

Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 23rd May 2017 at Meldon Village Hall

Parish councillors present

D Webber, P Heard, R Maile, M Cooper, M Littlejohns, A Ewen, B Wood, J Heard

Guest speakers

Inspector Mark Sloman (Devon & Cornwall Police)

Ian Brooker (DNP Ranger)

Melanie Pike & Theresa Weaver (Tor Support Services)

Cllr Kevin Ball (DCC & OkeRail)

Alison Duckers (Okehampton & Hamlets Neighbourhood Planning)

Cllr Mrs J Yelland (Okehampton Town Council & WDBC & Okehampton Street Pastors)

Also Present

Cllr A Leech (Okehampton Town Council & WDBC)

Cllr M Davies (WDBC)

Clerk – J Gillard

7 members of the public

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Littlejohns due to the recent ill health of the Chairman, Cllr Webber. Cllr Webber was welcomed to the meeting and he was wished a speedy recovery.

1. Cllr Littlejohns welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Apologies** – there were no apologies received.

3. **Chairmans report** –

I will start the report of the Council year with a presentation.

Early this year, Councillor Dudley Luxton submitted his resignation from the Council. Dudley has served on this Council for 34 years !

That is something that cannot go without being recognised.

Mr Luxton was presented with 2 walking sticks and a Certificate of Appreciation for his service to the council.

He was co-opted to the council at a meeting held on March 17th 1983 – there were 2 vacancies at that time, 2 councillors (Councillors Parsons and Williams) had resigned earlier in the year as they were moving out of the area.

No bye election was called following these resignations so the vacancies were filled – one of which was Dudley and the other was filled by Ken Heard.

Dudley's resignation obviously created a vacancy on the Council. We were very pleased to receive a lot of interest from people wanting to come onto the Council and these were from residents from the new developments to the east of Okehampton. We ended up with 4 applications, all from people who would bring skills and experience to the Council. The successful applicant was Brian Wood, before moving to this area

he has been a parish councillor in Harrietsham, Kent, he has served as a Kent County Councillor and a member of Dartford Borough Council. That is only a part of his previous experience, we are delighted to welcome him to the Council, he has already shown himself to be a keen and willing addition to the team.

Devon County Council have recently held their elections, with the Boundary changes that came into force at the election it meant that none of our area remained in the Hatherleigh and Chagford ward therefore we have lost James McInnes as a DCC Councillor. James has always been very helpful and supportive and we are sorry to lose him. All of The Hamlets is now within Okehampton Rural and we look forward to continuing working with Kevin Ball who was reelected for that area.

The Council is continues to be represented on many local groups: Okehampton United Charities, Holditch Trust, West Devon/Okehampton Liaison Group, Northern Parishes Links Group, Chamber of Trade, Okehampton Matters. Meldon Hall, and OkeRail Forum. You will hear more about that Group later. We have taken part in the Remembrance Day parade, Civic Dinner and Ten Tors Breakfast, and the recent Sidney Simmons Centenary celebrations at Okehampton Castle.

We have continued to support local organisations where residents of the parish benefit from the work they do:

- Royal British Legion
- Tor support Services
- Okehampton & District Community Transport Group
- Meldon Fields Residents Group
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Wren Music
- OCRA – for the Okehampton Sports Week
- Okehampton Battle of the Bands
- Party in the Park celebrations for the Queens jubilee
- Okehampton United Charity towards the allotments
- Okehampton Street Pastors

Planning – we continue to get consulted on all planning applications within The Hamlets. We always participate in other consultations such as the Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon Joint Local Plan, it is important we put our views forward, and we will participate in the Dartmoor National Park consultation which will be happening very shortly.

Monitoring of the river going through Brightley continues, we still see escapes of sewage from the main Okehampton sewer, it seems virtually impossible to get any actions taken but we keep trying.

Okehampton Business Park – I think we all get frustrated about how long it is taking for things to happen there but things are slowly moving forward.

Meldon Woods-

SW Endurance used Meldon car park for their annual ride. They have also recently been used to film Black Mirror

We also commissioned a full Health and Safety report on the trees, this identified some work to be undertaken within 6 months, some 12 and a small amount within 2 years. There are only a few trees that need felling, and some limbs to be removed, it is obviously important that the trees are regularly monitored to ensure the safety of visitors to the Woods. We have now completed the initial work required, and will be undertaking the second phase of work in the autumn.

The council also commissioned the creation of a new 10 year Management Plan for the woods. We applied for a Grant from the West Devon Town and Parishes Fund to fund this, and we were successful in being successful in obtaining the funds to cover the costs of this plan. The Plan has only recently been received, we now need to start implementing it, we have ensured it has been kept 'realistic and achievable', something that we can make sure happens fairly easily.

There was a very successful Meldon Wildlife Day organised by DNP and enjoyed by many local children as well as visitors

Welcome Pack – the Council decided to produce a booklet for new residents to The Hamlets, designed to give them helpful information as being new to the area. This has just been printed within the last 2 weeks and distribution to the new developments east of Okehampton is now taking place. Many thanks to Alison Duckers and her team who work on the Good Neighbours Magazine who volunteered to help with the distribution.

The Council is responsible for any bus shelter in the parish, we have one in Exeter Road and we have refurbished that this year. Now looking much smarter. We do experience problems with the glass being deliberately broken sometimes – fingers crossed it does not happen for a while again at least.

Queens Birthday Bonfire – we organised a bonfire close to the Camp to celebrate the Jubilee, enjoyed by those who attended, but a bit windy to say the least... We are also planning to take part in The Battles Over – The Nations Tribute to WW1 Beacons of Light, so we will be up there again November next year

West Devon Mayoral Award Scheme – we nominated local people in each of the categories and were delighted that Olive & Bill Hennessey won the Mayors Green Award – they can regularly be seen walking along Exeter Road and surrounding areas picking up litter, entirely voluntary, well done to them and thank you.

We have had a busy year, and am sure the coming year will be just as busy, more developments, a second primary school progressing and many other challenges.

Cllr Littlejohns then presented grant cheques –
£250 to Tor Support Services
£250 to Meldon Fields Residents Group

4. Guest Speakers

Devon & Cornwall Police – Inspector Mark Sloman

There has been a large increase in crime in the Devon & Cornwall area, West Devon has seen an increase of 14.5%, the majority of this has been violent crime. Violent crime figures do however include on line crime such as remarks on Facebook etc which is classed as harassment therefore falls into the violent crime category.

There has also been a 60% increase in hate crime, no patterns however.

Vehicle crime and burglaries have seen a large decrease, this is against the national trend, also non dwelling burglaries have decreased.

There has been a significant amount of shoplifting particularly in Okehampton, they are working with the Supermarkets to try and reduce this.

There have been 4 high profile arrests recently, the individuals now in HMP, Exeter and a reduction in crime figures has been seen since.

Tavistock and Okehampton have seen an increase in the supply of Class A drugs, it appears groups of criminals are targeting rural locations, more warrants have been carried out and safe guarding actions increased.

Tor Support Services – Melanie Pike

The Group (now a Charity) were set up in Okehampton in 2009, they are based at the Community Centre adjacent to the College. The charity provides free professional counselling to children and young people aged 5 – 25 years from Okehampton and the surrounding parishes. They work closely with the college and its feeder primary schools and last year helped approx 200 children. Counselling and psychotherapy helps avoid more serious emotional and mental health issues. They have 2 dedicated child and adolescent counsellors and a further counsellor working with sexually abused children. The charity is run by 7 trustees, they employ the 3 counsellors, also 2 co-ordinators, an admin person and 6 volunteer counsellors. They currently have 2 rooms, they are now looking to convert an area into a 3rd room in order they can help more children, they currently have 3 children on the waiting list. The majority of their funding comes from Children in Need, they have also received funding from Okehampton United Charity and the Police and Crime Commissioners. Melanie thanked The Hamlets council for their grant which will be used towards the costs of creating the 3rd room for use.

Okehampton & Hamlets Neighbourhood Planning – Alison Duckers

Alison is the Chair of the Group. Although progress at times has been slow and frustrating, they are now really hopeful that in October they will have a draft Plan. The workshop held in March in the charter Hall was very well attended and they gained a lot of new information from the attendees. This information has now been passed onto the Consultant that the Group are using to help with the process. Funding was received last year for the consultants costs although some of this had to be returned as the work did not progress as quickly as anticipated, they should be able to obtain further funding.

Okehampton Street Pastors – Julie Yelland

Street Pastors engage with people in the night time economy exactly as they find them by bringing a calm, non-judgemental presence to the streets. They protect and help people in vulnerable situations, prevent and diffuse altercations, provide basic First Aid and signposting. Police statistics show a reduction in street crime and anti-social behaviour where Street Pastors operate.

Okehampton Street Pastors are made up of volunteers from local churches, they carry flip flops, bottles of water, lollypops (proven to have the effect of diffusing potentially violent and abusive situations). They do not take the place of the Police. They come under the umbrella organisation Ascension Trust. All Street Pastors go through a rigorous selection process, they

provide references and are subject to a criminal record check.

They now operate in Okehampton once a fortnight on a Saturday night between 10pm and 2.45am, this is currently the maximum time they can operate with the number of volunteers they currently have – new volunteers very welcome! Ideally they patrol in mixed groups of 4. They wear uniforms which helps the Police identify them.

Dartmoor National Park - Ian Brooker

As you already know from last year's report, the Authority is in a slightly more stable position financially for the next couple of years but we cannot be complacent about our future funding and with this in mind we have been encouraged to look at new forms of funding to help us continue to meet our aims and objectives.

We are promoting the Donate for Dartmoor Fund which has already generated an income of just over £19,000 towards specific projects and last year, launched the Moor Otters initiative. Both are highlighted in the Enjoying Dartmoor Magazine and on our website. www.dartmoor.gov.uk

We also now have a National Park Partnership Group which is looking at sponsorship deals for all of the National Parks. A deal is in the process of being agreed with Colombia Clothing to supply all the NPs with uniform which you may see being worn later on in the year!

You may also have seen reported that Meldon Reservoir car park, which the Authority owns, has been highlighted as one of several car parks that may have car parking charges imposed by next year. Although our Members have agreed this in principal nothing has been finalised without proper consultation which will occur later on this year.

I am pleased to announce, that following on from last year's success, the Meldon Wildlife Day will happen again on Tuesday August 15th based at the Old Quarry. Just over 300 people attended this event, all enjoying the various activities that were provided by the numerous partners that joined us on the day. We will be following a similar format and can only hope to be blessed with the same weather. My thanks to the Parish Council for allowing us to use their land for this event and for showing such a keen interest on the day.

The Dormouse and Pied Flycatcher surveys continue in Meldon Woods and although it is early yet for dormice, we do have 10 Pied Flycatcher nests with eggs and females sittings and one clutch has already hatched. The weather has not been very kind of late but they are fairly robust birds and we are hoping for some good results.

Two rights of way projects will be completed this year including the replacement of the stepping stones along the edge of the Halstock Woods footpath that were badly affected by excessive water levels and improvements to the bridleway near the lime kiln on Aggregate Industries land where winter flooding makes this impossible to pass. Funding for other projects is on hold and will depend on the success of our fund raising schemes already mentioned, if they are to proceed or not.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my Voluntary Wardens, Jan and Neil Gilmour for their never ending help, support and encouragement throughout the year.

OkeRail – Cllr Kevin Ball

A special train to London was organised in March, 500 tickets were sold within 1 week of them going on sale. They ended up with a full train, there were some technical issues but these were resolved with a replacement train at Exeter. In London representatives met with Railway Minister to discuss plans for reinstatement of the service to Okehampton from Exeter. There is the potential for the introduction of a trial service, not likely to be before December 2018, activities are happening to improve the infrastructure of the line including signalling improvements and plans for a new parkway station and car parking on the east of Okehampton. They are looking at running another train in the autumn – potentially 7th October although not yet confirmed.

5. Questions from the Public – there were no questions.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.30 pm. All were invited to remain for refreshments.

Signed..... Date.....