

## **Chairman's Report to Holcombe Rogus Parish Council's meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024.**

Apart from the Canal's funding blow, a threat to our freedom of speech presented itself in recent weeks.

Mid Devon District Council's Standards Committee was due to meet on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024. One particularly contentious item for discussion was whether Public Question/Statement time should be removed from MDDC's meetings.

Barry Warren and a colleague understandably had become very concerned about this possibility. I circulated the message he had sent to his assorted contacts in which he expressed his concerns and contested the points made by a MDDC Officer who supported their removal.

I was surprised that this potential erosion of our freedom to address our Elected Representatives publicly only elicited one comment from you.

I was pleased that the papers accompanying the Agenda included strong support for retaining Public Question time from Councillor Luke Taylor, current Leader of MDDC. I attended the meeting virtually and was pleased that the Standards Committee voted to continue with Public Question time at MDDC's meetings. Additionally, questions received three days before a meeting will receive an answer during the meeting. Questions without Notice that can't be answered during the meeting will be given a written reply with ten days.

On behalf of Councillors, I would like to thank Leslie for her composure and careful attention to the Parish Council's business during the past months whilst she has balanced this with competing pressures at home.

*Adam Pilgrim*

Canal Report to Holcombe Rogus Parish Council's meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024 by Adam Pilgrim.

I attended the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee's (GWCJAC) meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March held in Phoenix House, Tiverton. Remote attendance was not possible since the IT equipment was being upgraded so the attendance was very good!

Following the death of Graham Moore last year there had been no Canal Business's Representative on the GWCJAC. It had been decided that a new Representative should be found.

Stephen Taylor, the new owner of the Canal Tea Rooms in Tiverton was appointed to represent the interests of the canal-related businesses.

MDDC's decision to further reduce its contribution to the Canal was noted and vociferously criticised by members. In spite of the considerable social and welfare benefits that the Canal offers our communities, MDDC's Cabinet had decided that funding the Canal was not classed as essential.

Aggregate Industries (AI) had sent a new staff member to update the meeting on the progress with the improved water transfer system that AI is required to install. This will be able to pass excess water from Westleigh Quarry to the Canal when needed to maintain satisfactory water levels in the Canal. Unfortunately, he was not familiar with the long, drawn-out history of this scheme and was surprised by the frustration expressed by members related to the lack of progress. While the Environment Agency has been unhelpful with establishing extraction criteria for Fenacre Brook, AI doesn't seem to be pressing for the scheme's completion. Another revision of the scheme by AI is underway it seems so there is more delay.

The forthcoming State of the District event will have an item on the perennial matter of dog fouling in public spaces and, apparently a MDDC Officer, Luke Howard, may present some encouraging information on a new Dog Fouling Policy and its Enforcement.

Our Canal Manager, Mark Baker, presented a comprehensive report on his works since October. It seems that work to reduce the severe flooding risk at and around Lowdwells has been proceeding well but, due to its complexity, is not a quick fix.

Mark has outlined his future programme of works and, hopefully, he will continue to keep our Canal in the good order that we have become accustomed to.

Ends.

State of the District – “Working Collaboratively with Town & Parish Councils” 20<sup>th</sup> March 5.30pm  
Tiverton Phoenix House.

I attended this meeting as a councillor on behalf of Holcombe Rogus Parish Council. This a report and a collection of reactions and thoughts.

The meeting was first addressed by Frank Letch, Chairman of District Council and County Councillor. There was a statement that we had a charter that was renewed every 3 years. This new one was going deeper with more collaboration and better attention to resilience and climate change and more communication. Luke Taylor leader of the District Council from Bradninch, mentioned the ‘10 Year Plan’. Then DALC and DCT explained their function with partnership working, possible involvement and potential use. The 6 discussion groups were then started led by district cabinet members with their managers. Questions were then asked by the likes of members, like me, going round each after 15 minutes.

1 In my order, PLANNING – Would it not be better to have 1 or 2 months gatherings of applications for Parish Councils- to have more time - + enforcement + employment! !

2 TOWN & PARISH CHARTER & JOINT WORKING BETWEEN TOWN & PARISHES – 3years- Go to Website to see the work done – Should be each P C to do it & should be shared.

3 SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE – Worrying that we have 3000tons/year of food waste still not recycled - ie not separated but in black bags -We do get over 15,000 tonnes recycled every year - If you want to keep paper dry you can collect lids for your boxes from the depot!!

4 EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESILIENCE – the RISKS for not planning eg lack of oil, electricity or car crash, plane crash or other – MDCC can help with planning templates, risk assessment and hierarchy of need – Should H R do it?

5 SHARED COSTS & SERVICES & PRECEPT SETTING with Andrew Jarrett (Deputy chief Exec ) Crediton started discussion asking after its assets- another parish worried about its VAT – I raised a point about cut in funding for the canal, despite the long standing commitment to fund from the early seventies – his response that the canal parishes should think about funding from their precepts because a lot of parishes did not have the benefit of the canal!!

6 COMMUNITY HOUSING & NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS – Bradninch is a Duchy village so virtually excluded -legal implications as to locality and planning structure- Willand has a good neighbourhood plan up on the website.

In further discussion - social housing - climate change – windmills on village halls – fibre optic cables replacing copper very soon – were mentioned a lot! - Communication, where Email was not used and communications generally were challenged – we need a lot more?

Hopefully we will hear a lot more from our District Council soon and you too can contribute further to help the debate.

Rupert Snook, Councillor, Holcombe Rogus Parish Council.