WEST HATCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

 Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of the West Hatch Parish held in the Village Hall on Thursday 31st March 2022

**ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES**

**Public: 7 parishioners, G Midworth (Clerk to the Council),**

**Apologies: E Bray, G Knight. J Dyer, R Wheatley, H Young**

**MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**The minutes of the Annual Parish meeting, held on 27th April 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record.**

**REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

The Chairman’s report was read to the parishioners.

Introduction

The last Annual Parish Meeting was held on 27th April 2021 on Zoom. We are very pleased that this year we are able to hold the meeting in person and our apologies for having to change the date of the meeting at short notice. The meeting fulfils the statutory requirement for the Annual Parish Meeting to be held between 1st March and 1st June. We have held five Parish Council meetings in the year and additionally three Parish Meetings specifically to discuss progress on the National Highways scheme to dual the A358. The last of these was held on the 10th February attended by our MP, Rebecca Pow. This Report covers the principal issues that the Council have addressed during the year.

2. Thanks

It is important that we recognise the commitment of those who work to further the interests of the Parish and our thanks go to all our Councillors and those other parishioners who have given time and effort to make the Parish a better place to live. As in past years I particularly want to thank Gillian Midworth, our Parish Clerk, who has coped with her ever growing work load with much diligence, attention to detail, sound and timely advice and that indispensable attribute, good humour. Without her efforts the Council would cease to function.

Particular thanks also to:

· David Lodge and Martin Middleton who bring common sense and reality to our relationship with National Highways and the A358 developments.

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

§ Martin Middleton who looks after of our finances and Douglas Kerr for upkeep of our footpaths, for organising the planting of trees and preparation of the Village Hall for our meetings.

Finally, David Lodge is standing down from the Council at the elections on the 5th May. The Parish owes him a considerable debt, not only for his assiduous hard work in looking after all the planning applications associated with the Parish but also for his wise counsel on the numerous difficult topics that need to be dealt with in the Parish. I am especially grateful personally for his sage support during his time as Vice Chair. Thank you,

3. Finance

The Finance Sub-committee met on 27th November 2021 and the Council subsequently agreed their proposal that the 2022/23 Budget should be set at £3350. This to be achieved by raising the precept of a Band D property from the current £21.32 p.a. to £25.00 p.a., resulting in an overall increase of £450 in precept. The increase in funding would enable the work on refurbishing the Parish Fingerposts to continue and provide contingency funds for any increase in costs associated with setting up the Unitary Council, associated Local Community Networks and election costs. Other standing items in the budget such as staff costs, insurance etc are predicted to be in line with the previous year, although we are aware we may need to take account of any inflation. The balance in the Account on the 31st October 2021 stood at £10,642.05.

The Council applied, in September 21, to the Somerset County Council’s ‘Opening up safely and Reconnecting Communities Fund’ associated with easing the restrictions imposed by the COVID pandemic. The Council’s application was successful and we were awarded £6,500 to be paid in two tranches. The Council agreed that the money should be made available to the Village Hall Committee, who had generated the proposal for the grant submission and is intended for the creation of better hospitality and recreation facilities for the village.

Principle issues during the past year

a. A358 dualling

The A358 developments have taken much of the Council’s time during the year. There have been three Parish Meetings to discuss and hear parishioners’ views on the proposed scheme by National Highways, these were held on the 28th July, the 18th November 2021 and the last, on 10th February 2022, which was attended by our MP Rebecca Pow.

The Council have formed, with 13 other parishes and Ilminster Town Council, a Community of Parishes (COP) to challenge National Highways scheme and propose a much-improved scheme if our first option, of only completing the Henlade by-pass and improving the M25 and Southfields roundabouts without the need to dual the entire length of the road, is unsuccessful.

The Parish Council responded to the NH Public Consultation in October/November last year with a detailed response and also signed up to the combined response by the COP. Many individual parishioners also responded to the consultation. The COP also submitted a report to National Highways on ‘The Deficiencies of the Consultation’ and a further detailed report on ‘The Suppression of the Concerns of the Community of Parishes’ to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). PINS responded by saying the Report should be sent to NH. To date NH have responded to neither report.

The Council remains committed to do all it can to represent as forcefully as possible the views expressed to our MP, Rebecca Pow, at the Parish Meeting on 10th March. The report of that meeting and other documents are available on the Parish website.

b. Twenty is Plenty

The campaign to reduce speeding in our village lanes continues and Martin Middleton is leading with the placing of eight ‘Twenty is Plenty’ and other warning signs at strategic points on our lanes. Further signs are planned. Contact with the National ‘Twenty is Plenty Campaign’ has been established and together with a parishioner, work towards a Somerset County organisation is being explored.

c. Local Government Re-organisation.

The formation of a Somerset Unitary Authority has been approved and elections of councillors to form the new County Council will take place on 5th May 22. The Ward boundaries have been redrawn and the Neroche Ward, which includes West Hatch, will have two councillors instead of the one that represents us at present. Details of how the Local Community Networks (LCN) will be formed from groups of parishes and their responsibilities and authority are awaited. It is likely that this will be a major item of work for the Parish Council during the year.

d. Potholes

There remain many unrepaired potholes around our lanes, particularly evident in Prey Lane. The Council is continuously reporting and chasing the SCC Roads Department to expedite their repair programme. We are also concerned at the damage to a number of our wild flower covered verges. We will continue to pressure the Council but individual reporting using the SCC website will assist the process.

e. SWAT Free Trees Initiative

In the Autumn Somerset West and Taunton Council offered Parishes free trees to the value of £50. The Parish Council bid was successful and 3 Oak, 2 Beech and 2 Lime trees have been received and planted in St Andrew’s Church Field.

f. Broadband

Connecting Devon and Somerset has appointed Airband as the contractor for the area. We await a presentation updating us on their plans for installation of fibre in the Parish. We understand that they will deliver ‘pole to pole fibre optic’ to each property but implementation may not take place before 2024.

g. The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations

The Parish Council has registered our intention to formally celebrate the Jubilee as part of the National Chain of Beacons. Our plans include a bonfire/beacon to be lit at the top of Griffin Lane on Thursday 2nd June and a community picnic event in St Andrew’s Field to be held on Sunday 5th June as part of the ‘Big Jubilee Lunch’. A small planning group led by the Village Hall Committee has been established to organise the celebrations.

h. Parish Fingerpost restoration project

The project to restore our fingerposts is underway under the direction of Martin Middleton with the help of Carrie Fletcher. More funds are being made available to the project and any assistance from interested parishioners would be very welcome.

i. Planning matters

There have been a number of planning matters during the year, these have included:

· Roadside trading from the road verge in Meare Green Lane, this was reported by the Council to SWAT who referred the matter to the Licensing Authorities.

· An application for the erection of a single storey extension to the front of Old School House was resubmitted and conditionally approved.

· The Council was informed of possible unlawful occupancy on Land at Meare Green and the District Council Planning Enforcement Officer was notified.

· An application for alterations to the porch and the installation of a dormer window at Hunter’s Lodge, have been approved.

Finally, my thanks to all Parishioners for their neighbourliness, thoughtfulness and forbearance towards all in the Parish and their support of the Parish Council during the ongoing Covid pandemic.

That concludes my Report.

**MATTERS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS**

**The Parishioners present thanked the Parish Council for the work that it had undertaken during the past 12 months particularly in respect of the A358 Consultation**

**Thanks were also given to Keith Read, the Chairman of the Parish Council**

**A request for additional ‘Twenty is Plenty’ signs were made for Lower West Hatch Lane**

**TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE**

**The latest accounts for the Village Hall had not been prepared as the accounting year does not end until the end of March. However, finances are healthy due to grants being received as compensation for Covid disruption.**

**The use of the Village Hall has increased with regular yoga and pilates sessions taking place. The Village Hall committee are arranging a full programme of events to celebrate the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee including Open Gardens, a cake making competition, a Jubilee beacon, and picnic and bbq.**

**The meeting closed at 7.55pm.**