

# OLD CLEEVE PARISH COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

Held on Wednesday 13 May 2026 at Washford Memorial Hall

**Present:** 29 parishioners, including councillors.

### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair, Judith Stabb, welcomed those present and introduced the parish councillors.

### 2. Minutes of the previous Annual Assembly

The minutes of the previous Annual Assembly, held on 21 May 2025, were agreed nem. con.

### 3. Chair's Report

The Chair gave a report of the Council's activities during the year (attached as Appendix 1), highlighting:

- the new Parish Plan;
- major improvements to Washford Recreation Ground;
- traffic issues in Washford and surrounding villages as a result of the B3191 closure;
- the purchase of new SIDs;
- grants awarded; and
- issues of concern raised by residents, including the Environment Agency withdrawal of maintenance for watercourses, fossil collecting at Blue Anchor, and the need for a bus service connecting Roadwater and other villages to Minehead.

The Chair thanked all councillors, past and present, the previous Clerk, Andrea Johnson, and the Locum Clerk, Jack Turner, for their hard work and support.

### 4. Budget overview

The Vice-Chair, Mick De'Ath, outlined the Council's budget, explaining the funding received through the precept and the amounts currently held in reserves and earmarked reserves.

The replacement play equipment at Washford Recreation Ground had been largely funded through grants. The Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) would be resurfaced during the summer months, funded by a Sport England grant and reserves, though the outcome of two further grant applications was awaited.

### 5. County Councillor report

County Councillor Cara Strom gave an overview of Somerset Council's financial position and priorities. She outlined issues she had taken up for the Dunster Division, which includes Old Cleeve Parish:

- speed restriction schemes for the A39 at Washford and Dragons Cross, and improved signage;
- potholes and other highways issues, with residents encouraged to report issues via the Somerset Council portal;
- the need to balance the supply of new homes, economic activity and the protection of village character;
- the emerging Local Plan, which will be open for public consultation during 2026;
- bus services; and
- supporting older people.

Cllr Strom reported that it had been announced that day that the Government would support Somerset Council in its bid preparation for funding to re-open the B3191. This was encouraging but was only the first step in the process.

### 6. Puthills Copse and Bellevue former play area, Washford

The Chair referred to the display of photographs and plans for the two sites, which had been offered to the Parish by Somerset Council. The land transfer for Puthills Copse has now been signed, and an ecology survey has been commissioned.

The Bellevue former play area is more problematic, as there are legal uncertainties over ownership of the access lane. Until these can be resolved, it would be unwise to expend any funds on surveys.

The Parish Council is keen to involve the local community and to seek views on the future potential use of both sites. Those present were encouraged to complete a short questionnaire, and local residents not present at the meeting would also be consulted. Contact has been made with Somerset Wildlife Trust and the West Somerset Green Forum to benefit from their expertise.

## 7. Open Forum

Issues raised by residents included:

- Fire risk to properties from steam engines on the West Somerset Railway.
  - **Action:** Parish Council to write to WSR to ask what mitigation they are planning this summer.
- The need for the No. 28 bus to stop at Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton.
  - **Action:** Cllr Cara Strom will investigate.
- Concerns about the footpath from Wisteria Court to the new Tregenna Huish Gardens development and the lack of enforcement from planning officers.
  - **Action:** Parish Council to write to Tregenna.
- Safety concerns relating to contractor vehicles at the Huish Gardens site.
  - **Action:** Parish Council has already raised this and will pursue.
- The provision of police warning signs about speed checks on the Dragons Cross to Blue Anchor lane.
  - **Action:** Cllr Cara Strom will enquire.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.57pm.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# APPENDIX 1

## CHAIR'S REPORT

**Annual Assembly - 13 May 2026, 7.00 pm**

A lot has happened since last May, when I took over as Chair. My predecessor, Geoff Williams, retired from the Council after six years and two stints as Chair. Cllrs Heather Beaver and Keith Hunt, who both represented Washford, also retired. They had all given many years of dedicated service and worked hard for the community, and I hope you will join me in thanking them.

This week, Washford Cllr Neil Scofield also resigned in order to concentrate on growing his various businesses. We all know how valuable the Post Office is to the village, and we wish him well.

We have been fortunate to welcome Barry Cridland, Cara Strom, Laura Short, and recently Theo Oliver and Colin Buckle to the Council. We still have a vacancy in the Roadwater ward and hope that someone will step up for this.

Our County Councillor, Christine Lawrence, also retired, and Cara Strom was elected to serve alongside Cllr Marcus Kravis as our representatives at Somerset Council. We will hear from Cara later in the meeting.

Our excellent Clerk, Andrea Johnson, has also taken a step back, whilst remaining as our Financial Officer. We are fortunate to have recruited an experienced Locum Clerk, Jack, who works remotely for a number of parish councils in Somerset. We are also seeking to make a permanent appointment.

I must start by thanking all councillors, particularly my Vice-Chair, Mick De-Ath, for their support, and Andrea and Jack for their help and guidance in dealing with the extensive governance requirements and increasing responsibilities placed on parish councillors, who are volunteers.

The Parish Council has many responsibilities, not much power, and a limited budget. However, we are surprisingly busy and Mick will give some insight into this later in the meeting.

Our monthly meetings are open to the public, who may address the Council on issues of concern or interest in the parish. This year, we have heard representations regarding fossil collecting at Blue Anchor, the Environment Agency decision to withdraw from routine maintenance of riverbanks, heavy earth movements, traffic generally through Washford, and the impact of the B3191 closure on local villages. Where possible, we have made representations to the relevant authorities.

Flooding is a concern for some residents. We are custodians of a large quantity of sandbags and sand should you have need. Some are available from the Lysaght Club, and the main store is in Washford. There are also supplies in Roadwater. In terms of flood warnings, the Environment Agency's remote tele-monitoring at Roadwater may be extended along the Washford River, and this is likely to become a cost to the Parish Council.

We have had requests for a bus service to connect Roadwater, Old Cleeve and Blue Anchor to Minehead, but despite a petition, we have not yet persuaded the bus company to provide this.

Philip Bramall is our bus champion. He is here tonight, and you may like to talk to him after the meeting.

We do comment on planning applications in the parish, but these are decided by Somerset Council or the Exmoor National Park Authority. I must stress that we can only make representations based on planning grounds, but we try to bring forward local knowledge to help inform decision-making.

By far the biggest concern in the parish is traffic. We have tried to alleviate some of the problems, but many are out of our hands. We are all familiar with the traffic problems from the closure of the B3191, and we hope that Somerset Council will be successful in its bid for funds to reopen the road.

We are focusing on providing funds for new solar-powered SIDs for Old Cleeve, Washford and Chapel Cleeve, with our existing battery-powered SID relocating to Roadwater. The SIDs play a role in reminding drivers, but as

we know, not all respond. I would like to thank Richard and Jan Hughes, who are working to secure financial contributions from Old Cleeve villagers towards the cost of a SID. Particular thanks also go to Cllr Steve Eggar, who maintains the current SID. We are looking for more volunteers to undertake the necessary training, so please consider this. Mick De'Ath has worked closely with the Highways Department on locating the SIDs and other issues, and will update us on this shortly.

With our County Councillors' support, we have been pressing for a 20mph scheme through Washford. It is hoped that the scheme will soon come into force on the A39 in the village, but we are also pressing for it to extend through Huish Lane and Willow Grove. It is highly likely that we will need to fund this ourselves, at a cost in excess of £5,000, but we think that is a worthy endeavour.

We would like to see a pedestrian crossing on the A39 to enable children from the Bellevue area to walk safely to school, but there are issues about the land required to do this. Cara will be presenting her report later in the meeting and will talk about highways issues, including a 30mph limit from Washford to Dragons Cross, which is also in the pipeline.

I must mention the successful Mature Drivers Event which we arranged in Old Cleeve last November and which was well received. All those attending, about 30 people, valued the information and the educational aspects. The Police Road Safety Team is very willing to repeat it should there be interest, so please raise this in the Q&A session later if you would like this repeated, perhaps in Washford or Roadwater.

One of my favourite takeaways from that talk was that if you have dashcam or phone footage of a near-miss or bad driving, you can upload this to the police website and they will follow it up. I now carry my mobile phone with the camera on when walking on lanes in Old Cleeve with no pavement. It is surprisingly effective at slowing people down when you aim your phone at them. I did hear of one Old Cleeve resident recently who stands in the lane brandishing her hairdryer, which drivers think is a speed gun. Seriously, it would be possible to set up a community speedwatch group, but this would need volunteers to come forward for training.

I would also like to thank Neil Schofield of the Washford Post Office, who provided "20 is Plenty" stickers for people to put on their bins or their own property as a reminder. This was paid for through the plastic bag levy, so it is doubly virtuous. I believe he still has some supplies.

One major achievement is that we have produced a new Parish Plan to guide our decision-making and priorities, which are to enhance and protect our parish. The plan is concise and focused, and we measure our progress against targets, some of which we have already achieved. There is more information about the Parish Plan on the leaflets you have and on the table over there.

We maintain the War Memorial at Dragon's Cross. Thanks go to those parish councillors who tidied the grounds and repainted the fencing posts last year. If you wonder why the grass is left to grow over the summer, it is because it is a County Designated Wildlife Site and there are orchids and other notable plants that are left to set seed. It is always cut ahead of Remembrance Sunday, and in November we had a short wreath-laying service there.

The Parish Council gives a number of grants. We support Roadwater Youth Club and the Blue Anchor Community Toilets through three-year service level agreements. The Youth Club receives £2,500 per annum and the toilets receive £6,000 per annum. In the past year, we have also given grants to Roadwater Cricket Club for grass cutting and essential mower repairs, the Citizens Advice Bureau, and Old Cleeve Community Orchard.

For 2026/27, we have £4,000 available for small grants up to £500, and we would like to hear from local organisations.

We work closely with Old Cleeve First School in Washford, which is a major user of our lovely Washford Recreation Ground, for which we are responsible. After many years of discussions, consideration and careful financial management, this year we have managed to completely transform the Rec with new play equipment, and there are more exciting plans in the pipeline, which Mick will outline shortly. We achieved this through the

amazing efforts of our Clerk, Andrea, who secured major grant funding, and through sheer hard work by many people. We are not finished yet.

Later in the agenda, we will be seeking your views on another project - Puthills Copse and Bellevue - but for now I would like to hand over to Mick, who will speak about the SIDs and Washford Recreation Ground, and how we have financed these projects.

### **Future of Puthills Copse and Bellevue former play area**

At the back of the hall, you will see some photos and a map showing the location of Puthills Copse, at the bottom of Bellevue, Washford.

This land was owned by Somerset Council, which offered it to the parish some years ago. After years of delays, I can now announce that I have today signed the transfer deed to acquire the site. It is not a large area, and there is an informal path running through it which is well used.

As part of our Parish Plan to preserve and enhance our community, the Council is seeking ideas about how we can best utilise this land. We have commissioned an ecology survey to give us a baseline, so we know what trees, plants and wildlife are there, and we are looking for ideas. It is wooded and includes an open area, currently covered in nettles, which I am told is a good sign.

At the top of Bellevue, there is an area of land which was once a BMX play area, but this was dismantled some years ago. A public footpath runs through the site, which is fairly open but includes wooded areas. There are potentially wonderful views from there. The County Council has also offered us this site, but there is uncertainty about rights of access down the lane to the garages. The lane is partly owned by the County, and it is believed the remainder is in the ownership of Magna Housing, but this is unclear. We have been pressing for a long while to get this issue resolved, but have been frustrated by the inability of the County to reassure us that we would be able to gain access for maintenance. I am determined to push the County on this, but we are not prepared to commission any surveys until we can be reassured that we can manage the site. It would be possible to make a small play area on part of the site, with some benches, leaving most of it wild, but again, we want your views.

These are two potentially exciting projects for the community to become involved in, and we want to hear your views. Last week, Hester Watson of West Somerset Green Forum, along with Sue Smith of Carhampton Climate Action Group, came along and had a look at the sites. Both have experience and involvement in conservation projects in West Somerset, and we hope to benefit from their experience.