

UNCONFIRMED

MELLS PARISH COUNCIL

(Mellsparishcouncil.org.uk)

Annual Parish Meeting

was held at Mells Barn on Tuesday 14 May 2024 at 7.00 pm. John Earl was in the chair, supported by 6 members of the Council. No residents were present
The Clerk, Joy Book was in attendance

01.05.24APM MINUTES OF LAST YEAR'S ANNUAL MEETING OF 9 MAY 2023

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 9 May 2023 had been previously approved by the Council at the June 2023 monthly meeting and were taken as read.

02.05.24APM APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE -Cllr Alan Brady, Cllr Barry Clarke – Somerset Council Councillor

All reports were circulated prior to the meeting so were tabled as being read by all those present.

03.05.24APM REPORT FROM SOMERSET COUNCILLOR:

2024/25 Council budget: Somerset Council has voted through plans to set a budget for the coming financial year but received a stark warning of significant challenges in the years ahead. Lib Dem Council Members unanimously agreed a range of measures to bridge a funding gap of £100m for 2024/25, including cost cuttings, increasing council tax by 5% and using £36.8 millions of reserves (a council's equivalent of savings). The proposals also include a 'capitalisation direction' request of £36.9m – seeking permission from Government to borrow money or sell assets to pay for day-to-day running costs. Amid specific plans to cut costs and increase fees, around 1,200 jobs are expected to go at Somerset Council over the next three years, equivalent to a quarter of the workforce.

Gigafactory plans for Puriton site: Agratas, a new business within the Tata Group, has confirmed its plans to build a gigafactory producing EV batteries at the Gravity Campus site in Puriton, near Bridgwater. A £4 billion investment, the factory will create up to 4,000 jobs and many more as part of the supply chain. There are reports that Somerset is putting in £150 million to the battery factory. In fact, £100 million is from the Government and the £50 million that is their input will be recovered from the scheme when in production. It is envisioned that the plant will be operational in the second half of the decade, eventually producing 40GWh battery cells annually, enough to supply 500,000 passenger vehicles. Once fully operational, the factory is set to Britain's biggest battery factory and one of the largest in Europe. Over the next five years, Somerset council plans to invest in the infrastructure, skills, site access and connectivity which we paid for by the business rates generated by the factory once it is operational.

Public libraries: Blood pressure monitors and heat surveying infrared cameras are now available to borrow free of charge for three days. They are owned by Somerset council so please do use them.

Potholes: It has been mentioned that 98% of claims are being rejected on the basis that they have not been reported to Somerset council. If you see a pothole that needs repair, please report it via the Somerset council website under report a problem on the road section

Local Community Networks: The groups have highlighted that one of the main topics of interest Highways. There is a new scheme being introduced called the Highway Stewardship. This is when a man and a van are provided in annual costs of £50,000 per year that person is available to complete drain clearance sign cleaning and verge cutting but not pothole repairs. Parish councils are being encouraged to contribute to the scheme and will get so many hours service each month. It is questioned whether it will offer value for money. Cranmore Parish Council will monitor.

Heating Support Grant: The deadline for applications has been extended for an extra 6 months.

One of the biggest areas of concern has been the planning process. Cllr Barry Clarke said that he and Cllr Philip Ham were putting together a list of issues that had occurred where the process had failed in cause unnecessary delay. He encouraged the parish council to report any concerns so that they could be included in their report to the planning department.

Flooding: Cllr Clarke said that he and Cllr ham were trying to get Somerset Rivers aAuthority to take an overall view of the actions of Defra, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group etc rather than them trying to fight them one at a time. They have a meeting planned with them shortly and will keep parish councils informed of the outcome

05.05.24APM REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN, BARN COMMITTEE: (Presented by Cllr Earl)

The Barn continues to be a successful and much used village asset. The barn is operating at present under a rolling lease as we engage with the Parochial Church. Council and the Diocese for a long term lease. We are also involved in taking a long term lease on the paddock at the East side of the barn. Once this is in place plans to put a new building in the paddock can be developed. Hopefully this will include a new kitchen, better toilets with disabled access, a meeting room and a bigger storage area. We could then remove the toilets and the kitchen from the barn and returned it to its more natural state.

Electricity costs continued to be a major cause for concern. The bill for March again being over £800 and although the barn had less used in January and February the electricity cost for each of those months was between £600 and £700. But as always the barn continues to cover it's expenses.

06.05.24APM RECREATION GROUND REPORT: Mells Sports and Recreation Company (report forwarded prior to the meeting. Presented by the Clerk)

The refurbishment work on the pavilion (after we suffered flood damage caused by a burst pipe) concluded in the Spring, just in time for the cricket season. Mells and Frome cricket clubs both used the pitches, albeit not as much as hoped due to inclement weather. The football season saw the pitches being used by Mells & Vobster Utd along with a range of Frome based youth teams. Again, however, the weather meant that fewer fixtures were played than we had hoped for as many games had to be played elsewhere (on astro surfaces).

Over the summer the playground area had a refurb, with new equipment installed and old equipment repaired where necessary. This represented a total investment of over £20k.

Various other organised activities have taken place over the year, including the scenic 7, the Mells 10k and more recently, Thursday boot camp sessions.

The tennis courts and fencing remain in a bad state of repair. The hope is to improve these over the course of the coming year, although this is an expensive exercise (circa £10k) which is not yet fully funded. The other focus for the coming year will be to try to resolve the long term future of the space, with the current 20 year lease expiring in September 2026.

07.05.24APM CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON CURRENT YEAR'S ACTIVITIES (presented by Cllr Earl)

The parish council are aware of the financial problems faced by Somerset County Council but are yet to understand how changes to services supplied by Somerset County Council will affect the village.

The triangle opposite the post office at last received its planning permission and a licence for the work to proceed. The area is now ringed with large stone and it is hoped that later this month topsoil will be added and the area grassed.

Talks have taken place this year with the relevant parties regarding the recreation ground and it's upcoming lease renewal and to what extent the parish council can offer financial help with the

annual running expenses. Further talks are expected before the lease expires. The Parish Council are to pass the new lease for the Tithe Barn solely to the Barn Management Committee subject to legal requirements.

There is still some issue with noise from the quarry in some areas of the village and the Parish Council continue to look for a solution and both Cllr Steve West and Cllr John Henderson regularly attend quarry meetings.

The increase in insurance and other fees has meant an increase in this year's precept but it is the first for 3 years.

Finally, I would like to thank Somerset Councillor Barry Clarke for Keeping the Parish Council up to date with SCC matters.

08.05.24APM PARISH DISCUSSION FORUM: No discussion took place.

Meeting closed at 7.05pm.

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The Clerk, Joy Book in attendance

APOLOGIES: Cllr Barry Clarke – Somerset Council Councillor, Cllr Alan Brady.

01.05.24APCM TO ELECT CHAIR FOR 2024/2025

Nominations for the position of Chair were called. Cllr Henderson proposed Cllr John Earl. Cllr Asquith seconded the proposal.

02.05.24PACM TO ELECT VICE CHAIR FOR 2024/2025:

Nominations for the position of Vice Chair were called. Cllr Earl proposed Cllr John Henderson. Cllr Seewooruttun seconded the proposal.

03.05.24APCM SIGNING OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE FORMS:

Cllr Earl and Cllr Henderson signed and dated the acceptance forms.

04.05.24APCM REVIEW OF REPRESENTATION TO EXTERNAL BODIES

Police representative	Cllr Alan Brady
Quarry Liaison Committees representatives	Cllr West/Cllr Henderson
Footpaths	Cllr Claire Freeman
Planning officers	Cllr Earl & Cllr Seewooruttun
Local Community Network representatives	Cllr Asquith & Cllr Brady
Responsible Financial Officer	Joy Book, Clerk

Meeting closed at 7.10pm