



**Cheddon
Fitzpaine
Parish
Council**

December '21 *SEASON'S GREETINGS* from *CFPC!*

NEWSLETTER

Websites: www.cfpc.co.uk & www.cheddonfitzpainevillagehall.co.uk

SPECIAL 'FUTURE OF OUR PARISH' ISSUE

WHAT'S GOING ON?

On the 19th of October, a surprise decision was reached at a 'full' meeting of Somerset West & Taunton Council (SWT), which has given this and other parish councils grave cause for concern. At that meeting it was resolved:

“that a community governance review be undertaken of the unparished area of Taunton and surrounding parishes (Trull, Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove, Kingston St. Mary, Cheddon Fitzpaine, West Monkton) with a view to the creation of a parish or parishes and council(s) to serve all or part of that area.”

Although not obvious from the vague form of words above, SWT's clear ambition is to create a new Taunton Council that covers not just the town but also some or all of the existing and well-established surrounding parishes.

'SURPRISE' DECISION?

We have it on good authority that this 'full' SWT council meeting did not include a significant number of Councillors, who had decided not to attend in the firm belief that the meeting was going to adopt the recommendation of SWT's own Working Party. That recommendation was that any new Town Council should consist only of the currently unparished area – a recommendation based, among other things, upon expensive legal advice received from a QC! In the event, the meeting simply overturned the recommendation of its own Working Group, ignored the opening guidance from the Chair that the business of the meeting was confined to considering the options already on the table, and proceeded to consider – and then vote for – an additional option put forward during the meeting. While this wasn't illegal and didn't break any rules, it certainly stretched the elastic of the democratic process as close to breaking point as you can get.

WHAT DOES THIS REVIEW MEAN TO US?

Read on, and we'll try and explain the implications in as clear and objective terms as we can. There's a fair bit of information to take in but *PLEASE* don't give up

half-way through. Be in no doubt: we're potentially at a cross-roads and what happens from now on is *REALLY* important to the future of our community.

WHAT'S THE 'UNPARISHED AREA'?

For *MANY* years now, part of Taunton has been an unparished area – mainly the centre of town, but reaching out to include Priorswood on our very doorstep. In practical terms, this situation has meant that SWT and its predecessors have had to pick up the tab for services provided to the 'unparished' community, which would normally be funded from the budget of a parish or town council, if one were in place. Of course, the district authority have to get that money from somewhere and the fact is that we in the surrounding parishes have been contributing to covering some of the costs of services in the unparished area through our council tax.

In actual fact, the parishing of the currently unparished area of Taunton to create a new Town Council is unquestionably a good thing, and is long overdue. Apart from being intrinsically unfair as explained above, the existing set-up is a bit untidy and inefficient – as is usually the case with exceptions to a general rule.

SO, WHAT'S YOUR PARISH COUNCIL AGAINST?

The bit we *DON'T* agree with is SWT's attempt to 'go large' with a new Taunton Town Council by annexing some or all of the surrounding parishes – including Cheddon Fitzpaine. To us, this amounts to nothing less than stealing the identity of our community. The question is: can the interests of a mixed urban and rural area like ours be properly served by a new Town Council that is likely to have a predominantly urban mentality and agenda? We seriously doubt it!

'IDENTITY THEFT' – ISN'T THAT A BIT EXTREME?

Well, not really. The prospect of being absorbed into a massive Town Council raises a number of fundamental issues. First and foremost, since 2011 (when the Conservative/Lib-Dem coalition government introduced a raft of community-based

Continued over

**Contributions for the February 2022
newsletter to the Parish Clerk by
16th January please!**

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legislation), the trend has been towards steadily devolving decision-making down to local-community level. It seems to us that what SWT are proposing goes completely against this principle.

Crucially, an integral part of the community legislation referred to above was that additional funding would be made available through a new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) with a bigger share given to communities that were willing and able to make their own Neighbourhood Plan – a kind of reward for taking the time and trouble to demonstrate that your neighbourhood has a cohesive ‘sense of place’.

This concept of giving us not only a real say over what happens in our immediate environment but also the money to make it happen is hard to fault. Surely, nobody has a better handle on what we want than we ourselves do. More to the point, it’s working very well in our Parish, witness the Neighbourhood Plan we’ve delivered jointly with West Monkton PC and the Maidenbrook Country Park and Somerset Wood – another joint project that is work in progress. The simple fact is that, consisting of ordinary residents working on a voluntary basis, Parish Councils are able to deliver exceptional value for not much money by applying common sense and local knowledge rather than party-political dogma.

WHAT EXACTLY IS ‘CIL’ MONEY?

