



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.

MINUTES OF THE COFFINSWELL PARISH COUNCIL MEETING TUESDAY 17th JUNE 2025 7PM AT ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

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

In attendance: Mrs L Moorse – Parish Clerk

1. The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.04pm and received apologies from District Cllr Radford and DCC Cllr Horner.
2. **To declare any interests arising at this meeting.**
No interests were declared.
3. **Reports:**
 - 3.1 **County Councillors' report.** Not received at the time of the Meeting.
 - 3.2 **District Councillors' report.** (Awaiting Cllr J Taylor's arrival)
 - 3.3 **Police Advocate and Neighbourhood Watch reports and updates.**
The Chair advised that there was nothing to report from Police Advocate or Neighbourhood Watch this month.
4. **Approval to consider, amend as agreed by the Council and approve the minutes of the following meetings:**
The Chair introduced this Agenda item by advising that due to previous disruptions the Minutes for the following meetings had been deferred to this current session. Meetings being 18th March, the 15th April Annual Parish Meeting and 20th May 2025. After confirming no objections, the members proceeded to approve all three sets of Minutes together. The motion was proposed by Cllr Avery and seconded by Cllr Bell and approval was given by those who were present at the respective meetings.
5. **Finance**
 - 5.1 The Payments Schedule was agreed and approved.
 - 5.2 The bank reconciliation for May 2025 was agreed and approved.
 - 5.3 The budget update for period 1st April 2025 to 31st May 2025 was presented with no matters arising.
During the presentation of these items where approval was given and documentation duly signed, the Councillors noted that costs now include Small Employer National Insurance payment arising from the new rules that could affect the tight budget. The bank reconciliation and budget update showed minimal spending so far, but members agreed to watch costs closely. They also observed

that while grants have usually been secured, some nearby parishes have increased their Precepts to boost financial flexibility.

6. Audit 2024-25

The Chair thanked the Clerk for managing the audit independently and noted the documents suggested the council had a clean report. The Clerk added her thanks to the Internal Auditor, Lee Accounting for her exceptional effort in preparing and finalising the audit materials within a short time frame and minor clarifications were quickly addressed, and everything was completed in time for the meeting.

The Council reviewed the following documents and signed where appropriate.

6.1 To note the Internal Auditor's Report

6.2 Certificate of Exemption was duly approved and signed

6.3 The Annual Governance Statement was duly approved and signed

6.4 The Accounting Statement approved and signed.

6.5 The Explanation of Variances included a 31% difference due to the King's Coronation Grant from the previous year, as well as asset purchases, election expenses, and a reduction in insurance costs.

6.6 The List of Items of Expenditure of £100+ for the year ending 31st March 2025 was reviewed

6.5 The Fixed Assets List to period 31st March 2025 was agreed and approved.

The period for "Notice of Public Rights and Publication of Annual Governance & Accountability Return" was noted for the period Monday, 23rd June 2025 to Friday, 1st August 2025.

The Clerk confirmed that all required documents would be uploaded for the External Auditor and the submission would be sent to them.

The Chair also advised that the Council need to consider how to spend remaining CIL (**Community Infrastructure Levy**) funds by October 2025, noting there is some uncertainty over what qualifies. Members also voiced concern over the broader fairness of how CIL is collected and distributed.

7. Funding & Grants:

The Clerk confirmed receipt of the first half of their annual precept payment. It was also noted that the Council are still awaiting a £300 grant under the P3 (Parish Paths Partnership) scheme and understand this would be forthcoming at the proper time.

8. Footpaths & Highways

The Chair advised that he had contacted Jon Boyd, DCC Public Rights of Way Officer, regarding improving the accessibility on Footpath 1, particularly for parents with pushchairs. The kissing gates at both ends of the path were identified as problematic. One post had already been removed at the Willow Park Lane end to improve access. Though the path is not surfaced with tarmac but gravel, people do manage to use pushchairs along it. Concerns were raised about the safety of the Bothy End exit, where the path joins a 60mph bend in the road. Previously, crude steps had been replaced with a sloped ramp to facilitate transport of gravel during the recent maintenance. The ramp remains, improving access but increasing safety concerns if users exit directly into traffic.

The Councillors viewed that the kissing gates were no longer necessary for livestock control. Instead, they seemed more effective at deterring bicycles and motorcycles. It was felt by everyone present that with proper design, a new type of gate could allow easier access for prams and mobility aids without opening the door to misuse.

The Chair advised that it was hoped a meeting would soon be arranged for John Boyd to visit the site, whereupon the Council could explore suitable gate alternatives and realignment of the path to exit in the same direction of travel rather than forcing a U-turn onto the road.

The Chair reported that there was a need for additional gravel chippings to complete the coverage of Footpath 1 and once it was sourced and purchased then he would arrange for another working party to help in completing the task during the Summer. He informed everyone that the P3 Grant of £300

would be received in near future and arrangements for the gravel would be delivered to the end of the Footpath to avoid past transport issues.

Thanks were given to Tim Rumble for path clearance, and to Sheena Orchard for trimming blackthorn around the 14-acre field and clearing vegetation at gates. He advised that Blackthorn poses risks if left unchecked.

A damaged gatepost on Blackham Way Lane (caused when a horse was spooked) was also noted and it was confirmed that Roger Wills will attempt to straighten it using his tractor.

The Chair reported that the five-bar gate on Footpath 3 has been removed, and undergrowth cleared by the landowner. The stile has been blocked, but wide opening remains, keeping the path accessible.

As there has been some concern raised by parishioners on this, he advised that the matter had been referred to the Footpath Warden, Steve Gardner, to confirm whether any regulations have been breached and to establish whether it falls under footpaths or highways. The landowner has indicated that a gate may be reinstalled during the summer, though details are not yet known.

It was reported that some local potholes have been selectively repaired, including patches on the hill down to the Bothy as well as a dangerous section on Dacombe Hill, which was only addressed after an accident.

One of the Councillors reported difficulties using the Devon Highways system to log a pothole near Kingskerswell, citing lack of photo and location upload options. Concerns were raised about the accuracy of depth assessments, with the pothole believed to exceed the 4 cm threshold. Concerns were also raised about the poor condition of local roads, with some repeatedly top dressed but now breaking up worsened by heavy delivery traffic, and including Footland Lane which is also deteriorating, with residents forced to weave around potholes to avoid damage to their vehicles.

Members went on to discuss the need for traffic calming measures, noting that speed limits alone are often ineffective. A recent incident involving a speeding vehicle near a yard highlighted risks to pedestrians. It was suggested that John Boyd (though a Rights of Way Officer), may be able to advise or connect with Highways on possible solutions. Options could include improved signage, narrowed roadways, or other physical deterrents.

The Council agreed that traffic safety should be treated as a priority for future planning, with potential funding support from the Parish reserves or CIL.

The Chair pointed out that there would be a few road closures over the Summer, which either would cause additional traffic through the villages, or causes residents additional inconvenience. The Council are trying to manage these as best as they can and then discussion followed concerning the various problems that had been highlighted by frustrated parishioners and which they themselves had also encountered.

- It was reported that a dispute had arisen when cyclists attempted to use closed roads. A compromise was reached allowing them to walk their bikes through the construction areas.
- The roads in question were generally reopened at night, though cones and barriers were often left in place, which slowed traffic.
- There had been reports of confusion over closure timings and signage. For example, Mill Lane and Dacombe Hill appeared open despite supposed closures.
- It was noted that a closure of St. Marychurch Road is anticipated towards the end of June 2025.

- Regarding the National Grid unfortunately although road closure permissions had been secured, approval for excavation was not obtained, leading to an unnecessary closure.
- It was reported that a pole had been mistakenly erected in the middle of a private driveway which had been later resolved but indicative of poor oversight.
- Trenches had been dug across private land without adequate consultation, and hedges were removed, causing understandable local upset. It was also questioned whether these cable trenches were dug to sufficient depth, raising safety concerns, and where works had included both overhead and underground cabling, with a step-down transformer installed along the route to reduce voltage before domestic distribution.

A major focus of the discussions was that there had been the impact of poor traffic management linked to the ongoing works. Residents described signage as unclear or missing, with official diversions poorly marked. This had certainly caused significant re-routing of vehicles through unsuitable rural lanes such as Connybear Lane where even caravans had caused congestion and near misses.

The vehicles diverted through Coffinswell and Dacombe and surrounding lanes were often speeding, leading to dangerous confrontations on single-track roads. It was noted that there had been an expressed willingness to deliberately block traffic to enforce slower speeds. It was strongly felt that diversions should be routed via major roads such as the A380, rather than rural backroads.

However, it was clarified that while the Solar Farm development had contributed to some vehicle movements, most traffic disruptions stemmed from National Grid infrastructure works. Monitoring of lorry movements was considered regarding concrete lorry deliveries being tracked to distinguish between solar farm traffic and other local construction projects.

The consensus by the Councillors was clear: better signage and more thoughtful routing are urgently needed before the next round of roadworks begins. It was agreed that the Parish Clerk would make a courtesy call to a key contact involved in managing traffic and explain the concerns that had been raised.

9. To note any correspondence received

The Clerk advised that the only recent communication involved an automatic bank debit for the Annual Data Protection fee due on 21st July 2025, discounted for using direct debit.

10. Parish Matters:

10.1 The Parish Council meeting dates for 2026 were discussed and agreed.

10.2 Councillors' Roles and responsibilities

At the meeting, the Chair revisited his earlier wish to share responsibilities more evenly across the Council. Whilst recognising that all Councillors are volunteers, he stressed the importance of teamwork and a cooperative atmosphere over quick results.

A list of ongoing tasks had been previously circulated, with councillors invited to choose duties voluntarily.

- Cllr Barnard confirmed that she would be happy to care for the Defibrillators, and the Chair advised arrangements for inspection, sharing of manuals, and access to login details would be provided to her in due course.

- Regarding the Village phone box, Cllr Spokes expressed an interest in looking after this and it was confirmed that an inspection had been carried out and although in fair condition there was a deteriorating wooden door. Purchase of the phone box will be for £1, but is dependent on the door being replaced, and a follow-up will be made if no response is received soon.

The Chair duly thanked the Councillors, expressing his appreciation for the value of maintaining good communication and shared responsibility within the Council.

10.3 To discuss Parish Council IT/email requirements.

The Council discussed the potential transition to a government-registered *.gov.uk* domain for its official website and email communications. This would improve credibility, provide councillors with dedicated email addresses, and align with Government recommendations.

While initial estimates suggested costs of around £500 per year, further research indicates that setup could be capped at £500 with ongoing annual fees closer to £200, often including multiple email accounts. Councillors supported this approach, provided costs remain within those limits. The Council's website is currently managed by TEEC, though there is some uncertainty about their relationship with "My Parish." Clarification is being sought on whether services are outsourced, and whether cost savings could be achieved by consolidating through a single provider. As the annual fee to TEEC has already been paid for the coming year, no immediate changes can be made, but options for greater value and efficiency will continue to be explored.

10.4 To receive any further updates on parish matters.

None

11. Correspondence received by the Parish Clerk.

Previously mentioned under Agenda item 9.

12. Planning & Enforcement Public Question Time:

No public in attendance.

13. Planning:

No new planning applications were received for this meeting and since the agenda preparation.

13.1 To note the grant of conditional planning decision on the following planning application:

25/00529/HOU – Kates Meadow, Dacombe.

Proposed – Conservatory

The Chair advised that no new applications are under review, though the Council has received approval for a conservatory at Kate's Meadow—a project previously approved twice before and is merely a renewal of existing consent.

14. Enforcement Issues:

14.1 To receive any updates on outstanding enforcement issues.

None

15. General Public Question Time:

None was in attendance.

16. To note the date of the next meeting:

Tuesday 16th September 2025

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and the Meeting ended at 8.20 pm.

Signed:
Chairman of Coffinswell Parish Council

Dated: