



Minutes of the Meeting of Dulverton Town Council

Held on Monday 11th December 2023 at 7.15pm, in the Town Hall,
Fore Street, Dulverton TA22.

Present: Chairman/Mayor: Mrs Christine Dubery. Councillors: Mr Nick Thwaites; Mr Alan Ottey; Mrs Louise Parrish; Mr John Preston; Mrs Ann Van Praag; Mrs Margaret Rawle; Mrs Allison Crisp; Mrs Frances Nicholson,(Somerset Council(S.C.)), who left at 7.45pm.

Deferment of Business for Comment by the Public: None

Apologies for absence and acceptance of any reasons offered if agreed:

Cllrs. Mr Bill Gash (DTC) & Mr Steven Pugsley (S.C.)

Declarations of Interest:

Cllr. Mrs Allison Crisp with regards Planning Application 6/9/23/021

Chairman's Comments & Meeting Management:

Cllr. Mrs Dubery wished all present a happy Christmas.

Questions for Somerset Council Councillors:

Cllrs. Mrs Frances Nicholson

Somerset – Devolution of Services and Assets:

The LCN can act as the over-arching organisation to coordinate “devolved services”.

This could be done by either:

- Parish’s precepting for services for which the LCN enables the procurement.
- Or – a preferred route – the Council makes available a ring-fenced sum for the delivery of certain services, the delivery of which the LCN facilitates. This latter can produce a cheaper, more targeted response to local priorities, as recently demonstrated by the Exmoor Highways Pilot drainage project, coordinated on behalf of the LCN by Dulverton Town Council.

The areas of service identified initially as being most pertinent to the Exmoor and Brendon Hills parishes which might be suitable for local direction are:

- 1) Winter service filling of grit bins and dumpy bags.
- 2) Ditches and grips clearance, and drain jetting and gully cleansing
- 3) Roadside verge and bank trimming.

The Highways Steward has proved to be a valuable initiative. If it is no longer to be centrally funded, a sharing of a Steward between the Exmoor LCN and a neighbouring LCN could be considered.

Somerset Council needs to take urgent steps if decisions are to be taken by parish and town councils about their precepts which are now in the process of being set.

It is imperative:

- a) That Somerset Council decide clearly which services it is no longer going to fund directly and communicate that to the towns and parishes within the LCN at the earliest possible opportunity.
- b) That Somerset Council considers creating a ring-fenced budget for towns and parishes under the LCN umbrella to administer services pertinent to them.
- c) If Somerset Council is going to withdraw support for services, it is essential for accurate costs of each service element to be established and communicated by Somerset Council, so the towns and parishes within the LCN can consider whether they wish to precept to deliver all or some of them, enabled by the LCN.

The Exmoor Federation of Schools, Dulverton - Long-term strategy, developed by the Governing Body, the local authority and the Diocese of Bath & Wells, to adapt the schools to secure their future.

Members were informed that in the face of increasing financial pressure, the need to meet high educational standards and the welfare of the pupils, the Governing Body have determined that early next year, Dulverton Junior School and All Saints C of E Infant School will share the more modern infant school building that opened in 2000 and was designed to accommodate over 120 pupils. Whilst based primarily at the All Saints' site, Junior School pupils will continue to have access to facilities at the old Junior School building, including the pool and the MUGA (multi-use games area). Catering staff will continue to prepare meals for pupils using the current catering facilities.

Discussions concerning the future of the Junior School building and grounds, which is the property of the local authority, are ongoing.

It is imperative that a school is maintained in Dulverton providing a good education with the financial constraints imposed.

Members requested that the Executive Head Teacher, Naomi Philp, is invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the proposals further.

Minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2023 as circulated: were approved and signed. Proposed by Mr Preston, seconded by Mrs Parrish and carried.

7009 Update of action points resulting from the last meeting:

7002 Lion Stables Public Toilet Facilities: The toilets have recently been jetted to remove a blockage and a camera survey undertaken. It was ascertained that the likely cause of problems is a lack of water pressure and the speed with which the cisterns are refilling.

A visit from the engineer from Danfo is still awaited to resolve the issue of a possible leak.

7003 ENPA Visitor Centre Proposals: Members request that a representative from E.N.P.A is invited to a future meeting, early in the New Year, to discuss what proposals are being considered with regards the future of the building currently housing the Visitors Centre.

Members also request a breakdown of costs with regards the Dulverton Visitors centre in comparison with the Porlock and Dunster Visitor Centres.

All Saints Church Wall: Further advice is being sought with regards possible options concerning the re-building and stabilizing of the boundary wall at the rear of the churchyard.

