

Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 19th April 2016 at
Meldon Village Hall

Parish councillors present

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

Guest speakers

Kirsty Tooke (DARE)

Dil Lord (WDBC)

Cllr J McInnes (DCC & WDBC)

Ian Brooker (DNP Ranger)

Bob Rush

Kirsty Tooke (DARE)

Sue Wonnacott (O&DCTG)

Angela Welch (DCC)

James Cox (Okehampton & Hamlets Neighbourhood Planning)

Dil Lord (WDBC)

Also Present

Cllr A Leech (Okehampton Town Council & WDBC)

Cllr M Davies (WDBC)

Cllr B Stephens (Okehampton Town Council & WDBC)

Cllr Mrs J Yelland (Okehampton Town Council & WDBC)

Clerk – J Gillard

6 members of the public

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and presented cheques for grants awarded to 2 local organisations -
Okehampton Battle of the Bands represented by Philip Burton and Museum of Dartmoor Life represented by Debbie Pritchard where the funds would be for the provision of the Tourist Information Service.

2. **Apologies** – Councillor J Heard

3. **Chairmans report** –

Last year started with the election of Parish Councillors, the previous 8 councillors all stood for election and they were all re-elected.

We now have 3 wards within the Parish – Little Fatherford with Maria as the elected councillor, Okehampton South – Phil, and Okehampton North with John, Martin, Dudley, Andy, Ruth and myself

Dartmoor National Park also had their elections last year and I am pleased to say I was re-elected for another term.

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.

Annual Assembly Minutes 2016:1

A new group that we have just been invited to participate within is the Okehampton Rail Forum, particularly important as the proposed new Station will be built within The Hamlets.

This year the Council have made donations to:

- Air Cadets
- Royal British Legion
- Okehampton Chamber of Trade – for Christmas Lights in Okehampton
- Okehampton Carnival
- Okehampton & District Community Transport Group
- Meldon Viaduct
- All Saints Church for improvements to the car park
- OCRA – for the Okehampton Sports Week
- Okehampton Battle of the Bands
- Okehampton United Charity towards the allotments
- Dartmoor Museum for the Tourist Information Service

The total of awards made was £2000

Fatherford railway footpath bridge – delighted to say the final stone walls have now been built and the bright orange barriers removed !

Unfortunately we had an issue with the work undertaken on the bridleway at Fatherford. Consultation and communication to us from DCC on the proposed work did not happen and the first we knew of the work was when it started.

Planning applications-

Explain process ie 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.

Particularly pleasing to see that it looks like there is progress on the development of the Opportunity Okehampton site.

Meldon Woods-

SW Endurance used Meldon car park for their annual ride again – although the original planned event had to be cancelled due to the weather conditions but it was rearranged for a few weeks later.

Woods used for Ranger Ralph day organised by DNP

Bird boxes replaced and monitoring ongoing.

The new website has continued to be updated – it is easy to use so please look at it, lots of information about meetings and particularly accounts and procedures, Government rules changed during the year which meant our systems had to change. It was pleasing to see that we have been ahead of the game compared to a lot of small councils – what we already had in place payed off !

Annual Assembly Minutes 2016:2

Abbeyford Woods – issues with leaking sewage that is being monitored ongoing. Important all issues reported to SWWA and Environment Agency.

Beating the Bounds – took place last year, good event shame about the weather.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING – JOINT PROJECT WITH OKEHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL. You will hear from James the Chair of this Group shortly, pleasing to see it is moving forward and important the momentum is maintained. Thank you to James for all his hard work and the other community volunteers involved.

COMMUNITY ENERGY – another joint project with Okehampton Town Council. This has recently been completed, you will hear from Kirsty later in the meeting and this has now moved forward to the next stage which Bob will tell you about later as well.

Next event coming up – this Thursday, 8pm at Blackdown, lighting of a Fire Beacon to commemorate the Queens 90th Birthday.

4. Guest Speakers

Okehampton & District Community Transport Group – Sue Wonnacott

The Group has been in existence for 26years, core work is the ring and ride bus service, the driver is paid and he also does a paid contract for schools work. Saturday trips to places of interest are also arranged. Priority is to take people to health appointments. They have 30 drivers and cover 274 square miles. They have 2 wheelchair accessible vehicles which are owned by the Group. They have 1000 clients. They also have a 15 seater minibus – from the Dept of Transport, this can be hired out to Groups. Car scheme cost £14k to run last year, the £7k grant previously received from NHS has ceased, they are applying for additional grants. New trustees are sought for the Group.

Okehampton & Hamlets Neighbourhood Planning – James Cox

James explained Neighbourhood Planning helps determine policies, develops ideas and initiatives. The Okehampton Town and Hamlets questionnaire has now been issued, all are encouraged to complete it. At the end of the process, the proposals have to go to referendum. The group was launched in 2015, the group developed in the autumn, the questionnaire developed over the winter, after analysis of the results from that further consultation events will be organised. The process does have limitations – it cannot contradict any national planning policy, it can compliment what is there. More volunteers for the Group would be very welcome.

Clr Webber thanked James for all his hard work chairing the group.

Dartmoor National Park - Ian Brooker

In case you are not already aware, Central Government announced a four year National Park Grant settlement in January with no further cuts to our finances during this period. This was totally unexpected news and although we are not returning to our previous levels of funding, at least we will have some stability and now, the ability to plan for the future.

In late March we received the 8- point Plan for England's National Parks which includes: connecting young people with nature; delivering new apprenticeships; driving growth in international tourism; promotion of the best of British food from

NPs; encouraging greater diversity in the visitors coming to NPs; enhancing peoples involvement in the interpretation of the historic and natural beauty in NP's; the promotion of health and well-being schemes and creating thriving natural environments. Full details at www.gov.uk

On a more local level, I reported last year about how the management of our rights of way network had to change including the use of more volunteers to achieve the ongoing maintenance schedules. I am pleased to announce that a staggering 84% of all of the rights of way in my area are now annually cleared by volunteers showing the commitment to this change in a very short space of time. I cannot thank enough the people who have risen to this challenge but especially to my Voluntary Wardens for this area, Jan and Neil Gilmour.

DCC have also kept our rights of way budget the same and as a result we will be continuing to employ a contractor to tackle the annual summer cuts on some of the narrowest paths where it is appropriate to use small scale machinery, such as parts of the King Way. I also have several rights of way improvement projects planned including three in Okehampton Hamlets but I am bidding against the other rangers for a reduced pot of money, so not sure if all will go ahead this year.

Meldon Woods continues to be a thriving area for wildlife and we have ongoing surveys for both Dormice and Pied Flycatchers. Not only has the Parish Council contributed to the provision of the boxes used for these purposes but also a local man, Roger Jewell, has voluntarily provided several boxes including a beautifully made owl box which was erected at the end of last year. He has also been very helpful with the surveys and keeping a watchful eye out in the woods.

I also used the Woods for one of our Ranger Ralph Club activities which was very successful and I am hoping, with the kind permission of the Parish Council, to do a similar activity in September this year.

Dil Lord – WDBC Locality Team

Dil introduced herself as part of the Locality team from WDBC, this team was created as part of their transformation project. The team is led by Nadine Trout with a team of 6 covering the whole of West Devon. The team is the link between the community, councillors and the council. Dil attends many local events and is the point of contact to resolve issues.

James McInnes – DCC & WDBC Councillor

BUDGET

Devon County Councils budget for the year 2016/17 is £443 million. The budget includes a £16.1 million boost for under pressure Care Services. The budget is based on a 3.99% increase. This includes a 2% increase that will go to Adult Social Care. Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 Devon's spending has reduced by £174 million.

The Government announced very late in the budget round some additional funding of £8.4 million. This is not money in the base budget and has been allocated as a one off payment:

Adult Services £5 million

Severe weather reserve £1.5 million which will include £1 million towards Highway drainage and safety defects.

Public Health £1 million

The Citizens Advice Bureau £40,000, which will now be in the base budget

We have been given the projected funding figures for the next four years. Which is further reductions, but at least we know what's coming. The way Local Government

Annual Assembly Minutes 2016:4

is funded is changing. By 2020 Local Government funding will come from Business Rates. Details are not yet available how this is going to work for Devon.

HIGHWAYS.

This has been a very wet winter and as a result we are seeing a large number of potholes. This is causing concern and I urge you to register/ report the pothole as soon as possible. Recently the government has announced addition funding of nearly £2 million to help with the over 30.000 potholes we have in Devon. Steve Dawe is my main contact. North Tawton has some potential flooding issues and I congratulate the Town Council on funding additional drain cleaning. We have met with the Environment Agency a couple of times over the last year to see how they can help.

CHILDREN SCHOOLS & SKILLS

I continue to be busy in my role as Cabinet Member for Children Schools & Skills. Last year we had an Ofsted inspection of our Childrens Services. I'm pleased to report that we have made progress and have moved from being inadequate to requires improvement moving to good. We are now working to move to Good. This is going to be a challenge, as the bar is being raised all the time.

The Schools dedicated Grant is similar to last year, this goes straight to schools. The government is currently consulting on Fair Funding for schools, which I support. Currently schools in Devon are about £270 a child below the national average and we continue to campaign for fairer funding. The devil will be in the detail and I encourage schools and parents to make representation through the consultation.

In the Chancellors Budget in March 2016 the government announced that all schools will become Academies by 2022 with a plan in place by 2020. I support schools that want to become an Academy, but I'm against this central dick tat, that all schools should be acadimized. This has big implication for a large County like Devon and its small rural schools.

Currently 88% of children in Devon attend a Good or Outstanding school. Well above the National average. We are also above the National average at all key stages of a child's education.

DNPA

As a Member of Dartmoor National Park Authority, appointed by Devon County Council I'm very pleased with the government's announcement that funding will remain flat and not be further reduced. The publication of the new purposes is also encouraging and shows a long term commitment to National Parks.

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. This year 2016/17, I will also have access to some capital funding. Again not a large amount, but useful. I was pleased to support the Okehampton Battle of the Bands.

Angela Welch – DCC Locality Lead for Okehampton

Angela is the DCC Locality Lead for Okehampton, it is a pilot role being trialled in 12 towns in Devon. The role is a known face to problem solve, strengthen relationships and someone to see things through the eyes of the community. She is based in Okehampton 1 day per week and moves around office locations. She feels Okehampton has many assets and much to be proud of, it has good people doing many things, strong volunteers. She feels Okehampton does face challenges and may not promote itself enough. The role is going well.

Community Renewable Energy – Kirsty Tooke

Kirsty explained the joint project between The Hamlets and Town Council received funding last year to undertake a feasibility study. It was found there were feasible sites for hydro and solar PV, 6 solar sites are now being progressed with a further 7 to follow. 7 sites for hydro were identified. Completion of the study with the results it has found now leads into the creation of CORES to progress things further.

Community of Okehampton Renewable Energy Society (CORES) – Bob Rush

Okehampton produced its own electricity 130 years ago and it now looks like it can start to do so again. A draft prospectus for the Society has been issued, it already has pledges of £30k. A business plan will be produced shortly. The aim is to generate electricity locally, sell it a discount to local community organisations and business and put the profit made to good community use in the Okehampton area. Investors in CORES may receive 3-4% interest each year and the satisfaction they are helping their community. For more information contact Beryl Holley berylholley@rush.gb.net

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

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed at 9.00 pm. All were invited to remain for refreshments.

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