

MONKSILVER PARISH COUNCIL
Quarterly meeting held on Monday 10th August 2026 at 7.30 pm
at the EMN Community Hall, Monksilver.

Present:

Monksilver Councillors:

John Stace – Chairman, Paul Appleton – Vice Chairman, Dan Cotterill, Mervyn Orchard-Lisle, Catherine Sleep

Somerset Councillor - Cara Strom

Residents – Wendy Jackson-Tudor and Frances Vere Hodge

In attendance – Mary Jacobs – Clerk to MPC

		Follow up
1.0	The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mervyn had sent apologies for a late arrival. He was stuck in traffic on the motorway, and would join the meeting as soon as possible.	Chairman
1.1	The hot dry weather over a prolonged period brings associated issues: - Scarcity of water (although our main river continues to flow). - Abundance of undergrowth including under the telemetry radar. - Excessive hay and straw littering our roads and drains.	8.4 refers
1.2	We celebrate the return of The Notley Inn to its former glory, all thanks to Barrie and Faye and their strong team. Parking is difficult, but I think less complaints.	2.1 refers
1.3	Our thanks to Catherine for rebuilding our internet mail and MPC Web Face, using Hugo Fox, also to Mary for the part she played. Catherine will be providing an update.	10.0 refers
1.4	Our thanks to Paul for masterminding and organising an evening for residents and farmers with Riparian responsibilities. It is being held on Monday 21 st September. Paul will speak with an agenda item.	8.0 to 8.4 refers
1.5	Our thanks to Ian for all he has done to select and have made, our new MPC Notice Board.	11.0 refers
1.6	WiFi fibre to the Village, update and who has been invited to take it up. Open Reach is be contacted by each resident's Broadband Provider. Each Monksilver resident will need to instruct their Broadband provider to contact Open Reach to connect to fibre. It is a free service. Those who already have transferred are reporting a marked improvement in speed	
1.7	It will be discussed later in the meeting, but pressure is growing for Parish Councils to be compelled to take responsibility for more basic maintenance of Village infrastructure, without public safety protection, insurance or support. No mechanical support or tools of trade. Unable to use power tools.	6.6 refers
1.8	Anne Preston-Littlewood, aged 104, is frail at the Musgrove. She will not move to Dunkirk House until stronger / if ever. Our thoughts are with her.	
2.0	Residents' requests:	
2.1	Unfortunately, Wendy and Stuart are experiencing difficulty in getting in and out of their driveway, due to cars sometimes parking on the opposite side of the High Street, where the road narrows. The main problem is that emergency vehicles will not get past and agricultural vehicles are driving over drains to	

squeeze by. It is thought that perhaps some of the vehicles may belong to users of the pub. They are delighted that the pub is flourishing, and open all week, but they wondered if MPC could suggest anything to deter parking on the narrow bit of the road, without deterring customers from using the pub.

John reported that white lining to mark out the parking bays at the pub is planned. The meeting was reminded that the Church has access rights along a narrow strip to the left of the car-park.

MPC encourages residents to put up private parking notices, where they own space adjacent to the highway.

Cara suggested white lining the road. Wendy thought this would detract from the beauty of the country lane and should only be considered as a last resort.

It was agreed that John and Wendy will have a chat with Barrie and Faye to see what can be done.

**Chairman
Wendy**

- 2.2 Frances reported that when it rains, a stream of water flows along Front Street, past the front garden at Porch Cottage. Much of the water comes down from the High Street and is very muddy, presumably from the bridlepath.

Mud collects up outside the garden gate and although Frances shovels it up and places it in the flower bed, more mud quickly reappears. It is often extremely slippery and is a hazard both to David and Frances and to anyone accessing the garden gate. They have nowhere else to put the bins on dustbin day and collecting them from this muddy area is a real risk to the bin men. Frances is frightened that someone will have an accident.

There is also the risk that flood water may flow into the garden from the road. Flood water came through the front porch and flooded the sitting room in October 2002, ruining the carpet and affecting furniture.

