



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

# Coffinswell Parish Council

Serving the Communities of  
Coffinswell & Dacombe

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## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING TUESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2025 7PM AT ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

**Present:** Cllr N Orchard (Chair), Cllr S Avery (Vice Chair), Cllr S Spokes, Cllr C Bell.

**In attendance:** Devon County Cllr A Dewhirst  
District Cllr J Taylor  
District Cllr J Radford  
Mrs L Moore (Clerk)  
Thirteen members of the public

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

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7:02 pm. and welcomed everyone present. Apologies received from Cllr M Atkinson.

### 2. The Chairman's Annual Report

#### Personnel

This is the end of the second year of the current 2023-2027 Parish Council election period and I'm pleased to say that our Parish Council personnel have remained relatively intact for the duration so far. Having said that, I'm sad to report that Councillor Ashley Brent has recently announced his decision to resign from the Council. I'd like to thank Ashley for over five years of service on the Council. His local knowledge, environmental and horticultural expertise and general wisdom will be missed. His resignation means that we now have a vacancy on the Council, and as the period in which an election can be requested has ended with no such request being made, we are now in a position to be able to co-opt a new Councillor. I can therefore invite anyone interested in filling the vacancy to apply to our Clerk Lucie Moore for a self-nomination form. The closing date for receiving the forms back is Tuesday 13 May 2025. We will then hopefully be able to co-opt a new Councillor at the next meeting of the Parish Council on Tuesday 20 May 2025.

This meeting also unfortunately marks the last time that we'll be graced by the presence of our Devon County Councillor, Councillor Alistair Dewhirst, as he has decided not to stand for re-election at the May County Council elections. Alistair has served on DCC for many years and has been a strong supporter of our parish. He has sat patiently through all of our Parish Council meetings, and provided us with many a report on the goings-on at county level. He has always been easy to contact, and never fails to act quickly on any enquiry, either dealing with it himself or ensuring that we get put in touch with the right person. He has also often helped us out with additional funding for Parish expenses or equipment. So, we are very grateful for his service to the community and thank him immensely. He will be a hard act to follow for whoever is elected to represent us next May. Thank you, Alistair, and enjoy your retirement.

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

## Finance

Moving on to the Parish Council finances, I'm happy to report that these remain in good health. Our spending was within budget across the board this year, and our reserves increased slightly, now standing at about £7,300, which represents about 13 months' revenue spend, against a target of about 12 months. Last year we requested and were granted a 6% increase in precept from Teignbridge in order to ensure we reached our 12 months reserve target. This year we applied for a 4% increase, and I'm pleased to report that that has been approved, so our precept for 2025-2026 is £6,785. I am therefore reasonably confident that our finances are adequate to cover our expenses over the next year.

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund** – our CIL fund currently stands at about £4,600.

We did not spend much of the fund last year, just around £200 on the geotexture underlay for the work on Footpath 1. However, there is a requirement to spend the money within 5 years of receipt, and that date comes up this coming October, or certainly by the end of the financial year at the end of March 2026 at the latest, otherwise we will have to return the balance. We therefore need to focus a little more attention on how best to spend the remaining funds this year.

However, following an email from Teignbridge DC regarding our spending of CIL money on hedge trimming and brushcutter kit, I am awaiting clarification regarding what CIL may be spent on.

The government website states that:

*'The parish council must use the CIL receipts passed to it to support the development of the parish council's area by funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure; or anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on the area.'*

Suggestions from parishioners for good ways to spend our CIL funds would be welcome, so please let me or the other Councillors know if you have any ideas.

**Parish Paths Partnership (P3) funding** – we didn't apply for any additional P3 funding last year as we had received a grant of £300 the year before that had not yet been used. I'm pleased to say that we finally managed to organise a working party last autumn to lay 10 tons of gravel on Footpath 1 round The Bothy, so this grant has now been spent. We have now applied for another £300 grant to buy chippings to cover the remainder of the footpath, and we await to hear if our application will be successful. We also made a small profit on having three more volunteers trained for strimmer and brushcutter use. This arose due to a change in the way that Devon CC manages the training. Previously DCC organised and paid for the training course, and we just attended for free. Now they pay us £220 per person, and we have to arrange and pay for the training and expenses. The P3 fund now stands at about £280.

*The Chair advised that since his written report had been prepared, the Parish Council have subsequently received confirmation of the approval of Grant.*

## 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 2025-2026 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. We have also been free of any significant enforcement issues, so we are thankful for another year of relative peace and freedom from stray caravans parked on the road.

The main development in the parish is the construction of the Court Barton solar farm, which started in February this year. Concerns regarding the construction traffic have not so far been realised, with all the site traffic accessing the facility from St Marychurch Road, and the Traffic

Management Plan designed to deal with HGV movements working well. We were also concerned that a lot of traffic might divert from St Marychurch Road through the village, but again this doesn't seem to be an issue. A planned closure of St Marychurch Road for 2 weeks in May/June while the main electrical connection is made may yet cause a traffic build up.

### **Strategic Plan**

The strategic plan for the parish, created originally by my predecessor as Chair, Alex Parkes, was reviewed and updated last year, but has not been reviewed again since. It will be looked at again during the 2025-2026 financial year.

### **Church Issues and Status**

The Parish Council, although not active in the management of St Bartholomew's Church, still has a vested interest in its wellbeing. As the focal point of the village and the only meeting place that we have, the Parish Council is keen to see the Church keep going, even though the congregation may be dwindling. Following a lengthy consultation period, the Diocese decided to change the status of the church to a Chapel of Ease, (not a Chapel of Rest as I called it in last year's report!). As far as I understand it, all the usual church functions still take place, but with reduced demands on the Church Wardens, and perhaps more paperwork for weddings, and those eligible can still be buried in the churchyard.

The Parish Council is not allowed by law to make direct donations to the church, but we can do our bit by hiring it for our meetings at a commercial rate. We can also pay for parishioners to hire it for meetings or events, but this year there have been few, if any, takers. We would like to encourage everyone to make use of the church whenever possible, and we have the funds in the budget to cover it, but we can't just hand the money over without good reason, so please do think about what we could do to make more use of it.

The Parish Council will continue to support the church in whatever way we can.

### **Roads and Footpaths**

**Roads and drains** - fortunately last winter's rains were not as bad as the previous year, and we've not had the major downpours that have caused flooding problems in the past, so on the whole the drains and gulleys have coped reasonably well. We've also not had particularly severe cold weather, so breakup of the road surface and potholing has not been too bad. The worst area has been on Willow Park Lane on the corner at the back of the church. This corner is the low point where a lot of the surface water from Connybeare Lane and the village ends up and has suffered from constant flooding. I'm pleased to report that Devon Highways, following a lot of persistence from Sheenagh, have finally got round to digging out the ditches, drains and puddles from opposite the entrance to the church all the way round the corner. They now look clear and in a much better condition than they have done for some time. So, thank you to Devon Highways and to Sheenagh for that.

**Oil spill** - in Dacombe we had the unfortunate incident last autumn 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. The emergency services did what they could to minimise the environmental damage, but work is still ongoing to clean up and remedy the problems caused. I have the details of the delivery company, their insurers and the company that has been contracted to do the clean up, so if you are still having issues following this incident then please let me know and we'll see what we can do.

**Grit bins** - thank you to Cllr Alistair Dewhirst for his contribution to the new grit bin that was installed on the corner next to Aller Brook House.

