

- iii. **NSC Flooding Factsheet:** This comprehensive 'what to do if...' guide has been posted to the parish website noticeboard.

020/22 COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

Cllr Redding

- i. **Renewable Energy Workshop:** This was held in the Village Hall on Sunday 29th January. Areas within the NSC ward of Congresbury & Puxton have been identified as possible for wind and solar generating sites. The organisers were seeking the reactions of residents to this and to other green opportunities such as home insulation, decreasing use of cars etc. Cllr Redding has been circulating a poster pointing to the outcomes and to an NSC consultation: the **Clerk will put this poster on the parish website.**

- ii. **Maysgreen Lane public footpath:** (Oct 21 Minute 079/21 & Nov Minute 087/21 refer). No work has been done yet to clear the path. **Clerk to contact the landowners for an update.**
- iii. **Maysgreen Lane Telegraph Pole:** As an ironic pointer to Minute 018/22i above, a particular pole seems to get damaged with some regularity. An Open Reach engineer was heard to say that they ought to reduce the speed limit along here to stop this happening.
- iv. **Village Hall Car Park Lights:** Hall management have had ongoing issues with the outside lights - the angle and spread and also the sensitivity and timing on them going on and off. There may also be a problem with the light facing the gate being triggered by the vibrations of some of the very heavy vehicles passing the hall. An electrician has been working on these issues and they have hopefully been resolved. However, Hall management will continue to monitor the situation.

021/22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Thursday March 3rd 2022 in the Village Hall at 7pm.

The meeting closed at 7.55pm

Minutes after-note: *After the meeting closed the complainant at minute 013/22 above entered on further abusive commentary on the Council and its veracity. The response from Councillors and the other attendees left him with the alternative of leaving the premises, which he did. There followed a 'phew!!' style circulation of remaining attendees reflecting on the evening's experience.*