



Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

Minutes, number 306 of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 5th November 2024, at 7.30 pm at Meldon village hall, Meldon, Okehampton

Councillors Present -

M Littlejohns – Vice Chair

M Cooper - Chair

P Heard

J Heard

B Wood

A Ewen

Cllr George Dexter

1 x member of the public

Also present –Mrs E Young Parish Clerk

Cllr Cooper opened the meeting at 7.30pm.

1. Members of the Public – One person came to talk about item 16.8 from Okehampton Voices. She explained the group was created just after the first lockdown. They are a relatively small choir looking to be heard more and to increase their members of which they currently have about 30. They feel by using an amp/speakers they will be heard more at local events.

2. Declarations of Interest – Cllrs Ewen and Wood declared they are members of RBL.

3. Apologies – Received and accepted from Cllr J Goffey and Cllr S Norris.

4. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting held on 1st October 2024. **The minutes were approved as being an accurate record and were signed by the Cllr Cooper. This was proposed by Cllr P Heard, seconded by Cllr Ewen, agreed by all.**

5. Planning – to consider and agree response to applications listed below together with any others received up to date of this meeting:

5.1.1 Reference:

3017/24/PDM

Proposal: Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed change of use of agricultural building to 1No dwelling (Class C3) & for associated development (Class Q (a+c)) - *for information purposes only.*

Noted.

5.2 Planning decisions – None

6. DCC and WDBC –

Cllr George Dexters October report

Devon Housing Commission Report

I attended the WDBC member briefing on the Devon Housing Commission Report. This report brought together a great deal of data which explains what I believe is well known anyway. A few of the key points are summarised below.

- About 30% of West Devon do not meet the decent housing standard. This means that authority ranks as the third worst in the country (out of 297 authorities).
- We have an increasingly aging population, with an average age of about 51, which is the highest in Devon.
- Our population is growing due to internal migration from other parts of the country.
- People leave the area when they are young and people come here when they are in late middle age.
- The percentage of affordable homes in Devon is about half that in the rest of England.
- There are more homes being built, but the proportion of affordable homes is falling.

It is clear that housing is a key issue for all authorities in Devon.

Planning Appeal by Leander Developments Rejected

Leander Development submitted an outline application for 60 1 to 4 bedroom houses and associated infrastructure for the land off Radford Way behind Baldwin Drive. Councillors will be aware that this has a long planning history.

Their appeal was rejected so the ball is now back in Leander's court to resubmit an application which takes into account the points made in the Appeal judgement. This judgement clearly says that the link the Kellands Lane is important and the value of the 'ransom strip' owned by Leander must be included in any S106 agreement with WDBC.

WDBC stated that it would have refused the application for three reasons. The first and second reasons relate to the absence of a legal obligation to secure appropriate affordable housing and community infrastructure. The third reason relates to the absence of clarity that a necessary pedestrian and highway link could be provided by the development through Kellands Lane. These formed the main issues in the appeal. An extract from the appeal judgement is shown below.

- “37. The link through Kellands Lane is required for pedestrians and cyclists as part of the appeal scheme, not for vehicular traffic. However, it is proposed to ensure that the link is provided to allow free passage of vehicles as it is an important piece of road network to promote connectivity and minimise journey length and congestion in the surrounding area.
38. The earlier evidence of the appellant talked about offering the link through Kellands Lane as part of the development for no consideration and it was not highlighted as an abnormal cost to the scheme within the EVA (despite the allocation for abnormal costs of around £700,000). More recent communication suggests that the cost of this connection and works to lay it out for vehicles and pedestrians at over £100,000 should be reflected in the overall package of contributions.
39. I consider that the Kellands Lane link upgrade specifically to facilitate vehicular usage instead of only for pedestrian and cycle movements would go beyond that strictly necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms but would nonetheless be a worthwhile benefit that should be secured by the development. The value attributed to this land as a 'ransom strip' have not been agreed, and the costs of the works to get it to an adoptable standard have not been provided in full. However, I accept that it is reasonable to attach a cost to this piece of infrastructure that could be delivered by the scheme, even if that would further undermine the ability to secure other aforementioned mitigation and planning benefits.”

Link Road and Crediton Road issues

I am continuing to press for the resolution of the issues of the opening of the link road and safe pedestrian access to the school along Crediton Road. While it remains frustrating not to be able to give any details, I think progress is being made with both the funding of the footpath along Crediton Road and the opening of the link road before the new station opens in 2026.

Citizens Advice

Vicki Rowe the CEO of our local Citizens Advice provided an update on the CA's activities and challenges. In Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon they helped 15,222 people with 49,907 problems generating £12,023,460 additional household income. She said that she was extremely proud of this achievement which reflected the hard work and dedication of all their staff and volunteers. They have reintroduced face to face services because not everyone is able to access their services online. (They are committed to redesigning their website so that people who are comfortable with technology can access self-help advice directly as well as booking an appointment online.)

Vicki did however emphasise that the organisation was short of both paid and volunteer staff. This resulted in long waiting times for people to attend a face-to-face session. In addition, they have simply not been able to help to resolve a significant proportion of clients due to the intractableness of their problems.

Pension Credit

Following the Government's plan to stop paying the winter fuel allowance to people not registered for pension credit, WDBC has stepped up its efforts to publicise and encourage the uptake of pension credits. As part of this effort there will be a pension credit awareness event in Okehampton Library on 19 November from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Cllr Tony Leechs October report

Parcel 3 Link Road, footpaths etc:

A further meeting was held with the Ward Members, WD planners, DCC Highways and others to discuss the Link Road, Kellands Lane, and footpath provisions last week. There has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes which remain confidential, but there has been a lot of progress.

As an aside, I took a photograph of the biggest pile drilling rig that I have ever seen, working on the area beside the existing link road on Parcel 3. This suggests that the peat and soft subsoil must be a lot thicker / deeper than expected.

Kellands Lane blockage:

The planning inspector has turned down the Leander Homes application to build over 60 houses on their plot of land, which now leaves a question about when and how the blockage can be resolved. The developer may well put in another application to cover the Inspectors concerns, but this does mean yet more delays in sorting out this junction, that has been going on for over eight years now.

Parcel 4a footpath / Crediton Road concerns:

I have been informed that the footpath on the Parcel 4b side has now been completed, so although the route is long, it should be a safer way to access the town, but it still means that people must cross the very busy Crediton Road that does not have any street lighting or any official pedestrian crossings.

A local Town Councilor took the time to walk the proposed route to the school from Parce 4a, and has said that it is not a suitable route for those attending St James, let alone trying to get to the town center. Unfortunately, it is exactly what we have been saying since before planning permission was given, but it is very difficult to find any alternative routes now.

Exeter Road Persimmons site:

I can only assume that Highways and the Developer have agreed that access from this site is adequate, now that the 30MPH limit has been moved further out of town.

Forthglade odors:

I have not had any further complaints about this issue.

Persimmons Crediton Road site:

As ever, I have not had any new information as to the progress or otherwise of the additional piece of play equipment. I have however been given a contact for the developer, who has agreed to try to chase this up.

St James Primary School playing field:

The playing field areas have now been lowered and grass is now growing. However, I have had a report from one of the residents at the bottom of the main playing pitch, that in recent storms, their garden was flooded out due to the runoff water from the pitch. It has never happened before, so the drainage arrangements need to be looked at.

Links meetings:

The second old Okehampton Matters meeting, which includes the Links meeting, was held in Okehampton last month, but I was unable to attend, but from the feedback that I received, nothing had been discussed that would have been part of the old Links meetings. WD will be looking at whether this should be separated out again.

Changes in planning (NPPF)

West Devon, along with other Devon Local Authorities, have produced robust responses to the governments suggested changes in the NPPF, and it is hoped that the government will respond positively to these by Christmas.

Household Support Funding: (HSF)

The new government has now extended this grant until spring next year. With the number of pensioners who will now not receive the heating allowance, they could well now need to apply for the HSF, so please make sure that anyone you know who needs help, contacts WDBC as soon as possible, as whatever money we do receive, will not last long.

Community Development: (CD)

West Devon 's new CD section has held meetings with members to try to find out ways to help the CD team work closer with their existing partners, and all other organisations working within our communities. Hopefully detailed plans can be developed quickly before winter really sets in, as I can envisage that there could well be a lot of people needing help to see them through it.

7. Dartmoor marshalls update - 25 recorded byelaw infringements dealt with at Meldon quarry – 8 fires, 16 camping and 1 general – **Noted. Kit Hancock from DNP to attend next month.**

8. Beating the bounds & VE day – Clerk to advise Dartmoor Search and Rescue and OTC the **Beating of Bounds** 2025 date will be 20 August. Cllr Cooper to attend the Okehampton Commoners AGM on 25 November and speak to the army camp.

VE day – 8 May 2025 to light the Blackdown hill beacon.

9. To confirm attendees at Remembrance Sunday – **Cllr Cooper, Littlejohns and P Heard to attend. Cllr Cooper and Littlejohns bought poppy wreath.**

10. Memorial bench Exeter Road – Local family wishing to replace existing rotten bench with a new metal bench. PC are happy to accept responsibility whilst it's in their parish. The family has agreed to maintain the bench. Proposed by Cllr Wood, seconded by Cllr Ewen, agreed by all.

11. OTC Christmas social – 4-6pm Wednesday 11 December – Deferred to next month

12. TOR support services annual report (previously circulated) – Noted.

13. Free Landmark tree from Devon Wildlife Trust – A rowan tree for Meldon woods upper car park.

14. To note Granite Way viaduct closure – 11 Nov – 1 December 2024 inclusive – See website for more details –Noted.

15. To receive reports from meetings and events attended by Parish Council representatives including – Cllr Cooper – attended the **Dartmoor museum of Life** open event which was very good. It was mentioned that local schools don't seem to visit. She also attended the Police cyber training, again useful but only about 12 people in attendance. The graffiti on Exeter Road footbridge (by Fatherford) is to be removed by Network Rail.

16. Finance –

16.1 Accounts for payment –

E Young wages for October	£647.83
E Young travel	£15.30
E Young expenses	£2.50
HMRC	£Nil
Meldon hall hire 5 th Nov 2024	£25.00
Ravenquest Inv RQ2442 – Meldon and OTP work	£275.00
Dartmoor National Park Authority – Marshalls	£2000.00

16.2 Credits received –

To note Interest earned	£48.56
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Resolved accounts be paid, proposed by Cllr Wood, seconded by Cllr Ewen agreed by all.

16.3 Request for spending –

16.3.1 Clerk to attend Devon SLCC AGM and Christmas lunch £29.95 + £4.00 bus

Proposed by Cllr Wood to approve, seconded by Cllr Ewen, agreed by all.

16.3.2 RBL donation £50.00

Proposed by Cllr Wood to donate £50.00, seconded by Cllr Littlejohn, agreed by all.

16.4 Finance correspondence –

To note two letters from Lloyds bank – **Noted.**

16.5 RFO report/Bank reconciliation
Balance per bank statements as at 30 October 2024

Current account (Treasurers)	£1,340.52
Deposit account (BB Inst online)	£68,734.25
	£70,074.77
Less: any unrepresented cheques	0 0.00
Add: any unbanked money	0 0
Net bank balances as at 30 October 2024	£70,074.77

The net balances reconcile to the Cash Book (receipts and payments account) for the year, as follows

Cashbook

Opening Balance	53,049.01
Add: Receipts in the Year	18,804.02
Less: Payments in the Year	1,778.26
	70,074.77
	£70,074.77
Closing balance per cash book (receipts and payments book) as at 23 September 2024 (must equal net bank balances above)	(No differences)

It was proposed by Cllr Wood to approve the bank reconciliation, seconded by Cllr P Heard, agreed by all. Cllr Littlejohns signed and dated the document.

16.6 Budget 2025-2026 – to consider initial thoughts for setting budget for coming year - All Councillors to forward their ideas to Clerk to enable a first draft budget to be circulated in advance of the Dec meeting when it will be considered prior to adoption in January. **Clerk to circulate budget excel document to all. All Cllrs to give some thought to amounts ready for next meeting.**

16.7 Clerks pay review scales and hourly rates to note revised nationally agreed pay scales and agree scales and payment of increased rates to Clerk including backdating of payments to 1st April 2024 **Proposed by Cllr Littlejohns to accept, seconded by Cllr Ewen, agreed by all.**

16.8 Grant application – Okehampton Voices (previously circulated) – **Proposed by Cllr Wood to grant £200.00 to the group. Seconded by Cllr Ewen agreed by all.**

16.9 To vire money from grant to S.137 budget – **It was proposed by Cllr Wood to ‘vire’ £900 from the grants budget to S.137. Seconded by Cllr Littlejohns, agreed by all.**

17. Environmental issues

17.1 Granulite quarry – Part 2.

17.2 Odours East of Okehampton – **to receive an update** – No recent complaints.

18. Open Spaces

18.1 To receive update from Working Group – Ongoing fencing concerns along bridlepath and by the A30. Cllr Littlejohns, P Heard and Cooper to resolve.

Men in Sheds to make 12 Flycatcher bird boxes, 12 dormouse boxes and 12 small bat boxes. **It was proposed by Cllr**

Wood to donate £180.00 towards the making of these boxes (money taken out of DCC grant). Seconded by Cllr Littlejohns, agreed by all. Clerk to ask they are made by mid December.

19. Highways

19.1 Snow warden \ salt bins – Cllrs Ewen and P Heard to fill up bins. No extra salt is needed.

20. Economic Development Projects

20.1 Okehampton BID– to receive an update No update.

20.2 Regeneration project update No update.

21. To confirm Date and venue of next meeting – Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at Meldon Village Hall – Noted.

Cllr G Dexter left the meeting.

PART TWO – Proposed by Cllr P Heard, seconded by Cllr Littlejohns, agreed by all.

Items which may be taken in the absence of the press and public. The Council is recommended to pass the following resolution:- ‘Resolved that under section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items as they involve the likely disclosure of sensitive and confidential information.’

22. To note current WDBC Enforcement case list and information – noted.

23. Lease of easements – Working group to understand next steps.

24. Potential Pathway Link in Parcel 2 – noted.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Signed Date

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