

WIDECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held on Zoom on Thursday 7 May 2020

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

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

Members of the Public: There were no members of the public present.

Clerk: Suzanna Hughes

Before the start of the meeting, Cllr Fenton read a poem to thank NHS workers and all those in the community who have helped with the emergency response to COVID-19.

4537 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Routley Rob Steemson (DNPA)

4538 OPEN FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

4539 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & 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. Cllr Partridge declared an interest in item 4545 (b).

4540 RATIFICATION OF MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 5 March 2020 which were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

4541 REPORTS

(a) County Councillor Cllr Gribble commented on the recent damage to Newbridge. Repairs have now been carried out and CCTV coverage shows the vehicle which caused the damage.

(b) District Councillors

Cllr Parker-Khan advised that much of TDC's recent work has been around the COVID-19 response as well as the continuation of the delivery of services in a safe and stable manner. Recycling centres are reopening for essential use. TDC has also released some guidance on bonfires asking people to consider their neighbours before lighting a bonfire. Cllr Nutley reported that TDC's income from car parks has dropped by 95% during lockdown and TDC has lost all income from its leisure centres. To date, 2408 applications have been processed for the Business Support Grant.

(c) DNPA Representative Rob Steemson sent the following report which was noted by members: From early March I had started distributing this year's copy of Enjoy Dartmoor to

commercial establishments and erected `Lambing/bird nesting` signs on Public Rights of Way, Common land and other Access land areas. On virtually the last day before lockdown I replaced some footpath signs and other advisory signs about parking whilst also erecting some new signs regarding camping/overnight parking in and around the Sherril area and chatted to Councillor Booty. Upon lockdown all DNPA staff were able to work from home however Rangers were and are still allowed (but not classed as key workers) to work on specific lone working projects and undertake patrols reporting back daily. This work includes Public Rights of Way checks and light repair works, erosion surveys and site monitoring (drainage work, grass seeding) but our main predominant role has been linking up with the Police through the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) to patrol and encourage/inform people not to visit Dartmoor. At first we had our own leaflet to distribute and this was very successful over Easter. From 3 April we then were supplied with a Police based leaflet (again successful) and have until recently been distributing and challenging people turning up. Over the last ten days (with mixed Government messages about taking exercise) our main role has been generally to sort out various disciplines on internal computer data bases & systems, deal with emails and point landowners to temporary advisory signage that can be used on Public Rights of Way and then to patrol but mainly to only count vehicles in car parks. Our own Health & Safety remains paramount in our daily work and we have noticed more hostility when approaching people. The DNPA website has ongoing general advice and all of our recent press releases.

(d) Police

No report.

(e) Delegate Reports

Cllr Elliott circulated two written reports in advance of the meeting. These were considered at items 4543 (a) and 4545 (c).

4542 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Partridge & Routley)

(a) Payments

Members received and approved the following payments for approval: Cheque no 001044 – Clerk's salary and disbursements (March & April) – £481.74 + HMRC (PAYE Q4) – £157.80 (reimbursed to the clerk)

(b) Insurance 2020/21

Members received and reviewed the insurance renewal quotation from Community First. It was agreed to accept the quotation and commit to a 3 year long term agreement to make an additional saving. The cost this year would be £182.94 (cheque no 001046).

(c) Members noted the key elements of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales)

Regulations 2020:

The Regulations permit the holding of remote meetings (with conditions) Local councils can decide the methods they will use to facilitate the holding of remote meetings There is no requirement to hold an annual meeting There is nothing in the Regulations permitting parish

meetings to meet remotely. In NALC's view, the current Government guidance means that parish meetings should not take place in person, including the annual meeting of the electors

(d) Members noted the new Regulations amending the deadline by which the Annual Governance Statement and Accounts of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return need to be published from 30 September to 30 November. The clerk advised, however, that she had completed the audit paperwork and this has been sent to the internal auditor to carry out the internal audit remotely.

4543 PROJECTS

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Edwards)

(a) Climate Emergency

Cllr Elliott circulated the following report in advance of the meeting: I attended The Dartmoor Assembly with Councillor Whiteside on 7th March in Chagford Jubilee Hall where the climate and ecological crisis was discussed. This was a well-attended event with many Parish Councillors from across Dartmoor, DNPA Members and staff as well as speakers from a range of backgrounds and disciplines throughout the day. Presentations and discussions covered the Dartmoor Management Plan, Moor Meadows, Hydrology, Flood Risk, Climate change impacts, Farming, Community Renewable Energy Generation and Wildlife. There was great enthusiasm from delegates to work together to tackle the issues arising from the climate and ecological crisis and the afternoon group work focussed on those which were seen as priorities by those present, and the actions that could be collectively taken to address them. These were many and varied and the idea is that work will continue across Dartmoor in helping to achieve these. In terms of what Widecombe could do, I was struck by the potential to use the Parish Field for good and a Community Orchard seems a real possibility. Not only is this beneficial in terms of planting trees (the focus must be on the right tree in the right place) but it could bring the community together to maintain them, harvest them and enjoy the fruits – literally! I was struck by one of the speakers who focussed on flood risk – initially it was my misconception that this is not really an issue for the inhabitants of Widecombe on our typically steep upland ground, but we were reminded of our responsibility towards those who live on lower ground...Just because we are not liable to significant flooding, we should remember that our actions have a potential impact on others and we can work to slow the flow of water, reinstate infiltration and reconnect floodplains. DNPA have worked on restoring the peat bogs on the high moor, but by planting an orchard in the Parish Field we would improve the absorption of water into the land to slow the run-off into the adjacent stream and river system. My recommendation to the PC is to consider the viability of planting out the Parish Field as a Community Orchard (I believe grants are available to help set this up). The Chairman thanked Cllr Elliott for her report. It was agreed that at some point in the future, a public meeting should be arranged to involve the community on how Widecombe might contribute to the Climate Emergency.

(b) Affordable Housing The Chairman advised that the Steering Group is meeting on Monday. He has been advised that funding for the project is still available. The landscape and visual impact statement needs to be completed. The project is going to be more expensive to deliver than originally thought. This will impact on rents. The wording of the Local Allocations Plan (formerly known as the Local Lettings Policy) has been agreed. A clause is included to ensure that local people are given first option. The Council will get the opportunity to discuss and review this. It is hoped that the planning application will be submitted over the summer months and it will then

go out to tender. District Cllr Parker-Khan suggested that the Council checks that the clause giving local people first option is in perpetuity.

4544 ESTATES

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Fenton & Whiteside)

(a) Sycamore Tree, Widecombe Green

(i) Members noted that, having given formal notice to DNPA that the Parish Council intends to fell this tree, DNPA has not protected the tree with a TPO. The Parish Council is now able to proceed.

(ii) Having declared an interest, Cllr Partridge left the meeting for this item. Cllr Whiteside advised that he had received four quotations to fell the tree. These ranged from £1750 to £3540. It was recommended by the Lead Councillors of the Estates team to accept the lowest quotation which had been submitted by Geoff Partridge. A discussion ensued regarding insurance, risk assessments and potential road closure. It was agreed that a copy of the contractor's insurance certificate must be requested and held on the Parish Council's files prior to work commencing. It was further agreed that it was the contractor's responsibility to carry out any risk assessments and to assess whether a road closure was necessary. Having previously agreed to leave a section of the trunk to create a carving, it was agreed that Cllr Edwards would start to look into this.

(b) Parish Field

(i) Members noted Cllr Elliott's suggestion in her report at item 4543 (a) to create a Community Orchard. Maintaining an area for botanical interest where wildlife would be unintruded with the possibility of reinstating a water feature was also suggested. Whilst not at the meeting, members noted Cllr Routley's written observation that a community orchard may block natural light to The Mill. After brief discussion, it was agreed that the Parish Council should explore the idea of a community orchard. It was suggested that trees may need to be stock-proofed as it was likely that the field would still need to be grazed. It was noted that this was something which had been done in Buckfastleigh and that Cllr Huw Cox might be able to provide some advice. Cllr Edwards agreed to look into this and provide a report at the next meeting.

(ii) The Chairman advised that an offer to rent the Parish Field had been made. The offer is £50 and there would be no liability to the Parish Council. It was agreed to look at the existing Parish Field licence agreement to see if this could be amended to exclude any liability.

(c) Poundsgate Noticeboard

Cllr Partridge informed members that the noticeboard was very near completion. The interpretation panel is being fitted and it is hoped that it will be in situ very soon.

4545 PLANNING/LOCAL LIAISON

(Lead Councillors: Cllrs Booty & Elliott)

(a) New planning applications/appeals: None.

(b) Planning Decisions/Withdrawals

The following planning decisions/withdrawals were received:

(i) 0125/20 – Amendments to approved permission ref: 0500/16 to change the roofing materials and create two internal doors, East Shallowford Farm, Widecombe-in-the-Moor Members noted that DNPA has granted conditional planning permission.

(c) Community Response to Coronavirus Pandemic Cllr Elliott circulated the following report in advance of the meeting: In mid-March, a Social Isolation Support Network was created and a new page on the Widecombe Village website was set up by Roger Claxton, for which we should be most grateful. This page provides a central list of all the services and offers of support from local businesses and individuals during the lock-down. This list has been kept updated as changes to government advice occur and as new offers are received or as businesses have been forced to close. Examples of things for inclusion are businesses offering home deliveries or preparation of grocery boxes for collection, individuals who are able to collect prescriptions/shopping, pubs & restaurants offering takeaway services, book swaps, school resources sharing, telephone chat offers, IT support etc. Members of the public can then easily access this list and there are direct links to email volunteers and businesses and telephone numbers are also provided so that it is as easy as possible for people to directly link up with the help on offer. It is being well used and the list has also enabled us to allocate volunteers to those known to be in need. We are also able to share a telephone number that can be used for anyone offline & this is being successfully run alongside the website. Kirsty Peake kindly offered her own personal number and makes herself available between 4 – 7pm daily to advise people in need of support of the offers that are available to them from the website and put people in touch with each other. The Parish Council should be hugely grateful for her efforts as this is an enormous undertaking and offers an essential service to those who are not online.

Unfortunately our loose leaf flier could not be distributed with the local Parish Links as hard copies are not currently being distributed, however, a PDF version was emailed out to local groups and larger versions are also being used as posters around the parish. The flier contents are being printed in the next Link for its online circulation. The overwhelming response from the parish has been positive and caring, with the number of volunteers currently exceeding those in need who are contacting us. We are working alongside the Ashburton Team and are in contact with them to ensure that we are not duplicating work and that volunteers are being used effectively in adjacent areas. I am confident that between us we have been helping the most vulnerable and socially isolated members of our community during these difficult and uncertain times. The Parish Council thanked everyone who had been involved in setting up this invaluable network for vulnerable residents of the parish, in particular Roger Claxton and Kirsty Peake for their efforts and ongoing support. It was agreed that the clerk would write and thank them.

4546 HIGHWAYS

Cllr Fenton commented that the cats' eyes are defunct on Widecombe Hill. 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

4547 CORRESPONDENCE

Members received an email from a parishioner asking the Parish Council to campaign for better mobile phone coverage in the parish as people are having to become increasingly reliant on technology. This has been particularly highlighted during the current pandemic and will be even more important when contact track and trace is introduced. It was agreed to discuss this in

more detail at the next meeting. In the meantime, Cllr Nutley offered to investigate what progress has been made to install the radio mast at Newbridge and also look into whether Airband still have plans to improve coverage across the parish.

4548 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 None.

4549 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be held on Zoom on 4 June 2020 at 7.30pm. The meeting will be advertised in the Parish Link and via the usual communication system.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.30pm.

Signed Dated

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Zoom on Thursday 4 June 2020 at 7.30pm.