

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Portbury Residents
held in the Village Hall, High Street, Portbury
on Tuesday 17th May 2018 at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr Mrs Cowlard Cllr Mrs Coles Cllr Romanski Cllr Mr Coles
Cllr Longstaff

Chairman: Cllr Phipps

Clerk: Mrs Drower

Others: Thirty five members of the public
Mr Summerfield – ROW Representative

1. **Introduction** – Councillor Phipps welcomed residents and explained the purpose of the meeting. He also introduced Councillors individually and explained their role within the Council. Residents were requested to turn-off mobile devices and advised of emergency exit locations.
2. **Convening of Meeting** – Cllr Phipps read the Notice to convene the meeting and was accepted as Chairman for the proceedings.
3. **Minutes of previous Annual Parish Meeting held 17th May 2017** – The Minutes were signed as a correct record of the proceedings. From this year the council will now publish the minutes of this year's meeting as soon as they are available on the website, instead of waiting a year as previous practice.
4. **Statement of Parish Accounts 2017/18**
Mrs Drower presented the end of year accounts. Income received totalled £23,690.57; expenditure totalled £22,683.79, leaving a balance of £1006.78. As at 31st March 2018, closing bank balances were £33500.17 including a ring-fenced amount of £7111.08 which has been reserved for the parish plan development, play scheme, village defibrillator and Village Green improvements and maintenance.

Mrs Drower also advised that the Notice of date of commencement of period for the exercise of public rights had been placed, and that residents could view the relevant financial documents and annual return year ended 31.03.18 between 06.06.18 and 20.07.18 at the Council's offices.

A full set of financial statements would be available to view on the parish website.

Cllr Phipps then explained to residents about current years precept and any increase. “You’ve seen the financial statement and a breakdown of where our precept income is spent. You’ll see that 56% of our funds are expended on administrative support, which seems a high amount, but is comparable with other Parish Councils in the area. The high percentage is due in part because there have been few increases in the precept within your rates over the last 20 years, whilst costs have gone up, so arguably the precept should be much more to cover the non-administrative areas of our budget. An issue that has been taxing us, me in particular, is to try to make the Council sustainable in terms of being able to secure future Councillors, especially a Chair of the Council. Over the years more and more work has rested on the shoulders of your Chair, in part because of changes in the support of North Somerset, but also it has to be said that Councillors have been gradually less willing and able to take on some of the responsibilities of looking after our Parish. This is no-one’s fault, it has just been a slow and progressive process. I think the past 2 retiring Chairs have therefore been very relieved to give up the job and have not stayed on to lend any support to the new Chair. Due to concerns about pension liabilities and cost risks, it was decided some years ago to place a contract for the administrative workload associated with the Council, rather than having a direct employee. The number of hours associated with this contract is fixed and is insufficient, in my view, to provide the level of help and support that your Council and Chair needs to keep on top of the work needed and to progress with any project that might need attention. It is for this reason that your Council has increased the precept yet again for this year in order to provide more hours for the administration needs that I see. We hope to make an appointment of a Parish Clerk within the next several months, on a part time basis, possibly for 15 to 20 hours a week. If we are successful in achieving this then the workload of Councillors will be eased, and this will, critically, make the job and task of being a Councillor much easier. We will then also begin to build a wider level of knowledge and expertise within the Clerk Role, meaning that when Councillors change, as they are bound to do, experience and knowledge isn’t lost making the role of new Councillors rather daunting and off putting. We hope therefore that in the future other members of our Community will feel able to put their own names forward for election as a Councillor with the knowledge that they will be well supported in the role.”

5. Portbury Parish Council Chairman’s Report

“It has been a busy and challenging year for your Parish Council and Councillors. We started the year with 7 Council members, one less than our complement, and later in the year we lost 3 of these due to a combination of circumstances. The workload amongst Councillors has therefore been unusually heavy and this has at times meant that we have not been able to progress things as quickly as we would have liked. The Neighbourhood Plan has therefore been very slow in moving forward, with the task of analysing last year’s questionnaire being an action that has had to take its turn, until recently. I’m happy to say that we now do have 4 new Councillors, appointed earlier in the year, and they are contributing to the work of the Council in differing ways. I welcome Wenda Cowlard Tony Coles Jo Coles and Keith Lanham They are learning the ropes at the moment but already contributing to reducing my own workload. At the same time we lost a further Councillor and so we are now back down to 7”

Cllr Phipps offered his thanks to all the work the councilors do and thanked the new members for joining.

Cllr Phipps asked the members of the general public to put their names forward if anyone is interested in filling the 8th place.

Traffic and Transport –

“We’ve seen the start of the implementation of the traffic calming measures that we’ve fought for over a long period of time. The measures aren’t complete yet, we will be seeing road markings and some repeater signs over the coming weeks. Already, we believe, traffic is moving more slowly on approach from the A369, and we have hard data to support this. There are still about 3000 vehicles a day, on average, exceeding 20mph. But vehicles exceeding 30mph are averaging about 1000 per day, which is a 50% reduction from previous surveys. We will continue to monitor the situation and request more measures if we feel necessary. It would be of immense help if we could get a speed watch up and running – we have asked so many times now for volunteers. If a group of residents could spare just one hour a month we could “police” the roads in and out of the village and get the numbers of offending cars even lower. Since last year we have managed to get the barriers on the footbridge replaced, this has made an improvement to the occurrence of motor bikes there. Whilst no road repairs have taken place we believe that there will be some funding in 2019 for us, we are assessing our priorities at the moment. The traffic orders for weight limits through the village have now been updated, some of you will have seen changes in signage. Happily the occurrence of big HGV lorries has reduced, but we are still badgering Highways England to listen to our problem and to think about signage on the M5. We think the main offenders now are lorries using a car satnav to find Nailsea off the M5 South. Some signage might be possible, but this won’t happen before 2020. Parking is a continuing issue in the village, the Bluebell weekends gave us a number of problems again. Cooperation with the Rugby Club did help in terms of knowing about pinch points. Traffic cones were used to help residents who had rogue cars outside their houses. Whilst we are getting better at supporting the event, it hasn’t got much better in terms of parking congestion. Happily though, we had a very successful few weekends raising over £4000 for our community and nominated charity. We’ve managed to get some improvements to our footpaths, making 2 key areas more useable for the ambulant disabled. Drop kerbs have been installed on Mill Lane near the bus stop, and also on the path on the west side of Priory Road. Some trip hazards have also been cured. There may be more to do. NSC responded very positively when we posed this problem to them and incorporated the work into their 20mph budget.”

Communication matters -

“We took the decision to withdraw from Facebook when we came under heavy criticism whilst trying to get started on a project to improve the Village Green. Whilst some of us voluntarily monitor Facebook for useful information, we will be posting on there without the facility for people to comment. If you need to comment to us please use e-mail. I would ask all who use Facebook to also consider their choice of language and to moderate their verbal attacks on officers of North Somerset Council. The language used sometimes does no credit to us, and hence the Parish Council will not be using Facebook as a means of collecting views.”

Planning Control -

“Whilst there has been no large scheme to be considered by the Council, there has been the normal steady flow of smaller applications. We are now better informed about the planning climate at a Central Government level, especially as a result of some

appeals that have been running. In the reports by the planning inspector on these appeal cases it is clear that your Parish Council's position and view has been both respected and supported by the inspector, against the views of North Somerset. We feel therefore that this puts us in a better position to guide the Parish through the final stages of the process of writing our own neighbourhood plan. Our general position on planning applications remains one of being in general supportive of what residents are aiming to achieve, as long as this does not seem unreasonable in the context of our semi-rural setting. If a scheme makes a house more useable and family focussed, then we will try to find a way of helping and supporting the application. If it takes cars off the street we will certainly help, if it adds cars to the street parking, we will be less helpful."

Litter -

"We are plagued by litter everywhere. Our efforts to clean up Mill Lane fell on deaf ears because of the issue of safety and traffic control costs on the part of NSC. A plucky, brave lady volunteer has been seen picking up the mountain of rubbish on Mill Lane over a period of several weeks. We wish to say a big thank you to whoever that was. We suffer from a lot of passing bus travellers, who use the bus stops on the A369, who drop litter as they pass, having bought a meal at the services. After a dialogue with Welcome Break we secured a donation to pay for a bin at the A369 Bristol stop on Martcombe Road, this is soon to be installed. As you might be aware NSC are cutting back on bin emptying services and so we will have to absorb the cost of emptying and disposing of the rubbish from this bin. Another reason why our precept comes under pressure. The Portbury Hundred is due to be cleared of litter during some road closures in June – details to be released soon. The road will be closed overnight on several occasions, so watch out."

Lengthsman -

"Our long serving lengthsman, Brian Weeks, retired recently and moved from the village. We wish him well. Brian leaves behind him not only a gap in knowledge but also, we now can't assume that tasks will be picked up quickly, as Brian used to drive through the village every day. He also used to house our waste bin on his own land, thus we've had to move this down to the footbridge. We also now need at least one green waste bin, and maybe a second for the allotments. The new lengthsman, Brian's son, Kevin, is now employed under contract and has now picked up all the duties needed, but the cost of this is greater than previously. We've checked prices and find that this contract is comparable with other people who offer this kind of service."

Flooding and sewerage problems -

"The storm drains in the village have been gradually filling up with debris and again due to lack of attention by NSC they got to a critical state in several places. Heavy rain comes in July and so we managed to get NSC to clear them all and get us back to a good state. They will only do this once a year however and so we have decided to pay for an extra clean, after the major leaf fall in November so that we minimise the risk of flooding at the bottom of Mill Lane. We are also digging out the ditches that run down to the Church to help to dissipate surface water when the drains can't cope. Again, this is an extra cost that we are absorbing. There have been several sewage problems too, the drain running from the village hall to the bottom of Priory Road has been a problem and we are not sure if it is cured yet. Please do not put wet wipes down the toilet – this is something that Wessex Water have reported back to us, particularly in the drain running from the school to the village hall."

