

## **Chairman's Annual report for West Crewkerne Parish Council May 2023-May 2024**

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 the Unitary Authority, Somerset Council came into being. Months of planning between the district councils would now be tested to see if that the one authority would be fit for purpose. Initially there were some settling in challenges I am sure, none of which seemed to affect West Crewkerne.

By the end of the year there were major financial problems within Somerset Council largely caused by rapidly rising costs especially in the areas of social and children's care. When looking at the budget for 2024-2025 Somerset Council declared there would be a need for savings of £100,000,000. These required savings were proposed to be achieved by cutting the individual budgets across all areas within the council from libraries, recycling centres, highway maintenance, to name but a few. Parish and town councils were asked if they would be willing and able to take on the responsibility in the areas likely to be affected by some of these proposed cuts, rather than lose them completely.

Mindful that rapidly rising costs were already affecting all, West Crewkerne Parish Council having no areas within the parish for which they could take responsibility, decided not to propose any increase in their precept. Depending on how the current financial year for Somerset Council is managed we are mindful that for the precept for 2024-2025 this may not be the case.

Once again there have been few planning applications over the past year. In May of 2023 there were consultations about a proposed Solar Farm at Mahe Farm in Wayford Parish. To date there has been no planning application received about this proposal.

Highways have as always been discussed at all our meetings throughout the year. As we are all aware there has been many months of wet weather. The drains are easily blocked with silt and gravel. The ground has been saturated and rain running off the fields causes flooding and landslides, especially along Cathole Bridge Road towards Roundham, and along the B3165 from Hewish crossroads to Clapton. Prolonged rain and large wide vehicles are eroding the side of the roads and it will be unlikely they will receive any repairs for the foreseeable future.

Reporting of flooding, blocked drains and potholes really assists with highway repairs, although it should be noted that sometimes it does take some weeks. It is frustrating that most roads within West Crewkerne do not have their drains and gullies emptied annually. We as a parish council may need to pay for additional drain clearing by raising the precept.

Roundham and the speed of traffic through this small hamlet is still very much on our agenda. It has been agreed that permanent speed indicator devices (SID) can be placed at each end of the hamlet, for which funding has been applied. However this long and challenging process has yet to be resolved.

Councillor Frank Freeman, who had been a member of West Crewkerne Parish Council for several years sadly passed away earlier this year. He was a highly respected member of our community and will be greatly missed.

I would like to thank our clerk Rose Richards for her support through the year and fellow councillors including our county councillors, equally for their support of West Crewkerne Parish Council.

Julia Borland

Chairman West Crewkerne Parish Council  
May 23rd 2024