SWT’s move is more than just a ‘land grab’, because the enlarged Town Council would also suck all the CIL money from the outlying parishes into its centralised coffers. CIL is a kind of tax levied on all commercial developers and home owners building anything with a footprint on the ground of 100m² or more. Currently, CIL revenue is gathered by district councils like SWT and paid out to parishes like ours in accordance with a formula set by the government. As you can imagine given the extensive residential development that is either in progress or planned in our area, the total CIL revenue from the parishes around Taunton is potentially huge. As things currently stand, we parish councils have the right to spend this money on capital projects in our parish as we see fit, provided we can demonstrate that what we’re doing is to the benefit of our community. This includes things like the country park, new sports facilities, extra rubbish bins, outdoor benches – the list is endless. If we let SWT get away with their attempted land and CIL-money grab, we will hand over control of our own destiny to some remote and unproven Town Council that will be free to spend the money generated in our parish somewhere else.

WHY HAS SWT CHOSEN TO DO THIS?

So, if it ain’t broke, then why are SWT trying to fix it? Interestingly, they haven’t really told us yet – which,

when you think about it, is a pretty startling omission! In the information they published following the meeting, they explained **the way** in which they plan to proceed with their ‘community governance review’ – but they haven’t yet given us **the reasons** for doing it in the first place! Are they doing it because they genuinely believe that being part of a giant Town Council is in the best interests of semi-rural parishes like ours? Or – as has been suggested to us – is this just a cynical attempt by an outgoing Lib-Dem majority District Council to create a power-base in a traditionally Lib-Dem area at the heart of the ‘unitary’ Somerset Council that will soon replace them in our currently Conservative-majority county?

As the saying goes, you pay your money and you take your choice – we truly don’t know what SWT’s real motivation is! Here at Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council, however, we can assure you that we don’t let party-political games get in the way of doing what’s best for our parishioners. Political parties come, and political parties go; but communities are much more important – and more enduring, provided they are allowed to look after themselves.

To give SWT their due, they have at least committed to carrying out a consultation exercise across the area potentially affected by their review before taking further action. Unfortunately (as was acknowledged at the famous meeting on October 19th), SWT are free to ignore the results of the consultation exercise provided they can give their reasons for doing so.

SO, WHAT SHOULD YOU DO ABOUT THIS?

That’s up to you but, before you act, please ask yourself the following questions that we think are the crux of this issue:

Where YOU feel you belong? What is the place that YOU and yours identify with? Is it Taunton Town? Or is it the immediate neighbourhood you live in, i.e. Nerrols, Maidenbrook, Rowford Village or Cheddon Village?

Who do you trust? Is it a Parish Council made up of unpaid volunteers with local knowledge about your community or some remote Town Council?

As a statutory consultee, your Parish Council will certainly be making its feelings known about what we consider to be an attempt to disempower this community. However, we do understand that you may not feel the same as we do and so we urge – no, we **IMPLORE** you to make your individual feelings known by completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it in the envelope provided (no need for a stamp). If enough of you do that, the majority view of the parish will be clearly demonstrated – to both this Parish Council and Somerset West & Taunton.

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More on SWT's review – what SALC think

Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council is a member of SALC (the Somerset Association of Local Councils). They have sent a letter to all the parish councils affected clearly stating that they share our view on SWT's review. Most of what the letter contains has already been covered in the preceding two-page report but the following is of particular relevance:

"It is the strong view of the Association that this should only be for the unparished area. We have not identified any ambition or inclination from any of the adjoining parish council areas that they should become part of a Town Council for Taunton. The Parish Councils surrounding Taunton have a long history of service to their local communities which often have different, and sometimes opposing interests to the residents of the unparished area. The new Council, if it is established, will be an untested body and adjoining councils may wish to see how it operates before considering whether or not they wish to be part of that body.

We recognise that some of the existing boundaries in the urban areas adjoining the unparished areas may be historical rather than logical but it is our view such issues may be handled through a governance review undertaken with appropriate consultation in the future. The Association is of the view that we should make our view that the adjoining Councils should not have been "dragged" into this issue but we would prefer to have your views before doing so."

Neighbourhood Plan revision

As already reported, Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton Parish Councils have submitted the revision of our joint Neighbourhood Plan (NP) to Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT). The NP – which sets out our vision for future development and policies which may be used to determine planning applications in the NP Area – is being consulted on before going to independent examination. Consultation runs until 5pm on Friday 17th December, 2021. The revised NP can be viewed on the SWT website at

www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/

and paper copies are also available to view at Cheddon Fitzpaine Memorial Hall, BACH, West Monkton Village Hall and Deane House. Anyone wishing to discuss this on the telephone can contact **Ann Rhodes, Strategy Specialist (Strategy & Planning Policy)** or a member of her team on **01823 356484**. If you want to comment on the NP this must be submitted in writing. There is a pro-forma available

on the above-mentioned website to help you structure comments, which can be posted to Planning Policy, Somerset West and Taunton Council, The Deane House, Taunton, TA1 1HE or e-mailed to strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Church Window

Due to lack of space in this special-issue newsletter, we regret that we are unable to carry the usual church reports and information re services. Please use the contact details below to find out what's happening across the benefice at this special time of year.

RECTOR: Rev. Mary Styles

Tel. 01823 451189; e-mail revmarye@gmail.com

Rev Jim Cox

Tel. 07967 817337; e-mail: jimcox11@gmail.com

Churchwarden: Diana Taylor Tel. 07808 158616

Administrator: Michele Hardiman on 01823 451257 or at office@southquantockbenefice.org.uk

'Adieu' to Rev Tracey Hallett

Well, we just couldn't bring ourselves to say 'goodbye' to someone who has made such a massive contribution to our community in so many ways. However, we must accept that our loss will be a career gain for Tracey herself and a real asset to her new flock in South Petherton. While we are sure that the community initiatives that Tracey has set up will carry on after she's gone, she will indeed be missed in these parts. Tracey will take up her new role in the New Year and her last local service will be at 10am on Sunday 26th December in West Monkton church.

As the saying goes: "Don't be a stranger, Tracey!" – and the same goes for Dean too.

Cheddon Fitzpaine Memorial Hall

I am pleased to report that the October 2nd fundraiser featuring local band Silverback was a great success, adding over £700 to our bank balance – exceptional for a single evening event. We thank all those who attended and sponsors Character Graphics, The Hamper Guys and Pyrland Farm.

Please note that we will be holding our **Annual General Meeting** in the hall at 7pm on the **7th of February, 2022**. As usual, it will be followed by our ordinary Trustee meeting.

Please also note in your diaries the following dates for winter/spring events next year: our next Quiz Night will be on Friday the 25th February, and we can look forward to the much-missed Cheddoners Variety Show on the 3rd, 4th and 5th of March (performances Thursday to Saturday as usual).

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Last but by no means least, I am sorry to announce that our cleaner, Sharon, is leaving us at the end of this year to move into full-time employment. Her contribution to the smooth running of the hall has been immense and we thank her for her efforts. Her departure leaves us with a big hole to fill, so would anyone who is interested in the job please contact either me or Bill Rigby for more information.

Malcolm Lown, Chairman, Cheddon Fitzpaine Memorial Hall Trustees Tel. 01823 412750
Email: info@cheddonfitzpainevillagehall.co.uk

Bill Rigby, Hall Manager

Tel. 01823 413925 (*messages answered within 2 working days*) Mobile: 07586 413290;
e-mail: memorialhall@hotmail.co.uk

Country Park & Somerset Wood report

Very grateful thanks are due to those individuals, couples, and families who gave up their time to come and volunteer in the Somerset Wood over half term. It was great fun meeting you all and seeing new faces; your enthusiasm is infectious and spurs the regular volunteers on. On the 30th October, over 50 hours of time was given; *THANK YOU!* The current average age of volunteers is 74 years, which we accept is the 'active retired'! I am looking at running fewer groups in the new year, but will aim for times that are more suitable to families. Watch this space." On Thursday, the 11th of November a short Service of Remembrance was held at the Somerset Wood Dedication Stone in the Country Park, where wreaths were laid by our Chair, Denise, and representatives of West Monkton PC, SWT, SCC and the British Legion. The weather was kind to us and there was a good turnout of ordinary folk, who understand the importance of remembering the sacrifice made by those other ordinary folk just over 100 years ago. The presence of a large contingent of primary-school children from our local schools underlined the joy and hope to this sombre occasion.

Jo Pearson, Volunteer Co-ordinator
Tel. 07891 529809



As already reported in the Gazette, we have had a big break-through in our search for the 'face' of Somerset Wood. The only life lost to Cheddon Fitzpaine parish in WW1 was that of William Bruford, who was born in 1880 and grew up on Nerrols Farm. Unfortunately, all attempts over the last couple of years to find a photograph of him had been fruitless – until a few weeks ago, when Goosenford resident and amateur local historian John Scanlon tipped me off that a collection of William's war medals and memorabilia had come up for sale. As the co-ordinator of our search for William, I discussed this with my wife and we decided to buy the collection – including two good-quality photographic prints of William – and "bring it home, where it belongs." Our intention is that the collection will eventually be securely displayed in the country-park visitor centre.

Cllr. Mike Batsch, Country Park Project Leader

Parish Council Meetings – 2021-2

Held at 7pm in the Committee Room at Cheddon Fitzpaine Memorial Hall on the second Monday of the month, these meetings are open to everyone. At time of going to print, covid regulations are once again allowing Parish Council members to meet face-to-face with members of the public in attendance.

13th December.

2022: 10th January, 14th February, 14th March, 11th April, 9th May, 13th June, 11th July, 8th August, 12th September, 10th October, 14th November, 5th December.

CHEDDON FITZPAINE PARISH COUNCILLORS **Cheddon, Rowford & Upper Cheddon**

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