



TATWORTH AND FORTON PARISH COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2024

Hello, welcome to our first newsletter of 2024 for the residents of Tatworth and Forton Parish and the first to be delivered to **all** households. It is also available on our website if you prefer that option.

2024 is going to be a challenging year for the Parish and its amenities with two planning reviews and the fallout from Somerset Council's financial issues. However, we will still be working hard to improve our amenities and resilience to flooding.

Councillors

We have 12 Councillors that work hard for the benefit of the residents of Tatworth and Forton plus surrounding communities. They are volunteers and give up their time free of charge. The Council is led by our Chairman Richard Down, who has made an immense contribution to this community. He joined the Council 18-20 years ago as a young man in his early 30s and has served on every committee at some point. He became Chairman in 2020 during the difficult days of the pandemic and lockdown. He is particularly interested in youth provision, the amenities in the Parish and has organised community events, more recently the Queens Jubilee and Kings Coronation in the playing fields which were enjoyed by many hundreds of residents. He helps on a practical level, getting his hands dirty at Jubilee Fields, helping with bulb planting, clearing downed trees and litter picking. Working together Richard and wife Kaye have created a Christmas light event and helped organise the Parish Council's Christmas lunch. He is a strong supporter of St John's Church. He has built up a relationship between the Council, police and other organisations in the area and has highly valued local knowledge of the village, its waterways and residents. His practical knowledge of ground works is particularly useful in planning and Parish amenities. He also has been on the Playing Fields committee and is currently on the Memorial Hall committee. As busy small holders, the hours given over to the community by Richard and Kaye often go unrecognised and as a Parish Council and on behalf of the residents we want to say Thank You.

Finance

Somerset Council

Residents may be aware that Somerset Council has a projected £108million funding gap in 2024/25. This is mainly due to ever-increasing care costs and a lack of financial support for these from central Government. The current plan is to address the shortfall by:-

£35m of savings

£17m by gaining agreement from Government for a 9.99% increase in Council Tax rather than the currently permitted 4.99%

£36m from reserves

£15m from either selling assets or borrowing money or both

£ 5m additional funding by HM Government

Note that proposed savings which may impact parishioners include the closure of public toilets in Chard, reduced leisure facilities in Yeovil, increased parking charges, introduction of a booking scheme for Chard Recycling Centre and reductions in highway maintenance. It is also planned to replace the black recycling box with a lower cost flexible alternative. Within the savings Somerset Council is also seeking to devolve responsibility for services and assets to Town and Parish Councils. This would increase the Parish Council's costs.

Tatworth and Forton Parish Council

In recent years the Council's element of Council Tax has either not been increased or been kept to a low level while its reserves have been reduced. It is now necessary to ensure that budgeted income matches budgeted expenditure. This will result in an increase which equates to approximately £14.50 per annum for the average householder in Band D.

The Parish council costs cover

Community – includes Youth Club, grants, newsletter, defibrillators

Public facilities – includes ground maintenance, bus shelters, seats

Running expenses – includes staff and office costs, insurance and audit fees

It is also responsible for maintenance of the Cemetery (approx. £10,000 per annum) which is self-funding. The impact of services and assets being devolved from Somerset is not fully known at this time but the aim is to cover any additional costs from reserves.

Jubilee Field

The three-metre-wide path has been completed and in the Spring some grass will grow over the plastic mesh improving the look and safety of the walk way. The hedge laying to the left of the pathway as you progress from School Lane has been completed although the clearance of the brush removed has been delayed as the ground is so wet. The Council has been praised for encouraging proper growth and wildlife. The brushwood removed is donated to a River Axe landscape recovery scheme at Magdalen Farm near Winsham. They will be using the brush to protect the river banks and slow the flow of the water allowing it to flood onto the Winsham flood plain. The Defra supported project is designed to alleviate the river flooding downstream within our Parish and beyond. Some chippings from the removed brush have also helped improve the remaining muddy areas at the top of the new path and the top gateway. The improved field drainage and creation of a storm water retention bank has been tested with the record rainfalls experienced. The Spring should provide us with some wild flowers there and further up the park field where a dedicated wild flower meadow will develop. The tree planting of specimen native oak, sweet chestnut, copper beech and wild cherry trees is completed in the park field and some sixty more woodland trust trees to the fenced off wet area plus more goat willow, silver birch and rowan too. Details of the plan for additional benches that can be installed in memory of members of the parish can be obtained from the Parish Clerk. Please look out for and read new information signs. The allotments still have plots without tenants but with the improved access we do not expect these to be available for much longer. Anyone interested should apply to the Parish Clerk to have their names added to the list.



Shelters, Bins and Seats

The new community notice board is in place at the new bus shelter at Perry Street Club. We all can take advantage of this via the parish office. All the bus shelters need continued maintenance and regular cleaning, a contractor will be commencing a schedule of repairs and painting shortly.

Memorial Seats

We have obtained permission to fit 3 public seats in the Parish, and are offering our residents the opportunity to donate a bench as a memorial and another option may be to purchase a share in a bench. We have had one offer but if anyone else is interested in this plan should contact the Parish Clerk for more information.

Coombses Pond

The purchase of this latest amenity that now belongs to the parish was completed late in 2023 not allowing us to organise work before the weather turned. We are grateful to the residents who volunteered to form a working party and some preliminary, professional work must be arranged to commence the task of

restoring this important space to a safe, relaxation area. As all owners of land bordering watercourses, we have critical responsibilities. A high priority should be given to the clearance and management of the leat bordering the pond and banks of the brook to ensure the unrestricted flow of storm water. Insurance limitations restrict working party activities to using hand tools only. Only those who carry a recognised certificate in using power tools in a public area will be permitted to volunteer in this way. The access and perimeter path must be cleared of vegetation and made safe. A contract has been placed for a professional team to commence work from a floating platform. More professional contract work is proposed in the first instance in the hope that volunteers can gain access and return this very important amenity to all the parish to enjoy. These are the “before” photos



Parish Green Verges

A thousand spring bulbs planted late last year suffered from a currently suspended Openreach job in Waterlake Road but we hope those remaining will soon appear.

War Memorial

Professional stone masons have made a fine job of the war memorial restoration. Additional work to the associated railings is planned now the trees from that area have been cut back.

Solar Lighting

A Somerset contractor has installed solar lighting along the short path near Perry Street Club, adjacent to the Forton brook from Waterlake Road, opposite Lower Coombses, to Holway. Some of the foliage there must also be managed.

Litter problem by Councillor Chapple

Is the litter problem getting worse, and can you help? From the main roads to the lanes to the footpaths... it seems to me that it's everywhere. And it seems to come back in no time at all. A little while ago, I cleared the short lane linking South Chard with the A358, extracting almost a sackful of litter and, inexplicably, nine bottles from the hedgerow. Within 24 hours, it was already starting to re-appear. While we would all like councils to deal with the problem, given the current circumstances, I'm afraid it isn't going to happen. So if we don't want to live in an open litter bin, it's up to us. While occasional mass litter picks are great, they are never going to be frequent enough to keep the place looking clean and tidy all the time. My proposal is that different people take charge of a certain stretch of road, footpath etc. and keep it clear as often as they can. I'd like to liaise with volunteers and record the areas covered. After a while, hopefully it will be the whole parish! We can provide some litter-picking equipment.

Can you help? If so, do please email me at the address below. Thank you. (Of course, if any people reading this do themselves deposit litter... please stop now! Other people shouldn't have to clear up after you.)

Important. If you do decide to join us in this, please do not tackle the main roads, take great care of traffic everywhere, and be aware that anything you are willing to do in this area is ultimately at your own risk.

Many thanks!

Contact email address is: admin@tatworthandfortonparishcouncil.org.uk

Flooding in the Parish by Councillor Heal, our Flood Co-ordinator

We have had a great deal of rain and fortunately our villages have not been badly affected. The River Axe has burst its bank a couple of times and made Chard Junction impassable. Emergency Services were

called and St Johns Hall was made available if required, but thankfully it was not. Our Resilience Sheds have had further improvements with equipment after our visit by Martock Flood Wardens. Thank you to Somerset Prepared for providing a grant for these. Further good news - the Community and Flood Warning training by the Devon and Cornwall Environment Agency, is happening in February. Hopefully we will not be required but if needed we will at least feel more able to help in a safe and positive way. I would personally like to thank these volunteers for their involvement in our community. If Parishioners have need of our help or wish for further information contact details are on our Parish Council website.

Cemetery

Maintenance continues to make this one of the most attractive cemeteries in the area. The lavender hedge around the Garden of Remembrance will be extended in the Spring once new stock is received by the suppliers. We have noticed a large amount of litter in the car park hedges, mainly alcohol bottles and cans. Please can this stop! It is not giving the best impression to those visiting loved ones.

Planning

An Informal Hearing by the Planning Inspector of Crossman and Mears' appeal against Somerset Council's decision to refuse planning permission for 95 houses at the top of Perry Street took place in the Council Offices in Yeovil on Thursday 8th February. The outcome is unknown at the time of writing.

The Parish Council submitted objections to the proposed Persimmon Development (236 dwellings) on land adjoining Holbear by the Forton Road in October 2023. Nothing further has been heard to date.

It is likely that Somerset Council will reintroduce a charge in 2024 for residents requiring advice as to whether or not a proposed development requires planning permission.

Community Matters

Youth Club

This continues at the Memorial Hall on Monday evenings 6:30-8:30pm for Year 5 upwards. From April onwards the Youth Club will be concentrating on ages 5-11, Years 1-6. Please come and give it a try. This is run by Active Learning & Skills, Chard and funded by the Parish Council. If this is not supported it will not carry-on next year.

Christmas Lunch

The Parish Council have received numerous letters of thanks for holding the event.



Fishing

We have been advised by the Chard Angling Club that they are planning to run several introduction to fishing and tuition sessions for juniors at Perry Street Pond (Mums and Dads welcome). These sessions are run with help from the Angling Trust who have been running such events for many years. All coaches will be qualified and DBS checked, and tackle and bait will be provided. Please indicate your interest and get further information from chardanglingclub.co.uk website.

Dates of meetings: Full Council – 7 March, 4 April, 2 May, 13 June. 7pm Memorial Hall

Council Office open 10.00-12.00 Tuesday and Friday, right hand door Memorial Hall

If you have any questions or feedback arising from this newsletter please send them to admin@tatworthandfortonparishcouncil.org.uk.