

Somerford Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 18 November 2024

Holmes Chapel Community Centre, 7.00pm

Present

- Councillor Geoff Bell (Chairman)
- Councillor Gwyneth Derbyshire
- Councillor Simon Hughes
- Councillor Jeanette Hardman
- Councillor Paul Crompton
- Councillor Trevor Massey
- Mr Carlton Evans – Clerk
- Ward Councillor John Wray (arrived 19.42hrs)

Declarations of Interest

- Cllr Hardman – any Loachbrook Estate discussions
- Cllr Derbyshire - any Loachbrook Estate discussions
- Cllr Massey – Somerford Chapel discussions

Part 1 Public Forum

One member of the public was present, Congleton Town Councillor Robert Douglas. He brought the Council's attention to the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan consultation (see later agenda item). He also spoke to the LGBCE's new proposal on warding arrangements and expressed his disappointment at them – a view shared by Somerford Parish Council. He informed the Parish Council that the Cheshire East Strategic Planning Board would be discussing the Sibelco Somerford Farm planning application on 20th November. As a Brereton resident he would be making known his and local residents' concerns.

154/24 – Apologies

The Council received and **resolved** to accept the following apologies:

- Cllr Bill Chorlton (travel commitments)

155/24 – Minutes

The Council **resolved** that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 October 2024 be agreed and signed as a true and accurate record.

156/24 – Accounts

See Annex 1

157/24 - Cheshire East Ward Councillor Report

Councillor Wray reported that the revamped Cheshire East Planning Portal is up and running though there are some glitches with it. The Clerk has already contacted Cheshire East planners about these. There appears to have been no progress with establishing a PSPO along the CLR in order to be able to tackle e.g. noise pollution.

158/24 – Clerk’s Salary

The Council noted that the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) had agreed on new pay rates applicable from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and **resolved** that this increase should be implemented as soon as possible. The Clerk is currently at spine point 22. The agreement will mean an increase in salary from £16.30ph to £16.93ph, backdated to April 2024.

159/24 - Budget and Precept for FY 25/26

Councillors again considered the budget and precept request for the next Financial Year, and the list of possible future projects discussed at its September and October meetings (Minute References **125/24** and **143/24**).

The Council noted again that the pace of housing development in the parish had slowed considerably. As a consequence the tax base to calculate the precept had risen only very slightly. Councillors recognised that after several years of reductions per household, the level of the precept per household might now need to increase, not least to keep up with inflation. In light of the UK budget announcement and inflation generally, non-discretionary costs such as insurance, audit and staff costs etc. are making up an increasing proportion of the precept and increasing budgetary pressure. The Council will return to this topic at its next meeting.

160/24 - Planning Applications

None received.

161/24 - Update on Somerford Chapel

Councillor Massey updated the Council about his meeting with the Bishop of Stockport at the Chapel. He had been impressed by its size and good condition and very positive about the prospect of increasing footfall and usage. Additional heating might be in place by the beginning of next year which would improve conditions further.

162/24 - Policies to Review

The Council reviewed its Financial Regulations and **resolved** to adapt them in line with the NALC guidance and the Clerk's suggested edits.

163/24 - Remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings

Councillors agreed to respond to the Government consultation individually, rather than collectively.

164/24 – Congleton Town Neighbourhood Plan Consultation

Councillors agreed to respond to the consultation individually, not collectively.

165/24 - Parish Signage

Brereton Parish Council had approached the Clerk and asked that we remove or relocate the Somerford boundary sign on the A54, apparently to make way for one of theirs. Councillors felt there was no clear need to do so, but had no objection to Brereton installing their own on the back of the Somerford sign. The Council also noted that the boundary sign between Somerford and Congleton was no longer attached to the posts – indeed one of the posts has disappeared.

166/24 – Defib at Somerford Park Farm

Brereton Parish Council had also asked if we want to take over responsibility for the defibrillator on the wall at Somerford Park Farm. The Council are agreeable in principle and asked the Clerk to investigate further what this might entail in practice.

167/24 - Update on the new website and emails

The Clerk will continue to explore how to resolve problems accessing the new email accounts, and Councillor Hardman will try to write some instructions that are simpler and clearer than those circulated by Parish Online, the service provider.

168/24 - Rhead's Meadows

The Clerk will chase the Cheshire Wildlife Trust again who had agreed to develop a costed maintenance plan for the Meadows. The Clerk has not yet ordered the jute

weed suppressing mats for the whips as we haven't yet identified a contractor who could install them.

169/24 - Blackfirs Wood

Cllr Crompton had spotted a CWT vehicle at the site and, as with Rhead's Meadows, the Clerk will chase the CWT for an update.

170/24 – Highways

Nothing further to report.

171/24 – Housing Developments

Some ironworks are being raised at Loachbrook ready for topping off, and some kerbstones are being replaced. The latest information received is that a Management Company would be installed in February. However, several other jobs such as fences, road signs etc. have not been completed and there is still no clarity about the drains and when these will be signed off by United Utilities. Councillor Hardman is drafting a letter to Sarah Russell MP since Bovis/Vistry are not responding to messages etc.

172/24 - Chairman and Members' Reports

Nothing further to report.

173/24 Clerk's Report

The Clerk reported that he and Congleton Town Council have been discussing dog bin emptying as there is a discrepancy between how many we and they think there are. He will investigate further with them. Cheshire East Council are looking to recover the costs of any future elections from town and parish councils. The Council will return to this item at the next meeting in the context of budget discussions.

The meeting ended at 2110 hrs.



Chairman

Annex 1

Finances as of 01 November 2024:

Account Balance: **£39,008.25**

Receipts since 01 October:

- £nil

The following **payments** since 01 October were noted:

- £54.78 – NEST, Clerk's pension
- £1,234.40 – Greenbarnes, replacement noticeboard
- £159.77 – HMRC PAYE
- £180.00 – BS Amies, website management
- £620.50 – Clerk's Salary
- £378.00 – PKF Littlejohn, External Audit

The following payments were **approved**:

- £1,231.44 – Crewe Colour Printers, Newsletter