

WIDECOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held in Leusdon Memorial Hall on Thursday 7 September 2023 at 7.30pm

Members present: Councillor Y Elliott (Chairman), J Bibby, D Edwards, S Jones, C Partridge and S Zab

Also present: District Cllr Cox

Members of the Public: Two

Clerk: Suzanna Hughes

4908 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Cllr T Guest
- District Cllr & Ashburton Postmaster Stuart Rogers
- District Cllr Nutley
- County Cllr Gribble
- Rob Steemson (DNPA)

4909 OPEN FORUM

(a) A comment was made about the repair of the cattle grid at Dartmeet and the fact that the road has not been partially closed to prevent damage to vehicles. Members advised that this has now been done.

(b) Members received a briefing from Chris Mayhead, Trustee of Widecombe Community Hall:

Administration

The Charity is administered by trustees, who are as follows:

Chair – Yvette Elliot

Vice Chair – Polly McAfee

Secretary – Sarah Reeve

Trustees – Alan Peake, Lloyd Mortimore, Iain Russel & Chris Mayhead

Our website includes regular progress updates & photos, forthcoming events, fundraising, minutes of meetings and details of trustees. www.widcombecommunityhall.org

Fund raising and financial position

We currently have around £200,000 in the bank, which includes £150,000 in high interest savings accounts whilst we do not immediately need it. All works to date, including gaining planning permission and legal ownership of the Hayes Field, access works and site drainage have been paid for out of fundraising or has been work done by volunteers at no (or minimal) cost to the charity. Our original target for local fundraising was £50,000 – an estimated 10% of total costs when the feasibility study was completed. We have already achieved 88% of this (over £44,000), which demonstrates the fantastic community support for this project. Prices

continue to rise as inflation soars, but we hope to be going out to tender for the main build this autumn and this will give us an up-to-date costing. At this point we will be making our first major grant application to the National Lottery Community Fund. Our wish is to continue to make use of local contractors wherever possible.

An Update on Progress – August 2023

Many parishioners do not have call to take the Natsworthy road from the village and may be unaware of the work carried out on the Community Hall site. Here is a brief resume of what has been done so far:

- We installed the new culvert to the stream including natural granite parapets and side walls. This provides access to the site.
- A drainage channel has been laid along the road edge and the granite kerbs to the upstream access road laid up to the cattle grid. We can't lay the downstream kerbs until we know the route for power and BT cables onto the site.
- We have installed a low noise cattle grid at the site entrance plus fencing and gates.
- All the overlying soft peat has been dug out down to the top of the gravel/rotten granite under the areas of the roads, parking bays and the building foot print. These areas have all been backfilled with stone fill from the new Brooks Lane houses and Northway Farm at a considerable saving to the hall in cost and environmentally.
- The new flood control swale has been constructed and only requires a concrete channel for substantial completion. The outfall drain and manholes from the swale to the stream have been constructed.
- A new noticeboard has been erected which is mainly to be used for Hall updates, to show plans and elevations and to keep locals and visitors informed about what's going on. When the hall is built this is more likely to be available as a community noticeboard.

All this work has been carried out by the Trustees and local volunteers from within the parish. We still have a few further tasks available to us and any help from others would be most welcome.

Current / forthcoming events

We are 2023 Widecombe Fair Charity of the Year, for which we are extremely grateful. We will beat the top of the main fair field, with updates of our work including video of design elevations and internal views. We will be encouraging people to support our ongoing work. We will also be drawing the winner of our Hand-sewn quilt raffle, thanks to the Widecombe Sewing Circle.

We are selling engraved stones, which will be built into our 'Supporting Wall' at the entrance to the building. These will be a lasting and tangible show of support for the hall and will help us to raise vital funds. Anyone can have their name engraved and this can be done through our website.

Valentine's dinner and dance – we will be hosting a Valentine's dinner and dance at the Old Inn on 16 February next year, incl. live music from Go Tell Alice. Further details and booking information is shown on our website.

Our next community event will be in the New Year – look out for details on our website, Facebookpage and in the Parish Link.

4910 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.

Cllr Partridge declared an interest in item 4913(b).

4911 RATIFICATION OF MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 29 June 2023 which were approved as a true and correct record.

4912 REPORTS

(a) County Councillor

Cllr Gribble was unable to attend the meeting but provided members with a copy of a Highway Management Conservative Group Briefing regarding safety defects, winter service, gully cleaning, grass cutting, ash dieback, road markings and traffic management.

(b) District Councillors

Cllr Cox advised members that TDC is to replace most of its ageing vehicle fleet with a mix of battery electric vehicles and new diesel units. The larger refuse lorries will be replaced with diesel as there is currently no suitable electric alternatives.

Cllr Cox also mentioned that he had received a briefing on Devon devolution. The proposal is a new layer consisting of two representatives from DCC, two from Torbay Council, two from Plymouth City Council, two representing all eight District Councils, one business and one education representative. Powers will be more devolved and the government will give more money but this will be filtered through this extra layer of governance.

District Cllr & Ashburton Postmaster Stuart Rogers

Cllr Rogers was unable to attend the meeting but sent the following updates:

Postmaster Report:

The Branch is launching the Hub and Spoke. The van will be in the Cafe on the Green carpark from the 25 September. The vehicle will have access to the internet via <https://www.starlink.com/> There will be an iPad and printer. Lucy the valued manager and driver of the van will be trained to access assistance and sign post help for residents. Customers who are digitally excluded will be offered assistance. Services and assistance will grow to be able to use the vehicle for Post Office services.

District Report:

Cllr Rogers also reported on TDC's decision to replace its vehicles with a mix of electric and diesel.

There are currently delays within the postal system meaning that garden waste permits are taking considerably longer than expected to arrive once mailed.

Provided it is longer than three days since you paid, your garden waste collection crew will be able to see on their in cab technology that you have renewed your subscription. You can therefore continue to place your bin out for collection.

Assisting support for residents is available and so important:

<https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators>

<https://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/benefits-and-support/>

We are very much in digital era and offering assistance to residents is so important.

(c) DNPA Representative

Rob Steemson was not present at the meeting but advised members that he has secured funding for replacement infrastructure on the Kingshead footpaths and is looking at works on site with a contractor tomorrow. He is also looking at the well-used Two Moors Way footpath between Ponsworthy and Jordan after recent report of path surface damage.

(d) Police Report

PCSO Campbell-Mosely (Ashburton Police Office) sent a report covering July and August:

July

– 0 criminal offences

– 5 non-crime incidents including road traffic collisions, anti-social behaviour, concerns for welfare, missing persons and other traffic issues.

August

– 2 criminal offences (Livestock worrying x 1; Theft x 1)

– 5 non-crime incidents including anti-social behaviour and public safety

(e) Delegate Reports

The Chair reported on a meeting that she and other members had attended with EE and the Home Office regarding the potential siting of a new telecommunications facility to provide/improve mobile phone coverage in Widecombe and the Widecombe valley. Various potential sites are currently being considered, none of which have yet been confirmed. The tower would be a lattice construction and painted to blend in with its surroundings. Emergency services will be prioritised. They all come with a 12 hour back-up battery but as the facility would also host emergency services telecommunications they would also expect to have an emergency generator which would kick-in if after 12 hours. If a suitable site can be located and they have the landowner's permission, they will submit a planning application to DNPA. At that point, they would hold drop-in sessions so that members of the public have the opportunity to speak to them about the proposal.

4913 PROJECTS & ESTATES

(Cllrs Edwards, Partridge & Zab)

(a) Parish Field

(i) Members formally acknowledged the new grazing agreement. A signed copy of the agreement together with the fee has been received and the sheep are now grazing in the field.

(ii) Members noted the installation of the water supply and thanked everyone who had been involved in this project.

(iii) The income and expenditure for the Parish Field (to 30 August) was received. A balance of £2232.25 was noted.

(b) Village Strimming

Members noted that the weeds had been sprayed following the last meeting. It was agreed that further spraying would not be necessary ahead of Widecombe Fair.

(c) Affordable Housing

(i) Teign Housing has received the 8 week notice from the developers on the properties, with a provisional ready for letting date of the 25 October 2023. This date is an estimated date and it is believed that there are likely to be delays. They will wait until the developers give 4 weeks' notice before advertising, as this will have a more definite ready for letting date. The properties will be advertised on Devon Home Choice for the agreed 2 weeks. Potential applicants are advised to ensure all the required information has been presented to Devon Home Choice if they have had a request for further information.

(ii) The position regarding allocation of one of the properties was clarified. Teign Housing confirmed that properties are being allocated fairly and in line with national and local policy including the Devon Home Choice Policy, which includes the legal requirement that certain groups override the local connection requirement. They are confident that the community will be welcoming and respect why someone may be given priority. If members are approached, they can direct parishioners to Karen Johnson at Teign Housing. When the homes are put on Devon Home Choice, it will be clear on the number and type available to support the management of expectations.

Teign Housing's position on under occupancy is always to avoid it where possible, as otherwise those who require a larger home miss out on something which is appropriate for their needs. But if there are circumstances and evidence where a specific situation may mean under occupancy is the greater housing need then we do so on a case-by-case basis in line with the Devon Home Choice Policy. Following those published rules is the surest and fairest way to avoid disappointment and ensure expectations are managed.

(d) Village Walkabout

Members received the notes from the village walkabout which took place on 9 August and discussed the agreed actions:

Website – Cllr Edwards contacted Roger Claxton about the future of the website and hopes to meet with him soon to discuss further. He will continue to have maintenance responsibility and is hoping that others will come forward to support him in the future. Members agreed that for the time being the Parish Council should continue to piggy-back the current site.

Cllr Bibby advised that there is some interest in letting the National Trust shop but it would be good to know whether the National Trust intends to advertise it.

Brook Lane housing – it was noted that the planning condition for children’s play equipment has been discharged. This was disappointing as the proposal seems wholly inadequate and unlikely to cost £5,000, the sum allocated in the s106 agreement.

Village green trees – the potential replanting of trees and the future of the sycamore closest to Church House should be an item for future discussion. It was noted that this could also be linked to recent correspondence from a regular visitor of the parish about the planting of a seedling he has grown from a conker which had fallen from the horse chestnut that was recently felled. The Coronation Tree fund should also be explored.

Informal parking at the bottom of Widecombe Hill – members considered whether this area could be improved by grading off the mud and laying planings. A working party could do this. It was agreed to ask Highways whether this would be acceptable.

Also at the bottom of Widecombe hill, members viewed the improvements to the new Right of Way. It was agreed to send a letter of thanks and acknowledgement DNPA for this work.

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

Members received an update from the solicitors regarding the lease. Some details have been requested from the Sports Group including clarification of the extent of the area to be sub-let to the Sports Group. Cllr Partridge, as secretary of the Sports Group, will liaise with its Chairman and advise accordingly.

4914 PLANNING/LOCAL LIAISON

(Cllrs Bibby & Jones)

(a) New planning applications/appeals:

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

Increase existing chimney height

Members had no objections to this application.

(ii) 0369/23 & 0370/23 – Hayloft Cottage, Widecombe-in-the-Moor

Repair of existing roof structure, replacement roof covering to barn for installation of PV panels, related cabling and equipment

Members had no objections to this application.

(b) Planning Decisions/Withdrawals

(i) 0298/23 – Old Post Office, Poundsgate

Conversion of outbuilding to holiday accommodation; alteration to nearby log store to form batroost

Members noted that DNPA has refused to grant planning permission.

(ii) 0268/23 – Dartmoor Christmas Tree Farm, Lower Cator, Widecombe-in-the-Moor

Retention of agricultural storage building, approved under Prior Notification 0051/18 but not built in accordance with plans

Members noted that DNPA has granted planning permission.

4915 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

(Cllrs Bibby & Jones)

(a) Payments

Members received and approved the following payments:

- Clerk's salary and disbursements (September) – £261.37
- G Partridge – Village weed spraying – £150
- T Hassell – Materials connected with the parish field water supply – £128.40
- S Jones – Materials connected with the parish field water supply – £271.50
- HMRC – PAYE Q1 – £177
- TDC – Election charges – £291.70

4916 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

(a) Fencing around the cattle grid at Dartmeet:

Members received correspondence from DCC Highways in response to the Parish Council's request that the fencing around the cattle grid at Dartmeet is replaced. Senior Highways Engineer, John Fewings advised:

'The purpose of the fencing appears to be for stock control, and the car park and surrounding land is all privately owned. The fence is some way from the highway and, as it is on private land, I cannot see how this would be the responsibility of Devon County Council as the local highway authority to maintain.' It was noted that the matter is also being pursued by DNPA Ranger Rob Steemson and Dartmoor Forest Parish Council.

(b) Cleaning of yellow lines at Newbridge

Members were unclear whether these have been cleaned and agreed to check whether they are clearly visible before any further action is taken.

(c) Other highways matters:

- The signpost opposite the Methodist church in Poundsgate has rotted out, fallen and needs replacing.
- The signpost at Parkland Head is very dirty.
- The sign that tells you how wide the bridge is as you turn off towards Ponsworthy is in poor condition. It is also not very visible being so close to the junction and can be easily missed

– The road surface at the turning to Leusdon (coming from Poundsgate) is very poor.

The clerk to report these matters to highways.

4917 CORRESPONDENCE

(a) Members received an invitation to attend meeting aimed at fostering a stronger and more collaborativerelationship between Teignbridge District Council and parish councils: Tuesday 12 October at 6pm in the Council Chamber, Forde House, Newton Abbot. District Cllr Cox advised that he would be attending thismeeting and would be happy to report back.

(b) Members received and noted a response from DNPA regarding its position on mobile phone coverage onDartmoor:

DNPA are very closely involved with discussions about broadband and mobile signal improvements acrossDartmoor. They are close to a point of the government awarding a major local broadband company with a multi-million pound contract under Project Gigabit to provide superfast broadband across the entireNational Park and are hopeful of a positive outcome.

The mobile phone situation is also under investigation, and DNPA is in discussions with The Home Officeabout this, as this is of vital importance when BT/EE begin removing the old analogue copper wires and switch of analogue entirely in 2025. Several meetings have been held with BT / EE senior management,and they have listened to concerns about the ‘switch over’ and what will happen with power cuts etc.

Although the new system does have battery back-up systems available, they only last a couple of hours,so it is vital that major work is done to the mobile phone network.

The Home Office is responsible for the Emergency Services Network (ESN), which has a series of mastsexclusively for the communications systems of the Emergency Services. There are plans to install 5 new ESN masts on Dartmoor, and for the first time, The Home Office has agreed that all ESN masts in veryrural areas (known as Extended Service Areas – ESAs) can be shared by commercial Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), and although this is up to the MNOs to decide if they want to site equipment at a givenmast (if they think it is commercially viable), this is a positive step.

The key word in all of this is NETWORK. Mobile phones are radio receivers and transmitters, rather likewalkie-talkies in a way, and this requires not only for them to have access to a mast, but that mast then must link up to the entire mobile phone network via line-of-sight. In places across Dartmoor – andWidecombe is a good example – being in a valley creates difficulties in accessing the network of masts. I do know that one proposed site for a new mast is at a farm at Bonehill. The Home Office is planning tohave all the new masts up and running by the end of 2024.

In summary, DNPA is starting to talk with MNOs to ask them to work with The Home Office to start thatprocess off. In theory, and without any guarantees at this stage, there could be significant improvements to the Mobile Network by the end of 2024. The conversations with MNOs are at an early stage, but in ourfavour are the fact that so many Mobile Network providers (e.g. O2, Virgin, EE, 3, Tesco Mobile etc) are merged companies already, and so several of them currently share mast equipment. In terms ofcommercial viability, this makes the chances of MNOs agreeing to use the ESN ESA masts much more realistic as they would have a broader customer base available.

(c) The Dartmoor Devil Cycle Ride – members noted that the annual cycle ride will be passing through the parish on Sunday 29 October.

4918 MEMBERS' ITEMS FOR INFORMATION OR GENERAL DISCUSSION, FOR INCLUSION ON FUTUREAGENDAS 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

It was agreed that Cllr Guest would join the Planning/Local Liaison Committee.

4919 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 5 October at 7.30opm in Church House, Widecombe.

Signed Dated