

# WEST HATCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of the West Hatch Parish  
held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023

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## ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

**Public:** 8 parishioners, G Midworth (Clerk to the Council),

**Apologies:** S Read

## MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Parish meeting, held on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 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 31st March 22 and again we are very pleased that for the second year running we have not been disrupted by untoward events and are able to hold this meeting in person. The meeting fulfils the statutory requirement for the Annual Parish Meeting to be held between 1st March and 1st June. We have held six Ordinary Parish Council meetings in the past year (31st March 22, 26th July 22, 28th September 22, 30th November 22, 25th January 23, and 29th March 23). Additionally, the Annual Parish Council Meeting was held on 12th May 22 and an Extraordinary Parish Meeting to discuss the Council's response to National Highways A358 Supplementary Consultation was held on 7th June 22.

This Report covers the principal issues that the Council have addressed during the year.

### 2. Parish Councillors

Very sadly Councillor Nick Harrison-Sleep died in November last year. A loyal, generous man who had been a Councillor for many years and gave much to the community. It is a cliché to say he will be much missed, it is, however, a self-evident truth and the parish will be the poorer for his passing.

David Lodge and Liz Bray resigned from the Council during the year and our thanks to them for their hugely valuable contributions to the work of the Council. Their positions have been filled by Kate Walters and Les Finlayson to whom we extend a warm welcome and thanks for offering their services. They bring a wide perspective and experience to the Council.

Two parishioners have put their names forward to join Council, Richard Sullivan, and Ben Haskins. Douglas Kerr has offered to stand down in order to allow Richard and Ben to join the Council and his offer has been accepted on the condition that as Chairman of the Village

Hall Committee he attends our PC meetings and makes his invaluable experience and advice available. Douglas has very generously agreed to that condition. Consequently, with the death of Nick Harrison-Sleap and the standing down of Douglas Kerr the Council has agreed that the two existing vacancies will be filled by Ben and Richard. The formalities of their joining Council will be finalised at the Annual Parish Council meeting, that follows this Annual Parish Meeting.

### **3. Thanks**

Moving on, it is ever 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 want again to thank Gillian Midworth, our Parish Clerk, who has coped with the demands on her time and knowledge providing much invaluable and timely advice, with patience, professionalism, and an incorrigible twinkle in her eye. Without her efforts the Council would cease to function.

In addition to those I have already mentioned particular thanks again go to:

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

§ Martin Middleton who looks after of our finances.

### **4. Somerset Unitary Council**

Vesting day for the new Unitary Council, Somerset Council, was April 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 and following redrawing of the Ward boundaries and the earlier Council elections, West Hatch will be represented by Councillors Ross Henley and Sarah Wakefield.

The Parish Council together with Stoke St Mary PC, lobbied hard for the Parish to be part of a likeminded group of parishes as the Local Community Network (LCN) boundaries were agreed by the County Council. The outcome is that we are part of the Chard and Blackdown LCN of parishes, which includes Neroche, Stoke St Mary and Hatch Beauchamp. The PC is generally content with the outcome of the LCN grouping. We await the details that will regulate the LCNs but anticipate meeting 6-8 each year commencing in the autumn. It is not yet clear how they will function or what value they will have.

### **5. Finance**

The Finance Working Party met in November last year and the Council subsequently approved the Budget and agreed that the 2023/24 Precept should be set at £3350, the same as last year. This means that the precept of a Band D property equates to £25.58p per annum. 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 March 2023 stood at £6,953.50, which reflects receipt of Somerset County Council's 'Opening up safely and Reconnecting Communities Fund' of £6,500 which was made available to the Village Hall Committee for the creation of better hospitality and recreation facilities for the village. £4,086.03 Of this has now been spent. Additionally, the Council received £1890 as a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in relation to a new development at Meare Green.

## **6. A358 dualling**

The discussion and engagement with National Highway and Somerset County Council have continued throughout the year. These have included:

- Responding to the Supplementary National Highways Consultation after an Extraordinary Parish meeting on the 7th June to discuss the Parish Council's response;
- Talks with Rebecca Pow, our MP, and National Highways, which have proved to be of little value.
- Continued support and engagement with the Community of Parishes (CoP) in an endeavour to make local parish voices heard and bring some common sense into the NH scheme proposals.
- Discussions with the CoP and the Parish Councils involved in the A303 Sparkford development scheme, on how best to approach the forthcoming Examination in Public.
- Representation at a County Council Scrutiny Committee at which the County Council were invited to respond in kind to the CoP's disclosure, in the interests of transparency and openness prior to Registration as an Interested Party, the submission of its 'Registration as an Interested Party' and 'Summary of A358 CoP issues' documents. The County Council led (by the nose) by its Executive Officers, declined to do likewise.
- Tours of our rural parish lanes with representative of NH representatives and County councillors.

The present situation is that National Highways submission of their Development Consent Order (DCO) to the Inspectorate, expected earlier this year, is on hold. Despite repeated questioning we have been unable to determine why, although Financial and Environmental Issues appear to be involved. It is only once the DCO has been accepted by the Inspectorate that Statutory Bodies, other organisations, and Individuals may register as Interested Parties to be involved in the Examination in Public, which is the next step towards the Secretary of State approving the project. The PC has agreed to register as an interested party as soon as we are able to.

We await developments but will continue to voice our concerns through the CoP and reiterate our view that the only essentials of the scheme are a Henlade bypass and proper resolution of the Southfields and M5 Junction 25 connections.

### **Other issues during the past year**

#### **a. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and King Charles' Coronation celebrations**

Both the Platinum Jubilee and Coronation celebrations were a great success with over ninety attendees at both events. Our thanks to all involved in the organisation and hard work that goes into making these events memorable, significant, and stamped with a West Hatch specific authenticity.

#### **b. Twenty is Plenty**

The campaign to reduce speeding in our village lanes continues and Martin Middleton is leading with the placing of more '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 we are now aligned with and an active part of the Somerset County organisation with a parishioner as a lead representative.

#### c. Potholes

Despite some effort by the County Council there remain many unrepaired potholes around our lanes, particularly Church Lane, West Hatch Lane, and Prey Lane. The Council is continuously reporting and chasing the SC Roads Department to expedite their repair programme.

#### d. Broadband

An Airband representative gave a presentation to the PC in January, which was not particularly informative despite repeated requests for details. We understand that we can expect full fibre broadband to be installed across the parish in the autumn. As and when more information becomes available you will be kept informed.

#### e. Parish Fingerpost restoration project

During the year the project to restore our fingerposts continued 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.

#### f. Community involvement Consultation

A working party of members met to discuss the consultation document and the Council agreed that it supports the points raised. The document details how Somerset Council will engage with the community on such matters as planning etc.

Parish Councils will continue to be statutory consultees for most planning applications.

#### g. Parish Website

Following a meeting held with members of the Parish Council and other interested parties, some changes to the website have been proposed to make the site more user friendly.

One issue raised was that the message 'not secure' appeared when opening the site. The contract with LCN did not include an SSL certificate (which authenticates a website's identity). The Council agreed to changes to the website and to a change in the contract with LCN, which incorporates this feature at a cost of £66pa for a two-year contract and a transfer fee of £90.00. A pro rata refund in respect of the unused term of the existing 5-year contract has been received. Our thanks to Robert Wheatley for his help in this reorganisation.

#### h. Planning matters

There have been several planning matters during the year, these have included:

- Application No. 47/22/0006. Variation of a previous application to increase the height at the ridge and for changes to the cladding and the addition of photovoltaics to the roof of the agricultural building at Abbey Wood, Griffin Lane, West Hatch. The PC proposed a number of changes to the application which have been accepted by the owner.

· Application No. 47/23/0001. A revised application for the erection of a single storey extension to the side of Old School House and double storey extension to the front of the property was resubmitted. The PC had no objection to this submission.

· Application No. 47/22/004. Erection of an extension to Fairacre, West Hatch Lane. The PC had no objection to this submission.

Finally, my thanks to all Parishioners who contribute to making the Parish a happy community and pleasant place to live.

That concludes my Report.

### **MATTERS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS**

The issue of dog waste bins has been raised by a parishioner and Thurlbear Woods has been identified as an appropriate location. The Clerk will obtain a quotation for the cost of installation and emptying and report back to the Parish Council at a later meeting.

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

The latest accounts for the Village Hall present a stable financial situation.

In 2022, the Village Hall received grants of £19000, of which £8000 has been spent on repair and maintenance. The next projects are to improve the floor and kitchen, which is basic and outdated.

The Village Hall raised £840 from various fundraising events during the year and continues to receive rental income from classes such as the weekly Yoga sessions.

Several successful community events have been held within the last year including the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations and an Easter Extravaganza and in the future the Committee would like to stage events that appeal to the older children and teenagers in the Parish.

The Parish Council thanked Douglas Kerr (Chairman) and Margaret Luck (secretary) for their hard work and contribution.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm.