

HOLCOMBE ROGUS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting

Held in the King George V Memorial Hall on Thursday 27th April 2023

At 7.00pm

DRAFT

1.1 Present:

Chairman Adam Pilgrim

Parish Councillors: John Butler, Rupert Snook, Jane Lock, Nikki Orchard and Sally Barker

District Councillor Jo Norton

Clerk Leslie Findlay

Two members of the public

2.1 Apologies:

County Councillor Ray Radford

3.1 Minutes of the previous Meeting

The Minutes from the 2022 Annual Parish Meeting were approved and signed by the Chairman.

There were no outstanding matters arising from the previous minutes

a. 20 is plenty sign – this matter has not been discussed further since last year.

b. Playpark – now complete and renamed the Mary Fewings Playpark

c. Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations- a very successful day

d. Prince of Wales Pub – the residents were unable to raise sufficient funding to purchase the pub so it is currently on the open market.

4.1 Reports from the Councillors

All the reports from the Councillors were available to view and are attached.

5.1 There were no reports from the Parish

6.1 There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.15pm

All the reports will be published on the website. The next Annual Parish Meeting will be in April 2024.

Adam Pilgrim

Chairman

Attached – All Reports

CHAIRMANS REPORT by Councillor Adam Pilgrim

The Parish Council has been operating smoothly during the past year. A significant factor in this is the care and hard work carried out by our Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer; Leslie Findlay.

It was decided that we would go through the Internal Audit procedure so that it could be demonstrated that the Council was operating in a proper fashion; procedurally and financially. Obviously, Leslie bore the brunt of this, spending many hours with the Auditor while he ploughed through her carefully maintained records. Councillors are very grateful for her diligence.

The Internal Audit confirmed that the Council is being governed well but there were some minor procedural “tweaks” to bring it in line with the best modern practices for this type of organisation.

I’ve been pleased with Councillors’ engagement in the various matters that have arisen during the year. Each Councillor has an area of responsibility.

One of these is monitoring the Parish’s footpath network; spotting maintenance issues and applying for County Council funding for necessary works. Unfortunately, Councillor George Trigg had to relinquish his footpaths’ role when he resigned from the Council. He had been assisted by a resident, Gordon Czapiewski, who continues to keep an eye on the footpaths for us.

Councillors were delighted to work with the late Mary Fewings’ family to successfully complete the transfer of the ownership of the Play Park to the Parish Council. This had been Mary’s long held wish but unfortunately, she did not live to see it happen. Her daughters, Tracey Fewings and Sally Waite, were keen to carry out their mother’s intention and helped smooth the process. The Mary Fewings Play Park was opened on 9th October 2022 for children to enjoy the new playground equipment.

The future of the Prince of Wales pub has been a community concern for the past years or so and the Parish Council has supported the Community Group formed to campaign for the pub to re-open and develop into a community centre or focus for the Parish.

The Council notes Planning Applications in the Parish and, guided by Councillor John Butler, makes its views known to Mid Devon District Council’s Planners.

There has been a great deal of worry about Devon and Cornwall Police’s Application to formalise its unauthorised firearms’ training activities at Pondground Quarry. The initial Application called for permission to use the site for “office hours” throughout the working weeks. Needless to say, many residents were appalled at the prospect of this amount of noise disturbance in their neighbourhood. John Butler has worked hard preparing the Parish Council’s Objections to the Application to augment the Objections submitted by the residents who would be particularly affected by the extent of the proposed firearms’ training. We await the Planners’ Decision.

Unfortunately, John Butler is not continuing as a Councillor for the 2023/7 term. He has served the Council for many years, contributing thoughtfully and with his characteristically dry humour. He will be missed and be a hard act to follow!

I'm looking forward to this next term which will benefit from some continuity since the majority of Councillors are serving again but with some new blood; we have a new Councillor, Frances Freeman and there may be another willing to be co-opted shortly.

2022/3 Canal Report by Councillor Adam Pilgrim

I represent our Parish on the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee and, due to the high maintenance standard of the canal, I rarely have to make any criticism of the Canal Manager's treatment of our section of canal.

The standard of the towpath throughout the in-water Devon Section is among the best of the rural canals in the whole Country. Elsewhere, waterproof boots or Wellingtons are often needed for towpath walks but here ordinary outdoor shoes are adequate throughout the year.

