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Minutes of the ordinary Meeting of Covingham Parish Council held on:

Monday 1st December 2025

At 7.00pm in the Small Hall at St Paul's Church and Community Centre, Covingham

Present: Councillors Bacon, Curtis, Hawkes (Chair), Kay, May, Parsons, Ricketts, Sandle and Wichall

Also in attendance: Laura Cutter (Clerk & RFO)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillors Bates (unavailable) and Walker (unavailable).

2. Declaration of Interests

Cllr Hawkes reminded all Members that they should declare any known interests in any matter, to be considered at the beginning of the meeting and during the meeting, if it becomes apparent that they have an interest in the matters being discussed.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 3rd November 2025

Proposed: Cllr D Kay

Seconded: Cllr S May

Vote: Agreed with one abstention.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 3rd November 2025 as a true record.

Minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday 14th November 2025

Proposed: Cllr V Curtis

Seconded: Cllr S May

Vote: Agreed with four abstentions.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the extra ordinary meeting held on Friday 14th November 2025

4. Matters arising from the previous minutes

- **Flood Alleviation Area** – Contractor has been asked to quote for tree planting.
- **Dorcan Brook Bank** – No response as yet from Swindon Borough Council. Five workers from Environment Agency have been doing work in this location and the River Cole.
- **Annual RoSPA Report Query** – No response from either company. *Clerk to follow up.*
- **Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)** – Site meeting on Tuesday 9th December to discuss start date. Equipment ready to ship after the new year to avoid delays and storage implications over the festive period. *Chair to liaise with Trees 4 Climate for tree planting to be done after the installation of the MUGA, before the end of February, to ensure good planting conditions.*
- **Flood Risk, Environment Agency** – Chair has established contact to discuss methods to deal with the effects of local flooding and raising awareness, rather than resolving the issue.
- **Weed Spraying and Road Sweeping** – Swindon Borough Council (SBC) will carry out road sweeping and repair verge damage caused by its recent weed spraying application, though future spraying remains uncertain. Cllrs Curtis and Hawkes reported at the Swindon Local Council Forum, held on 20th November 2025, that other parish councils face similar issues.

The Chair of the Forum's Partnership Working Party advised Covingham to formally express its dissatisfaction to the newly appointed Operations Director to seek resolution and provide a live example to enable improvement to future communications. *Action: Cllr V Curtis to contact SBC to express the Parish Council's dissatisfaction about the weed spraying.*

Proposed: Cllr R Bacon

Seconded: Cllr D Kay

Vote: Agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: Members agreed to formally express dissatisfaction to SBC about the weed spraying and request that no weed spraying or road sweeping is completed within Covingham's parish boundary for the next three years, due to pre-approved arrangements being put in place.

- **Southern Connector Road** – The Chair has written to the MP requesting that issues on Merlin Way be resolved, with work completed rather than abandoned, and no further development permitted until then. The MP's Assistant has referred the matter to SBC.
- **New Vehicle Update** – A suitable vehicle has been secured and the signage has been installed. The old van has been emptied, and the Working Party suggest that the old van is sold for trade at £200.00 including collection. The new van requires shelving and fitting at a cost of £112.00. The Clerk holds the necessary information to notify the DVLA to cancel the vehicle tax and record the sale.

Proposed: Cllr S May

Seconded: Cllr R Bacon

Vote: Agreed unanimously

RESOLVED: That the old van be sold for trade at £200 including collection, with the Clerk to notify DVLA to cancel tax and record the sale.

Proposed: Cllr J Ricketts

Seconded: Cllr S Wichall

Vote: Agreed unanimously

RESOLVED: That the new van be fitted with shelving and equipment at a cost of £112.00.

5. Public Forum

There were no members of the public present.

6. Police Matters

No update was received as no Police personnel were in attendance.

7. Chairs Verbal Update

- The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has introduced a new Assertion 10 policy in the 2025 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), focusing on digital and data compliance for parish and town councils. Chair will attend a webinar on this and related web topics on Tuesday, 2 December.
- Recent flood events were reported to SBC and the MP after the River Cole continued to rise for over an hour after it stopped raining. It was requested that this be investigated, as a blocked sewer in Covingham that evening may have contributed to the build-up. The matter has been raised for investigation, but no response has yet been received.

8. Clerks Verbal Update

Nothing to report.

9. Parish Maintenance Engineers

- **Monthly Reports** – Noted.

10. Reports from Parish Council Working Parties and Committee's

- **Data Protection & Governance** – Nothing to report.

11. Planning Matters:

- a) **To consider any planning applications.**

No applications have been received.

- b) **To note any comments from the Planning Working Party submitted between meetings.**

No comments had been submitted between meetings.

- c) **To note any decisions**

No decisions have been made within the parish boundary.

12. Financial Matters

- a) **To approve the Schedule of Payments for December 2025**

Proposed: Cllr S Wichall

Seconded: Cllr L Sandle

Vote: Agreed unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the Schedule of Payments as presented.

- b) Members received the monthly accounts reconciliation. Cost for the van has been allocated on the van cost budget line, as the VAT amount will be appropriate – permission for a virement to take place, so that it is added to the VAT amount to ensure the van line isn't overspent. *Clerk & RFO to check with the internal auditor.*

Proposed: Cllr V Curtis

Seconded: Cllr D Kay

Vote: Agreed unanimously

RESOLVED: That a virement from the VAT income line to the van expenditure budget line is conducted to ensure the van line isn't overspent.

- c) **Draft Budget 2026-27** – Members reviewed the first draft budget and thanked Cllr V Curtis for providing a thorough, well balanced draft budget. Key points included:

- Acknowledgement that the budget has been consistent over the past five years.
- The budget must be in line with inflation to cover operational costs.
- The weed-spraying budget has risen to cover additional early-season road sweeping, balanced by removing contingency from another line.
- The community grants budget will remain the same.
- The Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations for Parish Councillor allowance has not yet been received from SBC. Members concurred that as per previous years, it is unlikely that Councillors will take the allowances, despite 2026 being an election year.
- Members discussed creating an Ear Marked Reserve, ring fencing funds annually for long-term strategic projects.
- Further discussion is scheduled for the next meeting on 5th January 2026. Budget due for submission to SBC by 30th January 2026.

13. The Handy Mag

There is no Handy Mag published in December.

14. Matters for consideration

- **Inconsiderate Parking:** Members acknowledged there is still an issue with inconsiderate parking outside St Paul's Church.
- **Web Space:** Members were reminded to keep mailboxes tidy to avoid compromising the data storage. In view of upcoming changes following Assertion 10, meeting attachments may be provided as a password-protected ZIP file. Alternative options will be explored.

- **Speed Indicator Devices:** Figures vary with battery use and monitoring length. The Chair will review records, convert them into daily and weekly averages, and provide more accurate data than the system's standard summary. Additional volunteers and training will be sought in the New Year.

The meeting closed at 20.20pm

Signed.....Date.....