

HOLCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL
MENDIP DISTRICT OF THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET

www.holcombepc.org.uk

Clerk: Vickie Watts, Gallant Hill Farm, Foxcote, Radstock, BA3 5YB
clerk@holcombepc.org.uk 01749 880428 / 07971 516916

**Minutes from Holcombe Parish Council Meeting, which took place on
Tuesday 1st October 2024 at Holcombe Village Hall**

Councillors Present Cllr Davies (Acting Chair)
 Cllr Eade
 Cllr Emery
 Cllr Gait
 Cllr Govier
 Cllr Roberts
 Cllr Stratford

In attendance: There were no members of the public present.
 Clerk Vickie Watts taking the minutes.

1. Public forum

There were no points raised.

2. Apologies for absence

Cllr Brand and Cllr Kerr sent apologies which were accepted by the Chair.

3. Declaration of interests and dispensations

There were none.

4. Approve Minutes for the meeting held on Tuesday 3rd September 2024

The Clerk had circulated the minutes prior to the meeting for Councillors consideration. It was proposed by Cllr Emery and seconded by Cllr Eade that they accurately reflected the meeting and should therefore be approved and signed by the Chair.

Vote: 6 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstentions (Councillor had not attended the meeting)

5. Action updates from last meeting

All actions had been completed or would be covered later in the agenda apart from:

-) Somerset Grass Cutting contract – Somerset Council have informed the Parish Council that their grass cutting contract ends 1st June 2025. They are currently investigating how this might be carried out thereafter and how it might fit with the devolution agenda. They are open to discussions with Parish Councils on ground maintenance either as a full asset transfer or on a maintenance agreement. They have confirmed the total square meterage for each parish along with the maps showing the locations and invite any conversations around the subject.

Action: Quote for additional grass cutting and verge cutting to be presented at the November meeting.

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6. Reports

- 6.1 PCSO – The Clerk had circulated the PCSO report since the last meeting. The monthly ‘Meet the PCSO’ sessions are being run monthly at the Holcombe Farm Shop from 10am til 11am on 27th October, 24th November and 22nd December
- 6.2 Somerset Council – Somerset Cllr Tony Robbins did not attend but circulated the following report:

Summary

Last financial year’s outturn figure was a small underspend, which was a considerable improvement, and which protects our reserves – so good news.

The current year’s revenue budget is approximately £600million, and we are already forecasting an overspend, so our efforts will continue to deliver the savings as planned, identify actions and implement mitigations to prevent any forecast overspend, as we work through our Improvement & Transformation programme.

We need to retain our financial discipline. Like most other Councils, we continue to face the financial challenges caused by demand, in particular Children’s Social Care placements, and costs increasing at a greater rate than Council Tax and other income. Every effort needs to be made to ensure there is no further reduction in reserves.

Further Detail

-) 2023/24 financial year outturn to 31.3.24 was a relatively small underspend of £1.8million.
-) Earlier in the 23/24 financial year we were forecasting an overspend of £28.6million so we’ve seen a considerable improvement and that follows the introduction of Spend Control Boards.
-) The positive outturn will increase and protect our General Fund reserves and that is good news as we continue to strive to avoid a Section 114 notice (generally considered a council’s version of bankruptcy although councils have to continue to deliver services).
-) The current year’s budget of approx. £600million was set following a re-base of the Adults’ Social Care budget, and with use of reserves and a Capitalisation Directive (which allows Councils to use capital receipts from sale of assets or borrowing to fund everyday expenditure).
-) We will fund the Capitalisation Directive by sale of assets so that we don’t have to borrow more from the Public Works Loan Board at a premium rate.
-) Month 4 (end July) of this financial year is showing a forecast overspend of £8.4m in Service Directorates. Even with deployment of the £6million corporate contingency there is still a residual £2.4m forecast overspend.
-) One area of overspend is Children’s Social Care placements where increasing numbers of children cannot be safe at home and are now in the care of the Council.
-) The other area of overspend is in the waste and recycling contract where the contractor has found it impossible to maintain the service in our large county with its many rural areas at the previous cost.