New interpretation boards have been installed at Lowdwells and opposite the Limekilns.

There has been a lot of controversy relating to Devon and Cornwall Police's application for firearms' training in Pondground Quarry. The original application asked for Monday to Friday, office hours training but a revision has reduced this a good deal. Nevertheless, the noise disturbance that will result could have considerable adverse effects on the natural environment that has evolved in the canal corridor from Whipcott to Lowdwells particularly, not to mention the effect on local residents. Ecological Surveys are to undertaken to assess this objectively.

It's possible that the Covid pandemic restrictions have raised the profile of our stretch of the canal since visitors discovered it when trying to find less used paths for their walks.

Highways Report Councillor Rupert Snook

The roads in our Parish continue to be in an unacceptable state as is true in a large number of parishes in Devon. Where repairs to potholes have been undertaken, they are so near to other bigger potholes that have not been attended to. The quality of the repair is often so poor that within weeks the repair has gone and the hole is even bigger. Kennel's Bridge, the Whipcott road and the road to Pond Ground always feature as now do Black Lane, the road around Ford and the road to Wardmoor.

As a Parish, ably assisted by volunteers, we have attempted to maintain the village road drains and address the hedge maintenance. We are still working on these aspects.

The overall situation is not improved by our County Councillors observation that, in real terms the funding for Devon roads has been cut by 50% over the last ten years. Despite this, our District and County councillors are to be thanked for their endeavours on our behalf.

Please continue to use the Devon County website to report potholes.

Planning Report by John Butler, Chair of Planning Committee

1. Planning Applications & Appeals considered in the period from March 2022 to March 2023

- 1.1. The Council and its planning committee considered some 23 applications for planning permission, listed building consent and notifications to carry out tree works (in the Conservation Area) in the above period. In the main, these were not contentious.
- 1.2. However, Planning Application 22/00907 submitted by Devon & Cornwall Police relating to the retention of Pondground Quarry for use as firing ranges has been a very contentious application which has been opposed by the Council as well as by many members of the local community. This Application has yet to be determined by Mid-Devon District Council.

2. The MDDC Local Plan Review 2023/43

2.1 As previously reported the Local Plan Review 2013/2033 was adopted on 29th July 2020.

2.2 In January 2022 MDDC embarked on an Issues Consultation for Plan Mid-Devon 2023/43. This further review was intended to take into account revisions made to the (NPPF) National Planning Policy Framework in 2021 and other planning changes expected to be made by the Government as well as responses made to the Consultation Paper.

2.3 Having looked at the MDDC website, it is unclear what further progress has been made by MDDC Forward Planning. This is no doubt explained by the proposed planning changes contained in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill-see below.

3. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

This is a major piece of legislation currently going through Parliament. It heralds significant changes to the planning regime including the following:

- 3.1. Planning authorities will be required to have a design code covering the whole of their areas.
- 3.2. A proposed new Infrastructure Levy will replace Section 106 obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy: the rates will be set by local planning authorities having regard to local circumstances. There will be a duty on Local Authorities to prepare infrastructure delivery strategies.
- 3.3. Local plans will be limited to locally specific matters whilst general policies are deployed in most areas. For example, heritage protection will be set out nationally together with new national Development Management Policies.
- 3.4. Local planning authorities will have a new power to prepare supplementary plans where policies for specific sites need to be prepared quickly, including design codes for specific sites or areas.
- 3.5. Groups of planning authorities will be able to produce voluntary special development strategies on specific cross boundary issues.
- 3.6. EU environmental impact assessments and EU strategic environmental assessments will be replaced by a new system of Environmental Outcomes Reports.
- 3.7. Neighbourhood Priorities Statements will enable communities to have a simpler and more accessible way to set out key priorities for local areas and these will need to be taken into account by local authorities when preparing local plans.

- 3.8. There is also a proposal for residences on a street to have the right to propose development and hold a vote on whether it should be given planning permission.
- 3.9. There is proposed a new duty on decision-makers to make decisions in accordance with the Development Plan and National Development Management Policies, unless material considerations strongly indicate otherwise.
- 3.10. The Crown will have a right to apply directly to the Secretary of State for the determination of nationally important development.
- 3.11. The Bill amends and strengthens powers and sanctions available to local planning authorities to deal with individuals who fail to abide by the rules and the process of the planning system.
- 3.12. The notes to the Bill say that there will be changes to planning protection so that designated heritage assets, such as registered parks and gardens, will have the same protection as Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.
- 3.13. There are proposed changes to the Compulsory Purchase Order regime, including the granting of powers to local authorities to issue CPOs for regeneration purposes.
- 3.14. Provision will be made for a new type of locally led Urban Development Corporation with the objective of regenerating its area.
- 3.15. Where properties in town centres and in the High Street have been vacant for over 12 months, Local Authorities are to be given powers to instigate auctions to rent vacant commercial properties for leases from one to five years in order to attract new tenants.
- 3.16. There is a proposal that will enable local authorities to levy a premium of up to 100% on Council Tax bills for second homes, and for empty homes, after one year as opposed to two years which is the current requirement.
- 3.17. The Bill includes measures that will facilitate a better understanding of who ultimately owns or controls land in England and Wales. This involves the collection and publishing of data on contractual arrangements used by developers to control land such as rights of pre-emption, options, and conditional contracts.
- 3.18. A Government policy paper indicates that the government intends to remove the requirement for authorities to maintain a rolling five-year supply of deliverable land for housing where the local plan is up to date (ie adopted in the last five years).
- 3.19. There will be a material increase in planning application fees.
- 3.20. The National Planning Policy Framework will be revised. There are to be proposed National Development Management Policies that would take precedence over local plans as the primary policy guide for decision-making. The NPPF is to be re-focused on setting out the principles to be considered in plan-making whilst also streamlining national policy.
- 3.21. It is proposed to make it easier for planning authorities to issue completion notices to developers to require them to complete projects. There is a proposed introduction of commencement notices which will be required when a scheme with planning permission starts on site. This is designed to address perceptions of land-banking, and slow build out by large developers.
- 3.22. Powers to require developers to engage with communities' 'pre-application' would be made permanent.
- 3.23.

And much more!!! This is all subject to the Bill's further progress in Parliament and any General Election.

CLERK REPORT APRIL 2022 – MARCH 2023

FINANCE

1. Mary Fewings Playpark: It has been a year of spend having accumulated the necessary funding to finance the new Playpark. The Parish Council is extremely grateful to all those who assisted with the raising of funds which eventually totalled **£72692.17!** The actual play equipment has cost us £56730.00 but the dreaded VAT added a further £11346.00. Fortunately, we have been able to claim this back and return this amount back to the Solar Fund. Going forward into the new financial year this will be used to assist with the new street lights project. We were also able to purchase the signs for the Mary Fewings Playpark and now have £231.77 remaining in the Playpark Fund. It is hoped to ask residents if there are any small items that could be purchased for the park as this has to be spent on capital items having been specifically raised for the play equipment.

2. Income

The Parish Council received the following income in this financial year

<u>Receipt</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Precept	11,500	
Interest	137.47	
Playpark	16868.58	
Solar Fund	6864.64	Annual grant from Redhill Solar Farm
Public Rights of Way	160.00	
VAT reclaim	11610.23	There is a further £500 currently being claimed which will be supplement the income for 2023/24.
TOTAL	47140.92	

3. Earmarked Reserves

Playpark	231.77	
Public Rights of Way	771.24	Used to finance maintenance on the footpaths
Solar Fund	7885.55	Has to be spent on capital projects for the Parish
Street lights	15000	A new reserve set up this year to assist with the funding of new LED streetlights in the village
Baseline reserve	5000	Raised from £3000 this year
Total	28888.56	

4. Grants

The Parish Council awarded two grants

- a. Village Hall Trust - £1500 this is an annual grant to assist with the running costs of the Hall and comes from the Precept

- b. Village Hall Trust - £1643.04 this was a grant from the Solar Fund and paid for the new Hall curtains.

5. Donations

The Council made several donations in this financial year:

- a. £500.96 to assist with the funding of the Jubilee Celebrations
- b. £100 to Citizens Advice
- c. £45 to the Royal British Legion for the Remembrance wreath.

6. Expenditure

The Council spent a total of £81907.30 in this financial year. With rising costs in all areas, we are likely to see an increase in the general spend on the annual parish maintenance and insurance, subscriptions etc. The Precept was only raised from £11275 to £11500 for this coming year as Councillors wanted to ensure it could be kept as low as possible. The reclaimed VAT will be added to income.

7. This year with such a large amount of spending and receipt of funding it was agreed that there would be an interim Internal Audit. This has proved to be extremely beneficial (if not a lot of work for the Clerk) but it is hoped that the Council has all the required Policies in place and is abiding by the annual Governance and Accountability statement which is required. The accounts will also be audited by an external auditor and all the documentation is published on the website. To assist the Clerk and to provide more transparency the accounts are now done through SCRIBE which is a specific accounting tool for Parish Councils.

COUNCILLORS

We have had two resignations this year due to work commitments and currently have three vacancies. There will be a local Election in May so it is hoped these vacancies will be filled.

TRAINING

Councillor Sally Barker completed all the new Councillor training courses and the Clerk undertook several workshops to learn how to use SCRIBE.

MEDIA

The Council now has a media representative on the Council and the Clerk is publishing more information on the Holcombe Rogus Community website which is reaching more residents. All the Agendas and Minutes are published on the two Noticeboards and the Parish Council website. A brief summary of the monthly meetings is also published in the Parish News.

Leslie Findlay

Parish Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer/Proper Officer

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

Another Council year has just gone, how quick it goes. Things are hectic at County, it has been a challenging year, more so than any previous years, finances are very tight, there are services we have to supply, irrespective of the cost and the government do not allow enough for those services.

As a County Councillor you have to serve on various committees, for me I am on the Corporate Services and Infrastructure some of whose main responsibilities are roads, waste, planning, properties, etc. There are other committees I serve on such as Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) and the Canal Advisory Committee.

The sort of financial pressures includes Adult Services and Children and Young People, both of these suck up 79% of available revenue, this is mandatory, we have to do it. Because of the cost of these services, other departments revenues are squeezed.

The Council finds itself in a very challenging internal position in that Children's Services, SEND provision and budget sustainability face serious challenge along with concern from stakeholders regarding confidence in the Council to address these challenges. The continuous failure of the Council to improve the Inadequate judgement by Ofsted of Children's Services over a 12-year period has resulted in the children's minister issuing a Revised Statutory Direction for social care specifically citing failures of corporate governance and escalating to the appointment of a commissioner to oversee Improvement and hold the Council to account. There is also government intervention for SEND and a material threat of a s114 notice because of the High Needs Block deficit now approaching £130 M.

These are serious, material, well evidenced failures of the County Council's governance In response the Leader and Chief Executive in meetings with the children's minister have agreed the urgent need for a Review of Corporate Governance as a priority in conjunction with the formal work of the Improvement Boards in Children's Services where oversight of progress is led by the Commissioner appointed by the Minister and the SEND Improvement Board.

The services the Council provide, and the context of delivery have significantly changed; equally so our staff are impacted by these contexts too. In summary the Council finds itself in a very different operating context and the need for a review of priorities is required. In additionality the Council finds itself in a very challenging internal position in that Children's Services, SEND provision and budget sustainability face serious challenge along with concern from stakeholders regarding confidence in the Council to address these challenges. The continuous failure of the Council to improve the Inadequate judgement by Ofsted of Children's Services over a 12-year period has resulted in the children's minister issuing a Revised Statutory Direction for social care specifically citing failures of corporate governance and escalating to the appointment of a Commissioner to oversee Improvement and hold the Council to account. There is also government intervention for SEND and a material threat of a s114 notice because of the High Needs Block deficit now approaching £130 M.

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The Adult Social Services Budget is £336m per year and the Children and Young People Budget is £233m per year, these are all mandatory, we have to supply the service.

Highways for maintenance of Devon roads had gradually fallen from around £35 million in 2012/13 to approximately £25 million in 2022/23. Coupled with inflationary change, in particular the rapid increase in inflation seen in 2022/23, this meant that the maintenance budget had halved in real terms compared to a decade ago. This also has the knock-on impact of forcing change in priorities with safety taking higher consideration and proactive works being stopped, leading to rapid deterioration of roads.

80% of traffic use 20% of the 8,000miles od Devon's` highway.

Ray Radford

Devon County Councillor

Willand & Uffculme Division

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