

DRAFT

OFFWELL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OFFWELL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 17th MAY 2023 at 8.00P.M. IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllrs. J Tristram (Chair), C. Whithear (Vice Chair), A. Welch-Thornton
P. Hopkins, T. Norris & D Blackmore

In Attendance: A Jenkins (Clerk)

Members of Public: 0

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Parish Meeting and outlined / reminded everyone of the Covid-19 measures which had been adopted.

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllrs. Norfolk & Evans DCC Cllr. Hartnell, EDDC Cllr. Parr

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2022

The minutes were read out by the Chair and Cllr. Whithear proposed they were a true record of the proceedings, seconded by Cllr. Hopkins, all in favour.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chair said that Clive Whithear was re-elected as chairman last May.

He reported that the following had occurred since last May:-

The notice board purchased for Cleave Lane was not used as planning permission would not be granted. The council is pursuing options as to where it might be used. Also in Cleave Lane the Royal Mail postbox was stolen. Our clerk reported this and it has now been replaced. The Platinum Jubilee party last year was a great success. It was attended by 120 villagers and £200 was raised for the Honiton Admiral Nurse charity.

The recent King's Coronation party was also a great success. I would like to record our thanks to the villagers who worked so hard to make both these events occasions to be remembered. Your council was pleased to provide some funding. All the children attending the Coronation party received an excellent souvenir of the occasion.

The best kept village signs were repaired.

Sadly Clive had to resign the Chair due to ill health, but he continues as a councillor. As Vice-Chair I succeeded him. I would like to record our thanks for the hands-on help he has given on various repair and improvement projects, and to the dedication and efficiency with which he has chaired the council.

Since I took the Chair there have been 3 issues which have occasioned most concern in the village. The first was the policy regarding access put in place by the new owners of a parcel of land in Offwell woods. After a well-attended extraordinary council meeting a mutually acceptable and amicable policy has now been agreed.

The second contentious issue is not fully resolved. The application for a livestock transit facility at a site off Tower Rd was objected to by this Council but received planning permission from EDDC. However the enforcement officers have called a halt to work as some of the restrictions imposed by the planning decisions have not been complied with. Some additional technical issues have also been highlighted.

The third matter is a new application for the development of a youth football sports complex, also off Tower Rd, which the Parish Council has earlier this evening resolved to object to.

The Parish Council continue to monitor the state of the roads, both the lanes within the parish and the A35. We are talking with DCC and National Highways concerning speed limits and safety issues and will publish the results of discussions in due course.

The Council has provided grants this year as follows TRIP £150. Coronation Tea Party £250. It proved unnecessary to hold an election for members of the new Council which now commences its term of office, as 8 nominations were received for the 9 positions. I wish to thank those villagers prepared to put their names forward to undertake an unpaid role which fulfils the base level of our democratic governance. We will be looking to co-opt an additional member in the immediate future. I also wish to place on record our appreciation of the contribution made by those members of the outgoing council who have decided to retire from their roles. I must also thank our clerk, who performs a function which is increasingly demanding in both time and expertise as national governance directives continue to impact the requirements for parish council operation.

Your council will continue to look after the interests of the village, listening to the concerns of residents, and try to maintain the standards of care for the appearance and functioning of our area while ensuring best value for the money we receive through the parish precept.

5. Finance

The Clerk reported that when considering the precept and budget for 2023/24, the Council had decided to take £1,092 from reserves, resulting in a precept figure of £6,956 for 2023/24. This was an increase of £500 on the previous year's precept of £6,456..

The Chair thanked the Clerk for his hard work and diligence as the Council's RFO.

6. Reports:

a) Police:

The Clerk advised that the Police have not sent an annual report as they used to in previous years and also no longer send a monthly report advising of recorded incidents and crimes in the parish. They now send out sporadic newsletters but these do not advise about any recorded crime figures. Instead they refer one to the Police.UK website but this only shows crimes for the whole of the Honiton Rural Police area which includes many other parishes and quite often there are no crimes shown whatsoever. No crimes have been shown since October 2022.

It would appear that the Police no longer deem it necessary to give Parish Councils reports on the crime levels in their parish areas. We have complained about this as have many other Parish Councils but to no avail. We will however continue to press for more communication from the Police and for the recorded crime information.

b) County Councillor:

The Clerk reported that DCC Cllr. Hartnell had sent his apologies for not being able to attend the meeting and had sent the following detailed written Annual Report.

Annual Report by Cllr Marcus Hartnell

It is hard to believe that another year has passed and I'm reporting on what I have been doing as your County Councillor.

I spend a great deal of time every month focusing on highways matters, out on the ground across the division inspecting roads and reporting safety defects, empty grit bins, drainage problems and assessing which roads should be patched, surface dressed or fully resurfaced. I regularly meet with the Neighbourhood Highway Officer and accompany him on highway inspections. It is a huge part of the role, and whilst it is frustrating that there simply is not enough money to do everything, I do believe that by working in partnership with the highways team, together we do everything we can to keep our roads safe. Along with other local Conservative Councillors I continue to lobby local MP's to push for more highways funding from government.

Committee work is an important part of being your County Councillor, and I sit on three main committees. Over the past year I have been involved with interesting and varied topics, some of which I have highlighted below:

- Audit Committee
 - o Oversight of Internal and External audits.
 - o Counter fraud initiative especially around Council tax.
 - o Risk management.
 - o Audit of annual accounts.
 - Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Committee
 - o Moving Traffic Offences.
 - o Climate Change.
 - o Customer Service Centre visit.
 - o Rural broadband.
 - o Budget oversight.
 - o Highways dashboard and performance monitoring.
 - o Local bus services.
 - o Implementation of new financial system for the council.
 - o Motorhome parking policy on the highway.
 - o Libraries Unlimited.
 - Investment & Pension Fund Committee
 - o Oversight and responsible for £5bn Devon Pension Fund.
 - o Attend regular training days.
 - o Part of the Brunel Pension Partnership, pooled investments with ten other funds.
 - o Taking policy decisions to reach net zero by 2050.
 - o Five percent fund Investment in renewable energy infrastructure by 2025.
 - o Opportunity to invest in a local impact fund aligned with the levelling up agenda.
- I was elected in 2021 having identified four key priorities for Seaton & Colyton. They are listed below with updates and plans for the coming year.

- Safer Roads

- o Attended a meeting with Colyton Grammar School to discuss the school coach arrangements on the A3052 at Colyford. Discussions are continuing regarding some new plans from the School.
- o I've supported proposals to introduce 20mph zones on various roads in the division, but they have been unsuccessful. I will continue to argue the case and ask that more money is allocated to provide them for communities where they are requested.
- o At the recent East Devon HATOC meeting I proposed a reduction in the speed limit between Colyford & Colyton on the B3161 (Coly Road), which is now going to Cabinet for consideration. This is because it goes against council policy, however despite this it was supported by the HATOC committee unanimously.
- o I've requested that the yellow zig-zag lines outside Seaton Primary School on both Valley View and Scalwell Lane are formalised with a Traffic Regulation Order and repainted so that the Police can provide enforcement. For some reason these were never formalised and are only advisory, meaning anyone who parks there at present cannot be issued with points on their licence or a fine.
- o Highlighted road safety concerns on the proposed new development at Harepath Road.
- o Asked for improvements to the road layout on Seaton Road where the multi-use trail exits onto the main road.

- Action on Fraud & Scams

- o I attended a joint Crime & Safety roadshow held in Seaton on 1 April, where both the Police and Trading Standards were on hand to give advice and assist residents.
- o I will continue to work with Trading Standards to offer specific sessions around online safety and to raise awareness.

A very busy year, I'm sure you will agree, and there is still lots to do. I'm looking forward to attending the first meeting of the newly formed Colyford Parish Council following elections on 4 May, and also the opening of the missing link of the multi-use path between Seaton & Colyford which is scheduled to be completed in the Summer.

Thanks for all your support. I look forward to working with you all over the coming year.

District Councillors:

The Clerk reported that EDCC Cllr. Parr had sent her apologies for not being able to attend the meeting and had submitted the following detailed written annual report.

1. The Administration- throughout the year, East Devon District Council has been run by the Democratic Alliance, Independents, Liberal Democrats, Labour and Green Councillors, with the largest group, the Conservatives in opposition.
2. EDDC meetings- until late in 2022 meetings have been held on Zoom, consultative only, officers making decisions. The Full Council meetings continued to be held in person at the Ocean in Exmouth until March 23 when an Extraordinary Council meeting was arranged to take place at Blackdown House [subsequently cancelled, see below item 8].
3. The Council offices in Exmouth and at Blackdown House have not been open to the public except by appointment. The offices finally opened to the public in Spring 23 for limited hours and an appointment is advised.

4. Ukranian Refugees EDDC has been working with East Devon Citizens Advice and Devon County Council to assist with housing Ukranian refugees eg. checking properties and administering subsistence payments.

5. Queens Platinum Jubilee- every parish was offered an oak tree to plant to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee.

6. Scrutiny Committee I have been a member of this committee which acts as the Critical Friend of the Council. During the year Scrutiny has looked at a wide range of council work including:-

-Car Park Charges Scrutiny looked into the decision to increase charges, to double prices in the prime coastal car parks

-Report of The East of England Local Government Association Learning Review This report, costing at least £18,000, was commissioned by the Council to look into serious mismanagement of an Employment matter.

The findings were Confidential, but were leaked to Radio Exe. The Scrutiny Cttee received an update on the Learning Review, and also a report and list of remedial actions which the East of England Local Government Association advised EDDC it should take, to guard against further mismanagement of Employment matters by the Council in the future.

-People Data Scrutiny expressed serious concern re the long term absence figures relating to stress, The welfare of employees is a prime concern.

-Water Management A September Scrutiny meeting considered an item on Water Management, including Beach and River Water Quality. This was the first in a series of meetings on this topic which is of huge concern to the public. South West Water executives gave virtual briefings to Scrutiny and answered questions.

-New Local Plan Scrutiny considered progress on the Council's new Local Plan which proposed strategic sites for housing across the district and a second new town for East Devon. They also looked at how the Consultation on the Draft Local Plan had been carried out, and reported problems with the process.

-Quarterly Performance Data 4 areas were of particular concern- the figures for stress related sickness absence; the number of Household in Temporary Accommodation; the no. of days taken to process Housing Benefit Claims and changes to those claims [largely down to staff being re assigned to do work related to the Ukraine crisis] and delays in processing stage 2 Complaints [mainly housing related].

-The Budget The draft Budget was considered by Scrutiny at 2 all day meetings. The Council must produce a balanced Budget: a £434,000 predicted deficit was to be met by

taking money from the Reserves. Thanks to the Government awarding a better than anticipated Local Government Settlement, the amount that had to be taken from Reserves was £85,000. The Council cannot continue to use Reserves to balance the Budget, it is unsustainable.

7. Full Council meeting February 23 The Ocean in Exmouth

Budget- The Council met to approve the Budget. The Conservative Group did not support the Budget on 2 grounds- closing public toilets, and doubling car park charges.

Motion re Transgender Visibility- It was proposed the Council review its policies to ensure they were inclusive of Transgender residents' rights. Also that the transgender flag be raised outside the council offices on International Transgender Day of Visibility and International Transgender Day of Remembrance.

It was further proposed the Council agree in principle to sign up to the Stonewall's Diversity Champions Program for Employers, with delegated authority to the Council's HR Manager to bring a report to the Personnel committee on the implications of this.

I could not support the in principle signing up to a Stonewalls program. It has very recently been announced that Police Scotland has left this Stonewalls program, following on from the BBC, The House of Lords, the House of Commons, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and Ofcom, all of whom have previously left. There are serious concerns about the conflicting rights of Transgender people and Women, problems of women only spaces, women's sports etc. still to be resolved.

8. Extraordinary Meetings of the Council-

Since May 2022 there have been 3 Extraordinary Full Council meetings [and many Extraordinary Cabinet meetings].

Extraordinary meeting Sept 22- to receive the report of the Chief Executive re the former Councillor and Alderman John Humphries.

This person was investigated by the police, charged with very serious offences of sexual abuse, convicted and sent to prison. His Alderman status was removed by the Council at a Full Council meeting shortly afterwards.

Despite this, on a narrow majority the Council voted a Budget of £45,000 to fund an Investigation into the Council's handling of the matter. There would be no powers to compel witnesses and the Council was advised that it was unlikely any new information would be forthcoming.

Against the advice of the Chief Executive, Verita was chosen by the Council to carry out this work.

An Extraordinary Council Meeting was arranged March 23 to receive the Verita Report, and recommendations. This meeting was postponed at about 24 hrs notice. There is no information as yet about a new date for this meeting, when the report can be debated. The cost of this investigation continues to rise.

9. Colyford Governance Review

Over the year, a Governance Review was carried out by the District Council, at the request of the Colyford Village Residents Association. The District Council voted to establish a Colyford Parish Council. Following the May local elections. the first Annual meeting of the new council will take place 15 May 23.

EDDC also voted to Vest / transfer ownership of 3 fields owned by Colyton Parish Council to Colyford, value c.£140,000, as well as the annual rental income arising from the leasing of these fields, £3500. Also to be Vested in Colyford, their village gateways and Colyford Playground, which is on land leased for the play park.

Colyton Parish Council has challenged this decision and a Judicial Review will take place.

10. Dolphin Street Public Toilets- These are proposed for closure and disposal unless agreement is reached between Colyton Parish Council and EDDC. The toilets are a vital service for residents and tourists and should be kept open. It is to be hoped that by working together a solution can be found.

c) Any Other Reports

None

7. Open Session

The Clerk said that he had not received any pre-submitted questions.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Signed.....

Date.