

## SOMERTON – ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MINUTES

TUESDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> MAY 2023 AT 7.00 P.M.

1. Attendance and apologies for absence  
Cllr R. Walters, Chairman of Somerton Parish Council  
  
13 members of public (including three Councillors)  
  
Apologies received from James Bensly and Noel Galer
2. Minutes of previous meeting held on 17th May 2022.  
The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.
3. Reports received from
  - County Councillor James Bensly not present
  - District Councillors James Bensly and Noel Galer not present
4. Police representative not present
5. Reports received from representatives of voluntary organisations within the Parish:
  - a. Somerton 'Poors' Trustees by Mr M. Lees per appendix A
  - b. Somerton Staithe & Boat Dyke Trustees by Mr D. Shuker per appendix B
  - c. Somerton Village Hall by Mr S. Ashton per appendix C
  - d. Any other village organisation wishing to make a report - None

Thanks to Mr Lees, Mr Shuker and Mr Ashton for their presentations and to all attendees for their interest. The Chairman made a personal comment to the effect that it was disappointing that there was bad feeling expressed towards those people who kindly gave their time to improve the village. Constructive criticism is welcome, however it would be appreciated if parishioners could learn to disagree politely rather than engage in point scoring and negativity.

### 6. Parish Council Chairman's Report

A year of changes and resettlement

- New Clerk (Kate Martin-Smith) left after 1 year, now welcome to new Clerk (Clare Roullier).
- Kevin King came in as new Councillor (June 2022)
- Thanks to Trevor Jones, who resigned after over 20 years of being a Councillor
- Thanks also to Ivan Wright, who decided not to stand again after nearly 4 years.
- Welcome to David Shuker as a new Councillor
- Thanks to all Councillors who stood for the (unopposed) elections.
- Vacancy for new Councillor, to be co-opted

Large increase in precept for 2023-2024. This was due to unforeseen expenses incurred after the resignation of the Clerk (c. £1,000). A parishioner added that a Councillor (Cllr Barker) had offered to take minutes, however had also resigned.

New policies set up to ensure efficient running of the Council in the future. Website has been reviewed and small changes made to improve. More changes are planned to make this look better.

Contractor Ross Bird undertook grass cutting during the year and I am pleased to announce that the contract has now been renewed.

Spring and Autumn litter picks were carried out, with seven new volunteers helping out. A small amount of money (c. £100) from the Community fund was used to buy litter picking equipment. A small number of fly tipping incidents were also reported during the litter picking activity.

Bus shelter cleaning has been ongoing, albeit slightly sporadically. A new cleaning rota will be established with six volunteers. The PC will consider quotes for restaining the outside of the shelter, as it is starting to look a little tired.

The Sam sign has been moved regularly, every month, with the battery changed every two weeks.

Flegg Community Land Trust has evaluated potential sites for new houses and reported back to the Parish Council. Discussions are ongoing with the FCLT, confidential at present, due to commercial sensitivities.

A foot path working party was set up to facilitate review of Somerton's footpaths and requests to establish new paths, or re-open old ones.

Efforts to create a permissive path to link Coronation and Mill Lanes ongoing. After a lack of response from Ecotricity, the Parish Council had decided to approach the County Council to request to include this path as a right of way by foot only on the definitive map. However a very recent email from Ecotricity has suggested that they will review this again in more detail and revert shortly.

An initiative to re-open footpath No 8 (to the north of the parish, on the border with Horsey, allowing for a circular walk along the Broads adjacent to the Windpump and across to the coast and back to Somerton).

Biodiversity initiative: decision to allow small areas of grassland to grow to see if wildflowers will grow. Areas include c. 2m radius around Staithe sign, area around bollards near telephone box and areas around the War memorial (whilst still cutting a path from the steps to the memorial and directly around it).

A parishioner has raised the problem of dog waste (bags being left around), with Ross Bird also mentioning this. PC to consider, although costing issues may cause problems here.

