



# Coffinswell Parish Council

Serving the Communities of  
Coffinswell & Dacombe

The Cirl Bunting is the UK's rarest farmland bird. The entire breeding population is found between Exeter and Plymouth.

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## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> APRIL 2026 7.20PM AT ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

**Present:** Cllr N Orchard (Chair), Cllr S Avery (Vice Chair), Cllr S Spokes, Cllr C Bell, Cllr M Atkinson, and Cllr E Barnard

**In attendance:** District Cllr J Radford  
Mrs L Moore (Clerk)  
Seventeen members of the public

### 1. The Chairman to open the meeting and received apologies:

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7:43pm. and welcomed everyone present. Apologies received from DCC Cllr H Horner.

### 2. The Chairman's Annual Report

#### Personnel

This is the end of the third year of the current 2023-2027 Parish Council election period, and I am pleased to say that our Parish Council personnel have remained unchanged this year. Following the retirement of Ashley Brent from the Council at the end of last year, we were pleased to welcome Emma Barnard to the Council at our first meeting in May. We also welcomed Cllr Heather Horner to our meetings as our new Devon County Councillor following the retirement of Cllr Alistair Dewhirst at the elections last May. So, thanks to my fellow councillors for your support this year and for remaining in post.

I would also like to thank our two Teignbridge District Councillors, Cllr Jane Taylor, and Cllr John Radford for their support over the last year.

#### Finance

Moving on to the Parish Council finances, I can report that our spending this year was again slightly less than budgeted. Our reserves increased slightly, now standing at about £7,900, which represents about 13 months revenue spend, against a target of about 12 months. Last year we requested and were granted a 4% increase in precept from Teignbridge in order to ensure we maintained our 12 months reserve target. This year we applied for a 3.2% increase, and I am pleased to report that that has been approved, so our precept for 2026-2027 is £7,002. I am therefore confident that our finances are adequate to cover our expenses over the next year. There have been some suggestions that we should increase our precept by significantly more in order to anticipate possible increases in expenditure due to the upcoming local government reorganisation (LGR). However, as the form of the LGR has yet to be decided by central government, we have no way of knowing what additional expenditure our Parish Council may become liable for, so we have decided to continue with our current spend plans as they are, and then review them once the details and the effects of the LGR are known.

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund** – our CIL fund at the start of the year stood at about £4,600. With the requirement to spend the money within 5 years of receipt, the deadline for this was last October, so we needed to focus a little more attention on how best to spend the remaining funds or risk having to hand them back to Teignbridge. We also discovered that there were more conditions attached to what the money may be spent on than we had originally understood, so some suggestions for spending were vetoed by Teignbridge. However, following consultations with the Parish, we managed to spend most of the remaining funds on three wooden benches to replace the three existing 50 year old benches, three new noticeboards for the triangle opposite The Linny to replace the two existing boards which were both disintegrating and too small, a replacement cabinet for the Coffinswell defibrillator, and a makeover for the wooden signpost on the triangle which had become rather dilapidated and not very visible. For the Dacombe replacement bench we re-laid the base with concrete slabs to improve the area around it and also set it at a better angle facing more down the road. I think the replacement benches have made a significant improvement, and the general makeover of the triangle has made it look a lot better, so we are very grateful for the receipt of these CIL funds. The CIL fund is now down to about £85, so effectively fully spent. We will probably use the remaining money to maintain the new assets, for example teak oil to maintain the benches. At the moment there are no developments in the Parish that are likely to result in further CIL payments within the next year or so.

**Parish Paths Partnership (P3) funding** – having had a grant from Devon County Council for £300 for do some successful improvement work to Footpath 1 in 2024, last year we applied for another £300 to complete the job. Thanks to the volunteer working party last August we completed the laying of the geotexture underlay and chippings on the remainder of the path. For the next year's funding round there has been a change to the process so that we no longer need to apply for project funding at the beginning of the year, but this can now be applied for at any time during the year. We have therefore only applied for the standard maintenance grant which is based on the total length of paths that we maintain. We currently have about £850 in the P3 account, some of which is already earmarked for spending on strimmer servicing, fuel, and strimmer operator training.

