

Draft Minutes of
The Charltons Annual Parish Meeting

A meeting of the Parishioners

Held on Thursday 20th May 2025 at 7pm

At: The Reading Room, Hillway, Charlton Mackrell, TA11 6AN

There were seven members of the public present, eight members of the Parish Council, Somerset Councillor Stephen Page and the Parish Clerk.

1. Welcome.
The Chairman of the Parish Council Councillor Adam Ware opened the meeting by thanking those present.
2. Minutes of The Charltons Annual Parish Meeting held on 16th May 2024 were received, approved as a true record and signed by Councillor Adam Ware as Chairman of the meeting.
3. The annual report of the former Council Chairman Tamzin Elliott was read to the meeting.

Following my recent resignation from the Parish Council, having been elected in 2019 and serving as Chair since 2022, I am happy to provide this report covering the Council's activities up until my last meeting in March of this year.

During recent months there have been several changes in Councillors, with 2 or 3 longstanding members stepping down, and recent co-opting of 2 new Councillors. At the same time our long-standing clerk Becky reduced her portfolio of Parish Councils and left us at the end of April, and a new clerk was appointed – namely Tony Jay.

I should also like to mention the sad passing during the last year of 3 former Parish Councillors – Anne Petitt-Pierre, Christine Wellstead and John Morgan, whom we acknowledged at the time with a minute's silence.

I think in summary it can be said that it has been a 'quiet' year, one in which the Parish Council has quietly continued to support village life, in one of the smallest Parishes, even when you include the outlying Lytes Cary and Cary Fitzpaine!

Repairs to the War Memorial area were completed, a new 'Tommy' figure honouring the role of women in war was purchased, and the Remembrance Day service organised and conducted. The village car park had some work done to repair the surface and alleviate the flooding experienced during our very wet winter, and various highway maintenance tasks in hedge cutting along the pavements and at the back of the car park were carried out. Pond dredging in Mill Lane will be scheduled at the appropriate time of the year. All the Village Notice boards require

maintenance and repair which is in hand, and the three defibrillators, in Mackrell, Adam and Cary Fitzpaine were maintained and pads replaced throughout the year.

The Parish Council continues to support, with Grants, the Youth Club (one of the most successful we hear) Somerton Library, The Reading Room, The Community Hall and Memorial Field, and Citizens Advice (due to a withdrawal of funding from Somerset Council), all bodies which form an integral part of rural village life. I should like to congratulate the Community Centre for completing the very good play equipment installation and revitalising the Community Centre with events, licensing for a bar, and regular use by a football club, I wish them well with their current work to 'Raise the Roof' which the Parish Council have supported.

Work to 'restore' and refresh the Village Millenium Pillars was undertaken by volunteers, and two wooden footpath signs along the Welham road, for Sugg Hill and Somerton Lane, which had rotted and fallen, were replaced and erected by another volunteer resident whom the Parish Council re-imbursed.

Needless to say many planning applications for various alterations and construction were considered, and our decisions and opinions put forward to the planning department for due process through the system. Permission for the new development behind the Fox & Hounds had already been granted before the start of this Financial year, and the developers Grove Properties have now made a start, and have established a connection with the villagers interested, via social media and meetings, to keep us abreast of progress and intended actions, for which they should be commended, and I think will be essential going forward when the more intensive build period gets underway.

Sadly, the pub closed its doors during the year, and is missed by many, so hopefully the re-opening of that will happen soon.

There was again major flooding throughout usual locations in both villages, and the evacuation, again, of Primrose Hill Park made the local news and invoked the involvement of our local MP Sarah Dyke. I represented the Parish Council at a site meeting with her, discussing the wider issue of flooding elsewhere in the villages with those affected, and possible solutions and/or actions for the future, which fits with her broader question being raised at Parliamentary level of extra help for Somerset for flooding issues – I believe matters are progressing there although I have no details, and we need to keep reporting issues and taking what action we can to avoid future occurrences.

The Speed Indicator Device has achieved some excellent results in traffic calming, and has been moved around between three locations, a post being installed on Tuckers Batch/Tout Lane entrance to the village following an enquiry from a resident there. Purchase of a second device has been agreed to enable a more permanent effect to be achieved, as it is noticeable that when the SID is removed the traffic speed does increase. Sadly, due to the lack of volunteers coming forward despite appeals, together with some changes in Policing policy, the speedwatch team for roadside monitoring checks has ceased operation. Thanks to Alan, our Councillor with Highways brief, for all his hard work on this aspect.

