

WEST HATCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of the West Hatch Parish
held in the Village Hall on Tuesday 27th April 2021

ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

Public: 10 parishioners, G Midworth (Clerk to the Council),

Apologies: S Read, E Bray, N Harrison-Sleep

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on 14th May 2019 were approved and signed as a correct record. No Annual Parish Meeting was held in 2020 due to the Covid-19 Lockdown.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Chairman's report was read to the parishioners.

1. As we were unable to hold the 2020 Annual Parish Meeting because of COVID restrictions this report covers the main topics covered by the Parish Council over the past two years during which there have been nine council meetings, five of which have been held by Zoom. There is a statutory requirement for the Annual Parish Meeting to be held between 1st March and 1st June. This meeting fulfils the statutory requirement and is also being held on Zoom, which by its nature restricts the participation of parishioners. It is intended that the next Parish Council Meeting, the Annual Parish Council Meeting, will be a physical meeting held in the Village Hall on 18th May 2021, COVID permitting, and will be structured to enable a full discussion of the A358 developments and any other topics not adequately covered by this meeting.

2. Thanks

As in past years the work of many individuals goes towards the success of the Parish Council. In particular I would like to express our thanks to Gillian Midworth, our Parish Clerk, whose meticulous attention to detail, advice and unstinting efforts to ensure the continuing work of the Council throughout the COVID restrictions has been exemplary.

Additionally thanks to:

- All the Councillors for their unstinting support.
- David Lodge as Vice Chair, for all his work on planning applications and in conjunction with Martin Middleton has led our efforts to bring common sense and reality to our relationship with Highways England and the A358 developments.

§ Robert Wheatley, again for his IT advice and work on the WH Parish Website.

§ Our County and District Councillors - John Thorne and Ross Henley. John Thorne's reports to the Council have been detailed, comprehensive and extremely helpful.

· Douglas Kerr who joined the Council as a co-opted Councillor in January 2019.

3. Finance

The Finance Sub-committee met in November last year and the Council subsequently agreed their proposal that the 2021/22 Budget should be set at £2900 levying a precept of the same amount and giving an increase of £200 overall. As a result the annual precept payable is increased by 5% which, for a Band D property, will increase from £20.27 to £21.28. It is proposed to allocate £400 to work on refurbishing the Parish Fingerposts (work which Somerset County Council will no longer undertake). Other standing items in the budget such as staff costs, insurance etc are predicted to be in line with the previous year. The current balance in the account stands at £2486.

Principle issues during the past two years:

a. A358 dualling

The preferred route (Pink) was announced in summer 2019 and comprises dualling the entire length of the road as an expressway, providing a Henlade by-pass joining the M5 at Junction 25. There are no minor road connections between Mattocks Tree Green and Ashill (5 miles including the closure of West Hatch Lane and Bickenhall Lane) and only minor changes to the Southfield roundabout. The Parish Council's position is that extending the dualling east beyond Mattocks Tree Green is redundant and expensive and that the Southfield roundabout should be redesigned. Councillor Middleton remains our representative on the Highways England Community Liaison Forum, which meets before our next Parish Council Meeting on 18th May when the A358 developments will be discussed in full. In the meantime, as a formal 'consultation body', the Council is responding in detail to Highway England's Scoping Report for Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed dualling. The Council is working with other parishes to provide a consistent and agreed position.

b. Local Plan – Garden Community

In the revised SWAT Local District Plan published in October 2020, Taylor Wimpey, having purchased a major area of farmland from the Crown Estates in the vicinity of Orchard Portman and the Polo Ground, submitted an application for a major urban development (Garden Community) of many hundreds of houses East of the M5. West Hatch are very strongly opposed to this development and, in conjunction with Neroche, Pitminster, Stoke St Mary, Hatch Beauchamp and Corfe parish councils together with our County Councillor John Thorne, are forming an action group to oppose the development and prevent it from happening.

c. Local Government Re-organisation.

Parishioners will be aware that Somerset County Council have proposed that the

Four District Councils and SCC combine to form a single unitary authority for Somerset 'One Somerset'. The District Councils have united to make a counter proposal, a two-council local authority for the County, 'Stronger Somerset'. The Secretary of State, before making his decision as to which proposal to accept, is seeking the views of individuals and all parish councils. Consideration is also being given to a county wide poll. After much discussion, participating in webinars from the two protagonists, consulting SALC and seeking the views

of parishioners, the Parish Council have concluded that there is not a lot to choose between the two proposals but that on balance 'Stronger Somerset' is likely to be of marginally greater benefit to the Parish and have responded to the consultation accordingly.

d. Council engagement with parishioners

Although the Council has a list of email addresses for approx. 50 parishioners, it is aware that the list is not exhaustive and does not include those parishioners who do not use email. It has been agreed that a letter would be delivered to all properties requesting contact details and asking whether the resident wishes to receive information from either the Parish Council or Village Hall committee. This is an ongoing activity, and we hope that this will encourage greater engagement with the Council and local community.

e. Speeding

For some years the Council has been seeking speeding restrictions on a number of roads throughout the Parish. Somerset County Council has refused every approach made to them for signage and as a result the Council has purchased two 'Twenty is Plenty' signs and installed them on Upper West Hatch Lane. Their effect will be monitored and, if appropriate, further signs erected. We will continue to pursue SSC to take our speed problems seriously.

f. Climate Emergency Community Fund

The Council submitted three bids for funding from the SCC Climate Emergency Community Fund. One from the RSPCA for environmental involvement with the Parish, one for PV panels for the Village Hall and one for a tree planting programme and parish environmental record. All three bids were unsuccessful and letters from the SCC explaining why have been forwarded to the bid authors.

g. Broadband

Connecting Devon and Somerset has appointed Airband as the contractor for the area. They will deliver 'pole to pole fibre optic' to each property but implementation may not take place before 2024. A schedule of works will be announced in due course.

Thirteen parishioners have registered with an alternative provider – Truespeed- who are able to make arrangements outside the CDS arrangement if it is commercially viable for them to do so.

Fibre cables have recently been installed at the RSPCA by private contract without consultation with the Parish. A letter of complaint has been sent to the CEO of the RSPCA.

h. Village name plates

The Meare Green village sign has now been re-sited.

í. Dougal Clark

The Council has agreed the wording for the plaque commemorating the life and service of Dougal to the local community. The plaque will be erected in the near future.

j. Parish Fingerpost restoration project

As funds have been earmarked in the budget for restoration work, it is hoped that preliminary work will start once the latest lockdown has ended. One of the fingerposts on

the Parish boundary has already been restored by Stoke St Mary PC. Councillor Martin Middleton is leading this project.

k. Planning matters

A number of planning applications have been supported by the PC and approved by the planning authority. One application at Meare Green for the conversion of a barn to a dwelling house was objected to. A decision by the Planning Inspector is awaited.

MATTERS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

Several parishioners expressed their appreciation to the Parish Councillors for the work that they undertake to support the community. Members of the Parish Council thanked the Chairman for his support.

TO RECEIVE THE ACCOUNTS OF THE VILLAGE HALL

The latest accounts for the Village Hall have not yet been finalised. The Village Hall has been closed for the past year due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and current reserves stand at £2798. The Village Hall is due to re-open in May and the committee are looking for ways to increase activity and income.

The meeting closed at 8.05 pm