Various highways problems have been raised with the Council:

- Sign on Dark Lane near Burnley Hall which has been knocked over and propped up.
- Reminder of poor state of Horsey Road and to extract a date for when repairs will be carried out.
- Repairs made to the edge of Winterton Road (between The Street & Dark Lane) directs water away from the drain and it pools at the end of the drive to Somerton Hall causing hydraulic damage.
- Signage for RB12 from Manor Road to Low Road is inadequate and cannot be seen by drivers.
- Signage for Back Road RB11 still has the previous footpath signs. This needs to be updated.
- Ask Streetscene Inspectors if they have any influence with satellite navigation providers, mainly Google, that still identify RB11 and RB12 as legitimate routes for vehicle drivers. The Councillors' submissions to Google for correction have not been successful.
- Three potholes to be repaired along the side of Winterton Road.
- Request cutting of the high growth within the visibility splays to the junction of Manor Farm Road and Winterton Road.

7. To receive questions on any item/subject.

1. Parishioner: Did the Council think that the precept could come down next year?

Chairman replied that this was considered likely for a number of reasons. The increase in the precept included an allowance for the May 2023 election (£1,600) and to allow for reserves. In the event the elections were unopposed, so no expenditure was incurred.

2. Parishioner: Walking from the one side of the Staithe to the other meant walking in the road. Could it be possible to create a safe walkway here? Another parishioner mentioned that this had been discussed before and suggested the Parish Council contact Norfolk County Council to whether this part of the verge could be levelled to make it more safe to walk along.
  3. Parishioner: Did the Parish Council provide grants or awards to local organisations? Chairman replied that there was a Donations and Awards policy (available online or by request). It was suggested that this should be publicised more widely and it was agreed to do this.
  4. Two parishioners thanked the Chairman for his efforts
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8. Date of Next Meeting.

**2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 (TBC)**

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 20:25

### **Appendix A – Poors Land Trustees Report (Mr M. Lees)**

The Poors Charity owns 13 acres of local land (marsh land off Horsey Road). This is currently rented out to a long term tenant, for grazing plus annually for shooting rights, for a fee of c. £800/ year.

Annual expenditure as follows:

- £100 pa for insurance
- £600 distributed to residents
- £100 set aside as reserves

Reserves are needed due to anticipated probable remedial work needed after tenancy is ended.

The land is registered in the name of West Somerton Poors land. The land is vested in Official Custodian. Advice was sought from the Charity Commission and the Ethical Property Foundation, with free advice also provided by a solicitor specialising in land tenancy. Trustees have been liaising with Natural England on this item.

### **Parishioner questions and comments:**

- 1) Parishioner: As the tenancy agreement was set up before 1953 it was suggested that there would be a right to succession to the tenancy.
  - a. Mr Lees replied that this was not considered to be correct, however the advice was noted.
- 2) Parishioner: How was the £600 to residents distributed?
  - a. Mr Lees replied £100 each was awarded to six different people.
- 3) Parishioner: Have the Trustees applied to the Countryside Stewardship scheme or other Award schemes?
  - a. Mr Lees replied that they have looked into this but don't feel it's applicable to them. The parishioner suggested that this was reviewed as it was felt that funds may be available.

### **Appendix B – Staithe and Boat Dyke Trustees Report (Mr D. Shuker, Secretary of Staithe Trust)**

In July 2023 Mr Brett Hurrell became a trustee and agreed to become the Chair of the Trust.

The four trustees (Chris Grote (ex-officio), Brett Hurrell (chair) David Shuker (secretary), Jim Whitehouse (treasurer)) have met on four occasions since the last report and held an open meeting in October 2022. Four boat owners (out of 28 with assigned moorings) attended the open meeting.

In January 2023 a new mooring agreement was sent out to all boat owners with moorings. Despite a number of reservations about the new agreement expressed by several boat owners, notably relating to the introduction of a mooring fee, 24 out of 28 boat owners paid the requested fee (or designated it a donation) and several settled outstanding 2022 donations. Advice was sought from other organisations with similar responsibility for mooring. Martham Boat Dyke Trust advised that we should have separate insurance. Insurance cost c. £500 pa.

Having requested quotations from three insurers the Trust took out an insurance policy with Hiscox which offered an appropriate cover for the activities of the Trust at the lowest cost.

In September 2022 weed was cleared from the boat dyke by a weed basket of the Broads Internal Drainage Board and this is an annual recurring cost to the Trust.

The Trust also sought the advice of a qualified arborist about the leaning oak tree on the north bank near Horsey Road and although we were reassured to learn that there was little risk of it falling into the dyke it will need some attention over the course of the year and several quotes are being sought for this work

The trustees will be convening an open meeting of boatowners and residents on 10th October 2023.

**Parishioner questions and comments:**

- 1) Parishioner: For 35 years all meetings of the trustees have been held in public in the village hall. Mr Shuker was asked why meetings are now held in private (apart from a single open annual meeting in October).
  - a. Mr Shuker replied that there was nothing to suggest that all meetings should be held in public. The Trustees have been appointed to run the Trust to their best ability and they feel that it is appropriate to hold planning meetings in private.
- 2) Parishioner: The Agenda of the open meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022 didn't include the mooring fee. It was felt that this should have been included and made public then.
  - a. Mr Shuker accepted that this was an oversight and that with hindsight it should have been included.  
Parishioner follow up: The new copy of the mooring agreement has been made available, however it is felt that this should have been made more public.
  - b. Mr Shuker replied that 24 of 28 people have paid the mooring fee, which was a good return. However, the Trustees are mindful of comments and may revisit the mooring agreement.
- 3) Parishioner: Is it time to review the Constitution?
  - a. Mr Shuker replied that there is no constitution, merely governing documents.
- 4) Parishioner: A boat owner was concerned about the suitability of the slipway. Also noted that a commercial boat was in the way of their boat, which mean they had to clamber over it to get to their boat.
  - a. Mr Shuker replied that the slipway is only suitable for light vessels. A notice may be placed at the end of the slipway suggesting this. It had been considered to construct a more substantial slipway, but this had received negative feedback. A revised risk assessment addressing the use of the Staithe was being undertaken and would be available at the October 2023 meeting.
- 5) Parishioner: it was noted that the Trustees were appointed by the Somerton Parish Council. What responsibility was there for them to report back to the Council?
  - a. Mr Shuker replied that there was no responsibility or expectation for them to report to the Parish Council. The Council, as Custodian Trustee, has no input into the day to day management of the Trust, with its only duty being to nominate two Trustees every 2 years.
- 6) Parishioner (Winterton boat owner): the present Trustees are working hard and doing good works and helping to sort out the problems. They deserve praise and appreciation for their efforts.
  - a. Mr Shuker noted this with thanks.
- 7) Parishioner: Can the Commission include Winterton boat owners as Trustees?
  - a. Mr Shuker replied that this wasn't possible due to the PC Act 1974.
- 8) Parishioner: A Trustee resigned on 27<sup>th</sup> June but has not been replaced. Should this position not be filled?
  - a. Mr Shuker replied that the Trustees were quorate and had continued as such, however he accepted that a new Trustee should be sought to bring up numbers to requisite level.

**Appendix C – Village Hall Charity Report (Mr S. Ashton, Chairman of Village Hall Committee)**

The aim for the last year was to increase bookings for the hall which was done successfully with a profit (£90) being made for the first time. Thanks to all the volunteers who help out at the village hall to make this happen.

The 2022 fete made c. £4K profit, with £2K going to the VH funds and £2K going to the Church fund.

The recent Coronation event was well attended with nearly 70 residents attending, with cakes and drinks served.

Upgrades to the hall are planned, with various grants providing the majority of the funds for this. This means that the VH reserves of £32K will remain largely unused.

The 2023 Fete is planned for 19<sup>th</sup> August at 1pm.

Looking into the future, it likely that a new hall will be required, possibly costing up to £500K.

- 1) Parishioner: How much money did the VH get from the government for COVID?
  - a. Mr Ashton replied that the VH received £10,000 from the government as compensation for loss of income due to COVID.