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- J Following rebase of the budget, Adults is forecasting an underspend at this stage in the year.
- J All directorates are expected to deliver their savings or find alternative savings to meet the full financial value in 2024/25.
- J The Spend Control Panels will continue throughout this year as we cannot lose the financial discipline at this stage.
- J The Improvement and Transformation programme is based on restructuring the workforce of the Council, reducing the payroll costs by up to £40million per annum, devolving assets and services to City, Town and Parish Councils, the aforementioned sale of assets, plus new savings and different ways of working.
- J The restructure programme needs to be complete, and asset sales and savings need also to be in place before the end of this financial year on 31st March 2025, so that we can set the 2025/26 budget in February 2025 and start the next financial year with a smaller, more agile Somerset Council that can deliver its services within the income available from Council Tax, business rates, earned income and Government grants.
- J Every effort needs to be made to ensure there is no further reduction in reserves

6.3 Report on the recruitment process for new Clerk

Cllr Davies explained that the working party had put together the advert and information pack which was now live on the Somerset Association of Local Councils vacancy section of the website as well as being on Facebook and the parish website.

Applications close on the 11th October, with a meeting planned for 14th October to shortlist. There have been 2 expressions of interests to date. It is hoped that the successful candidate will be informed by the 28th October.

7. Parish Council Scheme of Allowances

Information had been circulated about the scheme prior to the meeting. The key points to note are:

- J if the Council does pay an allowance it will come from their own funds
- J such a scheme is only likely to be adopted by large towns (or cities) and several have already decided to pay their Cllrs.
- J co-opted Cllrs cannot receive an allowance
- J there is also the possibility to give the Chair an allowance (whether or not other Cllrs receive an allowance)
- J for a small parish like Holcombe, it is suggested the value of the allowance should not exceed £310/year

It was proposed by Cllr Gait that the Parish Council should contact Somerset Council to ask what allowance would be for Holcombe. He also stated that if the Parish Council was to give the allowance, it should be paid to all Councillors, however those present felt that they would be reluctant to move forward with allowances

Action: Clerk to seek confirmation of the allowance from Somerset Council

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8. Planning Applications

There was none

9. Report on Planning Updates

The decision on the appeal for 2023/2074/OUT - Application for Outline Planning Permission with some matters reserved for up to 9 no. dwellinghouses with details of access. Land To the East of Edford Hill Holcombe is yet to be decided.

There were no other updates.

10. Finance

10.1 Agree Bank Reconciliation – Cllr Emery checked the bank reconciliation and found it to be in order.

10.2 Consider and approve applications for Community Project Fund 2024 – The Clerk confirmed that there was £1,000 available for allocation. Cllr Kerr and Cllr Brand had considered the applications which had been received and made the following recommendations:

<u>Group</u>	<u>Project</u>	<u>Total cost</u>	<u>Total requested</u>	<u>Recommendation by Working Party</u>
1st Coleford Scout Group	Gas Fridge	£300.00	£250.00	£250.00
Holcombe FC	Goals	£1,499.99	£300.00	£300.00
Holcombe Village Hall	80 x chairs	£2,500.00	£300.00	£300.00
Holcombe Ladies Sports Group	Replace ball-bearings in curling stones	£233.76	£233.76	£120.00
Holcombe Brownies and Guides	Portable BBQ holders	£90.00	£90.00	£30.00
St Andrews Church	Tables for coffee mornings	£353.00	£300.00	Nil
		Total requested	£1,473.76	£1,000.00

It was proposed by Cllr Gait and seconded by Cllr Govier that the recommendations should be approved.

Vote: 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions.

Action: Clerk to write to applicants and notify them of the decision and issue the cheques.

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- 10.3 Consider quotes for pruning fruit trees –
3 quotes had been received and were considered by the Council. After discussion it was agreed to accept the quote from Mark Cassidy for a total of £150 for all 50 trees. The work will need to be completed in January.

Action: Clerk to write to the Contractor to confirm the order

- 10.4 Consider and approve 2nd Quarter budget review 2024/25
A copy of the second quarter budget review had been shared with all Councillors. After discussion it was agreed that the report should be approved and was duly signed by the Chair.

Vote: 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions.

- 10.5 Parish Council Payments:
The following invoices were presented for payment:

Vickie Watts – Salary & Expenses	£418.66
1st Coleford Scout Group - Gas Fridge	£250.00
Holcombe FC Goals	£300.00
Holcombe Village Hall - 80 x chairs	£300.00
Holcombe Ladies Sports Group – Ball-bearings for curling stones	£120.00
Holcombe Brownies and Guides - Portable BBQ holders	£ 30.00

Previously reimbursed to the Clerk:

AutoSpeedWatch sign	£58.60
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It was proposed by Cllr Gait and Cllr Stratford that the cheques should be signed.