All the years actions were of course within the overarching Unitary Authority of Somerset Council, who unfortunately continue to experience serious shortfalls in budget and the need to make many difficult decisions, the consequences of which are felt right down at Parish Council level with the withdrawal of certain services or reduction in frequency of provision.

The precept for our Parish budget was carefully set after discussions which included this 'risk', and although necessitated a modest rise which is unpopular with some, does mean that the Reserve we carry is adequate to safeguard any withdrawal of funding and cover the cost of maintaining services we all take for granted, e.g. some Highways maintenance, purchase of signage, servicing of dog bins and many other items. This was an action recommended 2 years ago at our Annual Audit, when it was noted that the reserve funds were less than adequate, so to rectify that within 2 years against the backdrop of Somerset Council financial problems is excellent.

There are continuing difficulties at times in communication with Somerset Council now that Districts are disbanded. There are many changes of personnel following redundancies, with new appointees who inevitably seem to lack local knowledge, and all seem far distant based in Taunton. In this aspect the presence of our local Councillors Tim and Stephen are vital, and appreciated, to keep us abreast of Unitary actions and projects, and at times assist us in taking early actions and passing our enquiries to the appropriate departments. However, I believe there is currently a review of ward boundaries in progress so standby for further changes.

Finally, this might be a timely reminder that any Parish Council, who are essentially unpaid volunteers, is only as good as the input and involvement of its' Parishioners, who are quick to turn to the Council whenever they have a complaint, or experience a problem, expecting a solution or at the very least guidance on where to go for advice, or who to inform. There is much ongoing in village life, and many other associations and groups to cover specific interests, but the bottom line is that the place where we all live requires attention paid to it, and as a Council we need information and interest from all, in order to do that appropriately, (the speedwatch team mentioned earlier is a good example). That said, I refer to my earlier comments that communication with local government is now difficult, both to make a report, and obtain any feedback, but without an alternative we need to make the best of the system we do have.

Information on all of the matters discussed at Parish Council is available via the Agendas and Minutes which are posted on the Parish Council Website every month, summarized and published in the Village News, and as hardcopy on the Notice Boards for those not online.

4. Report from Somerset Councillor Stephen Page.

Somerset Unitary Council is now two years old and is starting to come together after a challenging start due to the task of bringing the former County Council and five District Councils into one authority. Unfortunately, there are still slow response times to people trying to contacting the council.

There have been a number of Somerset Council achievements including a balanced budget for 2025-26, a roll out of environmentally friendly electric busses, the new

slinky bus service, improved Children's Services and pioneering work being done in Adult Social Care. There is an urgent need for more people to apply to become foster parents.

Challenges ahead include Local Council Network activities planning issues, enforcement and setting a budget for 2026-27. Four new enforcement officers are being appointed to deal with unpaid s106 contributions, planning enforcement and fly-tipping enforcement.

Changes are being considered in the way the Somerset Councillors are elected. The Boundaries Commission will be reporting in the summer following consultations. The total number of councillors is likely to be reduced from 112 to 96, with a single councillor for each division. This will make councillors more accountable. It is possible that The Charltons will be included in a larger division area including Ilchester. Parishioners are encouraged to give their views to Councillor Page at stephen.page@somerset.gov.uk

5. Reports from Local Groups and Organisations:

a. The Charltons Parochial Church Council. Liz Bale, churchwarden, presented the report.

The Parish of the Charltons is part of The Proposed Benefice of Somerton, The Charltons, Kingsdon, Long Sutton with Long Load and Pitney. Until the legal formalities have been completed this is how we have to describe ourselves. However, we were fortunate to have the Reverend Judith Swan installed as our new Priest-in-Charge at a special service held in St Michael's Church, Somerton on 25th July last year. Inevitably, with an increased number of parishes in the Benefice Judith is reliant on retired priests, lay readers and lay worship assistants to cover the number of services each week. We are therefore having more joint Benefice services held in different churches but, subject to that, The Charltons continues to have one Communion service and one Morning Worship service each month, alternating between the two churches. Service details are in both church porches as well as the outside noticeboards.