### **Solar Farm Community Benefit Fund**

The Court Barton solar farm development build went ahead as planned last year and is now nearing completion. One of the results of this development is that the developers, Recurrent Energy, offered to set up a Community Benefit Fund to compensate the Parish for the loss of amenity, i.e., the blot on the landscape and the disruption caused during the build. Their offer was a one-off payment of £20,000, to be paid once the farm was fully operational. We tried to get this offer improved but I'm sorry to say that Recurrent Energy have not moved. They say that the current financial situation regarding feed-in payments and grants is not what it was, and they are also contributing to the community via business rates, so they cannot offer the same level of benefit funding that some other solar farm developers have been offering. We therefore have to be grateful for the sum offered. Recurrent Energy are ready to make this payment to us, but there has been a slight delay caused by negotiations regarding the agreement that we've been asked to sign before the payment is made. I have asked for some changes to be made regarding non-disclosure clauses, and we are waiting to hear a response from their lawyers. As soon as this is resolved then I expect that we will receive the payment. Once we have the money in our bank account then we will start the process of setting up the Benefit Fund management and invite the Parish to suggest how the money should be spent.

### **Instant Access Savings Account**

For some time now the Parish Council finances have been operated using a single Lloyd's Bank current account. This means that all receipts and payments are made from the same account, regardless of whether they are Council operating costs, CIL funds or P3 funds. With the upcoming payment of £20,000 for the Community Benefit Fund, I looked at how this significant sum should be managed, and whether or not it should have a separate bank account. I found that although it is possible to open specific accounts for community benefit funds or societies, these accounts require you to sign up to use an approved set of rules for managing the funds. You can either adopt someone else's approved rules, or you can pay the legal costs of writing your own rules. On inspection of some of the approved rules I found that they were all considerably more bureaucratic and onerous than is reasonable for our relatively small fund. These rules also tend to apply to funds that are likely to run for many years, whereas our fund is a one-off payment that may be spent in a relatively short time. So, it didn't appear that the standard community benefit

fund type of account would be appropriate. I asked our Clerk, Lucie, to find out what options our current bankers Lloyd's had for setting up a separate account. She found that we could have an instant access savings account set up very easily. This account pays a small amount of interest and allows easy transfer between the current account and the savings account, so we now have that account set up. Our plan is to maintain a modest float in the current account while keeping the bulk of our reserves and the Community Fund in the savings account.

### **Meetings**

The Council meets roughly bi-monthly as this seems to work for us at the moment. The only problems arise when planning applications are submitted and comments from the Parish Council are required before the next scheduled meeting. Our policy is that if the application is a significant one and is likely to affect parishioners, then we will call an extraordinary meeting to discuss the application. For applications that are unlikely to be controversial, e.g., tree pruning, repair work to a listed building etc., then we will discuss these informally outside the meetings and submit a consensus response to Teignbridge. We have operated this process a number of times this year and so far, we are happy with the way it's gone, so we'll be continuing with the bi-monthly meeting calendar for the 2026-2027 year.

### **Planning**

We have had a relatively light year for planning applications, most of them for tree works, and most applications are not giving rise to much controversy. Probably the most significant application was for the demolition and rebuild of High Meadow in Coffinswell, which was granted approval by TDC last September. However, High Meadow has subsequently been put on the market for sale, so it's possible that this rebuild may not happen. We have also been free of any significant enforcement issues, although some unauthorised building work in Dacombe has recently been notified to TDC for enforcement action.

The main development in the parish has been the construction of the Court Barton solar farm, which started in February last year, and is now nearly complete, with just some works at the entrance on Ridgeway Lane to reinstate the hedge and complete the fencing. I'm pleased to report that the traffic management plan that was put in place to manage the deliveries was relatively successful, with few problems either on St Marychurch Road or through the villages. There were a few instances of delivery trucks either ignoring or being unaware of the plans which did cause some disruption on the village roads, particularly the very last delivery of an additional filter unit. This delivery did not work to the management plan and tried to drive through the village. Unfortunately, the large size of this delivery caused it to get stuck in several places, and also caused damage to a number of properties, and it took some time to get it back out down Under Way and on to the correct route. The haulage company responsible has subsequently agreed to pay for any damage caused.

