



West Monkton Parish Council

2023/24 ANNUAL REPORT

Your Parish Council

Who we are

West Monkton Parish Council (WMPC) is made up of nine Parish Councillors and a team of two Clerks who are all passionate about our local area.

West Monkton Parish Councillors:



Cllr Stuart Haskins

Chairman

stuarthaskins@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Cllr Alan Hall

Vice Chairman

Member responsible for Water Resilience and Maidenbrook Country Park

alanhall@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Cllr Barry Gage

Chairman of Brittons Ash Community Hall (BACH) Committee and member responsible for footpaths

barrygage@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Cllr Hazel Ellis

Spital Trust representative and member of the BACH Committee

hazelellis@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Cllr Mark Besley

Member responsible of Highways

markbesley@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Cllr Geoff Hope

Member responsible for Public Open Space, Recreation and Children's Play Areas and member of the BACH Committee

geoffhope@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Cllr Noel Munson

noelmunson@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Cllr Ray Tully

Member responsible for Safe Routes to School and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), member of the BACH Committee and WM Village Hall representative.

raytully@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk

West Monkton Parish and Somerset Council Councillor:



Cllr Norman Cavill

Member responsible for Water Resilience and LGR and member of the BACH Committee and Somerset Council Councillor

normancavill@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Somerset Council Councillor:



David Fothergill – Somerset Council (SC)
Councillor for Monkton and North Curry Division.
Leader of the Opposition
david.fothergill@somerset.gov.uk

Parish Council Clerks:



Amy Shepherd - Clerk
clerk@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk



Kate Welsh – Assistant Clerk
(Community)
community@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk

What WMPC does

WMPC works collaboratively with members of the community and partners to deliver our vision and objectives for the Parish, going over and above what is expected from a Parish Council.

Our Vision for West Monkton

Our vision is for WMPC and the local community to work together to protect and improve the social, recreational and environmental well-being of West Monkton and the lives of all who live, visit and work here.

Our Priorities and Objectives

WMPC has agreed priorities and objectives, available here: <https://westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/West-Monkton-Parish-Council-Vision-and-Objectives-Final.pdf>, focused on Our Environment, Community and the Parish Council.

In early 2024 the Parish Council developed a Strategic Plan for the period 2024-2027. The Strategic Plan is available here: <https://westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk/parish-council/documents/>

What WMPC has achieved in 2023/24

Our Environment

- Enabled the planting of trees in the parish. Further trees have been planted in Maidenbrook Country Park (MCP) during 2023/24 and 200 whips have been obtained from the Woodland Trust to be planted on the Sports Pitch site adjacent to the Eastern Relief Road.
- Continued to deliver a hi-vis initiative to encourage children to cycle and walk to school safely. More than 100 hi-vis jackets have been given to school children so far.
- Promoted public transport that is available in the Parish.
- Delivered swap events for seeds and toys.
- Provided grant funding for individuals for Climate Change projects based in the parish.
- Promoted recycling and reusing through the continued delivery of the Community Fridge to reduce food waste and running monthly repair cafes.
- Delivered a Growing Competition.
- Delivered two Farm Walks.
- Secured more grant funding for the Community Garden enabling its expansion.
- Deployed the Speed Indicator Device at various locations across the Parish, the data collected is passed to the police to inform their parking enforcement schedule.
- Undertaken a review of the village signs and requested feedback from Somerset Council with a view to making identified improvements as soon as possible.
- Continuing to engage with Developers and Somerset Council Officers about the proposals for Monkton Heathfield Phase 2 Development, building a good relationship with Creech St Michael Parish Council and organising a public consultation event for members of our community to provide their feedback.
- Continuing to engage with Developers and Somerset Council Officers about the completion and handover of the Monkton Heathfield Phase 1 public open spaces.
- Reviewed the phase 4 Hartnells Farm Development proposals and submitted comments to the Local Planning Authority.
- Commenced a project to develop a multi-agency approach to exploring natural flood management measures on streams and water courses in the Parish to slow the flow of water and reduce the risk of flooding of residential properties in Bathpool and applied for grant funding.
- Working with the Environment Agency to acquire land to enable a permanent flood relief pump to be installed in the Old River Tone at Bathpool.

Our Community

- Continued to deliver the Community Fridge, a great amount of food is being collected from shops and food waste is being reduced.
- Recruited in excess of 100 volunteers in the community to support community projects.

- Provided a weekly community café on Wednesdays from 2.30pm until 4pm at the BACH.
- Provided weekly Stay and Play Groups on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning at the BACH.
- Carried out regular litter picks with volunteers in the community
- Delivered a successful community event to celebrate the King's Coronation.
- Delivered a Dog Show and Easter Egg Hunt at the Country Park.
- Taking the lead in organising a D-Day Event at the Country Park on 6th June 2024.
- Delivered a monthly community quiz at Tacchi Morris.
- Delivered a festive volunteers evening at the BACH to thank all our volunteers for their support.
- Provide a monthly bereavement support group at the BACH.
- Continued to provide a Community Website – www.monktonmatters.co.uk
- Improved existing footpaths through the installation of new gates and stiles on Public Rights of Way across the Parish
- Provided grant funding to charitable, small and local groups to deliver goods or services for the benefit of members of the community in the Parish.
- Completed the legal transfer of the sports pitch land adjacent to the ERR and installed a fenced dog walking area with accessible gates.
- Poppy of Honour Memorial has been designated to be permanently sited in the CP, planning permission has been obtained for a Pavilion for the Memorial and fundraising efforts have commenced.