We are fortunate to have small hard-working teams maintaining these services as well as weddings, funerals and baptisms, the two church buildings, churchyards, village cafes, winter warmers, the Open the Book programme in the schools here in the Charltons and Somerton, pastoral care and prayer groups in addition to which we have an active team of bellringers. However, as with all volunteer groups there are several of us of older years who would welcome more people to help with various church tasks - we have recruited some new flower arrangers this year which is a considerable help.

We are grateful for the funding we receive from the Parish Council for the maintenance of Adam clock and for the support we receive from the wider village community. We are in the process of having the clock in Mackrell church renovated to include an automatic winding system so that we do not need a volunteer to climb the church tower every week to wind the clock! We are also in the process of installing a sound system in Adam church to make services more accessible to people with hearing challenges. We are exploring developments at Adam church to

install infrared heating and to reconfigure the internal space so as to install a toilet and servery, but these developments will take some time.

b. Charlton Community Centre. Rick Harrison and Dee Powell presented the report.

Firstly, thank you for this opportunity for us to share what the Charltons Community Centre have provided for the residents over the last 12 months. Indeed, they have been very busy.

I will try to keep it brief but illustrate how many events have been offered and the mix and range of both the opportunities and the diverse mix of groups we serve.

- Music events; There have been five of these with an eclectic mix from blues, gypsy jazz, rock and Military Wives Choir. Some have included hot food made and served by committee members
- Party in the Park last June to celebrate the completion of Project Charltons play area and garden. This was enjoyed by well over 100 visitors and opened by (our now MP) Sarah Dyke
- Village Day in July. Always a busy and well attended event
- Game On ... we had two these which are aimed at families coming together to play board games
- A Christmas Fayre
- The Community Christmas party; This is a free event where residents are invited to get together before Christmas for a glass of mulled wine and mince pie and a thank you from the committee for their support
- Community Café
- VE Day celebration

In addition, the hall is used for couples dancing lessons, UK velo (cyclists) dog training, birthday parties, weddings, funerals, Jumble sales, Remembrance Day, CHS talks, coffee morning and plant sale, Craft Fayre, rambles, the village school ceilidh in celebration of Somerset Day, The Macmillan Coffee Morning and the wonderful Village Ball.

The regular users are the Badminton club which is played there once a week and the pickleball club who use it twice a week, sometimes three and a thriving youth club which meets weekly in term time.

The biggest initiative we have very successfully introduced this past year is to open the bar and sell burgers, pies and hot dogs on the Saturday afternoons when the footballers are playing at home. This has proved to be very popular amongst residents who enjoy the opportunity of grabbing a pint and a pie and perhaps an ice lolly and can of coke for the children. There were 18 home matches this season and whilst we were unable to open the bar on every occasion, we certainly did on 90% of them.

I think this does illustrate quite clearly how well used and so how important the Community Centre is. Whilst the CC Committee do not organise all these events they usually are required to put the awning up (and take it down again), put tables

out and clear them away, sort lighting and sound equipment, shopping, cooking, serving and washing up. Needless to say, an inordinate amount of work is done, sometimes behind the scenes, by volunteers.

I would like to take the opportunity of thanking all those who help during the year but in particular Ian Cornish (who is no longer living in the UK but gave his all before he left in January and who we all miss terribly), Rick Harrison our chairman, Judith Baker and Andrea De Berker who all have given freely (and mostly cheerfully) hours and hours of their time and energy!

Our thanks also go to the PC for their ongoing financial support.

Raising the Roof

As we are sure you know by now the Trustees of the Community Centre are raising funds for a major refurbishment of the Community Centre. We are enormously grateful to everyone who has supported us and are pleased to be able to tell you that we have raised over £40,000 with your support.

We need to raise approximately £250,000 in total and so we have been busy applying to various grant making bodies. We are delighted that the Tesco's Surer Start programme has awarded us £500 as a result of your votes at Glastonbury Tesco's recently. Our Parish Council has promised £3,000 and we have a grant of £15,000 promised when we have the rest of the funding from an anonymous local charity. We are also delighted that the Somerset Community Foundation have funded the installation of the accessible ramp to the building at a cost of £2081. We have applied to the Community Fund of the Big Lottery for approximately £140,000. This is to fund the replacement of the roof, installation of solar panels, replacement of the single glazed high windows with double glazed ones, replacement of the fire doors and installation of bat boxes.