Frances notes that many other houses have drains outside to take away the water and she wonders if it might be appropriate for a drain to be placed by the garden wall of Selvre Cottage, next door to Porch Cottage, and in close proximity to the garden gate.

Cara has submitted a request to Highways and will reply to the clerk when she has received a response.

Cara

- 3.0 The minutes of the meeting held on 11th May 2026 were agreed as correct and signed by the Chairman.

- 4.0 There were no declarations of interest.

- 5.0 Matters arising. There were several points arising from the 11th May 2026 meeting. These are all detailed in separate items.

- 6.0 John posed a number of questions to Cara relating to Somerset Council and requested that responses be received by **1st September 2027**.

Cara

- 6.1.1 Somerset Council has now received an appalling "Best Value Notice" from the UK Government.

**7.1
refers**

What specific decisions over the last 4 years do you believe led to the Council reaching this point? **AND**

	The Government's Best Value Notice says the pace of transformation at Somerset Council is too slow. Why has the administration failed to deliver change at the pace required? AND What measurable improvements should residents expect to see over the next 12 months to demonstrate that the Council is recovering financially?	
6.1.2	Council borrowing now exceeds £1 billion. What is the administration's plan to reduce this debt, and over what timescale? AND How much is this borrowing costing taxpayers each year in interest and financing costs?	Cara
6.1.3	A number of council-owned assets have been sold during the past financial emergency. How much has been lost overall through these disposals compared with what taxpayers originally paid for them, and how does selling public assets at a loss represent good value for Somerset taxpayers?	Cara
6.1.4	Children's services have been downgraded to requiring improvement by Ofsted and adult social care has also been rated as requiring improvement. Despite substantial increases in spending, why have outcomes deteriorated so dramatically?	7.2 refers
6.1.5	Over £60 million has been spent on consultants and agency staff in the last 4 years. Why has this been needed and what value has it delivered for residents?	Cara
6.1.6	In the past, just 4 years of your Council, the Somerset Council element of Council tax has increased by more than it did over 12 years of the previous administration. How do you justify that and what is the primary cause? I suggest ill-discipline and poor fiscal management. Has Somerset Council prepared a contingency plan if the only cause of action is calling on Central Government to bail Somerset out? To require a financial rescue at a time of record local government taxation is disgraceful. Do you agree?	Cara
6.1.7	The submitted Scoping Consultation Paper for Somerset is a legal requirement and is causing considerable anguish and raising fundamental questions, Councillor Mervyn Orchard-Lisle will speak on this subject, and he too has questions we want answered. Monksilver hardly features and yet our village, like others, is being asked to undertake duties and a workload which in the past has been the responsibility of Somerset Council.	6.8 refers
6.1.8	Somerset Council is compelling Parish Councils to take responsibility for more basic maintenance of Village infrastructure, either through contracting services directly, or through the Somerset volunteering scheme.	6..6 refers
6.2	Now that new Supreme Court guidance is in place for single sex toilets, how will Somerset Council address the issue? This is an issue of importance to Catherine and females generally. Therefore, it was agreed that this needs to be an agenda item for a future meeting.	Cara Clerk
6.3	The Prime Minister has announced additional funding for mayors. What happens in the areas which do not have mayors?	7.5 refers

