

WIDECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting

held in Church House, Widecombe

on Thursday 22 May 2024 at 7.30pm

Parish Councillors present: Councillor Elliott (Chair for this meeting), Bibby, Edwards, Partridge and Raynor

Also present: District Cllr Nutley, District Cllr Major & Rob Steemson (DNPA)

Members of the Public: 34

Clerk: Suzanna Hughes

APM2024.1 CHAIR'S REPORT

Council – Tom Guest joined, Sandra Zab recently stepped down. 3 vacancies currently, so we would welcome any interested parties who are resident in the parish. Meetings taking place monthly, on 1st Thursday of each month (excluding August and December). Using Church House and Leusdon Memorial Hall to hold meetings at both ends of the parish. Responsibilities are shared out between Councillors and typically are split to cover Projects & Estates or Finance & Planning. Training is provided.

We own the Parish Field, behind the Teignbridge car park and want to ensure this is used by the community. Preschool have a space here for their weekly outdoor sessions and grazing is agreed annually throughout the summer. A permanent water supply was fitted last summer thanks to local volunteers and a management committee set up to create the orchard – we'll hear more from them shortly.

Changes on the Village Green – the large Horse Chestnut and sycamore were felled during the year as a result of disease. Two new trees (a Lime and a new Horse Chestnut) have been planted recently, including one to commemorate the King's Coronation, donated by David Fursdon, Lord Lieutenant of Devon. Thanks to Councillor Partridge for her successful application to Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) for funding of over £2,000 which enabled us to improve the layby area at the bottom of Widecombe Hill and also to grind out old tree stumps and replant new trees on the Village Green.

North Hall Playing Fields (the tennis courts site) are leased by the PC from Dartmoor National Park Authority and have then been sub-let to the Sports group. Our lease was renewed with DNPA, but excessive fees to redo the sublease have resulted in a deferment of this renewal for the time being whilst the Sports Group investigate funding opportunities for tennis court improvement works.

Affordable Housing – 8 new properties were built on Brook Lane through Teign Housing to high standards and with excellent environmental credentials. New tenants moved in before Christmas following a, slightly controversial, allocations process managed by Devon Home Choice. We welcome all of the new families to the parish.

Parish Precept (our element of the local Council Tax bill) – increased by 5% this Spring (typically an increase of only £1.11 per household over the year). Total precept income this year is £6798.

Annual grants up to a total of £1,200 can be applied for. We were delighted to support Widecombe Community Hall and Widecombe Preschool this year.

The Post Office van has been visiting the main car park every Monday since September, following the closure of the Village Store. Thanks to the Café on Green for helping with wifi initially, and to Stuart Rogers, Ashburton Postmaster, for his tireless work in providing outreach services to our rural communities. The van now has Starlink so is self-sufficient and is well used each week.

We welcomed Claire Hurrell, our new Neighbourhood Beat Manager who is working alongside PCSO Tamzin Campbell-Moseley. Both have attended PC meetings and also coffee mornings at Leusdon Memorial Hall to introduce themselves to local residents.

Revisiting the idea of finding a suitable location in the village for Devon Air Ambulance night landing site – previously dismissed due to the requirements for lighting masts and mobile phone signal. Animals are not permitted on land that is designated as a landing site, which had ruled out previously considered locations. Two potential sites now being considered – watch this space!

Thank you to all my fellow councillors for their ongoing work throughout the year and especially to our ever-efficient Clerk, Suzanna, who keeps us on the straight and narrow!

Now looking forward to hearing from representatives of the multitude of different groups and organisations that we are lucky enough to have within our community.

APM2024.2 COMMUNITY REPORTS

Community reports were invited. A summary can be found below.

Roger Claxton, representing Widecombe Website, was unable to attend but sent the following report:

The Widecombe website is 25 years old this year and continues to provide local people and visitors with information about the local area and its uniqueness, including local businesses, what to do, where to stay, what to read, local history, etc. The Parish Council section publishes the agendas and minutes of meetings as well as the annual transparency reporting. The site can always do more, and is there to help local groups should they want to. We are currently working on a new design for the site which is expected to go live within the next two months. This will make it even easier to add new content. A small team is helping to make this happen. Many thanks to them and to the Parish Council and all the advertisers for their continued support.

Di Cameron, representing Church House, was unable to attend but sent the following report:

After a very long drawn-out process we finally managed to complete the renewal of the lease with the National Trust. This to run for 21 years as did the previous lease. The terms have remained almost the same as (for the moment) has the rent. The Trust are planning to do some work on the outside of the building during the summer. If this takes place it will mean that scaffolding will be put up along the front.

The Committee were very sad when hearing of the death of Peter Dracup. Peter had been a much respected trustee for a number of years.

We were all very pleased to welcome his son John who has taken his place in this position.

If anyone has any questions regarding the Church House please get in touch with either Michael Pascoe (Chairman) or Di Cameron (Secretary)

Miles Fursdon, Snow Warden, was unable to attend but sent the following report:

62 volunteers, 17 tractor drivers – all is going well. When icy or snowy, the team clear and grit as many roads as necessary to ensure there are safe routes out of the parish to the main roads. Anyone is able to report an empty or damaged grit bin through DCC's website so please check the bin nearest to you and request a top-up if needed. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the Parish Council or Miles.

Michelle D'Arcy, Chair of Friends of Widecombe School

There are currently 11 Committee members. Fundraising have been varied and have included bingo nights, a fun run and a homemade chocolate business. The children have bought new tennis balls and other equipment for the school playground. Soon they will be holding a virtual auction and some lovely prizes have been donated. The main project this year is renovation of the school playground to make it more inclusive and age appropriate. Ultimately, they want to provide the best environment for learning, playing and connecting with beautiful surroundings of Dartmoor. All the families feel very lucky to be part of the school.

Peter Blood, Secretary to the PCC at St Pancras Church

St Pancras Church

A significant event this year was the retirement of Geoffrey Fenton. During his time at St Pancras, Geoffrey and his wife, Beth, made a significant contribution to the church and community. A new team vicar has now been appointed – Ross Hathway. Ross works part-time and is on duty on Mondays and Tuesdays and takes services on Sundays. Mark Rylands, Team Rector, has recently announced that, from September, he will be moving to a part-time role and will be retiring in March 2025. At the recent Annual Meeting, Mike Pascoe and Phil Gimlette have been elected as Church Wardens. Services remain unchanged with a 10.30am service on Sundays and special services throughout the year. There will also be a Christmas Tree festival in December.

Music in the Church is going from strength to strength with Michael Brown, Jacqueline Wilding-White and Alison Hathway providing the music for services. There is an ongoing project to replace the pipe organ which is now not fit for purpose. Obtaining permission to replace the organ has been a long process and the application for a faculty (church equivalent of planning permission) has now been submitted to Registrar of Exeter Diocese for approval. The new organ has been paid for by a generous donation from a parishioner and proceeds from fund-raising concerts in the church organised by Michael Brown.

The Church is open for visitors every date and it is fortunate that it is on the tourist trail as this provides a steady income for the church. However, with visitors carrying less cash, the Church is losing out on book stall purchases and donations. It is therefore planned to install a card payment donation station. As there is no internet connection, the machine will need to be removed to upload transactions on a regular basis.

If anyone wishes to get involved in church activities, please get in touch. These activities include a team of welcomers who greet visitors during the summer months, flower arrangers, making coffee after the services and bell-ringing.

We should remember Peter Dracup who passed away last year. He set a great example to us all through his outstanding service to the church and community.

Parish Link

690 copies, each with 44 pages, are distributed each month. It is also available to download on the Widecombe Website.

The operation to publish and distribute the magazine functions well but there is always room for more volunteers. Thanks to the editors, Debbie Richardson and Fiona Senior, the advertising manager, Rachel Arrowsmith-Brown, distribution co-ordinator Marilyn Wells and all the volunteer distributors. Everyone who publishes and distributes the Link is an unpaid volunteer so if you would like to help, please get in touch.

Content is slowly evolving and now includes some fun elements including a colouring page and a puzzle page. St Peter's, Buckland, now has a regular page as the Ashburton Parish magazine is not being published at the moment.

Thank you to all the content providers. More articles are always encouraged to refresh the content. Positive feedback is always welcome.

The finances are sound; income is derived from advertising revenue and donations for which they are grateful. The main expenditure is printing. Advertising contracts are available for 1-12 months. If you would like a copy of the Link delivered electronically, you can sign up for this on the Widecombe website. It is also available to view online on the Widecombe website.

Chris Elliott, Widecombe Community Hall

It has been a year of steady progress. At the outset, a local fundraising target of £50k was set. This has now been reached through a range of small-scale fundraising events. Local fundraising will continue and they are particularly grateful for donations received. There a number of supporters who make occasional or regular deposits into the account and the group is determined to use this money wisely.

As an organisation, they currently have funds of around £200k which are unrestricted and currently accumulating interest at rate higher than inflation. Grant fund applications are being worked on. Unfortunately, they were recently unsuccessful in securing National Lottery Funding.

There has been steady progress on the detailed design and groundworks on the site. Of all the money spent so far, the vast majority has been spent only on materials. Plant hire and labour has been largely free of charge or significantly under the commercial cost. This is a fantastic achievement and is due to the commitment of businesses and individuals in the parish.

There will shortly be another round of volunteer led works which will centre on the preparation of the grid connection, drainage works and landscaping. They are also expecting to lay some kerbs around the site with the intention of making good up to these and demarcating the construction site.

In parallel with this, an architect will be moving plans forward to something which is fully structurally designed allowing them to go out to tender and thus providing more realistic costings.

They look forward to the upcoming fund-raising events including a fun run in August.

The Committee are always keen to hear from people who are able to contribute relevant skills to the project. If you can donate your time on practical jobs, please sign up on the Whats App group.

Judy Southcombe, Defibrillator and Pre-School

Defibrillator

The defibrillator is in the bus shelter. The code to access it is '4680 tick'. Make sure you know how to access it and let Judy know if you see anything wrong with it. Use the telephone to call for an ambulance as there is no mobile phone signal

[Also note that there is another defibrillator at Leusdon Memorial Hall so there are two which are accessible in the parish.]

Pre-school

9 children are currently on the roll. 4 are going to school in the autumn. Finances are decreasing as new children starting in September might not be able to commit to the same hours. The government has not increased its funding but wages have gone up. They are very grateful to the Church House who rent the building to the pre-school at a very reasonable rate and they thanked the Parish Council for the area on the Parish Field which the pre-school have been able to use.

Widdy tots (from birth to 2) usually runs on Monday mornings.

Claire Partridge, Widecombe Sports Group

There is a floodlit tennis court in Widecombe and the Sports Group is always keen to welcome new members. There is also a basketball hoop, sometimes football is played and, in the past, other activities have been organised (e.g. after school etc).

Unfortunately, the condition of the court is deteriorating and needs resurfacing. The Sports Group is now looking at funding opportunities and would be keen to hear from anyone who can help support the Sports Group. The cost of resurfacing is around £25k.

Will Dracup, Shallowford Trust

Shallowford was set up nearly 50 years ago and has been linking inner city kids with rural life. It has been a busy year with several thousands of children having visited this year. There are currently 5 full-time equivalent members of staff and many volunteers whose help is very much appreciated. They are always looking for more volunteers so please get in touch if you wish to be involved.

They ran a pop-up farm opposite Clapham junction in London. This was visited by thousands of children and the Duchess of Edinburgh also visited. It was a fantastic experience for all.

Julia McDade, Trust Manager, has now left. Thanks to her and all she has done and very best wishes for the future.

John Southcombe, Leusdon Memorial Hall

John thanked all the Committee members for their help and support over the last year.

Social media presence has increased and they now have 350 followers.

Bookings for the hall have continued to recover, post-pandemic. Coffee mornings and whist take place monthly and as well as providing a social hub for the community, they also raise much-needed funds (average £250 per month).

Centenary celebrations culminated in a party on 20 October 2023 with 165 visitors in the afternoon and evening. A commemoration was held in November to remember those who died in both World Wars.

The Moorland Merrymakers performed their panto in December which was very well received. They have been great supporters of the hall over the last 60 years.

During the year, the hall has also been a venue for many other events including weddings, christenings, wakes, birthday parties and other community events.

At the Committee meeting in January, a series of improvements and repairs were agreed which will enhance the hall's comfort and ambience. These include more disabled parking at the rear of the hall and repairs to the fabric of the building and the two storage areas. New lighting will also be installed to light the path at the front entrance. .

Thank you to Kathryn Massey (Secretary) and Amanda Routley (Booking Officer) who have recently decided to step down from their roles.

Geoff Bamsey, Leusdon Church

Leusdon Church was built in 1863 by Charlotte Rosamond Larpent who, according to the story, lived in Widecombe but fell out with the vicar and built another church! She also built a school and fine house and so without her there would be very little in Leusdon.

Leusdon is part of the responsibility of the team vicar in Widecombe. Its population is small which restricts its activities and the congregation. It, nonetheless, has a very special feel and also attracts walkers wanting to rest after walking up from the river! It is an incredible view.

In terms of size, Leusdon Church is about half the size of St Pancras and about half as old. The organ in St Pancras was removed from Leusdon Church in 1883; the organ which replaced it still sounds very good. The new vicar's wife, Alison Hathway, now plays the organ during the services.

Leusdon Church is in good repair and TDC cut the grass in the closed churchyard.

The church is open every day for visitors and has benefited greatly from generous donations. Financially, it is in a comfortable position.

Thank you to all the volunteers who keep the church clean, arrange the flowers, make tea and coffee etc. They value their independence but also value their association with Widecombe.

Rob Steemson, DNPA

Rob is the sector ranger covering 6 parishes and 183 public rights of way. His main role is to manage visitors and dealing with PROW. Many improvements have been made over the last 12 months including signage, styles, boardwalks, gates, access and bridge repairs. They utilise local contractors where possible (signs are largely made by Wildworks) and they also assisted by a number of volunteer wardens who help survey the paths and make smaller, single-armed signs. Defects are reported on an app and works are then prioritised. On average, every year, half the rights of way are surveyed in each parish.

He is involved in the Ranger Ralph Club and Youth Ranger Club and Rangers have a strong educational ethos within his remit. He is also involved with the school and every year takes the year 6 leavers for an educational walk.

Works have been agreed on FP7 at Ponsworthy. The landowner has agreed to carry out some work to improve access.

Bill Allen, who has been a Ranger for over 35 years, is retiring at the end of the month.

Jane Bibby, Jubilee Orchard

The orchard was planted in the Parish Field 2 years ago. This year, they had a wassail and the trees were blessed.

Whilst the trees don't look particularly attractive at the moment, they are all healthy and have been protected by tree guards whilst they are establishing themselves.

It is the intention to produce a recipe book full of apple recipes. If anyone knows of anyone who might have an apple press which the Jubilee Orchard Committee could use, that would be great.

John Nutley – TDC

He is Executive Member for Open Spaces, Leisure Sport and Tourism. He is also a governor of Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, a members of DNPA and Vice Chair of the Exe Estuary Committee. Here very much enjoys what he does and is here to help.

John was sad to lose his friend and colleague, District Cllr Hugh Cox. As a result, there was a recent by-election at which Jack Major was elected.

Daf Edwards, Widecombe Singers

The Singers meet on Tuesday evenings in Church House at 8pm. It is open to all (no auditions!) and costs £3 per session. They sing at weddings, Widecombe Fair and any other event to which they are invited.

Sue Burd, Social Group

The social group meets every month and is open to anyone. They usually have a speaker, tea & coffee and a raffle. It costs £2 to attend plus £1 for the raffle. The group also meets for lunch at the end of each month.

Martin Cherritt, Rolling Along

He is the co-ordinator of a co-operative which runs a newsletter called Rolling Along. This is an emailed newsletter which currently has 150 subscribers. It is free to subscribe. There are opportunities to contribute to the newsletter and communicate to the community of Widecombe.

David Thomas, Widecombe Church House and Lands Charity

The Charity was set up in 1635, its main objectives at the time to maintain the Church, maintain the highways and relieve the poor. As the name suggests, the Charity once owned Church House. This is now in the ownership of the National Trust. However, the Charity still owns 1-4 Church Cottages, Dunstone and its present objectives are to provide affordable property for

rent and to split any distributable surplus to two beneficiaries – half to the PCC for the maintenance of the church and half to Widecombe Educational Foundation.

The cottages are let to tenants at affordable rents (i.e. 80% of market rent); preference is given to local people. Tenants are selected by the Trustees who are all local, Widecombe people themselves. One of the cottages fell vacant recently and has been refurbished and relet. 26 applications were received for the one cottage showing a substantial demand in the parish for affordable property despite the new housing on Brook Lane. Most of the rent goes on maintenance and refurbishment of the properties with a small surplus to distribute to the two beneficiaries.

There are 6 Trustees (Ross Hathway, Mike Pascoe, John Southcombe, John Dracup, Caroline Mann and Andrew Power). John Dracup is the Chair and David Thomas is the Clerk. The annual report and accounts are available to view on the Charity Commission website.

Jane Bibby & Sue Raynor, Road Warden Scheme

This is a scheme offered by DCC to enable parishes to fill their own potholes and deliver minor works in and around the public highway. More information can be found at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/communities/opportunities/road-warden-scheme>.

DCC offer training, insurance and materials and a grant towards the purchase of equipment.

The scheme has been running successfully in many parishes, including Lustleigh.

Volunteers are would be needed if this is something the community is keen to pursue. Please get in touch with the Parish Council if this is something you wish to be involved in.

Mike Welby, Widecombe Fair Committee

Mike advised that 2023 was the best year ever and he was very pleased to report that as a result, the Fair Committee was able to donate £30,625 to local charities.

The Chair thanked everyone for their reports; it was fantastic to hear about the dynamic and varied work within the parish and the array of social groups for members of the community to be involved in.

Signed:..... Dated