

EXTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Council Meeting held on Monday November 11th 2024 in Bridgetown Village Hall at 7.30pm.

Present:

Guy Thomas-Everard (GTE, Chairman), Robert Takle (RT), Colin Rawle (CR), Frances Williams (FW), Steve Rowe (SR), Janette Allen (JA) and Jennifer Yates (Clerk, JY).

Somerset Councillors Frances Nicholson (FN) and Steven Pugsley also attended the meeting from 20.15.

The meeting was opened at 19.30.

1. **Apologies:** Tonia Matthews
2. **Declaration of Interests:** Mr Thomas-Everard item 5a
3. **Public questions:** None
4. **Approval of the Minutes of the Council Meeting 9th September 2024 and matters arising:** The minutes were approved as an accurate record.
5. **Planning applications**
 - a) 6/15/24/005 Location: Week Farm, Hostel And Premises, Week Lane, Exton, Dulverton, Somerset, TA22 9JP
Proposal: Proposed Conversion of Barn to Form Sleeping Accommodation to be used in Conjunction with Exmoor Bunkbarn.
Photographs and reports were shared, and following discussion all were in support of this proposal
 - b) Other planning matters
6. **Update on Highways matters including proposed arrangements from Kier/Somerset County Highways:** JA attended the LCN meeting and fed back that there is going to be a lot of change in the Highways department. Andrew Turner has resigned following the proposal that his deputy team is reduced from 3 to 2 as a money saving strategy. Furthermore the 10 middle managers will be reduced to 4. As these are the people who know the road network well and attend the LCN meetings they are vital in being able to knowledgeably direct works on the roads in their area. The Parish Councillors are concerned that this will be a risk to the public as the roads are less well cared for and JA confirmed that this was brought up as a big concern at the LCN meeting, but that with the cuts in staffing and the cuts in provision already shared at previous meetings there is likely to be a deterioration in the quality and safety of the road network. There will be cuts to hedging with the onus being on landowners to maintain the hedges. Drains and ditches will also be cleared less frequently with the Parish Council being expected to monitor this and buy in services for gully clearance. It was discussed that this could have an impact on tourism with people not wishing to

bring expensive motor homes and caravans onto poorly maintained roads, and if hedges and banks are not cut back on our single track roads. JA explained that the County will still be responsible for safety, and therefore it will be important to note issues and report them as soon as possible in future. SR mentioned that there is already an issue with gully pits not being emptied out regularly. JY will request the parish gully list and the current listings for clearance (there is a variance of one – four years based on the ‘rural’ aspect and heaviness use of the roads). It was noted that while we have the costings for using Keir the Parish Council may wish to use independent contractors. There is an issue with permissions for them to work on the roads and it is hoped this will become more clear.

- 7. Finance Report:** including current balances and approval of cheques and confirmation of signatories. The current account balance as at 2nd July (latest statement) is £7,784.12 with the reserve balance as at 4th October at £1,654.12. It was agreed to make payments to Fluid Labs (website) of £204 and SALC membership £63.

SP and FN arrived at 20.15

- 8. Reports from Somerset Councillors:** There is a consultation available re the reorganisation of ward boundaries and the number of Somerset Councillors following the restructuring of Somerset Council. It is hoped that it will remain largely unchanged in this area with the more outlying parishes most likely to be affected. FN and SP feel strongly that the Exmoor and Brendon Hills parishes need to remain linked together as rural parishes.

In response to the earlier discussion re Highways SP and FN advised that local contractors could be used, but would need to request access to the roads to carry out tasks. It is likely that some verges will still be cut as this would be seen as a visibility (therefore safety) issue. Gullys will largely become the responsibility of the Parish Council. Again it was mentioned that standards are likely to drop to some degree. SP confirmed that despite his best efforts the LCN remains unable to hold funds and will not be in a position to coordinate works across the area, with the onus being on parishes to work together to book in works to share costs. It was noted that the winter maintenance programme of salting roads will continue as before.

The arrangements for changes to the site and Trustees/board for the local food bank are going well.

- 9. Discuss the proposal to purchase a bleed kit for the parish:** It was decided not to purchase one at this time.
- 10. Any other business:** There have been a number of thefts in the area and sheep have been taken. There is an Exmoor National Park consultation open currently re the Exmoor Active Travel Plan which closes on 22nd November. It is hoping to promote tourism whilst decreasing vehicular use.
- 11. Date of Next Meeting: 6th January 2025 at 7:30pm subject to receipt of Planning Applications**