Barnsclose Play Ground: The works being carried out by South West Water (SWW) have over run and there is a need for the access track to be retained until next year. SWW are therefore proposing to extend the agreement until April '24.

RESOLVED: That The Chairman is authorised to sign the agreement upon its receipt. Proposed by Mr Ottey, seconded by Mr Thwaites and carried.

Highways: Members were informed that the Traffic Regulation Order has been submitted. The yellow lines and restricted parking blips have been painted.

7010 Accounts:

Financial Statement – November 2023: See Appendix A

RESOLVED: That the Financial Statement as per Appendix A is approved. Proposed by Mr Preston, seconded by Mrs Crisp and carried.

Payments for approval – November 2023: See Appendix B

RESOLVED: That the payments as per Appendix B are approved. Proposed by Mrs Parrish, seconded Mrs Crisp and carried.

7011 Committees & Sub Committees:

Minutes to be approved by the relative Committee members and be adopted as part of this meeting:

a) Grounds Committee Meeting – 12th November 2023

RESOLVED: To adopt as part of this meeting the minutes of the Grounds Committee Meeting held on 12th November 2023. Proposed by Mr Preston, seconded by Mr Ottey and carried.

b) Town Management Committee Meeting – 12th November 2023

RESOLVED: To adopt as part of this meeting the minutes of the Town Management Committee Meeting held on 12th November 2023. Proposed by Mrs Parrish, seconded by Mr Ottey and carried.

c) Legal & Finance Committee Meeting – 21st November 2023

RESOLVED: To adopt as part of this meeting the minutes of the Legal & Finance Committee Meeting held on 21st November 2023. Proposed by Mr Thwaites, seconded by Mrs Rawle and carried.

d) Dulverton Partnership Meeting – 13th November 2023

RESOLVED: To adopt as part of this meeting the minutes of the Dulverton Partnership Group Meeting held on 13th November 2023. Proposed by Mrs Dubery, seconded by Mr Thwaites and carried.

7012 Setting of the Precept 2024/25:

Members determined that they had not received enough information from S.C. concerning the cost/existing contracts/available assets of service proposed to be devolved in order to set a precept at this meeting.

Clerk requested to write to S.C. requesting the information required as directed by Cllr. Thwaites.

7013 Planning Applications:

RESOLVED: To adopt the comments as per Appendix C as part of this meeting. Proposed by Mr Preston, seconded by Mrs Vann Praag and carried.

7014 Somerset Society of Local Council Clerks:

RESOLVED: To renew annual membership at a cost of £188.00. Proposed by Mrs Crisp, seconded by Mrs Van Praag and carried.

7015 Somerset Playing Fields Association:

RESOLVED: To renew annual membership and donate £25.00. Proposed by Mrs Dubery, seconded by Mrs Parrish and carried.

7016 Late Correspondence:

Correspondence noted by members.

7017 Questions for Members who have attended additional meetings:

Dulverton Weir & Leat Conservation Trust Meeting – 27th November 23: Attended by Cllr. Mr Bill Gash who submitted a written report.

Members were informed that SC has proposed a capex budget item to replace the temporary repair of the weir with a new temporary repair of caissons, with cement to reduce the water flow through them. Given S.C.'s current financial position there's no guarantee this will be approved, but if so work would be carried out next Summer 2024. This would protect the Weir for a further 5-10 years - in that time SC's position might improve and the DWLCT and others can raise funds for a long term solution. The cost would be £20,000 - £25000 and would create a breathing space while a long term solution and funding for it was worked out. It is anticipated that a decision will be reached February 2024.

It was noted that when the DWLCT applied for Lottery Funding, the absence of a contribution from Somerset County, skewed its bid. S.C. representative explained that until S.C. finances improve it cannot give any assurance that it can fund this in the future.

It was stressed that SC has a duty to maintain the weir and prevent the build-up of debris that could be washed down to the bridge later and cause flooding in the town. SC could face legal action by property owners, whose houses' foundations have been weakened by the leat drying up. Peter Thorn for British Canoeist provided an example of where a badly maintained repair with caissons, caused the drowning of a canoeist - again risk to SC for liability.

The Environment Agency is not interested in taking any form of active role.

Adrian Dowding flagged that his organisation had secured £500,000 in funding to improve spawning along its rivers including the Exe and its tributaries. (part of the DWLCT plan is to improve how fish can travel up the Barle to spawn).

7018 Issues to be raised with permission of the Chairman:

National Salary Pay Award 2023/24: Members were advised that they will be requested to approve the proposed pay award along with arrears outstanding since April 23 at their meeting scheduled for 12th January 2024.

Chairman