

WIDECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held on Zoom on Thursday 4 February 2021

Members present: Councillor Hassell (Chairman), Booty, Clare, Edwards, Elliott, Fenton, Partridge and Whiteside

Also present: County Cllr Gribble, District Cllr Parker-Khan and District Cllr Nutley

Members of the Public: There were two members of the public present.

Clerk: Suzanna Hughes

4629 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Cllr Routley
- District Cllr Cox
- Rob Steemson (DNPA)

4630 OPEN FORUM

Following discussion in December's meeting, a representative from the pre-school sought clarification on whether the pre-school is able to use part of the parish field for their outdoor classroom on Wednesday mornings from after Easter until the end of July. The Chairman advised that the projects team will be looking at this but there are a lot of things to consider and put in place before this can be agreed including checking with DNPA whether the space can be used for that purpose or whether a change of use application will need to be made. Cllrs Edwards and Clare will be looking into this and will report further next month. This will still give sufficient time to confirm with the pre-school whether the field can be used after Easter for the purpose outlined above.

A resident asked whether there was any news on the Airwave mast proposal. The Chairman confirmed that the Parish Council had no further information but that residents could refer to DNPA's planning portal for the latest updates. She also asked whether there was any update on the footpath to Hameldown as she was still unable to build her wall as the path has not yet been built up. DCC has done some work to reduce the amount of water flowing down it but the work now needs to be concluded before she can move forward with the wall which is at risk of falling down. Cllr Gribble asked if copies of the emails she has sent to John Baker at DCC could be forwarded to him so that he could follow it up.

4631 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Members were reminded of their responsibility to continually update their Notice of Registerable Interests and invited to state whether they have any interest in the items to be discussed during this meeting in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct.

Unforeseen requests for a Dispensation to be considered at this point only if there was no way a Councillor would have been aware of such before the meeting.

Cllrs Elliott, Fenton, Whiteside and Hassell declared an interest in item 4637 (b) as they were involved in one or more of the groups which had applied to the Parish Council for a small grant.

4632 RATIFICATION OF MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 3 December 2020 which were approved as a true and correct record.

4633 REPORTS

(a) County Councillor

Cllr Gribble advised that he had been involved in DCC budget meetings and had been contacted by residents about grit bins. The Chairman advised that he had been approached about the provision of grit bins on Southcombe Hill. Cllr Gribble responded that he had received other requests from parishes as well and at £350 each he would have to try and find the funding for them.

(b) District Councillors

Cllr Parker-Khan advised that TDC has been discussing budgets which will be very tight next year as a result of the reduction in council tax base in all but one parish, as well as the impact of Covid on income. Car parking income, for example, is down 75% year on year. The government has stated that it will top-up up to 75% of losses but this will still leave a 25% shortfall. Following the withdrawal of the rural skip service, she advised that she has been working with Cllr Cox to explore whether a group of local Parish Councils could come together to provide a similar service. If Widecombe wishes to be involved in this, the first step would be to join an initial meeting where parishes could discuss it without any commitment. It was agreed that Cllr Parker-Khan would contact the Chairman should a meeting be arranged.

Cllr Nutley reported that TDC has increased the budget by 2.85% (£5 per annum) which means the annual charge for a Band D property will be £180.17 (an increase of 10p per week). He advised that as well as the fall in income, the Car Park Review Group has also discussed and will be researching the installation of electric charging points. The recycling teams have done some excellent work over recent weeks with the increase in cardboard and packaging.

Cllr Partridge asked whether TDC, when they cut the hedge in the car park, would also be able to look at cutting the piece of hedge which is against the road behind the car park sign by the toilets as this is now quite high. Cllr Nutley offered to follow this up with TDC.

(c) DNPA Representative

Rob Steemson circulated the following written report:

An order has been placed for contractor to install boulders/banking at Newbridge & Deeper Marsh area and we are chasing Highways in regard to clearing and repainting yellow lines plus reinstating missing signs.

The eagle eyed amongst you who live in Widecombe village might on your daily permitted local exercise have noticed some minor vegetation clearance and new way markers on a couple of paths. I have also been made aware that the landowner of the footpath that links Bonehill road to the Rugglestone road would like to discuss having a gate instead of a stile which sounds a positive proposition. I would like to get the other end tidied up as well and replace/extend the boardwalk and other works. Hopefully we will discuss all works soon and have a plan.

Since lockdown three the Ranger Team has once again been working closely with the Police on patrolling and monitoring public exercise. I am aware that Police have issued tickets across

various moorland sites to those that have driven from far outside their immediate village, town or city thus going past many green spaces nearer their home.

(d) Police

No report.

(e) Delegate Reports

No reports.

4634 PROJECTS

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Edwards & Clare)

(a) Tree stump

Members received an update regarding the carving/removal of the tree stump. After discussion it was agreed to accept Paul Hext's offer to cut it off in return for the wood. It was noted that he has the relevant chainsaw certificates and public liability insurance.

4635 ESTATES

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Fenton & Whiteside)

(a) Members received and noted the tree assessment report compiled by Dart Forest Trees. Cllr Fenton summarised their recommendations. After discussion it was agreed that Cllr Fenton would seek quotations in time for the next meeting to:

- carry out a decay assessment test at the base of the chestnut by the Café on the Green;
- reduce via thinning the secondary branch overhanging the track on the north eastern side of the crown by removing approximately 3-4m dominant branches of the chestnut by the North Hall entrance

Cllr Partridge highlighted that Dart Forest had identified that the other sycamore tree on the green may have a limited lifespan and wondered whether the Parish Council should think about removing that tree and planting a more appropriate new tree in that location.

4636 PLANNING/LOCAL LIAISON

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Booty & Elliott)

(a) New planning applications/appeals

(i) 0625/20 – Blackdown Piper Farmhouse, Widecombe-in-the-Moor

Permanent use for temporary agricultural workers dwelling (principal dwelling) – granted ref 0257/18

Members agreed to make no comment on this application.

(b) Planning Decisions/Withdrawals

None

4637 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Partridge & Routley)

(a) Payments

Members received and approved the following payment:

- Cheque no 001062 – Clerk’s salary and disbursements (Feb) – £263.27
- Cheque no 001063 – Dart Forest Trees (Tree assessment and report) – £594

(b) Small Grants Scheme

Members received a summary of applications and agreed with the recommendations of Cllrs Partridge and Routley as follows:

- – Hand Bell ringers – £400
- – Widecombe PCC – £200
- – Widecombe Community Hall – £100
- – Cricket Club – £100 (for equipment rather than maintenance)
- – Widecombe Pre-school – £100

Cllr Partridge advised that an application had also been received by the South Devon Moorland branch of the Pony Club but the ground on which they want to position a noticeboard (Holwell Lawn) is not in the parish of Widecombe. After discussion, it was agreed that the Pony Club should approach Manaton Parish Council for funding.

It was noted that this would leave £600 as unallocated and it was agreed that these funds should be ring-fenced for additional grant funding later in the year.

(c) Purchase of commemorative bench seats

The Chairman advised that the History Group has raised funds to purchase two commemorative bench seats and has requested that the Parish Council places the order for the benches on their behalf (funds will be transferred by the History Group to the Parish Council). This was agreed.

(d) Future Meetings

(i) Members received and noted advice from DALC regarding meetings after 6 May (as it stands, government have no current plans to extend the regulations permitting councils to meet remotely). Members agreed that the Council should see how this issue progresses over the coming weeks.

(ii) Members received and approved the proposed meeting dates for the remainder of 2021.

4638 HIGHWAYS

There were no new highways issues.

The Chairman reminded members of the suggestion made by Cllr Partridge last year that we should plan in advance to clean the highway and reinstate the double yellow lines at places such as Deeper Marsh in time for Easter. Cllr Gribble offered to follow this up with DCC. The Chairman suggested that he discusses it with Rob Steemson and Parish Council members would be happy to point out hot spots etc.

Potholes and other highways maintenance issues can be reported direct to DCC:

Online: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

Telephone: 0345 155 1004

Email: customer@devon.gov.uk

4639 CORRESPONDENCE

None

4640 MEMBERS' ITEMS FOR INFORMATION OR GENERAL DISCUSSION, FOR INCLUSION ON FUTURE AGENDAS AND/OR ITEMS REQUIRING URGENT ATTENTION

Members are reminded that they have not received the statutory notice of this business to be transacted and should therefore recognise that any decision made may be taken to be unlawful if challenged in the future

(a) The Chairman circulated a report regarding the removal of the telephone kiosk at Dartmeet about which the Parish Council had not been consulted. He advised that he is waiting for a response from Chris Hart at DNPA about the consultation process and why the Parish Council had not been included. Cllr Fenton recalled that the Parish Council had been consulted about its removal in 2016 and it had been minuted that the Parish Council had objected on the grounds that there is poor mobile phone coverage, that it is required for emergency services, that it is a recreational site and that it is an isolated rural community.

Cllr Parker-Khan confirmed that telephone boxes are the responsibility of TDC's Heritage department. On this occasion, they notified DNPA under the assumption that DNPA would notify the relevant Parish Councils. Members were disappointed that TDC has not contacted the Parish Council and it was agreed that this breakdown in process needs addressing urgently. The clerk advised that the Council could also approach BT about its removal as it has previously been stated that BT will retain public payphones that are used, as well as those we have categorised as providing a social need. These have been identified as being located:

- – in suicide hotspots
- – in accident blackspots
- – in an area without any mobile coverage

It was agreed that these dangers and lack of signal in this location still exist. After further discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman would wait for a response from Chris Hart and then would write to the MP, Mel Stride to ask if he could follow the matter up with BT.

It was also agreed that the Parish Council writes to TDC to seek assurances that the process is addressed as a matter of urgency to ensure that all Parish Councils are consulted about telephone box removal in the future.

(b) Cllr Partridge informed members that she had noticed over recent years that the moorland roadside verges are becoming overgrown, particularly with gorse, which concerns her from an animal welfare point of view. She suggested that this is something which could be addressed with the Commons at some point in the future.

4641 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Zoom on 4 March 2021 at 7.30pm.

Signed Dated