

**Minutes of the Town Council held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 at 7.30pm, in Bruton Community Hall**

**Councillors present:** Baker, Batemen, Buckland, Coulter, Crawford, Dunn, Fradley, Hood (Vice Chair), Jones, Robinson, Taylor.

**In the Chair:** Cllr Hood.

**Officers present:** Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk.

Apologies have been received from Somerset Councillor Power, and Cllr Trimnell will be late due to attending another parish council meeting.

**Members of the public:** 4.

**Public session started at: 7.30pm**

Cllr Hood confirmed that the School Streets question and answer session will take place next week, before the Town Committee meeting.

A member of the public raised an enquiry regarding the accuracy of the pamphlets of local walking routes in Bruton. Up to date information about local walking routes in Bruton is available on the Walks in Bruton website. The Somerset Council Footpath Officer is Eve Wynn.

A member of the public had some comments related to the Land North of Brewham Road planning application, which is on this agenda for discussion. Thanks were extended to Cllr Jones for speaking at the Planning Committee - South meeting held in November 2024. The member of the public was invited to speak again before the agenda item was discussed by councillors.

**Public session ended at: 7.35 pm**

**Meeting started at: 7.35pm**

**MINUTES**

**24/127: Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972 s85(1)).**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Anderton.

**It was RESOLVED [11-0-0] [for-against-abstain] to accept and approve the apologies submitted and the reasons given.**

It was noted that Cllr Cullen was not in attendance.

**24/128: Declarations of Interest.**

Members to declare any interests, including disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI) they may have in agenda items that accord with the requirements of the Town Council's Code of Conduct and to consider any written requests from members for dispensations that accord with the Localism Act 2011 s33 (b-e) (This does not preclude any later declaration).

None.

**24/129: Minutes of the previous meeting (LGA 1972 sch 12 para 41 (1)).**

To receive, approve and sign [the minutes of the last Town Council meeting](#) held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024 as a true and accurate record.

**It was RESOLVED [11-0-0] to receive, approve and sign the minutes from the full council meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024 as a true and accurate record of that meeting.**

Cllr Hood signed the minutes.

**24/130: Reports from Somerset Councillors:**

- a. Lucy Trimmell – will be arriving late.
- b. Tom Power sent apologies.

A monthly report has been received and circulated for both December and January.

**24/131: Minutes and Recommendations from Committees and from those Working Groups that report to the Full Council:**

- a. Finance and Resources Committee. to receive the minutes from the meetings held on [3<sup>rd</sup> December](#) and 13<sup>th</sup> January (if available) and to note or approve any recommendations as required.
  - i. To note that the annual pay award for officers was agreed and has been applied.
  - ii. It was recommended that payment for an additional 31 hours to the Deputy Clerk was agreed, as legacy hours prior to the commencement of employment of the current Town Clerk, and a further 16 hours were

to be taken as Time Off In Lieu (TOIL) before the end of the financial year.

- iii. It was recommended that the Town Clerk takes some 54 additional hours accumulated as a handover period prior to her employment starting, as TOIL, before the end of the current financial year.

**It was RESOLVED [11-0-0] to note the annual pay award, to approve the payment for 31 additional hours with 16 hours to be taken as TOIL, and to approve that the Town Clerk is to take 54 additional hours worked, as TOIL.**

- iv. To consider and agree the draft Reserves Policy.  
The minimum level of general reserves held by the town council was discussed at length. There was some debate as to whether the minimum level is 3 or 6 months of Net Revenue Expenditure, or if it is 25% or 50% of Net Revenue Expenditure. Some Councillors felt that 25% was too low, and that the phrase recommended (that the council has an aspirational target for General Reserves to reach 50% Net Revenue Expenditure over the coming years) to be removed by Finance and Resources Committee, should be reinstated.

The level of general reserves top up will be discussed during the budget setting agenda item, to enable the budget and precept to be set, and not during part of agenda item 24/144b.

**It was RESOLVED [9-1-1] that the draft Reserves Policy be approved as circulated, but with the phrase ‘the council has an aspirational target of 50% of Net Revenue expenditure’ included.**

- v. To note that the [Risk Register](#) was reviewed. The Risk Register needs to be formally reviewed and agreed by full council before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.  
**Noted.**
- vi. To note that the [Investment Policy](#) was reviewed.  
**Noted.**

**b. Planning and Consultation Response Committee.**

To receive [the minutes from the meeting](#) held on 4<sup>th</sup> December and to note or approve any recommendations and decisions as required.

**Noted.**

**c. Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Group – to receive any updates. The group is due to meet on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025.**

**Noted.**

- d. BruBowl Working Group. To receive any updates.

The Brubowl Working group needs to meet.

**24/132: To discuss and agree the budget for 2025/2026**

To receive the recommendations from Finance and Resources Committee regarding the proposed budget for 2025/26. To agree budget for 2025/26 in principle, subject to any resolutions passed during confidential agenda item 24/141.

The chair requested that in setting reserves, councillors take into account the potential expenditure involved in legal advice about the judicial review, so that the budget can be set in open session.

The budget has been scrutinised very carefully, three times, by the Finances and Resources Committee. Cllr Jones overviewed the recent Finance and Resources Committee meetings, and also the Town Meeting (held on 7<sup>th</sup> January). The final budget proposal has been reduced considerably from the starting figure in November 2024. Budget items such as the Enhanced Highways Maintenance Scheme, walls and tree maintenance were reduced from the initial consideration. Individual questions were welcomed from councillors:

- The amount proposed for tree work was queried. Some tree work is already planned, with a small amount available in the budget for next year for any additional works required.
- The amount that was initially suggested to carry out works on gravestones and memorials in the closed churchyard has been reduced to £7500. Having a budget provision will ensure that these works are considered, and hopefully a better idea of actual cost will be available for the budget setting process next year.

Cllr Jones commended the Finance and Resources Committee, and officers, for their work and examining the budget in this level of detail.

Some councillors expressed a desire to keep the budget at a lower level, however it was recognised that an increase was essential. It was also agreed that General Reserves top up was required.

It was proposed to set the budget as recommended, £262,758.04 which includes a general reserve top of just over £15,432, taking the general reserve to just over £65,500.

**It was RESOLVED [11-0-0] to agree the 2025/26 budget at the recommended level of £262,758.04, which includes a general reserve top up of just over £15,432.**

**24/133: To agree and set the precept for 2025/2026**

To receive any recommendation from Finance and Resources Committee regarding setting the precept demand for 2025/2026. To agree the precept amount for 2025/26, subject to any resolutions passed during confidential agenda item 24/141.

As a result of setting a budget of £262,758.04, it was proposed to set a precept demand at £255,505 (rounded to the nearest £1).

**It was RESOLVED [11-0-0] to agree a precept demand for £255,505 to be submitted to Somerset Council.**

**24/134: Bruton Library**

To nominate and approve a councillor to be a trustee for Bruton Library.

Cllr Anderton has agreed to be appointed as a trustee for Bruton Library, as a town council representative, and was subsequently proposed.

**It was RESOLVED [11-0-0] to nominate Cllr Anderton to be appointed as a trustee for Bruton Library, as a town council representative.**

**24/135: Planning application 20/02297/OUT, Land North of Brewham Road, Bruton.**

To consider new submissions relating to this application following Somerset Council Planning Committee (South)'s decision on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024 to defer determination of the application.

With the Chair's agreement the Council was addressed by a member of the public who occupies a property adjoining the site of the proposed development, and is therefore in a good position to understand the practicalities of the access proposals. Among the points made were the following:

- Wyvern Close was designed as a residential cul-de-sac and is not wide enough for access to a housing development of this size. Double yellow lines outside 12 dwellings would be required to enable the refuse collection lorry to pass, and permitted parking by blue badge holders would still constitute an obstruction. (The dwellings are sheltered and social housing, several of whose residents are usually Blue Badge holders; currently there are two).
- Although there is a field gate at the end of Wyvern Close it is not used by farm vehicles, as Wyvern Close is so narrow and the access roads (Eastfields and

Brue Avenue) are so difficult to negotiate. Instead, farm vehicles use the much more convenient and accessible field gate on the Brewham Road.

- Vehicles leaving Wyvern Close and intending to travel northwards are currently directed by (at least four different) Satnav services to access Frome Road via Eastfield, and this would be the same for access to and from the proposed development. It is simply not realistic to expect traffic travelling to or from the north along Frome Road to prefer the much longer, roundabout route via the Brewham Road. Yet Somerset Council members and officers have already recognised that Eastfield is too narrow to accommodate a substantial increase in traffic flow.
- For these reasons, the current access proposals are simply not viable.

The proposed development was then discussed by Councillors who expressed support for the remarks made by the resident and made several additional points including the following:

- In response to previous iterations of this application the Town Council has repeatedly explained why Wyvern Close is not suitable for vehicular access to the proposed development. The apparent unwillingness of the applicants and the Highways Authority even to entertain this, let alone to consider viable alternatives, is extremely disappointing.

When this application was discussed by members of Planning Committee (South) at their meeting on 26th November 2024 it was demonstrated “*that delivery of the site would be unviable*”.

- Since Bruton Town Council has promoted the interests of pedestrians in and around the town for many years it cannot recommend approval of the very poor pedestrian access arrangements which have been proposed. More recently Somerset Council has proclaimed its commitment to ‘*Active Travel*’, but unless the Planning Authority insists on improved pedestrian access the Council’s ‘commitment’ will be seen as no more than paying lip service.
- The proposed development could be greatly improved if it were to include direct vehicular and pedestrian access to Brewham Road. The proposed vehicular access through the long, narrow and winding roads of an existing housing estate is demonstrably inferior and inadequate.
- Were direct access via Brewham Road to be adopted, the proposed GP Surgery could be located at the southern end of the site where it would be much more easily and readily accessed by most patients, both on foot and by car.
- Direct access via Brewham Road would necessitate the removal of a short section of roadside hedgerow, but that hedgerow is not species-rich.

Removing a small section of it would be a small price to pay for the improved wellbeing of existing Eastfield residents, future residents of the proposed development, and patients, staff and suppliers of the proposed new surgery.

**It was RESOLVED [10-0-1] that Bruton Town Council:**

- 1. Welcomes the applicant's commitment to the provision of a new GP Practice within the site of the proposed development, noting that the local Health Authority has deemed a new surgery a top priority and there are very few viable alternative sites;**
- 2. Supports the decision by Somerset Council's Planning Committee - South (the Committee) to defer determination of the application, pending resolution of a *"request for further traffic impact assessments for the Cuckoo Hill access to the part of the site proposed to be safeguarded for a GP practice;"***
- 3. Is dismayed that in the file note of 11/12/2024 the case officer dismisses the Committee's request, asserting that in respect of the proposed GP practice, *"any highways impacts, including the Cuckoo Hill access, fall beyond the scope of this application"* [emphasis in original];**
- 4. Is equally dismayed that in the file note the case officer contends that this application should be determined without considering the viability of access to the proposed GP practice (if a principle is not viable it cannot be safeguarded);**
- 5. Recommends that the proposed GP practice be relocated at the southern end of the site, providing level and shorter access to the town centre, along or parallel to Brewham Road.**

There followed a short recess for 5 minutes, at 8.28pm.

Cllr Taylor gave apologies and left the meeting at 8.31pm.

The meeting restarted at 8.33pm.

**24/136: Bank Reconciliations.**

- a. To approve the bank reconciliations for the current and deposit accounts and credit card for the period 1<sup>st</sup> November to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024, and 1<sup>st</sup> December to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024.
- b. To note that Cllr Fradley attended the community office to view and sign the bank reconciliations to 31<sup>st</sup> October, 30<sup>th</sup> November and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

**It was RESOLVED [10-0-0] to approve the bank reconciliations for all town council bank accounts as listed above, and to note that Cllr Fradley attended the community office to view and sign the reconciliations.**

**24/137: Accounts for Payment.**

- a. To receive the list of payments made in December 2024.
- b. To approve [payments list](#) for January 2025.
- c. To delegate to the clerk, in consultation with the Chair and the Vice Chair, to make agree any additional payments for January 2025 within budget limits or those payments that are for services and orders agreed by Full Council or Committees at previous meetings. The list of payments will be presented to Full Council at the February Full Council meeting.