Action: Clerk to get the cheques signed.

11. Highways

- 11.1 Update on Auto Speed Watch (ASW) – Cllr Roberts and Cllr Stratford shared a report which highlighted the problem of vehicles speeding on the hill and in some cases at dangerous speeds. The data showed that there are also a number of persistent offenders who need to be reminded to change their behaviour. After discussion it was recommended that the Clerk liaises with the PCSO to establish how the police can help address the problem of repeat offenders. It was agreed that Cllr Brand will include an update on the ASW data in the community magazine to reassure parishioners that the Parish Council are actively taking steps to assess and mitigate the problem. Councillors discussed whether a Speed Indicator Device would also act as a reminder to drivers to slow down. It was agreed to revisit this in the future if the actions from this meeting did not have a positive effect on reducing speed.

Action: Clerk to liaise with the PCSO. Cllr Brand to report in CHCM

- 11.2 Update on existing issues already reported to Somerset Highways
There was nothing to report.

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11.3 Report of new issues

Flooding on Green Lane is still an issue despite extensive work being completed over the last couple of years.

Action: Clerk to report to Somerset Highways

12. Discuss issue reported with the Lime Tree located in the Holcombe Playing Field

An email had been received complaining about the Lime Tree located in the corner of the playing field which is shedding small brown particles which cover the residents drive, guttering, walk ways which in turn are transported into our home effecting carpets, paintwork etc.

Hillside Trees Ltd have completed an inspection of the tree and noted that:

-) The tree appears to be in good health, the canopy is dense and leaf size is as expected for the species, there are no visible signs of rot or decay and no visible evidence of pathogens.
-) There are no branches overhanging the neighbour's property.

They also noted that inconvenience of natural substances from a tree is not a valid reason for a tree's removal. As there are no branches overhanging the property, any leaf litter and honeydew getting into the property is presumably blown in by the wind so reducing the canopy of the tree would offer little benefit. They said that lime trees respond particularly well to pruning in that they readily re-grow from any cut points and therefore any reduction in size would be short lived and need to be done on a regular basis incurring unnecessary expense with very little benefit to the residents.

After consideration, Councillors agreed that no action would be taken.

Action: Clerk to inform the resident of the decision

13. Consider changing the Parish domain name to .gov.uk

The Clerk will be attending an information session hosted by SALC on this topic on the 7th October and will provide a report to the Council.

Action: Clerk to attend the meeting and provide a report

14. Councillor Reports/Updates including Playing Field, Village Hall, SALC, etc

14.1 Playing Field – Cllr Emery reported that the Treasure Hunt which took place on the 8th September was well received and made the sum of £249.22 for the Playing field.

14.2 Village Hall – The Breakfast Club will be starting on Saturday 12th October at the Village Hall open from 9am and 11am

15. Meetings/Training to attend

30/09/24 – LCN meeting - Cllr Brand attended virtually and provided the following report:

Only 7 of the 18 parishes were represented which either indicates apathy or a lack of belief in the

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process. 2 hours were spent discussing highways, road safety and asset devolution, and whilst the discussions were fruitful and informative (albeit mainly negative), many of the issues are already known. As the LCN does not have a budget many of the points raised will have to be passed up the line for further discussion.

Despite the best efforts of the chair and deputy chair to sound optimistic and reassure the group that Somerset Council understood the issues and would be taking action, there was a sense of gloom that nothing tangible is likely to take place soon due to the dire nature of the council's finances. On the subject of asset and service devolution, virtually all parishes made the point that they would be unable to afford to employ Keir to undertake essential works in the parish such as bin emptying, verge cutting, drain clearing etc and would be very surprised if volunteers stepped forward to fill the gap. It was proposed that we raise the precept (possibly up to 30-40%) to cover the costs but Cllr Brand thought this would be unjust and would meet with very stiff resistance. He concluded that without the appropriate funding it was impossible to achieve the same level of service that we currently enjoy. There are tough times ahead and the Parish Council will need to consider very carefully how we maintain the services in the village on a tight budget.

02/10/24 - SALC Health and Well-being virtual event which will explain the grant fund and how to apply

16. Correspondence

There were none.

17. Next meetings:

5th November 2024 Parish Council meeting

The meeting finished at 20.25 hrs