

LOPEN PARISH COUNCIL

<https://www.lopenvillage.org/parish-council>

Minutes of the Meeting of Lopen Parish Council held in the Sunday School Room on Monday 18th May 2026 at 7.00pm

26/55 Election of Chair

Cllr Jones was proposed by Cllr Feeney, seconded by Cllr Crane. No further nominations were made and Councillors voted unanimously in favour of the proposal. RESOLVED to elect Cllr Jones as Chair

26/56 Declaration of Acceptance of Office

Cllr Jones duly read and signed their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, witnessed by the Clerk.

26/57 Election of Vice-Chair of the Parish Council

Cllr Feeney was proposed by Cllr Jones, seconded by Cllr Crane. No further nominations were made and Councillors voted unanimously in favour of the proposal. RESOLVED to elect Cllr Feeney as Vice-Chair.

26/58 Attendance and Apologies

Present: Cllrs Jones, Crane, Feeney and Armstrong (arrived at 19.11); Mrs Larsson (Clerk)

Apologies: Cllr King; Unitary Cllr Roundell-Greene

26/59 Declarations of Interest / Dispensations

Cllr Jones & Armstrong declared an interest in planning item 26/62ai with property neighbouring the boundary. A dispensation was granted to allow them to participate and vote in order to maintain a quorate meeting. This was approved on the basis that both councillors confirmed they would act impartially and that the application did not affect them significantly more than other residents

26/60 Parish Councillor Vacancies: No applications received.

26/61 Minutes of the meeting held on 27th April 2026

RESOLVED to approve the minutes as a true record of the previous meeting, which were duly signed by the Chair.

26/62 Planning Applications

a. New Applications

i) 26/00938/PAMB: Land At Church Farm Church Street Lopen TA13 5JX - Prior Approval

Notification for change of use of 2No.agricultural buildings into 2No. dwellings

RESOLVED to submit comments as follows: The Council noted that the building has never been used for agricultural purposes, having operated as kennels historically and more recently for equestrian use, neither of which qualifies as agriculture under Class Q. Members also observed that the buildings appear visibly not structurally sound, raising concerns about whether they can be converted without significant rebuilding. Further concerns included recent flood impacts and drainage issues, ecological impact, and the continued obstruction of the adjacent public footpath.

The Council concluded that the proposal does not meet Class Q requirements and that a full planning application should be submitted.

b. Updates and Enforcement:

i) 26/01056/S19: Knapp House Church Street Lopen South Petherton Somerset TA13 5JX - S19 application to vary conditions 02(approved plans) and 04 (windows/doors) to allow a change in design for a new smaller scheme, in relation to planning application 25/01791/LBC for Replace an existing single storey storage room to the north of Knapp Cottage. The new building will house an entrance hall, utility room and games room, consolidating multiple extensions into a cohesive design

Members reviewed the proposed changes and had no comments to make.

Details of applications and the council's full responses are available to view against the respective applications on the Somerset Council planning portal [Link to Planning Portal](#)

Initial

26/63 Areas of Responsibility

- a. RESOLVED to appoint members as lead on the following areas of responsibility:
 - Finance: Cllr Feeney
 - HR/Staffing: Cllrs Jones, Armstrong & Feeney
 - Ranger: Cllr Feeney
 - Rights of Way: Cllr Feeney
 - Highways: Cllr Crane
 - Planning: Cllr Jones
 - Website: Cllr Jones/Clerk
 - Flooding: Cllr Armstrong
 - Local Community Networks: All
- b. Delegation arrangements: Currently set out within standing orders and financial regulations, with additional items agreed by resolution at full council meetings. A scheme of delegation will be developed to capture arrangements in a simple and easily accessible format.

26/64 Membership of outside organisations

RESOLVED to continue with membership with the Somerset Association of Local Councils and to support the Clerks membership with the Society of Local Council Clerks (membership fees split proportionately with other council employers).

The council is also registered with the Information Commissioners Office.

26/65 Financial Matters

- a. Financial statement: Financial statement with bank reconciliation and year end position to 30/4/26 was circulated in advance of the meeting. No queries were raised and the reconciliation as verified by Cllr Feeney.
- b. Payments requiring authorisation
Members RESOLVED to authorise the following payments:

Clerk salary & PAYE to 31/5/26 (restricted information under GDPR)	
Internal audit fee	£200.00
Admin expenses	£4.07

The following payments made since the last meeting were noted

Unity Trust monthly fees – April '26	£7.00
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- c. Banking arrangements: Previous submission to add Cllr King as a signatory has not been processed by Unity Trust. RESOLVED to re-submit a new application to add Cllr King as a signatory on all accounts.

Members re-confirmed the following banking roles:

- Service Administrator – Clerk
- Approvers – Cllrs Jone, Crane & King
- Internal transfers – Clerk can arrange with one further approver.
- View only – Cllr Feeney

Members also RESOLVED to amend the bank mandate to allow internal transfers of funds to be authorised by one signatory following submission by the service administrator. This change ensures that internal transfers can be actioned promptly, avoiding payment rejections that can occur due to the order in which transactions are processed. It also supports achieving the best return on interest by enabling timely movement of funds between the savings and current accounts.

- d. Asset Register: The asset register was reviewed and agreed at the April meeting.
- e. Section.137 spend: There was no Section 137 expenditure during the 2025/26 financial year. All expenditure was incurred in the course of, or incidental to, the discharge of the Council’s functions, or in support of community recreational facilities enabled under other legislation

26/66 Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26

- a. Internal audit report: The internal audit was undertaken on 30th April 2026 by Joanna Simonds. Both a written report and the completed Annual Internal Duty Report from the AGAR were provided. Two areas were identified where the council was unable to demonstrate compliance, as follows:
Financial management & risk assessment: There was no evidence of a written risk assessment or its review. The council acknowledge that while risk management is undertaken in day-to-day activities, in order to meet the criteria for compliance, these must be documented. A new risk assessment is being considered at this meeting (refer minute 26/67d)
Digital and data compliance: The council has taken all steps to ensure compliance with the new Assertion 10, however, the new website was not live before the end of the 2025/26 financial year, and as a result did not comply with the new requirements.
As the launch of the new site is imminent and considering all other requirements being met, the council felt this was not cause for concern and were confident in future compliance. It was also noted that many smaller councils are expected to not be compliant with the new assertion this year as it is a significant pressure on their small resources.
- b. Exemption from a limited assurance review: As both the council's gross income and gross expenditure for the financial year were below £25,000, it meets the criteria to certify itself as exempt from a limited assurance review. RESOLVED to complete and submit the Certificate of Exemption.
- c. Annual Governance Statement: Members reviewed the Annual Governance Statement. Assertions 5 (financial management & risk assessment) and 10 (digital and data compliance) were marked 'No', for the reasons set out above. All other assertions were answered 'Yes'.
RESOLVED to approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26, which was signed by the Chair and Clerk.
- d. Annual Accounting Statements: Members reviewed the Accounting Statements, confirmed they agree with the Council's cashbook and underlying records, and noted that they have been verified by the Internal Auditor. RESOLVED to approve the Accounting Statements for 2025/26 and for them to be signed by the Chair.
- e. Period for the exercise of public rights: RESOLVED that the Clerk be authorised to set and publish the Public Rights period. This will be done in accordance with the statutory requirement for a continuous 30-working-day period which must include the first 10 working days of July.

26/67 Policy and Document Reviews

All documents were circulated to members in advance of the meeting with any proposed amendments highlighted.

- a. Standing Orders: RESOLVED to adopt the draft circulated, based on the new model document, with the amendments as set out. The most significant change is the introduction of a new schedule for the review of policies (see minute 26/66e below). A further amendment was agreed to set a period of 10 days before the approval meeting for the Annual Governance Statement to be provided to members.
- b. Financial Regulations: The clerk noted that some significant changes had been made from the model document in the adopted version and recommended re-instating some of the clauses. Due to the large differences requiring review, the Clerk recommended to arrange for a working group to review the document. RESOLVED to set up a working group made up of Cllrs Feeney, Jones and the Clerk. Following review, the financial regulations will be presented for consideration (timings to be confirmed).
- c. Code of Conduct: There have been no updates to the Somerset model policy and no changes were proposed. RESOLVED to re-adopt without amendment.
- d. Risk Assessment: RESOLVED to adopt the new risk assessment as circulated. The risk assessment will be further developed to include RAG indicators.
- e. Policy Review Schedule: RESOLVED to adopt the schedule to support the changes to the standing orders in relation to policy reviews at the annual meeting.

Initial

26/68 Insurance renewal

The clerk advised that quotes had not been received at the time of the meeting, however, advised expecting Clear Council's quote to be in excess of £300 as they have a minimum policy premium. As renewal is due on 1st June before the next scheduled meeting, authority was delegated to the clerk to arrange renewal with Zurich, with the renewal quote standing at £295.37. Providing there was not an increase in premium of more than 15%, it was agreed to amend the volunteer personal accident levels to equal those for staff/members.

26/69 Orchard Land lease

CLlr Jones continues to make follow up contact with Somerset Council to progress the draft lease.

26/70 Updates and actions on the following areas:

- a. Highways: Road defects are being marked up after reports but not resolved swiftly.
- b. Rights of Way: Bridge at Manor Farm has a damaged slat which Cllr Feeney has been asked to look into by SC ROW as the PPLO.
- c. Flooding: Flood group continue to meet, no specific matters to report.
- d. Training: None requested. The Clerk will forward the latest schedule from SALC when available.
- e. Local Community Network: The LCN AGM is on Tuesday 30th June at the Millenium Hall, Seavington St Mary. Agenda will be circulated once available.
LCN meetings are open to members of the public – more information can be found here:
<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/>
- f. Community Emergency Plan: There is a lot of local support in developing the plan. No specific updates to give at this time.
- g. Website: Last adjustments are being made and the website will be made live as soon as possible. It will continue to develop once live. Local organisations are still required to review their information and provide any updates.

26/71 Correspondence/Matters for report only: None.

26/72 Items for the next meeting

Any proposals to be submitted to the Clerk in line with standing orders.

26/73 Date of next meetings: Monday 29th June 2026, 7.00pm in the Sunday School Room.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 21.04pm.

Signed

Date

Initial