Allotments -

“We are trying to get the allotment site rejuvenated. There have been a lot of changes in the plot holders over recent years and some we believe find the plot size too big. There are vacant plots so if anyone is keen to have one, at a cost of £27.50 per year plus a £50 bond then get in touch. We plan to erect a communal shed down there so that there is a central facility for the storage of small tools etc. We also need an area to be allocated for green and other waste.”

Free School Transport -

“There has been a major issue with the attempt by NSC to remove the free bus service to Gordano School. This was not handled properly and NSC have conceded this and restored the service after a lot of interventions by parents and your Council. There remains confusion and worry about the future of this service and the options for choosing St Katherine’s or Gordano for 11 plus year olds. What I have managed to glean is as follows. We are pretty much equi-distant in terms of a walking route from both St Katherine’s and Gordano. We are within the 3 mile guide line for consideration of provision of Travel Assistance to get to either School, ie we don’t automatically get travel assistance. The subject of travel assistance is not linked to catchment area – parents can choose either, and sibling rules apply. However, when applying for your child to go to secondary school it is the parent’s responsibility to get the child to the nearest access point for travel, assisted or not, and to accompany the child as necessary. Children with special needs will get travel assistance in an appropriate form. This has taken the form of a school bus for many years and this helped when there was no credible direct bus alternative to either school, the walking route being unsafe for children. When there are free spaces on a subsidised bus parents can “buy” a seat for their child, this is billed by NSC. There is now a better service to Gordano and St Katherine’s, in the form of the X3/X4 and the 88 buses. NSC are reviewing the provision of school transport and will revisit the Portbury situation in July, ready for the September term. The cost of each bus to Gordano and St Katherine’s is about £27,000 per year. The cost of each First Group service bus is about £100000 per year (7 day a week all day service). Though we are all unhappy about these changes we can nevertheless see why this is happening.”

The playing field -

“I’m delighted to see that a group of parents has got together to arrange a summer event for kids on the Playing Field in June. The Parish Council was delighted to support this request, it is just the sort of thing that the field is intended for. Let’s hope for a sunny day.”

Neighbourhood Plan –

Cllr Phipps gave a slide presentation to the public. Cllr Phipps explained that the plan is not about stopping development, but about influencing future planning decisions. A lot of work has already gone into the plan, including sending out various questionnaires to the parishioners to find out their views on future planning and needs for Portbury. Identified on the slide presentation are the areas which are currently within the list of sites notified to NSC as having potential for future development. Currently the development density per acre is far too high, and the plan will put forward proposals for a development with less per acre. Cllr Phipps also commented that affordable housing was a real concern for residents, who want more.

Councillor Vacancies -

A final request for residents who can help us with running our Parish Council. We have one vacancy at the moment, and over time there are bound to be changes. As I've explained we plan to make the task of being a Councillor less onerous, and hopefully more fulfilling. If there are people with any time to give, then please step up. You will be asked to take on something, but you will be supported by an employed Parish Clerk.

Priorities for the next 12 months -

Settle in the service of the new lengthsman in order to keep the village tidy at reasonable cost Monitor the 20mph speed limit and take action if necessary – promote a speedwatch. Examine the condition of the War Memorial and secure grants for its upkeep. Employ a Parish Clerk for 15 hours a week – and up to 20. Complete the Neighbourhood Plan. Rejuvenate the Allotments.

We want Portbury to continue to be a desirable place to live for all. People should have the certainty that, having chosen to live in the village, they can be assured that the aspects of living in Portbury that are most valued are protected as far as is possible despite the inevitable changes in the world around us

6. Open Forum – Q & As

Cllr Phipps opened a question and answer session, topics included; planning and the memorial.

One resident enquired if the number of responses as a %age of the residents to the development questionnaire would count as it was so low. Cllr Phipps responded that a bigger number would have been better, but the low number would still count.

One resident commented that he was concerned that one of the proposed development sites to the left of Portbury Hundred is on a flood plain.

One resident expressed concerns that the development of Portishead would come nearer and nearer to Portbury.

One resident expressed concerns over the safety of the war memorial. Cllr Longstaff commented that the memorial has been assessed by an architect, who said the memorial was safe.

A resident pointed out that the new give way sign at the junction of Caswell Lane and High Street was the wrong way round. This was noted.

A resident observed that the Council had changed its standing orders and now residents were not permitted to take part in discussions during a Council meeting. The

resident expressed his concern about this. Cllr Phipps pointed out that this was in line with how all Parish and Town Councils were supposed to operate. Residents do have the opportunity to speak on a subject, but this is before the formal meeting starts. The Chair can suspend standing orders if appropriate to allow fuller discussion, and this has been done with some of the questionnaire topics. But once the Council is in formal session then residents cannot exert influence on the discussion in order to influence the outcome. This is how democracy is supposed to work. The resident commented that the new standing orders were not on the website. It was confirmed that they would be updated shortly along with a number of policy documents.

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Cllr Phipps thanked residents for attending and the meeting closed at 9.30pm

Signed as a true record of proceedings;

Name:

Position:

Date: