

## **WIDECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held in Church House, Widecombe on Thursday 2 November 2023 at 7.30pm

Members present: Councillor S Raynor (Chair for this meeting), J Bibby, D Edwards, T Guest, C Partridge & S Zab

Members of the Public: Two

Clerk: Suzanna Hughes

### **4932 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- Cllr Elliott
- District Cllr Nutley
- District Cllr Cox
- District Cllr and Ashburton Postmaster Rogers
- County Cllr Gribble
- Rob Steemson (DNPA)

### **4933 OPEN FORUM**

There were no comments from members of the public.

### **4934 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.

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4935 RATIFICATION OF MINUTES**

Members received the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 5 October 2023 which were approved as a true and correct record.

### **4936 REPORTS**

(a) County Councillor

No report.

(b) District Councillors

No reports.

(c) DNPA Representative

No report.

(d) Police Report

No report.

(e) Delegate Reports

None

4937 PROJECTS & ESTATES

(Cllrs Edwards, Partridge & Zab)

(a) Parish Field

(i) The income and expenditure for the Parish Field (to 2 November) was received. A balance of £1235.85 was noted.

(b) Affordable Housing

(i) Teign Housing has now advertised the new affordable homes at Brook Lane Cottages on Devon Home Choice. The bidding will close on Wednesday 16 November. The advertising period is one week longer than is usual for DHC in line with the requirements of the s106 agreement.

Teign Housing is arranging a meeting w/c 27 November in Church House for successful applicants to meet each other and answer questions. The Council will be notified of the date and members are welcome to attend.

(c) Trees

(i) Members received further correspondence about the horse chestnut sapling which is being donated to the parish. It was agreed that the donor should be asked to keep hold of the sapling until it grows more. Whilst the donor would prefer the sapling to be planted on the green, it was agreed that it would not be strong enough and that a more suitable location would be sought.

(ii) Cllr Zab circulated a report detailing options for obtaining suitable trees for the green. She has explored The Coronation Living Heritage Fund, DCC Emergency Fund, The Woodland Trust and The Devon Wildlife Trust. Trees are currently being donated by The Woodland Trust and The Devon Wildlife Trust but they are unable to provide the species considered to be the most appropriate for that location (horse chestnut and lime).

After discussion, it was agreed that Cllr Zab should explore how much it would cost to purchase a sweet chestnut and a lime (*Tilla Europea*) both 6-7 feet in height and report back at the next meeting.

(d) North Hall sub-lease between the Parish Council and WDSG

Members received a report following a meeting between Parish Council members and members of the Sports Group.

Cllr Partridge advised that she had spoken to Andrew Watson at DNPA and explained the issue. It was thought that the quoted legal costs seemed excessive and that the Parish Council should think about obtaining further quotes.

There was a discussion about the need for the Licence to Underlet (£1000 + VAT to draft). It was noted that this is typically so the landlord can retain an element of control over the property and the identity of the undertenant.

Members continued to discuss the mechanics of creating a Committee of the Parish Council to manage the Field/Sports Group but the feeling from the meeting with the Sports Group was that they would prefer to keep the status quo. Legal costs would therefore be the main hurdle. This said, other members of the Sports Group have not yet been consulted and it would be helpful to obtain the view of all Sports Group Committee members about their willingness to run the Sports Group as a Committee of the Parish Council.

A consideration if the Parish Council took over the running of the Sports Group (thus not sub-letting the land to the Sports Group) would be the potential liability for rates. The clerk advised, however, that the Parish Council may qualify for small business rate relief depending on the rateable value of the land. At some point in the future, it may be that the Community Hall would agree to take over the running of these facilities.

Members discussed whether the Sports Group would be able to access grant funding to resurface the tennis court if the issue with the sub-lease was resolved or whether there were other barriers to obtaining the funding. Cllr Partridge advised that the size and demographic of the community may limit funding opportunities.

The current level of usage was also discussed and it was thought that the facility is under-utilised. Another option would be to give DNPA 6 months notice to quit and to lose the facility altogether. The clerk advised that some years ago, DNPA earmarked North Hall field as land which it could dispose of and that it be worth exploring whether DNPA would be prepared to sell the land to the Parish Council.

Agreed actions:

Cllr Partridge to speak to DNPA about the need to have a Licence to Underlet.

Cllr Partridge to speak to DNPA about whether they would consider selling the land for £1 to the Parish Council.

Cllr Partridge to seek the opinions of the Sports Group Committee members about the Sports Group being run as a Committee of the Parish Council.

(e) Widecombe Website

Members received a summary document from Roger Claxton providing information about Widecombe website and its future.

It was noted that the Widecombe History Group is considering pulling away from the existing site and looking to create its own site.

Members of the Parish Council agreed that the existing site provides the Parish Council with a suitable online presence as is legally required and that a separate Parish Council website is not necessary. However, it was agreed that the Parish Council should consider making a more regular financial contribution to the website to help with the running costs and this could be built into the Council's annual budget. This may help towards paying for additional support to manage the site. However it was agreed that Cllrs Edwards and Zab should confirm who owns the domain name and who currently receives any income generated from the website.

4938 PLANNING/LOCAL LIAISON

(Cllrs Bibby, Jones & Guest)

(a) New planning applications/appeals

(i) 0473/23 – Rowden, Widecombe-in-the-Moor

Agricultural building (Prior Notification)

Members noted that DNP refused Prior Approval for a previous application submitted earlier this year (0249/23) and in DNP Officer's report, it stated: "...The site is located approximately 500 metres from the applicant's dwelling, in an isolated position. The proposed barn would have detrimental impact to the moor and surrounding landscape, and very visible from the road. The landholding within the applicant's ownership is all in a similar location and therefore alternative locations for the building are not suitable as they would have a detrimental impact on the landscape. The proposed barn will not conserve and enhance the landscape character, having a negative impact on its surroundings in the moorland edge slopes and upland moors. The proposed development fails to meet the required policy test of conserving and enhancing the landscape character and visual amenity of the National Park. Impact on landscape character is as important as visual impact and this has been highlighted in recent appeal decisions. The field next to the site on the east, is listed on the HER, which has medieval origins. In 1977 a single pot sherd was found in this field and recorded in the Widecombe Survey. The proposed development contrasts strongly with this remote landscape and will introduce an urbanising influence into a secluded tranquil landscape. Therefore, the application for Prior Approval is recommended for refusal..."

It was further noted that there seems to be no obvious difference between that application and the one now submitted for consideration. The Parish Council supported the previous application on the basis that the proposed building would have no impact on any neighbours, it would only be used for storage as it has no access to a power supply and it would be in keeping with the existing stable block.

It was therefore agreed to support this application again. The proposal supports an active farming business and the National Park is a working environment, not a museum, and as such new and more suitable buildings will continue to be needed for farming enterprises and a number of other similar buildings have been approved in the National Park. The simple fact that it is in an isolated position does not negate its necessity; in fact, it could be argued it is needed even more. It also appears to be in accordance with the DNPA Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan 2006-2026 particularly the core strategic aim of Farming being "To assist in sustaining viable farming and forestry systems as a vital element in the local economy particularly in ways that further the purposes of National Park designation." The document also states, "Farming is the principal land use in the Dartmoor National Park and is vital to sustain its special qualities."

(ii) 0470/23 & 0471/23 – Northway Farm, Widecombe-in-the-Moor

Variation of conditions 2, 15 and 16 of approved planning application ref: 0398/22 for re-siting of existing driveway and entrance, replacement of single glazing to double glazing throughout main house, replacement guttering and downpipes (partially retrospective), new slate tents to chimneys, alterations to the fabric of the tractor barn and the incorporation of a new renewable energy strategy comprising of a biomass boiler

Members noted that planning permission was obtained on 14/12/22 (0398/22 and 0399/22) to make a number of changes at Northway but in particular the re-siting of their entrance way. Work

started this year but as a consequence of substantial rainfall as soon as the new proposed driveway was opened up, it resulted on flooding their home of the hill and they have had to rethink a number of aspects of the planned new driveway. Also Highways have stated that they wanted the gateposts to be set back from the road. The applicants have decided to remove a number of changes such as the cattle grid (now to be gates) and removing the drain from the top of the drive and replacing it with a tumbled granite Settle Lip, different core materials etc.

The Parish Council supported the previous successful application, in particular with regard to the driveway on the basis that "...The proposed re-routing of the driveway addresses current inadequacies in terms of practical access and safety, including egress from the property onto the highway...". With that in mind, members agreed to support this revised application.

#### (b) Planning Decisions/Withdrawals

(i) 0394/23 & 0395/23 – Pink Cottage, Ponsworthy,

Increase existing chimney height (revised drawings)

Members noted that DNPA has granted conditional consent.c)

#### (b) Enforcement Matters

Following the matter raised at the last meeting regarding planning application 0252/21, the clerk advised that the Enforcement Officer has e-mailed the agent who dealt with the original application and subsequent complaint and hopes to have some more news soon.

### 4939 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

(Cllrs Bibby, Jones & Guest)

#### (a) Payments

Members received and approved the following payment:

- Clerk's salary and disbursements (November & December) – £511.04

#### (c) Budget 2024-25

Members received draft proposals showing 0%, 2% and 5% increases. There was a discussion about the Widecombe Fair income which members agreed required more detailed consideration at a later date.

Based on the discussion, the Finance Committee will make some minor amendments to the proposed figures and present them in January's meeting for a final decision.

Members briefly discussed the interest which the Council's reserves are currently generating and whether this can be improved.

### 4940 HIGHWAYS

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](mailto:customer@devon.gov.uk)

Members received a response from the Highways Officers in response to matters previously raised: 'The cattle grid being full has already been logged and the lads should be going up their shortly to clean it out. I have spoken to the Public rights of Way Warden who is responsible for Thornhill Lane and he informs me that there is a scheme in for the New year to try and deal with the constant issues. Whether they can be alleviated entirely is debatable, but hopefully considerably lessened.

Issues with water at Easter Lane. I have been up there and had a look and will report the broken drainage. I listened to the flow of water from that hole and the gully near by and checked the other drainage and everything appeared to be fine.

The issue is the amount of water. All highway drainage can cope most of the time but not with extreme or prolonged rain.

There is the sheer amount of water coming off the moor and down Easter Lane Cross and overwhelming the drainage.

The last time I went up and looked at the drainage here after contact from a MOP, the bulk of the water coming onto the road was from a field entrance opposite Great Dunstone Farm, higher ground. I have looked at the drainage here a number of times over the years and I am really not sure there is anything else we can do here; it is what it is. Great Dunstone is a low point and through natural seepage and water finding the path of least resistance on the highway, water from higher land will find its way here to join the stream.'

It was agreed to ask Highways to clear the four drains on Widecombe Hill (above Southway and Northway Farm). These have been reported online but Highways need to come with a machine and dig back the whole verge.

#### 4941 CORRESPONDENCE

None

#### 4942 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

Cllr Bibby reported that there were three applicants for the shop but only one applicant came to the interview with the National Trust. It is going to be an art gallery and gift shop.

Another matter raised was the parking around the school from the bottom of Southcombe Hill to beyond the school. Widecombe Fair Committee has agreed, in principle, to the school using its field for parking. Historically, Highways have objected to this as children would have to cross the road.

Cllr Bibby advised that the Air Ambulance no longer has to rely on lighting masts to land at night. She suggested that the Council might wish to explore possible sites in Widecombe again now that there is no requirement to operate lights using a mobile phone (the lack of mobile phone signal being a barrier previously).

Cllr Edwards advised that stock must not be kept on land designated as a night-landing site. This had also been a barrier.

4943 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 4 January 2024 at 7.30pm in Church House, Widecombe.

Signed ..... Dated .....