6.4	Regrading Watchet Lane. John Melrose, Somerset Council Pathways Officer has requested FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) make a site visit before any upgrading work is considered. Dan will keep the clerk updated on progress.	Dan
6.5	Highways:	
6.5.1	The yellow lining on the road; and the slow signs printed on both sides of the B3188 road, where the road narrows at Combe Sydenham has been delayed. John hopes that this will happen soon.	
6.5.2	The 7.5 ton weight restrictions have been approved. It is hoped that the signage will be in place soon.	
6.5.3	Following MPC approval in February 2026, to purchase and install two speed indicator devices (SIDs). John is meeting with Katherine Tyson in three weeks' time, so that she can agree the positioning of the SIDS. They will be purchased from Elan City. Further donations will be required to cover the cost.	
6.5.4	The foliage has been cut back at the Faircross crossroads. John would have preferred a further 10' or so to be cut back, but the sight lines have improved. Cara said she would organise the further cut back.	Cara
6.6	Somerset Council is compelling Parish Councils to take responsibility for more basic maintenance of village infrastructure, either through contracting services directly, or residents volunteering, after training through Somerset voluntary scheme. This places micro parishes at a disadvantage due to disproportionate operational costs. Parishes have to also bear the additional legal and insurance costs. Micro parishes cannot afford to employ professionals with the requisite expertise. Monksilver only has 101 residents on the electoral roll, residing in 64 properties, to share the additional contracted costs were Monksilver to agree. The volunteer scheme is limited and does not include public safety protection, insurance or support. No mechanical support or tools of trade are permitted through the scheme. Monksilver will resist this policy.	1.7 refers
	Cara responded that Somerset Council has to make difficult decisions between providing essential services and non-essential services. She suggested that maybe a new volunteering scheme, which is operational in the county, using youth offenders, which may be of assistance. The appropriate training and supervision is provided.	11.2 refers
6.8	Somerset Local Plan. Mervyn joined the meeting at this point and stated that the scoping document is raising fundamental issues. It is full of platitudes, but lacking in policies. The plan refers to the unitary area of Somerset, but It is unclear whether the Exmoor National Park area is included within the plan, or what consultation has taken place with Exmoor. Half of Monksilver falls within ENP. Monksilver only features once, simply described as a rural area. Stogumber and Crowcombe have been designated as areas for expansion, with Blue Anchor designated for the largest expansion. There appears to be no improvement in the infrastructure to accommodate this expansion.	6.1.7 refers
	The emphasis appears to be on urban sprawl, rather than meeting rural needs. There has been insufficient time for parishes to consult and feed-back on this first stage. It is hoped that communication will be improved for the next stages. MPC will publish on the website and encourage residents to get involved in future.	Website

Cara urged everyone to complete the housing needs survey when it is available. ENP undertook a detailed housing needs survey last year. Have these findings fed into the formation of the Somerset Local Plan? Some residents will be asked to complete a housing survey twice. How will this data be extrapolated to avoid duplication?

MPC regularly feeds back information to Somerset via Somerset Councillors Cara Strom and Marcus Kravis and the Local Community Network detailing the concerns about increasing development, and the lack of infrastructure. Have these comments been taken into account when drafting the plan? There are only two roads in and out of West Somerset and new job opportunities are not being created alongside the new housing developments. We need also to preserve farmland. Food security is of national importance.

Cara

The Clerk attended a presentation on the local plan, and the proposed changes to determining planning applications. A traffic light system is proposed, where only major developments will be submitted to committee to determine. All other decisions will be delegated to officers. It is also proposed that parishes take on enforcement action as this is voluntary, rather than mandatory. MPC has neither the legal expertise or the finances to undertake such action. Cara will obtain a copy of the video from Somerset Council.

Cara

MPC requested that a Senior Planning Officer attend the November meeting. Cara was not sure if this is possible. It may need to be at the LCN meeting. Cara will report back

Cara

- 7.0 Cara confirmed that she will be standing as the Liberal Democratic Party candidate at the local elections on Thursday 6th May 2027. She was able to answer some of the questions raised and she will endeavour to obtain responses to the questions which she could not answer.

Cara is the lead Member on adult social care and housing and also sits on the Hinkley Point Development Group. Difficult decisions have to be made. The Hinkley Council Tax working reduction fund does provide some support.

- 7.1 Best Value. Cara responded to John's question by reading a statement from the Leader, Bill Revans. "We recognise the seriousness of *(the)* announcement and we accept the need to demonstrate continued improvement. We also want to give every assurance that the work needed is already under way and we are on the front foot. Residents should be reassured that Somerset Council remains responsible for making decisions locally. Essential services will continue to be delivered and our commitment to improving services and achieving financial sustainability remains unchanged.

**6.1.1
refers**

This is a challenging moment, but not an unexpected one. We have been honest about the challenges we face, we have a clear plan, and we are taking the actions needed to secure Somerset's future.

Our focus now is on maintaining momentum, delivering improvement and demonstrating progress. We welcome the opportunity to demonstrate that progress to Government and to our residents, and this will help us access further advice and support. It is our aim to set a balanced budget in 2027-28 without the use of external exceptional financial support.

But the challenges facing Somerset are complex. Demand and costs in essential services, particularly care services, have risen sharply, and the current funding system does not properly reflect the pressures faced by large rural councils. We also recognise that we must continue to improve how we manage our finances, strengthen governance and transform services.

Above all, our responsibility is to the people of Somerset. Our focus remains clear: protecting vital services, supporting the most vulnerable people in Somerset, doing everything we can to put the Council on a sustainable footing for the future, and ensuring Government understands how it needs to support local services.”

John thanked Cara for the “party-political broadcast”.

7.2 Somerset is working at pace to rectify the OFSTED report into children’s services. Work had already commenced, prior to the publication of the report. Not all of it was negative. In particular OFSTED reported that:

- Senior leaders listen, value and work with children and young people.
- Social workers work closely with children and their parents and carers to help them to get the help they need, to be safe and have opportunities to live with their families.
- When it is not safe for children to stay at home with their parents, they come into care. Most live with foster carers who care about them and look after them well.
- Most children in care live in homes where they are happy and loved. Children take pride in their achievements and enjoy doing lots of activities.
- When young people leave care at 18, they are well supported into adulthood and to get their own homes, further education and jobs.

7.3 Cara responded to the question on adult social care by reading a statement “While we are disappointed with the overall rating, the assessment highlights both:

- Strengths in our system, including partnership working and the commitment of our workforce
- Areas where improvement is needed, particularly to ensure consistency of experience and outcomes

Since our assessment in September, we have continued to make significant progress across the areas identified, which include timeliness of assessments and reviews, support for unpaid carers, and how the council uses data to drive improvement.:

Dan commented that the NHS is funded through national taxation, yet local taxation has to fund social care.

7.4 Somerset council tax. Cara responded that the previous administration had left the finances in a dire situation. The way local councils are funded is not fit for purpose.

7.5 Mayoral funding. Somerset is supporting the proposed Wessex Mayoral devolution. It is pressing the Government to explain how these areas will be funded in the meantime. Cara suggested involving Rachel Gilmour MP, as devolution is a government plan.

**6.1.4
refers**

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**Cara
Clerk**

8.0	Wessex Water, drainage and the Environment Agency.	Vice-Chairman
8.1	Wessex Water does not have a hosepipe ban and is keen to protect its 50 years record	
8.2	Sewage continues to be discharged into the river during heavy rain. Dan suggested that a possible solution could be for Wessex Water to install an under-ground tank to pump into.	Vice-Chairman
8.3	Somerset Council confirmed at the last meeting that it is responsible for Culvert maintenance. Paul and John will continue to liaise with Somerset.	Chairman/ Vice-Chairman
8.3.1	Cara was requested to follow up on the 23 rd February 2026 minute and 11th May 2026 when Marcus (Kravis) was requested to follow up the resolution of the restriction in flow capacity of the culvert at Nettlecombe Park Road. Given the issues last winter and the anticipated worsening in the near future, it is essential that enlargement of capacity is undertaken. The residents have raised it directly with the EA, Somerset Council and Highways. MPC fully supports this and feels that it needs sustained pressure from all corners for fear it will be overlooked/ignored.	Cara
8.4	Paul is chairing a meeting on 21 st September, for residents and farmers with Riparian responsibilities. He has delivered a letter to all properties with a riverside frontage. The invite will also be posted on the website. Other interested residents are welcome to attend. Some residents have yet to respond and a push reminder will need to be sent. Following the receipt of the letter, the Notley Inn has cut back and removed the overhanging foliage. It is hoped that this will encourage other residents.	Vice-Chairman Website
9.0	Councillor vacancy. Co-option needs to happen before October or be deferred until the Parish Council election in May. Vacancies must be advertised for two working weeks and the Electoral Roll Officer must approve the advertisement and confirm any objections from the electorate. John continues to promote the MPC vacancy to the village.	Chairman
10.0	MPC data upgrade and rollout. Catherine has completed the roll-out of the https://monksilverparishcouncil.gov.uk website. The transfer to .gov emails is almost complete. Catherine has asked that all submissions to the website be flagged with website and that all photographs be taken in landscape . All documents should be saved in .pdf format .	Website
	Catherine will post on the village WhatsApp promoting the new website and encouraging residents to sign up for MPC postings.	Catherine
	Two monthly direct debits have been set up for the Hugo Fox website and email subscriptions.	
	The clerk has written to Black Cat cancelling the contract and the original website and emails are no longer operational.	
11.0	Local Communities Network update	Ian
11.1	Funding is available for flooding and resilience projects but does not cover coastal erosion or cliff stabilisation schemes.	
	Priority will be given to "oven-ready" projects capable of being delivered within the funding timescales.	

Somerset Council is working alongside the Environment Agency, Somerset Rivers Authority, Natural England and Internal Drainage Boards.

Significant emphasis will be placed on working directly with communities and parish councils to identify local priorities.

- 11.2 Denise Holway HM Prison and Probation Services presented the Community Payback programme, explaining its structure, benefits for both the community and individuals on probation.

The programme provides supervised groups to assist with tasks like litter picking, graffiti cleaning, parks maintenance, and decorating, offering value for money and restorative justice for local organisations and victims of crime

MPC has suitable projects such as cleaning the stonewalls, and cutting back the foliage in Pond Orchard, and is keen to encourage rehabilitation for young offenders.

Ian/Vice-Chairman

- 11.3 The parish noticeboard has been delivered from Earth Anchors Ltd. Ian has met with Zoe and the Clerk to ascertain the best position and height. It is a smart unit with the MPC name above the cabinet. It has cost £755.94 including VAT. Ian will erect the new board imminently.

1.5 refers
Ian

- 11.4 Finance report.

- 11.5 VAT reclaim. As MPC is undertaking a number of projects, where VAT can be reclaimed it is worthwhile registering to reclaim VAT under S.33 of the 1994 VAT Act. To do so requires the use of Making Tax Digital software. The Clerk requested permission to:

- 11.5.1 Register with FreeAgent software. This is MTD compliant and is a free service provided to NatWest business accounts. A saving of several hundred pounds.
MPC approved unanimously with no abstentions.

Clerk

- 11.5.2 After rollout of the FreeAgent software, the Clerk requested permission to register with HMRC to reclaim VAT.
MPC approved unanimously with no abstentions.

Clerk

- 11.5.3 MPC has passed the external audit scrutiny for 2025-2026. From the current financial year, the Smaller Audit Authority will be offering digital audits. This will become compulsory from 2029 onwards. The Clerk recommended using digital auditing at the earliest opportunity.
MPC approved unanimously with no abstentions.

Clerk

- 11.5.4 MPC is holding £10,000 in various reserves. This could be earning interest in a business savings account at 0.08% on instant transfer between business accounts with no administration charges. The clerk requested permission to open an account.
MPC approved unanimously with no abstentions.

- 12.0 The dates of future meetings:
23rd November 2026 at 7.30 p.m. – approval of the 2027-2028 budget
22nd February 2027 at 7.30 p.m.
Thursday 6th May 2027 Parish Council election (if contested)
10th May 2027 at 7.00 p.m. Annual Parish Meeting

- 13.0 There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.35 p.m.

