

**Minutes of the Stokenham Annual Parish
meeting held on Tuesday 10th May 2016
in the Stokenham Parish Hall at 7.00p.m.
with Cllr Piers Spence presiding**

The Chair welcomed everyone and there were approximately 27 people in attendance.

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Jane Greaves – Stokenham School
John Cadman – Stokenham Parish Hall
Dean Small – Torcross Tank
Martin Withers – Torcross Congregational Church
Greg Chambers – Chillington Community Association
David Sidwell – Stokenham Short Mat Bowls
Mary Sanders – Chillington Methodist Church
Tom Hoeksma – Stokenham Parish Council
Adrian Goodman – Stokenham Parish Council

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 27th March 2015 were APPROVED as a true record and all present agreed before they were duly signed by the Chairman.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman gave a resume of the parish council year. 14 meetings had been held, with an average attendance of 12 councillors out of 13, and some 50 members of the public had attended at various times. 47 planning applications had been considered, and over 100 reports received on subjects as diverse as the occurrence of eel grass in the estuary to the persistence of potholes on the A379. In addition to the ordinary parish council business, refurbishment of the Stokenham to Torcross footpath had been completed, together with fencing the lower boundary of the Chillington playing field and the creation of a pedestrian access between Helmers and Orchard Way. Heritage Lottery Funding had been obtained for the Growing Orchard Communities project, to promote the wider use of orchards in the parish, including the community orchards at Stokenham, Beeson and Chillington. The aim of this project was to encourage people to use them not just as orchards but as community public spaces, to enjoy wildlife and recreational pursuits such as picking the fruit.

Julian Brazil had at times summed up District Council as a rubbish collection service with a small planning department on the side. The parish council had even less authority, and no power to make those further up the chain of government listen to its views. Those on the parish council were all volunteers and it was at times a thankless job. Despite this, throughout the year, all the parish council work got done: paths were cleared; verges and hedges were trimmed, mowed and cut; gullies and culverts cleaned out; bus shelters maintained; and landowners were reminded to keep their hedges trimmed. So perhaps the mark of an efficient Parish Council is that it is only noticed when it stopped doing what it is supposed to do.

One topic that repeatedly reared its head throughout the last twelve months was the fragility of our coastal communities in the face of coastal erosion happening right before our eyes. The communities of Torcross, Beesands and Hallsands had taken a beating. Each had a different prognosis and treatment and parish council professed their solidarity and would continue to bring pressure to bear to try and assist with solutions that would or could work.

The Chairman finished by thanking all his colleagues on the parish council and whose wise advice he had relied on during the year and acknowledged the support of the parish clerk.

4. VERBAL REPORTS

POLICE

Sgt Green explained that he was the Kingsbridge Neighbourhood Team Officer and advised the below: .

Total crime for Stokenham Parish 01/04/15 -31/03/16 = 19

Same period 2014-2015 = 30

Same period 2013-2014 = 18

Breakdown of crimes year 2015-2016.

Fraud: 2

Burglary: 1 (down from 10 previous year)

Criminal damage: 4

Offensive phone calls: 2

Out of control dogs: 3

Theft: 4

Drink drive: 3

These crimes had been dealt with as follows:

3 people arrested and charged (the drink drivers)

1 person cautioned

4 people subject of community resolution (restorative justice)

There had been a 36% reduction since last year, which was broadly similar to the Coleridge area figure of 31%. Total crime was down 3.8% during that period over Devon County. Sadly domestic abuse and sexual offences appeared to be on the increase.

For Devon and Cornwall a fall in crime was good news but he was cautious as a large national survey of rural police forces found that 27% of crimes in rural areas were never reported. He was not convinced that it was 27% in this area but accepted that there was a degree of under-reporting. If people felt that the police were not around they just did not report crime. Sgt Green felt this perception was wrong: they were still around, just did not have the office desks. There were many different ways of reporting crimes and he urged everyone to act. If someone is a victim of crime they should report it, because a crime not reported cannot be investigated. Resource-wise, this was a geographically strange area, being a fantastic rural and coastal landscape sandwiched between Plymouth and Torbay, each of which required considerable resources. At times he had to have difficult conversations with senior staff to ensure he retained enough officers in the South Hams, therefore even if someone experienced a minor crime they should report it to 101 or email 101@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk

Cllr Rogers was surprised that a crime like theft could be under-reported and asked whether a police crime number wasn't necessary in order to make an insurance claim. Sgt Green said that it was, but suggested that people might not report a theft either because the stolen items were not insured, or because the insurance excess was so high so it was not worth making a claim.

Sgt Green left the meeting to attend Kingsbridge Town Council.

COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Cllr. Brazil noted from the previous report and figures provided he was almost being encouraged to commit crime to keep police officers in a job!

As a local councillor he noted these were difficult times and all local authorities and local bodies were struggling to survive. Therefore across the board they could not afford to do some things.