**Speed limits** - there has been ongoing concern in the village regarding cars and vans going far too fast on our narrow lanes, particularly noticeable whenever St Marychurch Road is closed and traffic diverts through Coffinswell and Dacombe. We have obtained some '20 is Plenty' stickers for people to put on their black or green bins, or on other suitable (and legal) places, as a reminder to drivers to slow down. However, this is never likely to fix the problem. The Parish Council has discussed this issue several times now, and we have agreed to start the process of trying to get the speed limits through the Parish reduced. As one might expect, this is not a quick or simple process, and I apologise for the slow start, but we do intend to get going on this activity shortly.

**Road Warden** - thanks to Matt Redmond for volunteering to become our Road Warden last year. Unfortunately Matt and Nicky have now moved away from the parish so we now have a vacancy for a Road Warden. If you would like to take over this role then please let me know.

**Footpaths** - thanks also to Tim Rumball for managing the footpaths this year, he's done a great job of keeping the paths passable, particularly the bottom end of Kerswell Lane which gets very overgrown if not kept in check. Our main focus this year was on getting Footpath 1, which runs alongside the stream by The Bothy, into a better condition for walking. This path tends to get very muddy in wet weather and needs topping with gravel. We had previously been given a P3 grant of £300 for this, so we spent this on 10 tonnes of limestone chippings. A further £200 was spent on geotexture underlay material using money from the CIL fund. The geotexture underlay is intended to stop the chippings just disappearing into the mud. With many thanks to the volunteers in the working party in September we managed to spread chippings on about 2/3 of the length of the path. We are pleased to report that the treated sections of the path have held up very well over the winter, and the contrast between the treated path and the untreated muddy sections shows how effective the work has been. We have therefore applied for another P3 grant of £300 so that we can treat the rest of the path this year. Thanks also to John and Helen Churchward for letting us dump the 10 tonnes of chippings on their field, and to Ian Mitchell for moving half the pile to the other end of the path to minimise the amount of manual labour involved.

We now have three more qualified strimmer/brushcutter volunteers to help with footpath maintenance. So, thanks to Neil Bowers, Mark Clayton and Mike Harris for volunteering to do the training day, and thanks to Devon Highways for paying for the training.

#### **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.

**Events** – we had hoped to run an Open Gardens event this year as a fund raiser for the church, and although several people stepped forward to help organise it and show their gardens, in the end I felt that we didn't have sufficient numbers to make the event worthwhile. We note that Galmpton is running an Open Gardens event this year, so I'll be visiting that to get some tips on how to encourage more people to join in, so perhaps we'll try again next year.

#### **Thanks**

Many people contribute to our parish and its life, and I'd 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've done that, grow our food.

Thanks to the team that looks after the church. It's 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, and Sheenagh has given the triangle opposite "The Linny" a makeover recently, and the bulbs she planted last year have certainly looked good this spring.

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.

Thank you to my fellow councillors, past and present, and to Alistair, Jane and John, 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.

**Informal Public Session:**

Parishioners raised concerns about a proposed new building near High Meadows which is felt to be significantly larger in design and more visible than the previous plans, involving the removal of the existing building and a construction period of 2–3 years. Discussion followed during which concerns were expressed regarding potential disturbance and the need for a Construction Management Plan. It was noted that removal of trees around the Old Rectory has increased visibility of the site.

A suggestion was made to investigate reducing the parish speed limit to 30mph or 20mph in certain areas.

The Chair confirmed that the village's phone box is a Grade II listed building, available to purchase for £1. Suggestions were invited from parishioners on potential uses for the box.

Regarding the Solar Farm development – mention was made about the closure of the St Marychurch Road and Ridgeway Lane from the 26<sup>th</sup> of May to 10<sup>th</sup> June 2025 so that the new electric power cable can be connected to the Solar Farm. The Chair noted ongoing difficulties in communication with the Farm's developers and advised that discussions are pending.

With respect to the use of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) Funds, suggestions from attendees included:

- Purchasing land for community use (e.g. a village hall).
- Investing in electric bikes or EV charging points.
- Tree planting and replacement, which received public support.

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

Signed:  
Chairman of Coffinswell Parish Council

Dated: