MINUTES OF SPARKWELL ANNUAL RESIDENTS MEETING

Held on 10th March 2020 at Hemerdon Village Hall

**Present**: Cllrs May, Taylor, Pearson-Bunt, Lee, Peacham and Milford

Dawn Johnson (Clerk)

**In attendance**: Cllr John Hart (DCC), Cllr Keith Baldry, Cllr Dan Thomas (SHDC), 9 members of the public (MoP)

**Not in attendance**: Cllr Small

**AM001/20 Introduction and Welcome**

Cllr May welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced himself, fellow parish Councillors and the Clerk to the Council, Dawn Johnson.

**AM002/20 Apologies for Absence**

None

**AM003/20 County Councillor Report**

Cllr Hart said that he endeavoured to come to as many meetings as possible.

Over the last year, Hemerdon Mine has been one of the issues (as it looks that it may come back to life again) and the flooding at Venton Bridge. Residents who were expected to walk their children through the flooding now have a bus to pick them up. Even though a lot of money has been spent at Venton Bridge, they have still failed to solve the problem. It is the lowest spot for miles around and all the water runs there; they are now looking to put up measuring sticks.

DCC have put in a bid for money for the new Lee Mill slip road which will take the cars from going down through the old route. They have an opportunity to put a decent slip road into the industrial estate and the money is part of a package of bids being sent off to central Government. They will be arranging public meetings, one for residents and one for the industrial estate.

There is always a lot of debate at Parish Meetings about hedges and drains!

**AM004/20 District Councillor Report**

Cllrs Baldry and Thomas jointly reported:

Until the election in May 2019 the two District Councillors for Sparkwell were Ian Blackler and Keith Baldry. Ian did not stand in the election. The two councillors are now Dan Thomas and Keith Baldry.

South Hams Council has 31 Councillors. As a result of the election, the composition of South Hams Council is 16 Conservatives, 10 Liberal Democrats, 3 Green Party and 2 Independents.

The previous Leader did not stand for election and his expected replacement lost his seat. Cllr Judy Pearce (Salcombe and Thurlestone) became the Leader. She has an Executive Committee of 5 Members, including Keith who has responsibility for Environment. He is also a member of the Council Tax Setting Committee and the Waste Board. Dan is a Member of Overview and Scrutiny and the Licensing Committee.

In 2019 we have made recommendations from the Sustainable Locality Fund for payments to Sparkwell Scouts and the Lee Mill Community Association.

Despite our opposition the Planning Committee has given permission for 25 houses in Lee Mill off New Park Road.

The South Hams share of Council Tax agreed for 2020-21 has increased by £5pa for a band D property. This includes an allocation of £400,000 for climate change prevention projects. The South Hams share of Council tax is less that 10% of the total.

The Chief Executive of SHDC, Sophie Hosking is leaving. The process has started to appoint a new Chief Executive. The name of the new Chief Executive will be known later this month.

**AM005/20 Chairman’s report**

Cllr May thanked Parishioners for taking the time to attend the annual residents meeting and explained that it was not a meeting of the Parish council, but a statutory meeting of parish residents which must be held at this time of year.

As the public notice states, residents can use this forum to bring up any current local issues you may have or anything in relation to the past years activities of the Parish Council.

He then went on to say that the Parish council meets every second Tuesday of each month, except for August, and over these 11 meetings we work through a fixed agenda and any additional items raised by our parishioners or by ourselves. We include an open forum where any member of our community can raise questions or propose actions regarding local issues to the council.

Also in attendance at our monthly meetings are our elected representatives from both the District and County Council. At each meeting we deal with finance, planning issues, highway matters, Police business, and any correspondence we may receive.

We also update and adopt policies and procedures to ensure compliance with legislation including, Financial Regulations, Audit Regulations and Information Access.

In addition, Council members attend external events representing the Parish, including, planning meetings and site visits, Highways department meetings, various workshops and forums, liaison with Devon County Council, South Hams District Council, the Environment Agency and Police on local issues affecting our parish.

With regard to Finance we have been able to make grants to the Parish Pump magazine and Citizens Advice Bureau. We have also maintained a zero percentage increase in our precept for 2020/21 for the second year running.

Our own road and snow warden deals with highway matters, trying to resolve some of the many issues that arise during the year, regularly reporting on the location and severity of potholes and local road condition including flooding issues to Devon County Highways department. We have had some success with the road surfaces being patched as required and the potholes filled.

*Cllr Peacham arrived at 6.30pm*

We have still to resolve all the flooding issues, but we are constantly raising this issue at all levels and have now taken on our own lengths man to try and alleviate some of the recurring problems. I am sure you have noticed he is doing a great job around the parish, and if you see him, give him a wave! Trees can now also be cleared on local roads by our own trained members.

We look to comment and report on all planning applications and enforcement issues within the parish with site visits by our appointed representatives as required. We support applications as well as opposing developments that are clearly unreasonable or excessive, with the most recent being an application for 25 houses to be built on the same land as the rejected major development last year at Lee Mill; although vigorously objected to by the parish and local councillors, this was unfortunately approved.

The Drakelands mine site has been taken over by a new owner Tungsten West and we have taken an active role in the reinstatement of the local liaison group meeting with Devon County Council Minerals planning authority and the Environment Agency. The PC will be working hard with the new owner to ensure compliance.

During the year we have supplied and fitted 3 defibrillators around the Parish at Hemerdon, Lee Mill and Sparkwell, have saved the BT Public phone kiosk at Sparkwell, and produced a light touch emergency plan for the area.

We are working on fast Fibre broadband for Sparkwell, and will be launching a new grant scheme in April which will enable any organisation to apply for a grant.

He stated that the Parish Council will continue to spend wisely and serve the community to the best of their ability giving their time freely as volunteers and taking on tasks with determination and dedication.

He thanked fellow Councillors for their help and hard work over the last year, the District and County Councillors for their regular support and the Parish Clerk for her hard work, support and guidance to him personally and all councillors, ensuring they are all kept up to date with the latest requirements and procedures.

He again thanked all for attending and said that the PC currently has vacancies and encourage people to apply and help provide services and support to the community.

The Chair then welcomed comments and questions after item 6.

**AM006/20 Local Issues and public question time**

1. **Update on Fibre broadband**

Cllr Pearson-Bunt reported:

1. Terminology

There is a lot of confusion about broadband services in general, and we have found that this complicates the process of explaining the benefits of full fibre to the premises. The standard definitions used by comparison sites are as follows;

10 Mb + “Standard”

30 Mb + “Fast Fibre”

55 Mb + “Superfast Fibre”

100 Mb + “Ultrafast Fibre”

In practice the service providers use these terms interchangeably so many people think that they already have a fast fibre connection but don’t. Regardless of terminology Openreach (who provide all of the infrastructure regardless of who you buy your services from) have advised us that everybody in Sparkwell is currently connected by copper wires to the cabinet in Venton and so in practice this will limit their broadband speed to around 13 Mb on a good day. For example, we pay Sky for Broadband Superfast Fibre (which should mean 55Mb + download speeds, whereas in practice we typically get 9 Mb on download and a pathetic 0.4 Mb on uploads.) The good news is that the suppliers can’t charge you any more when your new fibre to the premises gives you speeds above those you are already paying for.

2. Background

Members and local residents will already be aware that we have been investigating ways of getting a good and reliable broadband service into Sparkwell for some months, and had confirmed that postcodes for central Sparkwell qualify for the government sponsored Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme. These Vouchers must be claimed by a supplier from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and are worth up to £1500 per residential property connected and up to £3500 for small businesses and schools. We initiated a proposal with Openreach in November last year under their Community Fibre Scheme which allows communities to club together to bring fibre to the premises to participating residents and businesses. This will provide Ultrafast broadband to those properties with speeds of up to 330 Mb, close to the limit allowed by the processing speeds of home computers. This kind of speed will allow seamless streaming of video and data content for users downloading content, but also massive upload speeds so that businesses and people working from home can send very large files instantly to their clients and customers. The significance of fibre to the premises (FTTP) is that it goes all the way into your home as fibre, without copper wire to slow things down.

3. Progress

In January we submitted a list of about 80 properties to Openreach (who will install the infrastructure and fibre connections to each property) and have used this to calculate costs for the project. This list includes about a dozen “business” addresses including DZP, Welbeck, Sparkwell School, and the Treby Arms. Openreach have quoted a total cost of just under £70k to connect all these to a full fibre to the premises service and have confirmed that we should have enough vouchers to cover the cost of installation if everybody stays on board with the project.

We have since had email confirmations from enough of the participating properties and businesses that they will confirm to Openreach that they are willing to have an application for the Voucher submitted on their behalf in response to an email. They have also confirmed that they are prepared to sign up to a Fast Broadband contract of 30Mb or more once the new connection has been installed for a period of at least 12 months. In most cases (where people have an existing broadband supplier such as Sky or BT) they will probably not have to pay any more than at present, although they will need a new Hub box to cope with the higher speed. BT supplies these for free but Sky have told us they would charge £10 for delivery.

In the last week we have set up Sparkwell Community Fibre Ltd (a non-profit Company limited by guarantee with two SPC Councillors on the Board, Ruth Pearson-Bunt and Clare Lee). This is needed to act as a "legal entity" which will represent the community and sign the contract with Openreach once we have confirmation that we have enough vouchers to cover the cost of installation. We are currently awaiting this and hope to get confirmation around the end of March or early April. It was necessary to create this Company to act as the legal entity for the community as it proved impossible for SPC to take on the role directly. I have taken on the costs of doing so personally in order to maintain momentum for the project as there is always a risk that the voucher scheme might be withdrawn.

Once we have signed the contract it is vitally important that all of the participating properties on the final list check their emails (and junk mail) for the offer from DCMS and reply promptly to this to confirm that they are willing for DCMS to supply a Rural Gigabit Voucher to cover the cost of installing the fibre connection to their property. Openreach are keen to proceed with installation and the contract specifies that this should be complete within 12 months of starting the project.

Having ultrafast broadband in the village will significantly improve life for residents and especially for students, businesses and those who work from home. It will create new opportunities within the village and should also help to reduce a proliferation of ugly masts and antennae which would otherwise arrive with 5G and other microwave suppliers. High speed broadband is rapidly becoming essential and will improve property values and desirability within the village.

Question – will this require digging up the street to lay cables? No it is overhead lines.

Cllr Thomas asked to make the point that this is a long reaching benefit to the community and it was a shining example of how parish councils can work for the community.

*Cllr Taylor arrived at 6.45pm*

Cllr May asked for agreement to change the order of the rest of the agenda. Agreed.

1. **Our plans for tree planting**

Cllr Peacham reported:

There is funding available from the Parish Council and the Newnham Solar Fund for tree planting, so the next issue is where we can plant trees. It is very difficult to find public areas. The (Hemerdon) Village Hall owns the field next to it and have agreed that there will be trees planted there. The only other significant patch of land is Boringdon Camp, which is owned by SHDC, and is 3.8 hectares. SHDC intend to dispose of this land and we, and our District Councillors, are working on getting the Council to release the land to us so we can plant trees.

Smaller sites are limited. Cllr Peacham has been talking to land owners to get the estates to free up some land. It would be difficult for the Parish Council to fund this as it is private land, but there is government funding available, so he is working with the estates on this.

So far, the response from the estates is supportive but they are yet to identify a patch of land.

Cllr Peacham is also the Road and Snow Warden. He undertook a course which means that in theory he can close and work in the road. However, in reality this is not the case as you need traffic lights and there are many safety issues. He liaises with Devon County Highways on potholes (there is a clear specification for an emergency and a non-emergency pothole). The DCC website does work and anyone can use it to report.

A MoP said it is frustrating that there could be 3 or 4 holes and only one meets the criteria and gets repaired. Cllr Hart said they are putting more money into this and he is hoping that next year they will patch rather than fix the potholes.

Cllr Peacham said that the Snow Warden had not been needed this year but we do have 2 tonnes of salt. Cllr Peacham fills the six salt bins which are not Highways’ bins. The intention is not to salt the roads, as that is the job of Highways, but there is a network to salt problem areas after the event.

He had also completed a chainsaw course which means that he can clear minor trees from the road.

1. **The future of footpaths in the Parish**

Cllr Peacham reported:

There is a 1888-1913 ordnance survey map which is the definitive map of rights of way (ROW); the modern one does not show public footpaths, the old map is the definitive map. The Government has declared that any such unregistered ROW will cease to exist in 2026 if they are not “claimed as in use” and current.

The Ramblers Association website is where you can declare the footpaths and then the Ramblers Association will do the rest. If we do nothing then the paths will disappear and they will doubtless be fenced off.

Cllr Hart said that DCC had been going around the Parishes in the last 5/10 years working to identifying footpaths. There should have been a presentation to the PC at some point during that time.

***Action*** *– Cllr Hart will check this for Sparkwell.*

1. **Update on the future of the mine**

Cllr May reported that he and Cllr Peacham had recently attended a liaison meeting. The new company is doing a lot of tests in Finland to trial magnetically removing tungsten and chemically removing rock. If successful then they will build a pilot site but it will probably be 12/18 months before we see anything here There is another meeting in May. We have a good relationship so far with the new owners who understand all the historical problems and issues and are paying attention to those The new processes should eliminate the LFN problems. We are hearing re-assuring words.

We have assurance that the £14Million fund is still intact.

MoP question - is the shelf life of the mine still the same, to 2035?

If there are more minerals then it will stretch in time and size. The boundary of the mine is the controversial point.

MoP question – are they looking to blast?

Yes, the new process is the extraction. We have flagged up the blasting issues.

There is talk of pushing the mine out to the boundaries but that is a planning matter.

They have to raise a lot of money to proceed.

*Cllr Baldry left the meeting at 7.08pm*

MoP question – is there any chance of them planting trees.

Cllr Peacham explained that Wolf Minerals did plant trees but they did not plant them properly and most of the trees have died. We are talking to the new owners about this.

The history of the mine and previous owners was explained.

Cllr Lee re-assured everyone that the PC will work hard for the community and encouraged everyone to get involved when necessary.

1. **Help us to form our climate change plan**

The Chairman said that we are starting to look at preparing a climate change plan and we would like to hear ideas from the community that the Parish Council could include.

The Chairman opened the floor for general questions.

MoP question – the way the licences for waste work seem to facilitate fly tipping.

Cllr Hart explained that historically Plymouth wanted to charge for Devon residents using Chelson Meadow. DCC refused to pay so improved the Ivybridge centre. Even when it was free, there was still fly tipping. The fact that there are charges for waste has meant that the Council has kept rateable values down substantially and they were not going to change the policy for charging. When DCC put the charging on builders rubble, there was a saving of over £1M. Local Government is getting money in which it needs and offsets what it costs to get rid of the waste. The southern part of Devon and Torbay puts waste into the incinerator in Plymouth; the gate fee for that is substantially lower than other options

There is no answer to fly tipping or littering. The District Council has to pick it up and the County has to get rid of it.

The issue of waste being mixed in the back of the refuse lorries was raised.

***Action*** *- Cllr Thomas will take up.*

MoP question - who is responsible for dangerous trees?

The land owner is responsible. We can chase up the land owners if they fail to maintain.

MoP question – there is a bottle bank in the car park of the Miners Arms but why isn’t there one in Sparkwell?

Cllr Thomas said that in the autumn of 2020, the District will be collecting bottles from the kerbside.

MoP question – what can be done about speeding traffic in Sparkwell?

This is an ongoing problem and we have only recently found out that the 20mph speed limit is enforceable. Speed bumps are not environmental friendly so are not the answer. The PC has set a reserve in the coming year’s budget to look into this.

There was discussion about speed signs. There are two types, one that flashes the speed if it is above the limit and another which records the time and speeds. This data can then be passed to the Police with a suggestion that they set a trap at the time.

***Action*** *– The Clerk will contact DCC and Yealmpton Parish Council for more information.*

MoP question – is there any local deer culling as the numbers are getting out of control? Yes, this does happen; it is done by professionals.

Meeting closed at 7.45pm

This is a true and accurate record of the meeting

Signed ……………………………………………………………….

Name ……………………………………………………………….. Date …………………………………………..