

WITHYCOMBE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

Draft Minutes of the Withycombe Annual Parish Assembly held at the Memorial Hall on Thursday 21st April 2016 at 6.30pm

PRESENT

Parish Councillors: Emma Wright (Chairman), Steve Crossman, Richard Barnham, Amanda Gardiner, Sue Gill

Also present: Brenda Maitland Walker (West Somerset District Council), Christine Lawrence (Somerset County Council), Members of Public.

In attendance: Andy Giles (Clerk)

The Meeting was digitally recorded

1. CHAIRMANS WELCOME

Emma Wright, Chairman of the Parish Council, welcomed those in attendance and opened the meeting at 6.30 pm.

2. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Jean Humber, Peter Humber, Mike Burnett.

3. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY HELD ON 22ND APRIL 2015

The minutes were circulated. It was proposed by Steve Crossman and seconded by Richard Barnham that the minutes be approved as a true record of the meeting held on the 22nd April 2015; this was unanimously agreed and the minutes were signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING

None.

5. SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

Christine Lawrence delivered a report as County Councillor responsible for Withycombe. She began by thanking the Parish Council for its hard work during the past year; she also thanked Emma Wright for the work she had done as Chairman since taking on the role in 2015. Christine paid tribute to the many volunteers within the village, who contribute to village life in a great many ways. She thanked them all for their efforts.

Christine gave an update on a number of topical issues including problems associated with large vehicles travelling through the village, flooding issues and delays to the repair of Somerset County Council property in the village. She also reported that the County Council had set a budget for the current year but resources were limited, which meant that the delivery of services in the current financial climate would remain challenging. Christine advised that the rollout of broadband services was progressing albeit slowly, and it was hoped that the availability of broadband in the parish would improve in the not too distant future.

6. TITHOLES ORCHARD DEVELOPMENT

Parish Councillor Richard Barnham advised that progress on the development of the site had stopped due to the need to relocate electricity cables together with a transformer. Negotiations were taking place between the Crown Estate and Western Power, regarding the cost of the work that was necessary. Richard advised that he had been informed that that work on the site could be delayed for a number of months. Christine Lawrence advised that she would endeavour to find out more information about these issues at a meeting she would be having with the Crown Estate in the coming weeks.

6. TOWNSEND FARM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The Chairman reported that development of the site was now approaching completion and that anyone interested in acquiring one of these homes should register with the Housing Authority as soon as possible.

7. REPORTS FROM VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

Withycombe Active Living Group: Roger Hurst delivered a report on the activities of the Withycombe Active Living Group. He advised that the group aimed to provide friendship, fun and social activities for older members of the community and that the Group continued to do so despite a reduction in funding. Roger gave a summary of the Group's activities over the past year which included lectures, music, luncheon outings and tea parties.

Roger thanked Somerset County Councillor Christine Lawrence for the support she had given the Group; he also thanked members of the village, the Parish Council and the Memorial Hall Committee for their support. Roger gave special thanks to Valarie Barnham and Carol Wright for the help that they had provided.

The Chairman thanked Roger for his report. She also asked that any residents who regularly park opposite the Memorial Hall, if they would endeavour to park elsewhere on Wednesday mornings. This would be a tremendous help to the Active Living Group as it would leave space available to be used by vehicles transporting elderly and infirm members of the Group to and from the Memorial Hall.

St Nicholas Church - Withycombe: Roger Hurst delivered a report on behalf of St Nicholas Church. He advised that the Church had experienced a reduction in worshippers in recent years and that average attendances were at an all-time low of ten people. Despite the low attendances, the Church continued to be popular with visitors and with a number of younger families settling in the village. It was hoped that attendances might improve in the future. Roger reported that extensive repairs to the Church would be required over the next three years and that this, and other running costs, represented a significant financial challenge. Roger summarised activities of the Church during the past year and emphasised that visitors and newcomers to the Church were always welcome.

St Bartholomew's Church / Rodhuish Chapel Council: Richard Devitt delivered a report on behalf of St Bartholomew's Church, Rodhuish. Richard advised that the Church, whilst small, was thriving and that seventy five people had attended the carol service at Christmas. He also advised that a number of concerts would take place during 2016 to help support the Church and that efforts were being made to improve the parking facilities at the Church.

Withycombe Memorial Hall: Judith Tilley delivered a report on behalf of the Trustees of Withycombe Memorial Hall. Judith advised that the Hall served as a memorial to residents of the village who had given their lives in the service of their country and it provided a social centre for the village. She reported on use of the Hall during the past twelve months and that two important and valued groups that had used the Hall for a number of years (the Art Group and the Dance Group), no longer used the facility and that this had had a significant detrimental effect on income. Judith advised that the Memorial Hall Committee were constantly seeking ways to improve usage of the Hall. A number of maintenance issues had been addressed during the past twelve months including repair and resurfacing the floor of the main hall, internal decoration and some electrical works.

Public Rights of Way: Mr Chris Adams had resigned as the nominated Public Paths Liaison Officer (PPLO) for the Parish in 2015 and Kerrie Thorne had been appointed to the role. Unfortunately Kerrie had been unable to assume the full responsibilities of the PPLO due to personal circumstances. The Chairman advised that the matter will be referred to the Parish Council to determine a way forward.

Withycombe Short Mat Bowls Club: Emma Wright delivered a short report on behalf of Mike Burnett who was unable to attend the meeting. She reported that the Club meet regularly on Thursday evenings and that the Club had recently attracted new members and continued to thrive. Emma advised that the Club was in a position to offer free lessons to anyone interested in joining and that new members would be most welcome.

Withycombe Wheels: The Clerk delivered a report prepared by the Chairman of Withycombe Wheels, Mr Peter Humber. Peter advised that Withycombe Wheels had made fifty four journeys during the year which represented a small increase on the previous year. The majority of journeys were undertaken for medical reasons and whilst the number of service users was relatively small, to those users it was of vital importance. Peter thanked the Parish Council and Somerset County Councillor Christine Lawrence for their support in fighting proposed cuts to the funding of the service earlier in the year.

Withycombe Parish Council: The Parish Clerk delivered a short report on the role and activities of Withycombe Parish Council. He advised that the Parish Council fulfilled an important role in liaising with all organisations that are responsible for delivering services within the Parish; these include the County and District Councils, Exmoor National Park Authority and the Avon and Somerset Police Authority.

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had experienced some difficulties following the election in 2015 and that, for a time, it was unable to function due to an insufficient number of Councillors. These difficulties had now been overcome, however one seat on the Council was still vacant and the Clerk asked that if anyone was interested in standing as a Parish Councillor, they should contact him for further details.

The Clerk reported that the Council had now set up a website and all details of Parish Council business would be displayed on this site. The Clerk explained that the Parish Council would like to expand the website to enable it to be used by other community groups in the parish. The general consensus of the meeting was that the website would be very useful and several suggestions were put forward regarding its future development. Parish Councillor Steve Crossman suggested that the website could be used to gather email addresses from residents who wished to be informed of important information / events that affected the parish. It was agreed that this would be very useful.

Judith Tilley advised that, in time, the website would fulfil the role of the parish magazine which had, until recently, been prepared and circulated by Jean Humber. Judith asked that the meeting record a vote of thanks to Jean for the considerable amount of hard work that she had put in to the parish magazine. This was unanimously agreed.

The Chairman reported that she had been asked by local farmers to remind dog walkers to keep their pets on leads when walking anywhere near livestock. She also advised that there was a property in the village which was uninhabited and not being maintained properly. The property was not only unsightly but also causing a number of problems for neighbours. District Councillor Brenda Maitland Walker agreed to investigate the matter.

9. DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT

Brenda Maitland Walker delivered a report as District Councillor with responsibility for Withycombe. She reported that the District Council had experienced serious financial problems in recent years and that this had been exacerbated in the past twelve months following changes to the rateable value of Hinkley Point power station. Brenda advised that the District Council had managed to set a balanced budget for the current year (2016/17) and for next year (2017/18), but beyond that the financial position of the District Council looked very uncertain. She reported that work was underway to look at a variety of options for the future of local government in West Somerset with initial findings likely to be available in July 2016.

Brenda circulated information which may be of assistance to local groups seeking to raise funds in the future. She also reported that West Somerset Council had changed its policy regarding planning; she advised that if a planning application was reviewed by the Parish Council and the Parish Council subsequently raised an objection, the application would automatically be referred to the West Somerset Council Planning Committee for consideration.

A member of the public asked Brenda about the future of local government in West Somerset particularly in light of the fact that West Somerset Council was facing such an uncertain future. Brenda advised that a number of options were being considered and that her preferred option would be to retain West Somerset Council if it was possible to do so.

Parish Councillor Steve Crossman asked if any progress had been made regarding the repairs of the hole in the road outside Court Place Farm. Brenda advised that a date for the work had not yet been set following the recent survey of the problem using CCTV equipment. County Councillor Christine Lawrence agreed to pursue the matter.

10. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A member of the public asked what would happen to the Titholes Orchard site if the current hold ups, caused by ongoing negotiations between the Crown Estate and Western Power, delayed the development beyond the dates set out in the planning approval.

It was agreed that the Parish Council Clerk be instructed to write to both the Planning Authority and the Crown Estate in order to determine what the current situation was with the site and how the development might be affected by ongoing delays.

11. CHAIRMANS CLOSING COMMENTS

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the Annual Parish Assembly for 2016 and for their contributions to the meeting. She invited everyone to stay behind after the meeting and to enjoy refreshments which had been arranged by the Parish Council to allow everyone to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's 90th birthday. The Chairman thanked Parish Councillors Sue Gill and Amanda Gardiner for preparing the refreshments.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm.

Signed _____
Chairman

Date _____