### **Strategic Plan**

The strategic plan for the parish for 2023-2027, created originally by my predecessor as Chair, Alex Parkes, was reviewed and updated again this year. There are no significant changes to the plan, although some activities on the action plan monitor have been identified as being somewhat behind schedule. Attention will be paid in the coming year to try to make more progress with these items. Full details of the action plan monitor are available on the Parish Council website.

### **Roads and Footpaths**

**Roads and drains** – although we didn't suffer too badly from winter flooding this year, as usual the winter rains have caused some breakup and potholes in the roads. I have reported a number of potholes as they appear to Devon County Council Highways, and I have to give them credit for their quick response, often filling in the holes within a matter of days, so thank you DCC for that. Unfortunately, that does not mean that the roads are perfect as there are various criteria that define a pothole in terms of size, depth, edge shape, and position in the road, so what might look like a pothole does not necessarily qualify as one, so it doesn't get filled. I think that on the whole the wheel-breaker holes have been filled, but people still need to drive at a sensible speed and look out for the rough patches.

We haven't had too many road drainage problems this year, and a lot less mud coming down Connybeare Lane and in Dacombe, but there are still a few problem areas such as the corner on Willow Park Lane by The Round House that DCC Highways have said that they will look at. We've

also tried to keep the pipes and puddles clear at the bottom end of Under Way to minimise the amount of water on the road there.

**Oil spill** - in Dacombe we had the unfortunate incident in autumn 2024 when an oil delivery tanker managed to rupture its tank when trying to make an ill-advised trip up Downaway Lane. The tanker was parked up next to The Barn while most of the oil drained out onto the verge and down the drains. Although the company responsible did pay for an initial clean up, it was apparent that there was still a significant amount of oil on the verges and probably under the road by The Barn. There was therefore a second attempt at a clean-up earlier this year, when a stretch of the road was dug up completely and a lot more contaminated soil removed. The road was re-surfaced, and it now looks like this issue has been resolved.

**Grit bins** – In the one cold snap that we had this year it became apparent that we could do with another grit bin at the T-junction of Connybeare Lane and Under Way, in front of the thatched cottages. Thank you to those who ferried some salt from the bin at the top of the hill by Swallows Hatch, but we'll look at getting another bin for this junction before next winter.

**Speed limits** – I am afraid that I cannot report any progress towards getting reduced speed limits in the villages this year. Unfortunately, this is potentially quite a bureaucratic process, and we are lacking volunteers to tackle it, but we will be trying again this year.

**Road Warden** – we still have a vacancy for a Road Warden if anyone would like to volunteer for that role. Please contact me if you would be interested in doing that role.

**Footpaths** – thank you to Tim Rumball for managing the footpaths again this year. Tim's been doing a great job on the footpaths and the byways over Kerswell Hill.

As mentioned above in the Finance report for P3, we have spent some time this year finishing the surface coverage of Footpath 1 round The Bothy, and we've also completed the re-modelling of the entrance to the path at The Bothy end to make it easier and safer to access, particularly for pushchairs. The surface has held up reasonably well in the continuous rain that we had for the first three months of this year, although some of the chippings have been washed off in the wettest places. We do still have a small pile of spare chippings at the Willow Park Lane end of the path, so we'll look to repair the bare patches shortly. I think people will agree that the resurfaced path has remained easily walkable in the worst of the wet weather this year, unlike previous years when it could sometimes be extremely muddy and slippery.

### **Policing and Neighbourhood Watch**

Thank you to Sheenagh Orchard for running the Neighbourhood Watch scheme and being the Police Liaison contact. I think we've been fortunate to have had another relatively quiet year on the whole, but the occasional incident with anti-social behaviour of one sort or another has shown the value of the network as a means for dealing with these issues.

## **IT**

### **Full-fibre broadband**

We were pleased that Openreach finally managed to complete the installation of full-fibre broadband last June, having been promising it and doing various works on it for two or three years. Having said that, we found that a small group of properties around the church and near The Linny were not included in this upgrade. I am pleased to say that they finally added these properties in the last month, so I believe that at least 95% of the Parish now has full fibre, if not all.

