

Combe Florey Parish Council

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 13 th May 2025 7:00 pm At Combe Florey Village Hall	Written by: Neil Truby
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Annual Parish Meeting Minutes

Councillors Present

Cllr Jacquey Newton (Acting Chair)
 Cllr Neil Truby (RFO)
 Cllr John Passingham
 Cllr Adriana Truby (from 8:00 pm)

In attendance

Parishioners x 19
 Cllr Mike Rigby from Somerset County Council

2025/1) Welcome by chairman - Jacquey Newton

The Acting Chair welcomed the parishioners in attendance; introduced the councillors, explained the absence of the Chair, and explained the purpose of the meeting.

2025/2) Apologies for absence

Cllr Robin Cleverly
 Cllr Adriana Truby (late)
 Gemma Combes (Parish Clerk)

2025/3) Adoption of Minutes

The minutes from the 14th May 2024 were taken as read. No dissent to adopting the minutes. Signed by the Acting Chair.

2025/4) Chairman's Report

Cllr Newton read out Cllr Cleverly's report.

The past year has been relatively quiet for the council, with most matters proceeding as business as usual.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Neil Truby, who has joined the council as our new Financial Officer. Neil succeeds Simon Hawes, who stepped down at the end of last year after seven years on the council. On behalf of the council, I would like to thank Simon sincerely for his excellent financial stewardship.

Over the course of the year, the council considered five planning applications, all of which were supported. While three involved minor works, there were two more significant proposals. The first was a completely revised scheme for the development of five new homes at Greenacre Farm, which is currently awaiting approval. The second was an outline proposal for six houses as barn conversions at the Hawkins Barton farmyard site, which has now received approval.

Progress continues on the village garden, which is beginning to take shape and look very attractive. We plan to carry out additional planting this spring to fill in remaining gaps and further enhance the space.

One topic where we would welcome input from parish residents is the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds. As you may know, CIL is collected from new developments and must be spent within five years on infrastructure or services that are directly needed as a result of those developments. It cannot be used for general council operations or existing community needs, and unfortunately the regulations surrounding its use remain somewhat unclear. At present, the council holds approximately £10,000 in CIL funds and could receive an additional £40,000 if the proposed 11 new houses proceed. The village garden project is being financed from these funds.

In closing, I would like to thank all members of the Parish Council and our Clerk for their hard work and dedication throughout the year.

2025/5) Financial Report

Cllr N Truby stated that the accounts for the financial year ended 31st March 2025 had been audited by Mr Tony Spence and are ready for regulatory submission. Cllr Truby gave a summary of the Parish Council's financial position:

Minutes from Combe Florey Annual Parish Meeting May 13th 2025

Signed: [Chairman]

- The Council recorded a net surplus of £6,648 for the year to 31st March 2025.
- Of this, £6,344 related to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) income, which is restricted to specific purposes. Excluding the CIL, the underlying surplus from normal activities was £304.
- As of 31st March 2025, the Council held total reserves of £17,098, including £9,723 of ring-fenced CIL funds for infrastructure-related spending.
- The remaining unrestricted reserves equate to nearly two years' regular expenditure, indicating a strong and stable financial position.

A parishioner asked for clarification on how long the Council has to spend the CIL money. It was explained that each tranche must be spent within 5 years of receipt or returned to Somerset Council.

No further questions were raised. The full Financial Report will be made available on the Parish Council website separately.

2025/6) Somerset Council report (Cllr Mike Rigby)

Cllr Rigby outlined the financial issues facing the County Council on funding issues. Key points made:

- Somerset Council has had challenges to set a balanced budget.
- A large proportion (70%) of the County Council's expenditure is on statutory responsibilities such as Social Care.
- As a result of statutory responsibilities, the Council has had to curtail expenditure on items that are most clearly visible to most residents, such as public toilets, and bus subsidies.
- In 2026/27 Government allowed the Council to raise Council Tax by 7.5% normally maximum of 5%.
- Cllr Rigby expects 2027/28 to be the last difficult budget before efficiencies from the merger of former District Councils bear fruit.
- What has worked well is that some Town and Parish Councils have taken on some responsibilities/tasks formerly undertaken by Somerset Council (e.g. parks, toilets etc.) and there are good working relationships between Somerset Council and those Town and Parish Councils
- Highway maintenance contracts have been renegotiated and include warranty period for filled pot holes.
- Cllr Rigby discussed the challenges of rural broadband. He has had a meeting with central government about initiatives to complete the connections of fibre internet to remote properties; and is arranging a summit with main providers of mobile telephony to see if 4G provision can be improved.

A number of questions were asked by parishioners:

- Cllr Rigby clarified that he believed that the "Voice over Copper Wire" facility for landlines was being removed nationally within the next year, and that all subscribers would need to move to a Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) facility. Parishioners are encouraged to contact their landline phone provider for more details.
- Cllr Rigby confirmed that social care cost 70% of the council's budget and that some individual costs on social care were exceptionally high. Out of 500,000 residents in Somerset there are nearly 10,000 individuals needing social care. This is an issue that all Councils in England are facing.
- In response to a question about central government's recent announcements on restrictions on migrant visas for social care workers, Cllr Rigby explained that it is difficult for Somerset County Council to recruit locally, and it takes many migrants from Nigeria and South Africa. There is concern about how central government visa quotas will affect Somerset, and the County Council is urgently seeking clarification.
- The Acting Chair asked if there is anything that parishioners could do to help lobby central government. Cllr Rigby promised to provide feedback on this to her.
- Planning applications are being considered to re-locate the Co-operative store in Bishops Lydeard.

Minutes from Combe Florey Annual Parish Meeting May 13th 2025

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- One parishioner mentioned that, in the course of a planning application which he has active, there have already been 4 different Planning Officers assigned by the County Council. Cllr Rigby acknowledged that there are problems and explained that there is a national shortage of such officers. There is a long lead time to train and employ new Planning Officers and the Council is developing short- and medium-term plans to improve retention and recruitment rates.
- Central Government require Somerset Council to build 59,000 new homes in the next 15 years.
- Cllr Rigby explained why constraints such as the Quantock Hills National Landscape (formerly AONB) status, and the extensive flood plains of the Somerset Levels, make large-scale housing development in the Taunton area problematic. Other developments across the county are under consideration.

2025/7) Policing Report

The Police representative was not present and had not submitted a specific report. However, the Acting Chair noted that she had circulated regular reports in the months leading up to this meeting, and that no crimes had been reported in Combe Florey during the reporting period

2025/8) Report from local groups**1. Parochial Church Council**

Mrs Cindy Bottard read out her report. The full report will be made available on the Parish Council website separately.

2. Village hall

Mr Philip Greenway read out his report. The report was received without comment. The full report will be made available on the Parish Council website separately.

3. Combe Florey Defibrillator group

Mrs Jean Phillips read out her report. The report was received without comment. The full report will be made available on the Parish Council website separately

The Community Email is administered by Jean Phillips so please email her if you wish to either be added or removed from the list.

2025/9) Public Forum, discussion on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Acting Chair explained the purpose of CIL, the timescales over which the funds must be spent, and the results of her research into items upon which the funds may, and may not, be spent.

CIL receipts must be used "to support the development of the local council's area, or any part of that area, by funding:

- a. the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure; or
- b. anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area."

She explained that any suggestions could not be adopted until approval was provided by the County Council's Planning Enforcement Officer and so little feedback could be provided at this meeting.

Parishioners suggested:

- An extension to the burial ground or burial area of the churchyard.
- A feasibility study into a footpath close to the A358 from the West Bagborough turn (campsite and holiday cottages) to the Farmer's Arms, as holidaymakers are endangering themselves and others by walking along the A road.
- Improvements to the state of Honeyball Lane, including deterrence of and barriers to the deer.
- A bus shelter for the use of the young people who are collected from the Village Hall car park by school and college buses.
- Improvement to the bus shelter on the A358 near the easterly part of Combe Florey.
- Bus shelter in the village for school children
- Repair to the bent rail on the bridge by the easterly entrance to Combe Florey from the A358.

Minutes from Combe Florey Annual Parish Meeting May 13th 2025

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- Parish church - It was noted that the gates to the Churchyard (single gate to the West and double gates to the East) are in a poor state of repair.
- New railings for the burial ground.
- Rubbish bins in the village.

Parishioners would also like to know the outcomes of these suggestions in due course as the Parish Council considers them.

2025/10) Public Forum, discussion and general questions: Establish parishioners' priorities for forthcoming year.

The Acting Chair invited those present to express any other issues and priorities they would suggest:

- Address the overhaul/replacement of reflective bollards on the A358 near the West Bagborough turning.
- Concern was raised about the increased volume of traffic that drives through Combe Florey, and the speed at which some of it travels. Noted that the proposed new development of 5 homes at Hawkins Barton will add to the volume.
- Concern was also expressed about the issue of the rising spring close to the grass verge at the front of the Church. A new salt bin for this location or capturing the water and piping it to the drain could be considered.
- Can anything be done to improve the safety of the turning onto the A358 close to the Farmer's Arms? One parishioner pointed out that views along the main road are heavily obscured in both directions and that he believes that it is a potentially lethal junction.
- Repair to the bent rail by the easterly entrance to Combe Florey from the A358

2025/11) NEXT MEETING:

Annual Parish Council Meeting 27th May 2025 @ Combe Florey Village Hall. Time 7.00 pm

Meeting closed at 20.35

Minutes from Combe Florey Annual Parish Meeting May 13th 2025

Signed: [Chairman]