Needless to say, this has taken a lot of work, and we are enormously grateful to Nigel Parkinson, Joe Bolton and Bob Densley who have joined the Trustee team of Rick Harrison, Judith Baker, Andrea de Berker and Ian Cornish to produce the application and hopefully to oversee the funded work. We are still awaiting a decision for the Community Fund as we write this article.

We have also applied to the Somerset Community Foundation Energy Efficiency Fund and received £10,000 towards the cost of replacing the heating in the Community centre.

We will continue to make applications as funding becomes available to complete the rest of the work converting the lobby area and kitchen into a community café area and reconfiguring the changing rooms to include a small studio space and an accessible toilet whilst maintaining the use of the changing rooms. Watch this space!

The Annual General Meeting of the Charltons Memorial Community Trust will be held on Tuesday 9th September at 7.30pm at the Community Centre. We will then be able to give you more information on the progress of the refurbishment work. As this is a very exciting time for the Community Centre, we are looking for new Trustees. If you would be interested to know more, please do contact any of the

current Trustees- Rick and Dee Harrison, Judith Baker, Andrea de Berker, Alex Sedgman, Juliet Long, Paul Ross or Damien. We look forward to seeing you at the AGM and hope you will join us for refreshments at the end of the formal meeting.

- c. Charltons Youth Club. The report of Kate O'Boyle, Village Youth Club Co-Ordinator was read to the meeting

The Youth club continues to be very well-received by our young villagers and we have approx. 15-19 young people attending our weekly term-time sessions at the Community Centre and overall, approximately 30 members.

The Youth Club continues to play an important role in helping young people in our village feel connected to each other and their community as well as providing valuable opportunities for self-development and insight, and helping to entertain and provide some enjoyment for our younger villagers outside of the school and home setting. A recent survey conducted for Children in Need shows that the youth club has had a significant impact on helping our young villagers raise their self-esteem and feel more able to advocate for themselves as a result.

The club continues to employ 2 youth workers from the Community Youth Project to run the weekly sessions, supported by a small group of volunteers. Thanks to the generosity of the community centre committee who do not charge for use of the hall and field, our main fixed costs are the employment of the 2 youth workers which totals approx. £6,500 per year. As we no longer receive any funding from the county council for youth provision we rely entirely on grants and fundraising to raise this money to keep the club afloat.

I'd like to thank the Parish Council for their annual grant which helps to pay for the Youth workers costs to enable us to keep the club running. We have also secured a regular yearly income from Glastonbury Festival of £1500 by running an off-site stewarding group, although this will not be awarded next year due to the festival taking a year off. Last year we were awarded a £6000 grant from Children in Need and raised £5000 by running a fundraising Ball (The Sustain-a-ball) which was well attended by 100+ villagers and beyond.

Currently we have enough money to last for another 1.5 years, therefore we are currently looking for other funding opportunities to help secure the club beyond the end of 2026. We are also hoping to recruit some new volunteers to help run the club alongside the Youth workers. However recent attempts at recruitment through Village news and village emails/ Facebook have been unsuccessful.

- d. The Charltons Tennis Club. Dee Powell presented the report:

We are very fortunate in the Charltons to have a tennis court in the Community Park. I have responsibility for the use and maintenance of the court. Last year we were able to install a new net, thanks to a generous £200 grant from Keinton Mandeville's Big Breakfast. We were experiencing issues with weeds but have been very fortunate to find an excellent court valet who has managed to restore our court to a high standard.

We have 28 members who pay £30 per household per annum. but if there are young people under 18 or in full time education whose parents/carers don't wish to play, membership is free providing an adult sign the membership forms and takes full responsibility. We are presently hoping to introduce coaching for both adults and children,

6. Open Public Parish Forum.

Discussions took place regarding traffic speeds in the parish and safeguarding following an incident that had taken place in the playground.

There being no further representation, the meeting closed at 8.00pm and was followed by the Annual Parish Council meeting.

Signed: Dated:Chairman