**It was RESOLVED [10-0-0] to approve the payments lists as detailed above, and to delegate to the clerk as detailed, to make additional payments for January 2025 as per item c above.**

**24/138: Transfer of funds between bank accounts**

- a. To note the transfer of £15,000 made by the clerk from the CCLA deposit account to the Unity Trust current account for December 2024 payments.  
**Noted.**
- b. To note the transfer of £15,000 to be made in January to meet the January 2025 payments.  
**Noted.**
- c. To approve a transfer of additional funds from CCLA deposit account to Unity Trust Current account in order to pay the invoice for the installation of the zip wire (approximately £15,000) upon successful installation (due to be installed w/c 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025).

**It was RESOLVED [10-0-0] to approve the additional transfer of £15,000 as detailed, in order to process the payment for the installation of the zip wire.**

**24/139: South East Somerset Local Community Network (SES LCN)**

A survey has been received from the SES LCN to be completed. To consider delegating completion of the survey to Cllr Jones and town council officers.

**It was RESOLVED [10-0-0] to delegate the completion of the LCN survey to Cllr Jones with council officers.**

**24/140: Clerk's Report.**

To receive [a short report](#) from the Town Clerk to update on ongoing matters. The report has been published on the town council website.

**Noted.**

**24/141: Reports - to receive reports from:**

Cllr Trimmell gave a short oral report, overviewing the current boundary change consultation. Somerset Council have set up a working party to collate and submit initial suggestions for the boundary review, as a starting point. The Chair and Vice Chair of the working party voted against the proposal, therefore there is no submission from Somerset Council. A time extension has been requested, in order that a response may be submitted. Initial impressions are that Bruton and Wincanton may be in separate wards.

**a. Members representing the Council on outside bodies.**

None.

**b. Town Councillors.**

Cllr Jones commented that there is no proposal for the boundary commission currently, but it is likely there will be in the summer.

Cllr Crawford had occasion to call in the police recently. Officers were very efficient, understanding and sympathetic.

Cllr Fradley commented that the zip wire installation was progressing quickly, it's very exciting.

Cllr Hood met the owner of the woods at Higher Tolbury. The dead ash trees are going to be felled, and replanted with native species trees. Both footpaths are likely to be closed to permit the works to go ahead safely.

**c. Chair.**

None.

**24/142: Date of the next meeting of the Full Council:** The next full council meeting is Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2025, 7.30pm at the Community Hall.

Agenda items to the clerk for consideration by Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

**24/143: Exclusion of Press and Public**

To consider the exclusion of press and public for the remainder of the meeting under the Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings Act 1960, Section 1 (2), on the grounds that discussion of agenda item 24/144 is commercially sensitive.

**It was RESOLVED [10-0-0] to exclude the press and public from agenda item 24/144 as it is commercially sensitive.**

**Meeting closed at: 8.45pm.**

**Confidential session opened at: 8.45pm.**

**24/144: Judicial Review in respect of 19/00655/OUT**

- a. To consider advice on whether to apply for judicial review of Somerset Council's recent decision to approve this Planning application, and to decide on the next steps.

Members were given an oral summary of a briefing note that had been circulated to members and published on the Council website earlier, and which summarised the Judicial Review process and possible costs. They discussed whether seeking Judicial Review would be an appropriate response to Somerset Council's handling of this application, and then went on to review the risks, potential costs and potential benefits of pursuing such a course, and considered how such an initiative might be funded.

**It was RESOLVED [8-0-2] to instruct a barrister for advice and a Letter Before Claim (at a cost of £5000 and £1,500 [+VAT] respectively), to be funded from General Reserves, as agreed earlier in the meeting under item 24/132 (Council budget for 2025/26).**

**It was RESOLVED [10-0-0] to request that the interested Residents proceed in parallel with the preparation of a CrowdJustice crowd-funder, for launch ahead of submission the Letter Before Claim.**

- b. To make decisions on any funding in the 2025/26 budget (and any subsequent precept request increase) that may be required for the investigation and possible implementation of the judicial review process. This item was no longer required, since the budget was finalised and approved during agenda item within the main meeting.

**Meeting closed: 9.10pm**

**END OF MINUTES**