Our Parish Council

- Been an open, transparent and proactive Parish Council, taking new projects forward and sharing information on the WMPC website www.westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk , Monkton Matters website www.monktonmatters.co.uk and the WMPC Facebook Page www.facebook.com/westmonktonparishcouncil
- Continued to deliver the WMPC Vision and Objectives to focus WMPCs activities on important matters in our Parish.
- Taken an active role in the Hestercombe Local Community Network, with Cllr Haskins acting as Chair of the LCN and Cllr Cavill as Vice Chair.
- Used Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support the delivery of parish priorities and objectives including:
 - Community Fridge
 - Community Garden
 - Community Event and Engagement Equipment
 - Defibrillator at the Village Hall

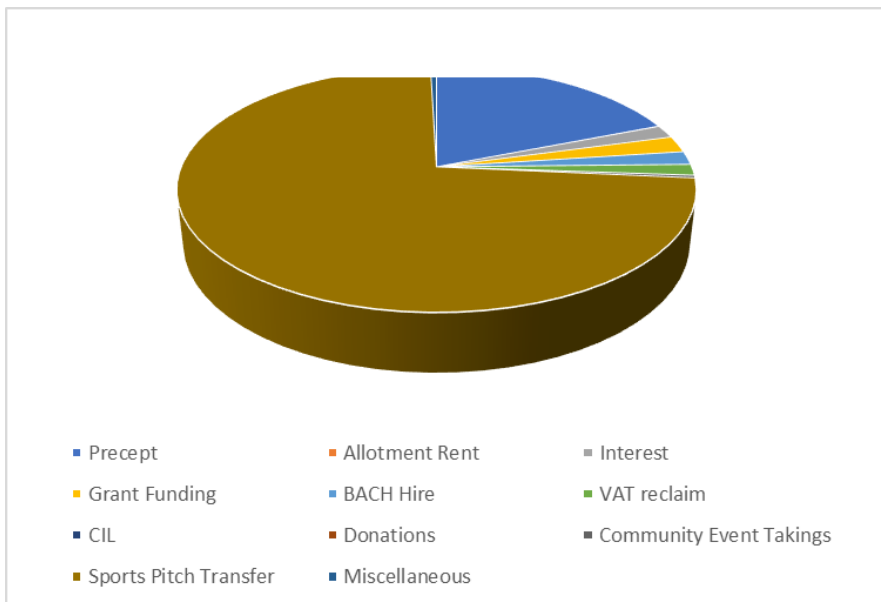
- Provision of new benches.
- Provision of more litter bins.
- Delivering the vision for the Country Park.
- Tree and Hedge Planting.
- Supporting the Canal Towpath Comet Trail project.
- Footpath restoration.
- Applied for and secured grant funding to support our community work to deliver an expansion to the Community Fridge and Community Garden.
- Encouraged members of the community to give ideas of what WMPC should do and how money should be spent through regular posting on Monkton Matters, the Facebook Page and the Village News.
- Ensured value for money in respect of all of the Councils spend through obtaining quotes for all work.
- Publicised information about income and spend in a more understandable format (available below).
- Developed a Parish Council Strategic Plan 2024-27 setting out a Vision, Priorities, Objectives and a Plan of Activity for the Parish Council.
- Been an active member of the Garden Town Advisory Board

What income does WMPC receive and how money was spent in 2023/24?

The information from the financial spreadsheet for this year has been presented as a series of pie charts below. If you are interested in further details, please do not hesitate to contact clerk@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk¹

¹ The information in the charts is based on the data available at 29th February 2024.

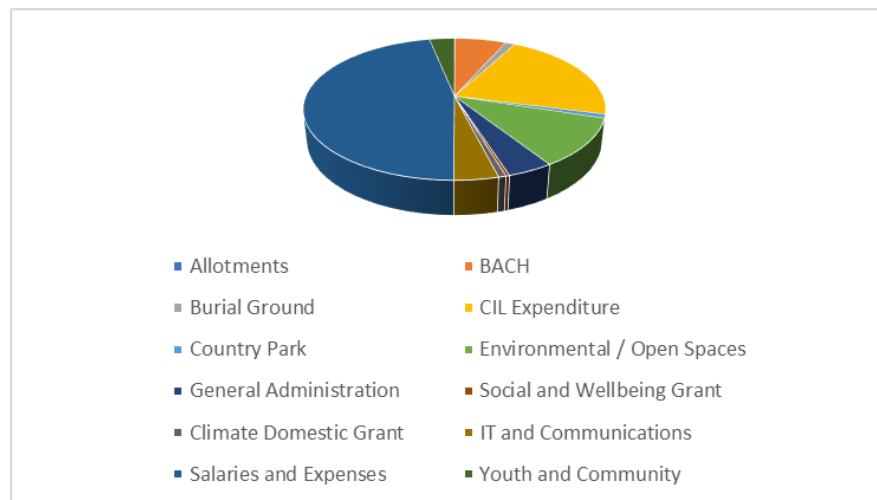
Income:



Type of income	Income received
Precept	£121710.00
Interest	£10793.87
Allotments	£300.00
Grant Funding	£13832.37
BACH Hire	£11269.02
VAT reclaimed	£9281.83
Donations	£65.95
Sports Pitch Transfer	£467794.40
Community Event Takings	£2197.17
Miscellaneous	£2864.93
Total income	£640109.50

Expenditure:

Type of Expenditure	Expenditure
Allotments	£97.15
Brittons Ash Community Hall	£9659.61
Burial Ground	£1840.00
CIL Expenditure	£31457.45
Country Park	£1311.24
Environmental / Open Spaces	£16295.10
General Administration	£6132.99
Social and Wellbeing Grant	£500.00
Climate Domestic Grant	£1000.00
IT and Communications	£5901.44
Salaries and Expenses	£69263.15
Youth and Community	£4732.45
Total Expenditure	£173254.10



If you have any comments to make on any of the pie charts presented above, please contact clerk@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Parish Councillor Reports:

CLLr Stuart Haskins – Chairman’s Report

I hope this report finds you well and looking forward to a warm and dry summer. Let’s face it, we have certainly had our share of wet weather this winter and I’m sure the keen Gardner’s out there will be desperate to make a start on their plots. Your Parish Council has once again had a very busy year and I will try to bring you up to speed with all the Projects we have been working on without, I hope making my report too long. As you will see your Councillors have reported on issues, they cover at our meetings however I will be adding to those comments in my report. I am pleased to welcome Councillor Noel Munson to the PC team. He is a retired member of our Parish and in recent months been part of our repair team at the BACH.

The year started with the vesting of the new Somerset Council Unitary Authority on 1st of April. This of course saw the demise of the 4 District Councils and Somerset County Council. Under the new set up Parishes have been grouped together into what are now called Local Community Networks (LCNs). Under this arrangement West Monkton PC sits in the Hestercombe LCN together with 7 other Parishes these being Broomfield, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Creech St Micheal, Durston, Kingston St Mary, North Petherton and Thurloxton. I am currently the Chairman of this LCN and I think it’s fair to say that after a slow start we are now beginning to find our way and hopefully fill the gap left between Parish Councils and the new Somerset Council. April 1st also saw the “go live” of the new Taunton Town Council which as some of you may know took over control of a significant part of the Cheddon Fitzpaine PC area. I should point out that this has not significantly affected the way in which WMPC works with Cheddon Fitzpaine PC on matters such as our Neighbourhood Plan, the WW1 wood and Country Park.

As I am sure you are aware by now the Somerset Council is currently facing considerable financial challenges and major shortfalls in its budget both for this current year, 23/24 and going forward into 24/25 and beyond. As a result, and under the banner of “Devolution of Services” the Parish Councils have been asked if they are prepared to take on certain nonessential services in their community. WMPC has expressed an interest in taking on some of these duties but to date nothing has been agreed or committed too. However, we believe we can deliver some services more cost effectively and efficiently for our community possibly using our Parish Lengthsman and / or working with our LCN Partner Parishes.

Your Community Clerk, Kate Welsh, has been very busy this year and in addition to running the Stay and Play group, Community Café, the repair shop, Bereavement Group and much more she has been pivotal to the events taking place at the Country Park. These included the Easter Egg hunt, the Coronation Party, the Dog show etc. Other events initiated by Kate have also been very successful in particular the monthly Community Quiz Nights which are run at the Tacchi Morris Arts Centre.

Kate is of course the key link between the Parish Council and the Army of Community Volunteers, and it was enjoyable to meet and chat with some of “Kate’s Army” at our Volunteers festive evening in December. Volunteering really does make a difference to your community, and it is only through this involvement support and commitment that we can continue to build our community and bring the old and new parts of the Parish closer together. Our litter Pickers, Community Fridge and Country Park teams to name just a few really have made a huge impact and really do make the difference in and around the Parish. So, I would urge anyone who has time on their hands no matter how small it might be, please get in touch with Kate and join her Army.

The World War One Wood and Country Park continue to develop and bring enjoyment to those who volunteer in it as well those who simply use it to exercise. Several events are now a fixture in the calendar as the location becomes well know across the County. Events like the Remembrance Day Service and Easter Egg hunt are now well attended, and plans are

developing well for the D Day 80 years celebrations on June 6th this year. It was hoped that the amazing “Poppy of Honour” would be installed by June but that is now looking unlikely due to the complexity of the structure and its installation time required. It is hoped however that it will be in place by November this year ready for the Remembrance Day Service and its dedication.

Your Parish Council continues to meet twice each month except for August and December. In addition to the regular PC meetings, your Clerks and Councillors participate with numerous other groups and organisations such as the Garden Town Advisory Board, LCN, Multi-Agency Flood Group, A358 Road Improvements, SALC and many more. When added we attend in excess of 150 meetings each year in person and online.

For the last two years the Parish Council has developed a Vision, Priorities and Objectives, for 2024 this has been expanded and a Strategic Plan for the Parish and Community has been developed. This sets out what the strategy is and objectives are for the coming year and how we will deliver our Vision for the Community. From this we hope that you will gain a better understanding of what we do and how the Precept is spent. It is unfortunate that we needed to increase the Precept again this year but as you will see it is considerably less than the average rise across the County or the figure residents of the new Taunton Council now find themselves having to pay. The PC Website (www.westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk) has been updated this year and is now easier to navigate likewise Monkton Matters (www.monktonmatters.co.uk) is now the “go to” site for local information and updates on what’s going on in and around the Parish.

MH2 the Garden Town development planning application or (Langaller Park as it will be known) was re-submitted by Persimmon / Redrow (The Developers) in early February of this year and as the development is in both West Monkton and Creech Str Micheal Parishes, we formed a joint Parish working group. Since the original application was made some 2 years ago, we have held regular meetings with the CSM PC, the Developers, the County Planning Department and County Highways to raise our concerns, put forward alternative ideas and hopefully influenced all parties in making the correct decisions for our community. In some matters we have been successful in achieving change to the proposals but not so in others. Whilst approval of MH2 at some point is inevitable the experiences of WMPC with MH1 are still prominent in our minds and those experiences have been put to good use in our discussions. By the time you read this report the public consultation events at West Monkton and Creech St Micheal will have taken place where I hope you have had a chance to make comment to the Parish Councillors be it for or against the development plans. Following these consultations your Parish Clerk and Councillors will draw all the feedback and comments together and submit it to the Planning Officer. That report will of course be available on the PC website.

MH 1 continues to be a thorn in the side of your PC but at least we are now progressing on a number of fronts. Following snagging works by the Developers the adoption of estate roads and ERR by County Highways is progressing at last. In addition to this and following our public meetings in late in 2023 your Parish Council is now in the final stages of taking over the MH1 Public Open Spaces (POS). It was hoped that the acquisition of the land by your PC and the setting up of the new Management Company would be completed and the end of February, but it is now looking unlikely and that it will be mid to late April before legal acquisition is complete. That said, we are sure that the new arrangements will be a step change in the management of MH1 and with resident participation on the Board I am sure that the benefits will soon be evident to see. Following an exceptionally wet winter flooding continues to be high on our list of issues with the area in around the Old River Tone in Bathpool being of particular concern. Your PC, working with the Environment Agency is currently progressing the purchase of a parcel of land south of the Railway on Hyde Lane on which to install 2 permanent pumps. These works will be funded from the Hartnells Development S106 fund. Other areas of concern are the new attenuation ponds installed in recent developments. Wessex Water have investigated these to ensure they are installed correctly prior to adoption.

Cllr Alan Hall continues to lead a multi-agency working group to develop initiatives and projects that will “slow the flow” of water from the Quantocks into your Parish. Also, in and around the Parish we have numerous sections of blocked highway drainage. It is hoped that some of these sites will be repaired by SC Highways in the new financial year but given the ongoing financial position SC finds itself in, it is unlikely all of these repairs will be completed, and some sites may revert back the PC to resolve them.

The Hartnells Phase 4 Planning Application was also submitted in late 2023. Your PC raised a number of concerns about the application involving drainage POS and the impact on Greenway.

Earlier this year your PC completed the legal acquisition of the land on the South side of the ERR which was designated for sports pitches under the MH1 development planning approval. In partnership and working with the Taunton Rugby Club and West Monkton Cricket Club, a committee has been formed to oversee the project. Plans have been prepared and a pre-planning advice application has been submitted regarding the proposal to amend the original MH1 granted planning approval to reflect the new facilities on the site. A fenced off dog walking area is now in place and starting this spring work will commence to install pitch drainage and underground services after which the Rugby and Cricket pitches will be laid. Some funding for delivery has been received from MH1 developers, grant applications will be made to secure additional funding. Further development of the site is planned which will see the building of a Skateboard facility and BMX pump track and Changing Rooms. At present the construction timings of these facilities aren't definite but hopefully will be in place within the next 2 years. Over 200 trees have also been secured from the Woodland Trust which will further enhance the site and local environment.

Thanks to the Volunteers, the Community shed / fridge continues to be a great success and the volume of food that now passes through it is increasing year on year with daily collections now reaching into more than 10 suppliers. The food, clothes, toys and the book swaps are also very popular so much so, that the initiative has now outgrown the shed. Your PC is therefore investigating how the facility can be expanded which may involve a second shed or a completely new building. Some Grant funding has already been obtained so watch this space as they say.

During the year Councillor Elliston retired from the PC due to relocating his home and a new job. Its pleasing to see he is still taking an active role in the running of the Community Garden which has really taken off this year and thanks to a recent Health and Wellbeing Grant from SALC, the Garden now has a Potting Shed, more tools and more growing beds. All being well and if the rain stops, this summer should see much more produce grown some of which will be placed in the community fridge/shed.

So, in conclusion it's been a hectic year yet again for all the Councillors and Clerks I just want to say a final word that in addition to the numerous meeting I have mentioned the PC team have been out there running competitions, putting up gates and fences, cutting grass erecting sheds, setting up and running functions, raising sponsors and support. On your behalf I would like to thank all the Councillors for their contribution to the community plus the Clerks, our Lengthsman and finally the Volunteers; without their support many of our projects would not be possible or as successful and our Community would not be building and developing as it is.

Cllr Stuart Haskins
Chairman West Monkton Parish Council.

Cllr Alan Hall – Vice Chairman

It has been a busier year than last as the PC continues to drive the needs and benefits for the parish community.

Sports Pitches : The groundwork to establish a sound controlled start to the Sports Pitches has been done. Taking over this area of land from Persimmon/Redrow was finally completed in August 2023 after 8 years of frustration for the residents of Monkton Heathfield Phase 1 and the wider parish. Proposed designs for the site have been developed and approved by the ECB, RFU and Somerset Cricket foundation. The site has been designed to benefit young people in the Parish and working with West Monkton Cricket Club, it will expand their options for junior and ladies teams and working also with Taunton Rugby Club Junior sections the added facility allows the large junior squads to not be hampered by washed out pitches.

Ground works start in earnest in March to prepare pitches for drainage, levelling and seeding with the plan for pitches to be ready for the 2025 season.

Within the sports field area BMX track and hopefully a skate park facility are proposed. All plans are with Somerset Council Planning for their feedback.

Country Park and Memorial Somerset Wood: With the volunteers we have enhanced the area with consolidating the pond area with aquaplants, the trees planted in 2018 are well established and have grown to 10 to 12 feet. It has been a challenge to try and control the deer influx who seem to think all the work is done to assist their mealtimes.

Unfortunately there has been some vandalism at the Country Park which is demoralising for the volunteers, after all their hard work to have items destroyed is not acceptable. Plans are in place to fully open up the park by June this year after the 80th anniversary D-Day celebrations being organised for 6th of June, with once again the Beacon lighting at 21.15pm nationwide.

The PC has applied for Lottery funding to establish and consolidate the amenities within the park for the benefit of the local community and still driving the concept of walk and cycling to the park and events.

The PC has been honoured with the agreement for the National Memorial “Poppy of Honour” having a permanent home within the Somerset Wood representing all the fallen from UK and Commonwealth countries. This will be a prestigious event for the unveiling by dignitaries from many walks of life. Working with the Architects a design has been established and planning approval given. Work is now focussed on fundraising to get the memorial built this year. Once installed it cannot be moved thus securing the area for eternity.

Flood Prevention Scheme initiated: As rainfall increases each year, the risk of flooding in Bathpool from the Old River Tone also increases. A Multi-Agency approach including major utility bodies, Hestercombe House, Quantock Hills, FWAG and Farmers within the water catchment area has commenced and a plan of slow the flow, natural flood prevention measures on water courses / streams dispersing into the Old River Tone has been developed and grant funding applied for.

Representatives of FWAG are visiting each farm / landowner in the catchment with what they consider, working together, will not only aid the farms / land but give safer living to properties further downstream. The PC is working with the Environment Agency, to enable the installation of two new permanent pumps in the Bathpool area to reduce flood risk to properties in Bathpool further.

I represent the PC on the Garden Town Advisory Board which provides advice on developments being proposed and makes recommendations to ensure that proposals meet the Garden Town principles.

I thank all the council members for their help and especially our Clerk and Community Clerk without whom my life would have been a lot harder.

Clr Barry Gage

The public rights of way continue to be well used by members of the parish and beyond. My thanks go to all are volunteers who help keep these valued amenities clear of vegetation. Please help by taking a pair of secateurs with you on your walks.

Brittons Ash Community Hall

My thanks goes to Maggie Little who continues to control the booking system for the BACH, she can be contacted on 01823 323662.

If you are interested in playing Bridge you may wish to know that the Taunton Bridge Club now meets at the hall on Friday evenings.

The Parish Council has taken the decision to cut the grass verges on the A3259 through the village and in Greenway using its own machine, this decision has resulted in a saving of approximately £4000 for the Council.

Cllr Hazel Ellis

I first came to live in the Parish in 1964 and have lived here, on and off, since then. I was first elected as a Parish Councillor in 1989. I have served continuously as such, until the present date, and as you can imagine, I have witnessed a great many changes in that time, mostly for the good, but not all.

I run the local Rainbow Guide Unit, which although is based in Ruishton, also covers West Monkton, Monkton Heathfield, Creech St Michael and the surrounding areas. We have a long waiting list so I am urgently seeking more assistants to help me with this and if you would like to volunteer your help it would be gratefully appreciated by myself and the girls.

I am a member of the Brittons Ash Community Hall Committee and I am the Parish Councils representative for the Spital Trust Almshouses, these are occupied by four older ladies who have a connection within the Parish.

Cllr Mark Besley

The PC has continued to interact with Somerset Council Highways dept this past year. Some work has been carried out regarding the numerous pot-holes, blocked gullies, overtopping streams and flooding in the parish however there is still much work to be done. Some highways responsibilities may be devolved to Parish Council or Local Community Networks which may improve things. The Parish Council does not agree with the highways design for the Monkton Heathfield phase 2 development (known as Langaller Park). Despite numerous meetings to voice our concerns the design has not changed; we fear significant congestion between the 'Cricket Club' and 'Langaller' roundabouts with the proposed 30 mph speed restriction, 5 pedestrian crossing points and the replacement of the roundabouts with multi crossing zones. Accessing the new 'through' school in the development by foot or by bicycle will be a challenge with the current number of vehicle movements on the A38 (between 10 – 15,000 per day), this is before the building of 1450 plus new houses. The Parish Council welcomes the installation of the proposed traffic lights at the Monkton Heathfield Road junction with the A38 which should reduce traffic coming from the north into Monkton Heathfield. School children crossing the bottom of Yallands Hill face a continuing risk, agreement regarding a crossing is required between SC Highways dept, the developers and the Parish Council but despite regular requests to move the idea forward no progress has been made since my last report. Traffic management at the bottom of Yallands Hill should reduce traffic flows coming into Monkton Heathfield from the south.

If you have concerns about highways issues in the community please get in touch with the PC, any issues can be raised by members of the public at our twice monthly meetings.

Cllr Noel Munson

As the newest member appointed to the Parish Council I am finding my way around the roles and responsibilities of the council and its policies. I have lived in the community since 1997 and I am keen to be involved in shaping our future at a challenging time for the Somerset Council which affords us new opportunities at a local level. Changes always bring concerns and risk and I aim to represent the community in an impartial and balanced way to ensure we achieve great outcomes for everyone.

I have personal interest in the power of sport to bring people together and help youngsters to grow, so this will be an area of focus for me along with my experience in owning and managing a home care business for the elderly which will stand me in good stead when representing the more senior members of the community. I am also keen to protect and enhance the natural beauty of our parish and aim to lead on environmental issues.

Cllr Norman Cavill

Working as a County and Parish Councillor this last year has been challenging. It has been good to be involved with both MH1 and 2 sites as well as the Country Park and our proposed new sports pitches.

As the Unitary Council has taken over the District's obligations, so my work now covers issues and delivery of a wider range of service and project delivery. I have been particularly involved with Audit and Planning Committees, it seems much of my year has been taken up with identifying financial and phosphate issues.

I must admit I still like to be planting a tree or building cages to protect them. It is great to be a Parish Councillor and be able to make a difference to our area whilst helping our community. As ever, I am more than happy to assist with any issues you may have, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Clerk's Reports:

Amy Shepherd – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

The overall role of the Clerk is to ensure the smooth and lawful running of the Council and to advise Councillors accordingly. The Councillors' Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations and Standing Orders are revised, reissued and adopted every year. The Register of Councillors' Disclosable Interests is filed and maintained at Somerset Council. Councillors can apply for a 'Dispensation' if Disclosable Interest would otherwise prevent them from speaking or voting.

Parish Council Meetings

PC meetings take place in the BACH twice a month on the second Tuesday and fourth Tuesday of every month at 7.00pm. Members of the public are invited to attend the meetings and speak in Public Question Time. All agendas and minutes from PC meetings are available on the PC website (www.westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk).

Parish Council Websites

In addition to the PC website and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/westmonktonparishcouncil), WMPC have a community website (www.monktonmatters.co.uk). Monkton Matters is an online space giving news, information and details of events in the Parish of West Monkton (incorporating Monkton Heathfield, West Monkton and Bathpool). Monkton Matters is for the community and its contents is developed and posted by the community. All local residents are encouraged to contribute relevant articles or submit details of local events. The website is as good as we make it and the vision for the site is that it is a one-stop shop; the go-to place for all community matters.

Various local institutions, from schools to the police, from churches to the council, are represented on the site, posting updates. It is possible to find local businesses and services as well as hear about community groups, clubs and sports teams running in the local area. It has helpful information to aid exploration of the parish and its history as well and plenty more besides. If you would like to submit an article or an event for inclusion on the website, please visit the website and complete the form. Alongside news and events, businesses that are based or operate in the Parish can also add their details to the directory. If you would like to add your business details, please visit the website and complete the form. If you have any queries or would prefer to submit items for inclusion on the website via email please contact editor@monktonmatters.co.uk.

Planning

Planning is included on the agenda of both PC meetings each month. Members of the public are welcome to attend and speak. Between 1st April 2023 and 28th February 2024 over 40 planning applications have been considered by the PC and comments submitted to Somerset Council (the Local Planning Authority). The submitted comments can be viewed on the Somerset Council website under the application registration number. Most applications are accompanied by reports on various elements of the development ranging from Sustainable Urban Drainage to Ecology to Travel Plans. Prior to Parish Council meeting, the reports are read, notes prepared for councillor discussions, and a check made for conformity with NP policies.

Maidenbrook Country Park

The Parish Council remains committed, with CFPC, to the CP. Work to improve the surface of the track entrance, to provide fencing around the pond have been completed during the year. Further trees have also been planted throughout the year with the help of volunteers.

Climate initiative

The PC has developed a timetable for Climate Initiatives, working in conjunction with 'Businessallaboutyou'. Several successful events and articles have been tabled via social media, tying together the various environmental initiatives available in the Parish.

There have been seed swaps, toy swaps, farm walks, free hi-viz vests for schoolchildren and bike marking to encourage walking and cycling; growing competitions to encourage pollinators; litter picking and much more.

Trees have been obtained from the Woodland Trust for planting around the perimeter of the sports pitch site adjacent to the ERR, these will be planted during March 2024.

Grants have been provided to individuals and organisations to assist with retrofitting buildings. If you have ideas to help the Parish Climate Initiative, please get in touch!

Brittons Ash Community Hall (BACH)

The BACH is a purpose-built community facility that with the support of Cllr Barry Gage I oversee the running of. A Committee made up of Councillors and volunteers including Gordon and Maggie Little and Tricia Cavill also provide invaluable support with running the BACH, particularly from Maggie with Gordon's support managing the bookings and diary for the BACH. The BACH is available for use by individuals and groups for regular weekly bookings, group meetings, activities, and private functions. The BACH has a number of exercise classes, an art group, sewing group, mums and baby groups and many more. Take a look at the online calendar available here <https://westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk/bach> or at the Welcome Screen to see what activities are taking place.

If you would like further information about booking the BACH, please contact the Bookings Officer, Maggie (bachbookings@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk)

In addition to the on-going management of the PC assets and servicing the meetings of the PC, there have also been a number of projects that have started or continued during 2023/34 that I have supported. These include:

1. MH1 Public Open Spaces – negotiations have continued throughout the year with the developers about the completion and handover of the Public Open Spaces in MH1 to the PC to manage following their completion.
2. Deployment of the PC SID at locations across the Parish. The data that is collected is shared with the Police to inform their enforcement schedule.
3. Actively engaged with Planning Officers and Developers regarding the MH2 planning application.

4. Secured the legal transfer of the MH1 Sports Pitch Land and submitted a pre-planning advice application to Somerset Council about the pitches being used for Rugby and Cricket.
5. Read and developed responses to local and national consultations about matters that affect our Parish.
6. Reviewed and noted the conditions of Planning Permissions and Section 106 agreements to ensure the obligations are delivered.
7. Supported the multi-agency approach developed to slow the flow of water to Bathpool through natural flood prevention measures and applied for grant funding.
8. Developed a Strategic Plan for the Parish Council for 2024-27
9. Completed a village sign review in the Parish, feedback is awaited from Somerset Council Highways.
10. Supported fundraising efforts for the Poppy of Honour Pavilion to be built at the Country Park / Somerset Wood.

If you would like any further information about any of these projects or have any ideas of other projects that the PC could support, please get in touch – clerk@westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk.

WMPC Finances

The WMPC Financial Regulations govern the way WMPC finances are run.

Daily, weekly and monthly accounting tasks are carried out by the Responsible Financial Officer. The tasks include paying for goods and services, maintaining the payroll, pensions and HMRC, obtaining quotes, monitoring the budget, ensuring that adequate insurance is in place for the Council, its employees, and its assets, keeping Councillors and Clerks up to date with latest ideas and legislation by ensuring regular training is available, ensuring that WMPCs communications and IT are up to date and operating efficiently, asset management and risk assessment.

When commissioning work, WMPC obtains a number of quotes, to ensure best value, and interest from local suppliers is viewed favourably.

Every month a finance report is issued which demonstrates receipts and payments, conformity with budget line by line, and a bank reconciliation. The Council is not VAT registered and VAT is reclaimed quarterly.

Audit Working Party

Once a quarter the Audit Working Party (AWP) meets to review the PCs finances as part of the risk management procedures in place. At these meetings a more detailed bank reconciliation is scrutinised, the quarterly VAT reclaim is reported, the Financial Regulations are kept under review, and other matters needing attention are considered.

The AWP remains vigilant on the level of exposure of the bank balances and investments. The AWP considers grant applications received in two windows, 1 April to 15 May, and 1 September to 15 October. Further information on the Grants Policy can be found on the website www.westmonktonparishcouncil.gov.uk.

Recommendations from the AWP are made to main Council.

The Budget and Precept

The budget and precept are set in November for the year ahead. The main source of income for the Parish is the precept which is based on the budget.

In November 2023, a review of last year's budget and the year to date was undertaken; and the services that were likely to be devolved due to Somerset Councils financial position were also taken into account.

CIL is an additional source of income, received from developments in the area, which is a Levy paid to the Local Planning Authority (SWT), of which the Parish Council receives 25% because it has a NP. The proportion would only be 15% without a NP. The CIL funds must be spent within 5 years or handed back.

The budget reflects the needs and aspirations of the growing community in our Parish and the PCs desire to maintain all the Parish as a safe and pleasant place to live and work.

An outline budget for the next three years is included in the budget preparation to ensure a degree of future proofing is built in.

The precept for 2024/2025 has increased quite significantly, with more community work and devolved services likely, the increase in precept was necessary this year. Despite the increase, the precept cost per property is around half the Somerset average and is also less than neighbouring parishes.

The Internal and External Audits of the PC documents were completed successfully for the year 2022- 2023. Recommendations from the Internal Auditor have been incorporated into the regular financial procedures of the Parish.

The Internal Auditor has been appointed for the year ending 2024, and work on the year end accounts will begin soon.

The report on the External Audit, which is conducted by the Audit Commission, can be inspected by members of the public by appointment, please look out for the notice on the website in July.

Kate Welsh – Assistant Clerk (Community)

In the last year, I have completed the CILCA course and am now a qualified Clerk although my main role is developing community within West Monkton Parish. My hours have increased in line with developing projects and groups and I now work approximately 110 hours per month.

Over the last year, I have developed more events at Maidenbrook Country Park including a successful Easter Egg Hunt, although this year I do need to make the clues a little easier! The King's Coronation Event was a success and we have again learned from experience the open mic and band were very popular we are looking to recreate this again at the local parishes' Tug of War Event and Fun Day on the 29th June. We also worked with St Giles Animal Rescue who ran a Dog Show which was well attended, and we are planning for a bigger and better event this year on the 1st September. Thank you to all the volunteers who make these events possible!

Part of my role this year has been about applying for funding for our various projects and are currently through to the second stage in a Lottery Application for the Country Park, where if successful we will be able to improve access to the park and create more volunteer support for volunteers as well as having toilet facilities and a volunteer hub. Thank you to all the Country Park Volunteers who have helped develop the park over the last few years!

Another funding application that has been successful this year is the SALC Heath and Wellbeing Grant which we received to improve the Community Garden. Our volunteers work hard to sow, plant out, care for, and harvest the vegetables from the garden and share the produce with the Community Fridge. We hope this grant will help provide more tools and facilities to make volunteering a more enjoyable experience and encourage more of the community to get involved.

The Community Fridge has secured funding and we are currently looking at a range of options for a more permanent home for the Community Fridge with CCTV and more space. Over the year, the Community Fridge has started collecting further afield from Aldi, Lidl, Bookers, M&S, and Tescos in Taunton. The volunteers work hard to keep the fridge clean, collect food daily, keep the books and clothes tidy and open and close the shed. The team does a great job keeping this project running as it does and it is much appreciated.

Our regular community projects have continued to be popular including the Community Quiz nights at the Tacchi Morris which seem to be going from strength to strength. Thanks to our volunteers, Andy our Quiz Master, and Matt who help us on quiz nights.

Our Community Café on a Wednesday afternoon has become a real hub for the community and we have a Repair Café and a Loss Bereavement Group that run once a month alongside the cafe. We are also looking to start a Peer Support Group for Families of Children with Additional Needs as there seems to be a real need for this in our community. We also started a Knit and Crochet Group who join us weekly and made hundreds of poppies which we used to decorate the parish in November! I am sure you will agree they did a fantastic job! They also made some amazing Christmas decorations and we decorated a tree for the West Monkton Church Christmas Tree Festival and they won first prize! We have a regular team of volunteers at the café for the regular projects and to serve the children from West Monkton Primary School who come to see us at the end of their day on a Wednesday for hot chocolate and biscuits!

Stay and Play Group runs twice a week and is popular with many families in the community and it has been lovely getting to know parents, carers, grandparents, and little ones! I have particularly enjoyed watching families support each other at these sessions and seeing friendships develop. We have been lucky enough to have some lovely parent volunteers help us at the sessions, setting up and clearing away and keeping on top of organising boxes and toys! Sheila has also joined me on a Thursday to help with making teas and coffees and Mandy has recently joined me on a Wednesday. This help is much appreciated and frees me up to have meetings or do administration as my role is getting busier and busier!

We also have a team of volunteers who do litter picking in the community and my role is to support them by providing equipment, and bags as well as ordering bin lids and stickers. These are a dedicated group of people who make a huge difference to our areas, keeping them clean and tidy. Please support them by making sure you and your children put any litter in the bins provided and pick up your dog's poo.

This coming year I will be focusing on building on my existing relationships with West Monkton Primary School. Also, I have started meeting with a group of young people at Monkton Wood Academy to chat about all things community and develop some ways we can work together to benefit the community. This will be an involving project and I am very much looking forward to sharing ideas. I have also joined the Youth Alliance, to support further youth work in the parish and the Local Community Network meetings are very much focussed on ways we can provide more for the young people in our areas.

We also have a companion volunteer who goes out into the community supporting those who are isolated and need support, company, transport to medical appointments, and errands. Margaret is a real asset to our community and is making a huge difference in the lives of those she supports.

We have about 100 volunteers who work with us and my role is to support them in their roles however they are amazing people who give their time freely to make such a difference in our community, it makes my job extremely rewarding and I would personally like to thank them for all they do. The Parish Council provided a Christmas Event with a buffet and drinks for all volunteers and that was a wonderful social evening that was enjoyed by all.

Please get in touch with me at community@westmontkonparishcouncil.gov.uk if you would like to get involved in any of our projects or have ideas for new groups or projects, I would love to hear from you.

The reports from Councillors are presented in accordance with the CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY 2011, the guiding principles of which are that publicity by local authorities should: be lawful, be cost effective, be objective, be even-handed, be appropriate, have regard to equality and diversity, and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

Meeting Schedule 2024

Meetings are held either via Zoom or in the Committee Room, BACH commencing at 7.00pm. All PC meetings are open to the public and there is usually a Public Question Time (at around 7.10pm) where the formal meeting is suspended whilst questions and comments are welcomed.

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DECEMBER						
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Bank Holiday	Business Focused Parish Council Meeting
Project / Community Focused Parish Council Meeting	Annual Parish Meeting