

# Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 14th April 2015 at  
Meldon Village Hall

## **Parish councillors present**

D Webber (Chair), P Heard, R Maile, M Cooper, J Heard, A Ewen.

## **Guest speakers**

Andrew Shadrake (DARE)

Rebecca Black (WDBC)

Jo Rumble (DNP)

Cllr J McInnes (DCC & WDBC)

Ian Brooker (DNP Ranger)

## **Also Present**

Kirsty Tooke (DARE)

Tom Furness (DARE)

Cllr A Leech (Okehampton Town Council & WDBC)

Cllr K Ball (Okehampton Town Council, WDBC & DCC)

Cllr J Goffey (Okehampton Town Council)

Tom French (Okehampton Times)

Clerk – J Gillard

9 members of the public

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, he thanked the Councillors and Clerk for their support throughout the year.
2. **Apologies** – Councillor D Luxton, Cllr M Littlejohns
3. **Guest speakers** – the Chairman welcomed all the speakers

### **Andrew Shadrake, DARE, Okehampton Community Energy Project**

Andrew outlined a joint project between Okehampton Town Council and the Hamlets Parish Council Assessing the renewable energy resource in the area. A study would identify a small number of potential sites for renewable energy (such as a set of school or industrial estate roofs, which could accept solar PV). Talk to councils, landowners and others to see whether the sites might be used. Work with people in the community to see if they are interested in forming an energy co-operative to own the renewable installations, using any profit for community benefit. Examining whether the installations could be funded from local investment, through a community share issue.

The Councils have been successful in obtaining Government funding to enable the study to take place, this would happen over the next 1 – 2 months. There would be community involvement. Both Councils feel this would be of significant benefit to Okehampton, retaining money in the local economy, reducing fuel costs and potentially providing support to local organisations and also providing an investment opportunity.

## **Rebecca Black, WDBC, Neighbourhood Planning**

Rebecca explained that The Hamlets and Town Council had agreed to undertake a joint Neighbourhood Plan covering the whole of both parishes. This plan would have statutory weight in the Planning Process, it is a plan prepared by the community for the community. The focus would be on how land is used, identify a vision for Okehampton, allocate sites for housing and it may cover design policy. A lot of consultation and involvement from the community would be needed. Funding is available to assist with costs. The Plan would probably cover similar timescales to Our Plan which is to 2031. As the area covered also incorporates an area of Dartmoor National Park, both authorities would be involved and work with the Councils with WDBC taking the lead.

## **Cllr James McInnes WDBC & DCC**

Devon County Council continues to implement reductions in its budget like every other Local Authority.

Devon County Council net Budget for 2015/16 is £437.7 million, with a 1.9% rise in Council Tax.

Since the cuts started, Devon County Council has taken £127 million out of the budget, £46 million in this 2015/16 financial year. A further £34 million is projected to have to come out next year.

Some one year only additions in this year's Budget are:

Local Welfare Assistance £1 million, this is used working with District and Borough Councils to help the most vulnerable benefit claimants with small grants for household items.

Road gritting, £100,000 to keep the current routes

Public Transport, £100,000 to have some flexibility following the consultation on DCC supported Bus routes.

Crossing Patrols, £100,000 to allow the School Crossing Patrols to continue while alternatives are looked at

Support for the CAB £40,000

We usually have a projected funding figure from central government for the next two years, but as we go into the General Election we do not have these figures.

The Schools dedicated Grant is £465 million, this goes straight to schools. In the financial year 2015/16 we have received about £16.5 million extra for Devon's schools from central government, for which we are grateful. But this still leaves schools in Devon about £270 a child below the national average and we continue to campaign for fairer funding.

**HIGHWAYS.**

This has been an average winter, despite this we are still seeing Potholes appearing, please report them as soon as you can. The Local Highways Team is changing and I will update you when I know what has changed. Steve Dawe is my main contact.

I was pleased we got the funding for the Fatherford Footbridge that has been a parish aspiration for many years. The funding came from a one off government grant for access to Dartmoor. A number of projects are under construction round Dartmoor. I have to comment it is bigger than I expected. The construction has been guided by the fact that it is a footbridge over a railway line. There are particular safety concerns that have to be addressed.

This has been a very busy year for me since I took on the role as Cabinet Member for Children Schools and Skills in March 2014. We have re – modelled the Youth service and are in the middle of remodelling the Childrens Centres to have a contract for each Borough/District area. This will help us to continue to deliver with less money. Child Safeguarding is one of the cornerstones of what the County Council does and a considerable

amount of work is being done to improve our services. A new Emotional Wellbeing Service will be available to schools from September.

I'm a member of Dartmoor National Park Authority, appointed by Devon County Council. This is challenging, balancing the purposes of the National Park with the needs of a living community.

West Devon HATOC and County Committee, as County Councillors we have a small budget for community projects. Not thousands of pounds but a few hundred that could help a project happen. I was pleased to be able to support the Battle of the Bands.

### **Ian Brooker, DNPA Ranger**

DNP budget has been cut by 40% over the last 3 years, 3 rangers have been lost. This will result in many changes including the way in which public rights of way are managed. The grant given by DCC to DNPA to enable them to do this is reduced, DNP will move towards more of a monitoring officer role as opposed to being able to carry out any work required. Work to trim hedges, maintain gate furniture etc is landowners responsibility and they will be expected to carry out the work. Meldon Woods are being well used by the wild life and members of the public which is good to see.

#### **4. Chairmans report- The Chairman gave the following report for 2014/15**

Full compliment of Councillors throughout the year.

2015 is election year not just for the General Election but for WDBC plus the parishes in WDBC, nominations for all the elections have recently closed and I can let you know that there were 8 nominations for the 8 council seats on Okehampton Hamlets Council so there is no need for an election in this Parish. Our parish wards were reviewed by WDBC and we are now operating under the new revisions – OH South, OH North and Little Fatherford. This has helped with the imbalance we previously had. Total number of electors in the parish now between 700 and 800 and still rising !

Chair also represented Parish Councils on DNP authority – up for reelection this year.

The Council is also represented on :

Okehampton United Charities, Holditch Trust, West Devon/Okehampton Liaison Group, Northern Parishes Links Group, Chamber of Trade, Okehampton Matters. Meldon Hall, took part in Remembrance Day parade, Civic Dinner and Ten Tors Breakfast, West Devon Civic Dinner.

This year the Council have made donations to:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Royal British Legion
- Okehampton Chamber of Trade – for Christmas Lights in Okehampton
- Okehampton Carnival
- Okehampton & District Community Transport Group
- Community Linx
- OCRA – for the Okehampton Sports Week
- Okehampton Battle of the Bands

The total of awards made was £1900

#### **Annual Assembly Minutes 2015:3**

Fatherford railway footpath bridge – delighted to say this has finally come to fruition.

Planning applications-

We are one of the Consultees, it is WDBC who make the decision based on planning policy.

Some of the ones we have commented on -

Crediton Road developments including the site for a new primary school

Opportunity Okehampton site

Exeter Road industrial Estate – mainly change of use

Householder applications – usually for erection of conservatories, porches or other small extensions.

DCC Public consultations – responded to those that have taken place eg Libraries and Public Transport

Meldon Woods-

SW Endurance used Meldon car park for their annual ride again – this time weather conditions were good and the event was able to take place.

Woods used for Ranger Ralph day organised by DNP

Bird boxes replaced and monitoring ongoing.

Other losses during the year – bus shelter glass broken yet again

Litter picking day – held this time, 25 sacks of rubbish collected from around Meldon.

Flood plan for Brightley – this project headed by Cllr Andy Ewen was completed during the year. Plans have been distributed to all residents in Brightley. There are a few copies on the table at the side of the room if anyone wants to have a look at it.

Stock of sandbags and sand at Brightley and Stock of Grit – 4 locations around Hamlets

The new website has continued to be updated – it is easy to use so please look at it, lots of information about meetings etc

Government legislation has changed the Audit procedures for small councils – in effect we will no longer have to have an external audit. We have therefore decided to appoint a formal and qualified internal auditor who is an expert in Parish Council finance and procedures – his checks will ensure we are doing everything correctly.

LOOKING FORWARD – lots to look forward to.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING – JOINT PROJECT WITH OKEHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL. You have already heard from Rebecca. Exciting opportunity, important for the future of the whole of Okehampton. We need members of the public to be actively involved – this is not a council project, it is for the community to say what they want and make sure it happens.

COMMUNITY ENERGY – another joint project with Okehampton Town Council. Talk to us if you would like to be involved or talk to Andrew at the end of the meeting.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

**Signed..... Date.....**