

MAIDEN NEWTON AND FROME VAUCHURCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 9th April 2026

Held in the Village Hall at 6.30pm light refreshments were served prior to the meeting
commencing at 6.30pm.

PRESENT:

Trena Fox (Chairman) (TF)
Carol King (CK)
Anne Clements (AC)
Gareth Scott (GJS)

Jeremy Edwards (Vice Chair) (JE)
Toni C-M (TC)
Georgina Stephenson (GS)

In attendance Mrs M Harding (Clerk), Cllr Neil Eysenck (Ward Councillor), Guest Speaker Steve Oliver (DWT) 9 members of public. No apologies

1. Welcome and housekeeping and receive apologies

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting noting the emergency exits and toilets and welcomed Steven Oliver to the meeting

2. To welcome speak Steven Oliver speaking on the Beaver Wild Release consultation

Stephen Oliver thanked the Cllrs for the invitation to speak. He gave a very interesting and informative presentation on the Beaver Wild Release Project.

He explained that beavers were once a native resident species, having lived in this country around 400 years ago. In 2021, Eurasian beavers were introduced into a controlled site on the River Hook in Dorset, where they have been studied over a five-year period by Dorset Wildlife Trust and other organisations. This work has been carried out under licence, and Natural England is responsible for preparing and issuing the relevant licences for both enclosed and wild release projects.

Stephen advised that the current consultation relates to proposals for wild release. There are already several sites in the Purbecks where beavers are living freely, and the Rivers Hook and Frome are considered good habitats for future release. Natural England is supportive of full licence applications, but as part of the process a full public consultation is required. This is intended to gather feedback and help residents understand how people and beavers can live alongside one another.

The River Frome catchment includes 12 water bodies and covers approximately 460 square kilometres. A range of consultation events is being held, including one in Maiden Newton on Saturday, with further events planned in Dorchester.

Farmers and landowners are being consulted as key stakeholders, and it is hoped that beavers will become a normal part of the local natural environment. Stephen explained that beavers contribute positively to freshwater ecosystems by encouraging biodiversity, slowing the flow of water, and helping to reduce flooding in some areas. Their presence can also improve habitats for insects, bats, birds, and other wildlife.

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He also outlined some of the challenges, including the risk of localised flooding and tree damage. It was noted that beavers would not be suitable in the middle of settlements, but they can thrive in appropriate rural habitats. Discussion also covered the fact that otters may prey on young beavers, although the two species are able to coexist.

The current consultation forms part of a proposed 10-year plan linked to the licence application process.

The Chairman thanked Stephen for his interesting and informative talk and expressed the hope that many villagers would attend the consultation session being held in the Village Hall on Saturday between 12.00 noon and 3.00 pm.

3. To receive the minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on April 3rd 2025.

All agreed

4. To receive the Parish Chairman's report for the year 2025-26

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting and presented her report for the past year.

She reported that in April the Parish Council appointed Traction Sports to undertake a feasibility study for a Multi-Use Games Area. Following a successful grant award of £15,000 from Dorset Council in May, the project is now well underway, with completion of resurfacing works expected shortly.

The Chairman noted changes in Council membership during the year, thanking Alan Lawrie, Becky and Emma for their service, and welcoming new councillors James, Georgina and Gareth.

An extensive village survey regarding the potential use of Skips Field has been undertaken. This remains ongoing, with discussions continuing between the Parish Council, the Community Land Trust, and the landowner.

Improvements within the parish over the year include the installation of a new noticeboard and a financial contribution towards cemetery maintenance.

Flooding continues to be a significant concern. While some mitigation works have been carried out, several properties remain at risk. Discussions are ongoing with the support of the Ward Councillor and MP to seek longer-term solutions.

Work is progressing to finalise a lease agreement with the football club, which it is hoped will support future grant funding opportunities for the benefit of the club and the wider community.

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The Local Plan consultation, held between August and October, included a well-attended public meeting, which informed the Parish Council's response.

The Chairman highlighted concerns regarding proposed fire station closures and noted the Parish Council's intention to continue working with Ward Councillors, the MP, and the community to oppose the proposals. She also wished to thank the group of local residents campaigning to retain the fire station for their commitment and efforts.

The Chairman thanked all councillors for their work throughout the year, much of which takes place behind the scenes, as well as the flood wardens for their continued dedication. Special thanks were also given to the Clerk for all the work she does in supporting the Parish Council; her contribution is invaluable.

It was noted that there is currently one vacancy on the Parish Council, which the Council hopes to fill at its May meeting.

5. To receive the Finance report for 2025-26

Financial Overview

The Parish Council has maintained a positive financial position, ending the year with a surplus despite a year of significant investment in community facilities.

Income exceeded expectations, supported by grants, infrastructure funding, and strong local income streams, while expenditure reflects both planned projects and ongoing village maintenance.

Income

Income was significantly higher than budgeted, including:

- Precept: £37,800
- Grants and donations: over £20,000
- CIL funding: over £12,500
- Strong returns from interest and local income streams

Important note:

Funds relating to the Old Fire House are ring-fenced. The Parish Council holds these funds on behalf of the associated group, and they are not available for general spending. The Play area funds also paid into the PC account will be ring fenced.

Expenditure

MUGA & Playing Field-The largest area of expenditure, reflecting major investment in resurfacing and improvements.

General Administration- Slightly above budget due to subscriptions and IT costs, offset by savings in other areas.

Council Property & Maintenance- Overall below budget, though some areas such as flood work required additional spending.

Allotments- Generated a surplus and continue to be self-sustaining.

Play Area- Maintained within budget with regular inspections and repairs.

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Bank Reconciliation (31 March 2026)

The Council's accounts have been fully reconciled and verified.

Breakdown:

- Current Account: £5,818.83
- Savings Account: £12,986.32
- 32-Day Notice Account: £36,426.02
- Fixed Term Deposit: £30,000

Total cash held: £85,231.17

This confirms that the Council holds healthy reserves to support future projects and ongoing commitments.

Conclusion- This has been a year of strong progress, with:

- Delivery of a major community project
- Successful external funding
- Careful financial management
- Healthy reserves maintained

The Parish Council remains in a stable and sustainable financial position moving forward.

6. To receive a report from Dorset Council – Ward Cllr Neil Eysenck

The Ward Councillor provided an update on Dorset Council matters.

- It was reported that the Annual Budget was agreed at Full Council on 10 February 2026. This is the first multi-year central government settlement for several years, enabling improved financial planning over the next three years. The budget includes a revenue allocation of £482m and a capital programme of £66m.
- Additional funding has been allocated to address flooding issues, including £5m for capital works focused on flood-prone areas, particularly rural roads. The Highways budget now totals £48m, with a further £250k in the revenue budget to support rural services, including an additional gully clearance team.
- Members were advised that additional resources are being directed to the Community Highways Team to address staffing shortages. Although the service is currently in a period of transition, it is anticipated that increased staffing capacity will improve service delivery in the longer term.
- Dorset Council's Emergency Planning Team has applied for a Section 19 review to investigate the causes of flooding across Dorset. It was requested that this review should specifically consider what went wrong in recent flooding events and identify root causes.

Maiden Newton Updates:

- An update was provided on the Loders to Maiden Newton Trailway. Works at Wetley Bridge and Crutchley's have been agreed, and it is hoped that the section through to Maiden Newton will also be progressed in due course. Although there have been some landowner issues which are still being negotiated.

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- An update was also provided regarding flooding in Frome Vauchurch. This remains a key concern, particularly as it affects a route used by children walking to school. Discussions are ongoing with Highways and the landowner to identify the source of the issue and explore potential mitigation measures, including the creation of a swale. Further work will be considered.

Matters for Parish Council Input:

- Future of the fire station.
- Flooding issues within the village, including how the Parish Council can support ongoing discussions following the recent visit from the MP.

Key Issues Highlighted by the Ward Councillor:

- Planning matters, including the sad passing of Councillor Bolwell (former Chair of the Strategic & Western Planning Committee).
- Ongoing flooding concerns in Maiden Newton.
- The Parnham planning application.
- Flooding and associated road damage across the ward, including potholes in Loders, Netherbury, Poortons and West Milton, and the recent four-week closure of Barrowlands Lane.
- It was noted that recent exceptional weather has contributed significantly to flooding and road damage. Comments were made regarding drainage and run-off management, including the need to avoid poor percolation where possible. Repair timelines have been affected, leading to delays in addressing some issues.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to Neil for his continued work and support for the village, which is greatly appreciated.

7. Your issues or comments

Cllr A Clements thanked Dorste Council for finally carrying out the repair on the road to the surgery.

The meeting was followed by the Maiden Newton and Frome Vauchurch group Parish Council meeting.