### **BT phone box**

As reported last year, BT decided to de-commission our red telephone box due to lack of use. They have now removed all the telephone equipment and locked the door. However, they offered to sell the box to the Parish Council for the sum of £1, which we decided to take them up on. We did spend some time trying to persuade BT to replace the door before we took ownership, as it had been broken for some time and repaired temporarily. We have been unable to get them to replace the door, so we have to take it as it is. We are now waiting for them to remove the lock barrel so that we can get on with giving it a bit of a makeover and re-purposing it for another

use, possibly a book exchange. Thanks to Cllr Sally Spokes for volunteering to manage this activity, and we look forward to being able to get on with it once the lock has been removed.

## **Website and emails**

For some time, the government has been trying to persuade local councils to move to .gov.uk websites and email addresses. We looked at this previously and decided that the expense involved wasn't worth the benefits. However, this year the government has become more insistent about this, and our audit requirements have also changed to include the requirement to move to .gov.uk, so we've been forced to re-consider this. Lucie Moorse has done a great job of working with our IT supplier to get our new domain name registered and the website transferred over, together with new Parish Council email addresses for herself and all Parish Councillors, and this has been done at a much more reasonable cost than we had previously been led to believe would be the case. The new website is now up and running at [coffinswellparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://coffinswellparishcouncil.gov.uk). The email address changeover has not been quite as smooth, as we've found that although it seems to work fine on Outlook on Windows, we haven't got the correct installation information to get it to work on iPhones or iPads. As soon as we get this resolved then the Parish Councillors will start using their new email address for all Parish Council business instead of their personal emails, which will provide greater security both for the Parish Council and for the Councillors.

## **Thanks**

Many people contribute to our parish and its life, and I would again like to thank everyone who does a little, or a lot, to keep the parish going, looking good, and being the place where we want to live.

Thanks to the farmers who manage the landscape, cut all the hedges, remove fallen and diseased trees, and when they have done that, grow our food.

Thanks to the team that looks after the church. It has been another difficult year for the church, and our Church Wardens Gordon Bower and Michèle Berry are working hard to try and ensure its future. I know they would love some more help with this, so please step forward if you can.

Thanks to the well area gardeners, Sheenagh and Sue, for their expert gardening skills, and to Jed and Roger for bringing and taking away. Sue also keeps the area around the Coffinswell sign on Under Way look nice. Sheenagh's gardening and planting on the triangle opposite "The Linny", together with the new bench, noticeboards and sign have made this area a much smarter area than it was a year or two ago.

Thank you to all our litter pickers for keeping all the roads and footpaths as litter-free as they are and thank you to Sheenagh Orchard for managing the teams and the kit.

Thanks again to Tim Rumball for managing the footpath maintenance, and the strimming volunteers.

Thank you to my fellow councillors, past and present, and to Jane, John and Heather for their work and their support.

Finally, extra thanks to our Clerk Lucie for all her work running the Council and keeping us on track.

*\*\*District Cllr J Radford left the meeting at 8.11pm\*\**

Cllr Bell thanked the Chairman for carrying out his duties effectively and conscientiously. This met with agreement and light-hearted approval from those present.

## **Informal Public Session – Discussion Points**

A member of the public raised questions regarding the Government's heating oil support scheme, noting difficulties in obtaining clear information from the District Council regarding eligibility and implementation. It was reported that initial contact details had been collected from potentially eligible residents, but further updates had been limited. Concerns were expressed about the apparent lack of progress and clarity on the administration of the scheme.

The Chairman advised that such schemes are often announced before full operational details are in place and cited previous examples where national schemes had experienced implementation issues. The use of collective purchasing schemes for heating oil was also mentioned, including services that allow residents to compare prices and reduce costs through group buying arrangements.

Attention then turned to local matters which included fly-tipping and potholes. During the discussion Cllr Bell encouraged residents to report issues directly to the relevant authorities, noting that multiple reports can help prompt action. The reporting process was described as straightforward, including the use of photographic evidence and What3Words location data.

Concerns were raised regarding the reporting and repair of potholes, including the handling of duplicate reports and thresholds for intervention. The Chairman clarified that residents may add their support to existing reports.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and the meeting ended informally at 8.23pm, with groups staying on to chat and to enjoy the refreshments provided.

Signed:  
Chairman of Coffinswell Parish Council

Dated: