MINUTES OF SPARKWELL (VIRTUAL) ANNUAL RESIDENTS MEETING

Held on 9th March 2021

**Present**: Cllrs May, Pearson-Bunt, Milford, Peacham, Lee, McEwing, Ansell, Harvey and Webb

Dawn Johnson (Clerk)

**In attendance**: Cllr Keith Baldry (joined the meeting later)

**AM001/21 Introduction and Welcome**

Cllr May welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**AM002/21 Apologies for Absence**

None

**AM003/21 County Councillor Report**

Cllr Hart was not present at the meeting.

**AM004/21 District Councillors’ Report**

This is a joint report from Cllrs Keith Baldry and Dan Thomas

We were sorry to learn of the death of long-term Councillor George Small. During the year Cllr Julian Taylor stood down. We have been pleased to work with him and especially on planning matters. We wish him well.

South Hams Council has 31 Councillors. The composition of South Hams Council is 15 Conservatives, 10 Liberal Democrats, 2 Green Party and 3 Independents.

Our responsibilities on the Council include the following. Keith is a Member of the Executive with 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.

It was good when Sparkwell Parish Council meetings resumed in July 2020.

In Jan 2021 we made a successful recommendation from the Sustainable Locality Fund for payment of £500 to Sparkwell Zoo.

We welcome progress on the Lee Mill slip road. It is very much a step in the right direction, and we hope the project comes to fruition.

Despite our strong representations to the Development Management Committee the planning application for 25 dwellings at Placelands Lee Mill was approved.

We arranged a meeting to discuss Borringdon Camp attended by both of us and the SHDC Officer. We were pleased that after our representations, SHDC agreed not to sell the land. We will hold a site meeting once covid allows to discuss tree planting in line with the Parish Council environmental focus.

The South Hams share of Council Tax agreed for 2021-22 is increased by £5 pa for a band D property. The South Hams share of Council tax is less than 10% of the total Council tax bill. The main elements are County Council and Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Chief Executive of SHDC Sophie Hosking left last year. The new Chief Executive Andy Bates started last June. The manner of his new work is very different to normal. He has had little chance to meet Members and staff in person. This has been done through the internet.

South Hams has had to concentrate a lot of attention on Covid matters. Very few staff attend the office. They work from home. Many in less than ideal circumstances. We have also diverted staff from normal duties into issuing government grants to businesses.

In summary this has been both a difficult year and a very different one for the Council.

Cllr.keith.baldry@southhams.gov.uk

Cllr.Dan.Thomas@southhams.gov.uk

**AM005/21 Chairman’s report**

Cllr May thanked everyone for taking the time to attend this evening’s virtual annual residents meeting. This is 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 year’s activities of the Parish Council.

He introduced himself; also in attendance via zoom this evening are fellow parish Councillors many of which you will know, including the Vice chairman, Ruth Pearson -Bunt, and the Clerk to the council Dawn Johnson.

In normal times the Parish council meets every second Tuesday of each month, except for August, this year however due to the pandemic we have had a few months break keeping up to date by e-mail and resuming our meeting via Zoom in July during these 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.

In attendance at our monthly meetings (currently via zoom) are our elected representatives from both the District and County Council. At each meeting we deal various points including finance, planning issues, highway matters 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, again in normal times Council members attend external events representing the Parish, including, planning meetings and site visits, Highways department meetings, various workshops, and Forums, liaising with Devon County Council, South Hams District Council, the Environment Agency and the Police on local issues affecting our parish.

Over this last year it has been challenging for all of us to continue the work of the Parish council. However we have been working together on various projects effecting the parish, in regard to finance we have been able to make grants to the park and ride scheme, and the Ivybridge food bank from an Emergency Covid fund that we made available.

As always, our own road and snow warden has been dealing 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. But as always, we rely on members of the public to report the issues to us. We still have flooding issues around the parish, but rest assured we are constantly raising this issue at all levels and as you know we employ own lengths man to carry out the important work of clearing drains and ditches to alleviate some of the recurring problems. He has been successful around the parish, and if you see him, please give him a wave!

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, of course this has been very difficult this year under the Covid restrictions, but we work as a group with our local knowledge to ensure we can make a balanced judgement to support applications as well as opposing developments that are clearly unreasonable or excessive,

As reported last year the old Drakelands mine site has been taken over by a new owner Tungsten West, and we have been and continue to be in dialog with them, the Devon County Council Minerals planning authority, and the Environment Agency through regular meetings. Be assured that we will be working hard with all parties to make sure that the concerns of our parishioners are addressed and that compliance with the planning requirements of the mining operations are adhered to.

During the year we have had our climate change statement approved and have embarked on various projects as part of a wildlife initiative with planting through the corridor of Sparkwell village, and a community orchard in lee mill along with other wildlife friendly planting. This has generated a lot of community involvement and a very positive response.

The fast fibre broadband for Sparkwell is moving forward with works continuing at pace.

He said that as a Parish Council we will continue to spend wisely and serve you to the best of our ability giving our time freely as volunteers taking on tasks with determination and dedication.

We have had a few changes this year within the parish council team with our previous vice chair Councillor Julian Taylor retiring and he would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his support, dedication and hard work and wish him well in his retirement.

Sadly, we have to report that our longest standing member of the parish council councillor George Small unfortunately passed away, and he would like to thank him also for his dedication over many years.

On a happier note we have had four new members join the Parish Council and we would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Councillors for their help and hard work over the last year, the District and County Councillors for their regular support and above all a big thank you to our parish clerk Dawn for her hard work, support and guidance to him personally and all councillors, ensuring we are all kept up to date with the latest requirements and procedures.

In conclusion he again thanked everyone for attending this evening and said that we currently have vacancies on the Parish council so please do apply and help us provide services and support to the community.

As there were no members of the public present, there were no questions.

**AM006/21 Local Issues and public question time**

1. **Update on Fibre broadband**

Cllr Pearson-Bunt reported:

There has been good progress since this was discussed last year. They have managed to keep the set of core subscribers who are willing to commit to take up the service.

There was much progress regarding the planning, surveying, and implementing. The Open Reach One contract taken out in mid April for one year so the timescale in place. A clause has however been inserted regarding pandemic and time slip if needs be.

Cllr Harvey joined the meeting at 6.30pm

There is an issue with one pole that needs to be replaced and which is in a difficult position to access so needs special equipment. When this is replaced then implementation should be March or early April. We are extremely close.

Some subscribers have received an auto generated message saying that there is only a month left to take up the vouchers.

We have seen a few of these messages over the last few day, but they don't seem to have been sent to all of our voucher subscribers as yet. These are a bit confusing, and I have been in contact with Openreach for guidance. Their response is:

"Please reassure subscribers that no vouchers are being cancelled at present.

The messages from DCMS are auto-generated but they have added the message below to allay concerns

You should note that during the Covid-19 situation your voucher will not be cancelled.

DCMS have advised that they will inform us when the current extension on vouchers is due to be withdrawn and we are monitoring the situation."

We currently don't think there is any reason to worry. The original expected delivery date was based on a one-year contract commitment which does not arise until mid-April and this is effectively extended by the Covid flexibility as noted above. We should not need to go through a process of extending the vouchers, but we will keep an eye on progress

Cllr Pearson-Bunt explained that this project is for Sparkwell but once the infrastructure is in place then it should be easier for other villages, specifically Hemerdon. Lee Mill does however already have fibre broadband.

1. **Climate change plans**

Cllr Ansell reported:

Hedging has been planted around the blue container in Bottle Park, Lee Mill and bubble/family groups planted 7 trees at the weekend, which went very well. She has been discussing some flower beds with Cllr Pearson-Bunt and is keen to move on to Phase 2 which will include bug hotels, fences, more plants and shrubs.

Cllr Peacham reported:

The plans for Boringdon Camp have been delayed because of Covid. If we are able to take over Boringdon Camp then we will be able to plant hundreds of trees. Small trees have been planted in the community field in Hemerdon, and he is continuing to plant trees with 50 small oak trees and 20 plants being grown in plots to go in the spring.

We have this year made an attempt to speak to landowners about their hedges. We should follow up and try to educate that there is a better way to cut their hedges for the benefit of wildlife and there are government grants available for this.

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

Cllr Peacham reported that Tungsten West are ongoing with their research and development to prove the viability of the mine; the next phase is to raise finance in the first half of this year to enable them to keep going. If they can raise the finance, we would not see actual production re-start until the second quarter of next year. We are having more dialogue with Tungsten West than we ever had with Wolf Minerals with regular meetings. We have a better understanding of the detail and are working together closely with Devon County Council and the Environment Agency.

Meeting closed at 6.45pm

This is a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Signed ……………………………………………………………….

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