

SOUTH TAWTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held in the Victory Hall, South Zeal on Monday 18th May 2009 at 7.30 pm.

DRAFT Minutes of the South Tawton Annual Parish Meeting, held at the Victory Hall, South Zeal on Monday 18th May 2009 at 7.30 pm

Present

Councillor A White (Chairman), Councillors Souness, Cann (Borough Councillor), Curtis, C White, C. Coombs, J. White, and Darch, Councillor J McInnes (County Councillor), Mr N Payne, (Corporate Director, WDBC), Mr I Brooker (Senior Ranger DNPA), Mr K Bishop (DNPA Chief Executive Officer), Mr D Webber (DNPA Ward Member), Mrs H Poustie (Head Teacher, South Tawton Primary School, 5 parishioners and P.N. Brotherton (Clerk).

Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Pillar and Mr B Jeffery.

Minutes

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting on Monday 14th April 2008 were read by the Clerk. It was proposed by Councillor Darch, seconded by Councillor C White and agreed by all those present that they were a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Accounts

The Clerk circulated the audited and adopted accounts for the year ending 31st March 2009 and explained various points concerning them. Colonel Clark proposed and Councillor Coombs seconded that the accounts be adopted. All those present agreed. Rev^d. J Smart asked about the Dog Warden Scheme and the clerk explained the details of this partnership.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman said that the past 12 months had been a period of progress once again for the parish and several notable events and issues had been completed. The council had been very fortunate to have had an enthusiastic team of volunteers lead by Tony Clark who had completed our Parish Plan. An excellent 83% response rate to the questionnaire reflected the interest that people have in their surroundings. Councillor White mentioned in particular the contributions made by Tony Clark, Alan Wright, Hugh Norman, Peter Brotherton, Judith Beacom, councillors Julian Pillar, Jane White and of course the Beacon Distribution team and the editor. Now we have, he reflected, this excellent source of information and an action plan to help guide the issues raised. The council were committed to take this forward. However, he suggested, they would be unable to do so without the enthusiastic support of parishioners.

Turning to flooding issues, he said that progress had been made with the flooding problems that continued to threaten the houses at the foot of South Zeal. Funding had been secured from WDBC for survey work on the recreation Ground with a view to constructing a temporary 'off-line' flood water storage area. He thanked Councillor Cann and Jackie Smith (WDBC project officer) who had both been instrumental in gaining the necessary funding for this phase of the project.

The chairman mentioned Ramsley Common, an important feature of parishes history, which had had a bit of a trim-up over the last few months to improve access. This work was being led by Councillor Woolland who, in consultation with the owner and DNPA, planned to keep the common under control whilst maintaining its character and its important function as a wildlife haven.

Referring to the recent uncertainty surrounding the 179 bus service, he underlined the fact that it was a lifeline to allow parishioners to access important facilities in Okehampton. The council had managed to steer a course through all the rumour that had surrounded the issue and he looked forward to the new service. However, he reminded everyone that parking on the route was still an important issue.

Turning to finance, the chairman underlined that the precept for 2009/10 had been held at the previous year's level whilst still budgeting to maintain the services and support for local organisations.

Planning, he went on to say, was always a hot topic in parish life. Again, as mentioned in last year's report, we did not always agree with the decision-makers, but tried hard to put across the reasoning for reaching a recommendation. There was, he said, nothing like LOCAL knowledge and perception of a situation.

The chairman said that last August had seen the parish celebrate the Beating of our Dartmoor Boundary in the traditional fashion and said that this important tradition of marking the boundary stones must continue by bringing along the youngsters of the parish to show them where and why we did it. The celebrations at Taw Mash always went down well and he thanked Bill Murray for organising these. The chairman reminded everyone that an event of this type took a lot of organising and he wished to thank everyone involved for helping organise transport, the loan of equipment and the help on the day. On this point he reflected that it had been sad news to hear of the passing of Trevor Wonnacott who had cooked the roast there and elsewhere for so many years. Particular mention in his Report, he said, must go to Councillor Bryan Woolland who had helped in so many ways, to Tim Sanderson who had also given much of his time and expertise and to Kevin, the guide, who had done a sterling job.

On this positive note he closed with thanks to all fellow councillors for their support, guidance and assistance over the past 12 months. He also thanked the clerk for his knowledge, guidance and never-ending minute taking, and to everyone who had assisted our community to continue to make South Tawton Parish a place we all enjoyed living, working and playing within.

When invited to comment or question, Tony Clark emphasised how supportive he considered the Parish Council had been, espousing the identified Parish Plan issues and both he and Rev^d. Smart thanked the council and chairman for their proactive support for the community at large.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor J McInnes and invited him to present the County Councillor's report.

County Councillor's Report.

Councillor McInnes opened his address by listing the main elements of the County Council £800 million budget for the coming year, of which £359 million was ring-fenced for education. He went on to describe how DCC Highways were organized and asked to be kept informed about the state of the rural roads. There had been a number of problems with changes of contractors for the local bus service he said but that fortunately solutions had been found.

Listing the committees on which he sat, he outlined issues concerning the provision of services for upper gastro-intestinal cancer being centralized in Derriford Plymouth and concerns about county care homes and patient transport. Planning concerns had encompassed new schools, recycling facilities and wind farms. He reminded the meeting that he had a small budget for community projects and said that he had been pleased this year to help projects in the parish including the refurbishment of South Zeal Play Area, The Parish Plan, and the Dartmoor Folk Festival.

Councillor McInnes concluded by reflecting on the Local Government Structural Review in Devon. Local government review in Devon he said had seen many twists and turns in the last year. His own view was that this was an unnecessary distraction, unasked for by the residents of Devon. We had a deep recession, he said, which was what our minds and resources should be focused upon. Reorganization of local government in Devon would be a damaging distraction at such a crucial time.

The chairman asked that thanks for support and hard work on the behalf of the parish be passed to DCC Highways, and in particular to Mr M Stoddart (Highways Superintendent) and councillor McInnes said that he would be pleased to do so.

The Chairman thanked Councillor J McInnes and invited Borough Councillor Cann to present his report.

Borough Councillor's Report.

Councillor Cann began his address by thanking the Chairman, the recent Vice chairman, councillor Souness and the Clerk for all their hard work.

He then mentioned the 3% rise in the council tax which was the lowest rise in six years, yet the Borough Council had still been able to find savings of more than £0.5m without affecting frontline services, achieving this and yet having the smallest staff of any council in this tier.

Listing other developments and initiatives, he mentioned that the council intended to build another 175 houses next year, that out-reach services had got to many more places and that, thanks to Jackie Smith (Project Manager) the flood prevention measures in the village were progressing. He further drew attention to the need for more local, affordable housing, mentioned WDBC's Pre-Submission Core Strategy document and the 'Toolkit', designed to help public authorities, professionals and local communities reach a balanced view about the current and future sustainability of rural communities. Councillor Cann concluded his remarks by questioning whether staffing reductions were anticipated in DNP involving both the Ranger and Enforcement services.

Invited by the chairman to question or comment on council Cann's report, councillor McInnes asked that a copy of the Parish Plan (2008) be sent to WDBC so that help in the realisation of the contained issues could be supported. He was assured that this had been done. The Chairman thanked Councillor Cann and invited Mrs H Poustie (Head Teacher) to present the school report.

School Report

Mrs Poustie introduced her report by outlining the organization of the school, stating that there were seven classes with over 20 staff who appreciated being part of a vibrant local community. The children, who had designed their own questionnaire as part of the Parish Appraisal, clearly showed that they valued their "friendly neighbours".

Although some would consider this to be a small school, a "larger school" experience is offered, including a range of opportunities through a wide variety of after school clubs, trips and residential. She also mentioned pupil participation in art, the school orchestra, choir, a drama performance for older local residents and the productions of Alice and Joseph. Mr Poustie said that she was most grateful for all the time, often outside their proscribed hours, that staff gave to organize and run such ventures. She went on to list visits to London, France and Hooke Court

Thanking Helen and Tony Clark for once more supporting the Cross Country Competition, she said how delighted she was that the Weaver Cup for this event had returned to South Tawton. The netball A and B team had won their league and the football A team had done well.

She thanked the governing body for all their support and challenge and reminded everyone that governorship was a voluntary role.

Described the recent history of the bid to improve the school's facilities, she thanked the Local Authority, Cllr James McInnes and MP Geoffrey Cox, who had been appalled by state of the buildings, for their support and help. We were continuing with plans to develop the outside areas as a learning resource. She emphasized how well the local schools worked together, citing violin tuition, singing workshops and fund raising for solar panels as examples.

Mrs Poustie said that the school welcomed volunteers and had regular support from parents to help run the library and garden and to work with staff on school trips.

'FOSTPS' had been re-branded as the PTA. Reminding people of events such as the Silent Auction and Carols around the Christmas Tree, she said that they had worked tirelessly for many years and now had a sizeable team which raised lots of money to provide exciting events for the children.

Mr Poustie concluded her remarks by inviting anyone had not visited the school for a while and would like a tour of their local primary, to please feel free to drop in so we can arrange a suitable time.

When invited to comment or question, Tony Clark emphasised what an important part of the community he considered the school to be. Several comments were made concerning the timing and siting of the proposed second Okehampton primary school

The Chairman thanked Mrs Poustie and invited Mr Bishop (CEO, Dartmoor National Park) to give his address.

The Dartmoor National Park

Mr Bishop introduced his address by describing that the purposes and duty of the Dartmoor National Park was to conserve and enhance the beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park. There was also a duty to foster the economic well being of communities, which lead him to describe the current financial base of the Authority and its income stream.

Mr Bishop emphasized that whilst exercising their core duty of guardianship and protection, the National Park worked in partnership with the Ministry of Defence, farmers and individuals to achieve a balanced approach to the management of the area for the benefit of all those who live, visit it or work within it. He said that whilst planning issues dominated his post-bag he would like to dispel the apparent public perception that the Park was 'set in aspic'. On this theme he described the work that was being undertaken on a Design Guide, the information services for teachers and pupils, the work with community development and the sustainable development fund.

Mr Bishop concluded his address by describing the "Three Ps", Pounds, Politics and People, that were seen as challenges. He had already described the financial constraints. He explained that he thought that politics, with a small 'p', represented the possible changes in local government structure that would, apart from forcing change in the recruitment and structure of the Park's Governing Body, have no effects on its boundaries nor on its duties and responsibilities. The Chairman thanked Mr Bishop and invited questions and observations on his address.

Councillor J White had concerns over planning. She thought that the Authority's approach was inconsistent, and that parish council's views were not listened to. In response, Mr Bishop said that he thought the planning department was now 'more stable'. He agreed that there must be a consistent approach to planning applications and the decisions made on them and referred to the development of the Local Development Framework that underpinned this. He mentioned that Parish Councils were 'Statutory Consultees' and that their views were important. He reflected on the possibility that Parish Councils might be able in future to speak at Development Management Committee meetings and concluded that he hoped all such matters would be seen to improve.

Colonel Clark observed that liaison was the key and, welcoming the fact that Mr D. Webber (DNPA Ward Member) was at the meeting. He suggested that Mr Webber's role was not well known and that more use should be made of his expertise and knowledge. He went on to say that the role of the Rangers was essential and that their support and help could be broadened to liaise with parishes more often. Mr Bishop agreed, saying that he would welcome the Ward Members as ambassadors for the Park. He thought that the Ranger's function as front line 'eyes and ears' was essential and that the only constraints on increasing their role were financial considerations. Pressed to describe possible staffing reductions by Councillor Cann, Mr Bishop regretted that both the Rangers and Enforcement Officers might be reduced by one.

Councillor Cann hoped that the word "Authority" might be deleted from the title DNPA as many people had told him they thought it sounded rather unfriendly.

In response to a comment by Rev^d. Smart about the increasing invasion of bracken on the moor Mr Bishop said that he was sympathetic to this. He thought that there had been a swing from over to under-grazing practice in recent years but that recent progress in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy suggested that a new scheme might be piloted in which farmers would have a major role in both design and implementation. Colonel Clark stated that Commoners had the resources to deal with the matter chemically but that legislation forbid such use near water courses, which had made such application impossible.

Mr Payne (WDBC) emphasized the importance of the Parish Link Committees and suggested that DNPA should make more use of them to promote liaison.

There being no other questions or comments, the chairman, councillor A White, thanked the speakers and all who had attended the meeting and closed the meeting at 9.30 pm.