As District Council representative he noted Local Authorities had been capped at 2% for rates increase and if they were above they had to go to referendum. It was too expensive for a referendum so in truth Local Authorities were just capped at 2%. However as a relatively low precept authority they were allowed the rule of 2% or a £5 increase on each bill which had put them up equivalent to 3.5% this year. Their main duty was rubbish collection and South Hams District Council he felt did a pretty good job at this and this was clear as everyone was affected. Their other issue was planning and planning enforcement and he could not say the same about this service and did not think it had been running well and was continually told by officers and some senior councillors that it would get better. This District Council planning he felt had reached a stupid point where someone out at Dunston Cross was developing a house and it took 5 months for SHDC to get there to say stop. This was replicated across the District and whilst the department was under pressure with cuts as local residents we deserved better.

District Council had also consider setting up a Local Authority Company as part of the Transition 18 project. They had downsized backroom staff and kept frontline officers which were good but the IT system which was supposed to help had major problems. They needed to get round the IT problems and on 23rd May they would be meeting the software company. One thing about a Local Authority Company was that lots of councils set up arms length business companies but SHDC wanted to move all their service provision into one company and there would be a shell of District Council left. This proposal would come before District Council members in June. The intention was that once set up they could then sell services to other authorities. Firstly Cllr Brazil felt they should achieve a product they could reliably sell to others before setting such up a company and this was currently an ongoing argument.

As the County Council representative they went for the 2% increase plus being allowed another 2% ringfenced to pay for adult social services which had been affected by the increase in the minimum wage. Cllr Brazil supported this outgoing because he felt County did not have any other option. Adult social care needed support more than anything else as they were suffering. One bug bear he had with County was their approach to roads and road maintenance. Devon County had the largest road network of any local authority in the country and it cost £60million p.a. and following Government cuts roads were getting worse. Now County would not mend potholes till they got bigger or they did repairs slower and this was storing up a problem which could only get worse. With the proposed devolution County might find other ways of raising revenue or may indeed get more funding into the Core Budget.

Like the Parish Council Chairman he wanted to talk about coastal erosion. At Torcross, this time round the response had been brilliant. Fifteen to sixteen years ago when the last breach took place it took months to sort everything out with regard to funding, planning and sensitive area agreement. This time all the partners were involved and it was team work and within a few days there as a diversion through the car park, the road was mended and opened and works stopped during the Easter holidays to allow businesses trade. Parish Council supported all these works along with others partners such as Whitley Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England, District and County Council. When the cracks appeared some did not think they worked quickly enough but seeking the best solution they now had piling down 4metres which had given a very vulnerable piece of road probably another 20 years life.

At Beesands as in all coastal defence works neither County nor District Council had the amount of funding to stop coastal erosion. That task and funding fell on the Environment Agency. Erosion at Beesands was quite extreme and the Green was probably half the width it was before this year and it was only sand and soil and any high tide or big swell more could be washed away. Cllr Brazil suggested it would not be long before the houses would have front gardens of beach. They were awaiting an Environment Agency report to give views but at

present District were in limbo as rock armour was pretty useless costing £200 - £300,000 and had little effect.

At Hallsands there was massive erosion and the road that ran up to the old Hallsands hotel completely collapsed 3 – 4 weeks ago with a high tide and big swell. County Council had said from the beginning that they did not have funds and were not inclined to protect the road and now it had gone they had no duty to. The residents had done a fantastic job creating the temporary footpath and fencing off the dangerous areas and the coastal path was reopened down at Hallsands so hopefully it would remain to the end of summer. In the longer term if nothing was done the truth was that the whole car park and beach would be eroded and there would need to be a long term solution. The South West Coastal Path Team in the next few months would be deciding what their preferred route was. Cllr Brazil had requested them to liaise with residents as he had been just as guilty, with regard to lack communication, but it was an issue down there and he would not pretend that they would get funds and all would be alright. He appreciated that for some people with properties it was an awkward time but in the long term view it would be remiss of County Council to protect a small area of beach when they had all other calls on their services and funding.

There was a large planning application that had not been verified by District Council as yet coming for Green Park Way. District officers were going through matters with the developer at present and parish council did not have any information on this as yet. When it came for consultation he asked everyone to comment at that time because at the moment there was no point in expressing views to the District Council because the application did not have a reference number as yet. As the local District member he would be asking for the application to be taken to full committee so that whatever views all could see all arguments and any decisions taken were open and transparent. All issues for a planning application were a balance of economic, social, environment etc. Cllr Rogers asked when local people should be commenting on what community facilities they felt should be given to benefit the community for this development. At District sometimes there were things that the developer accepted because the community wanted it. However section 106 monies were provided for education, transport (i.e. a roundabout) and recreation. The former are set at contributions but the recreation provision was more flexible and could provide something for children or sporting or the environment.

Alison Churton from Bickerton, Hallsands asked if they could have section 106 monies for coastal erosion and was advised no. Down at Hallsands they as residents had been looking at activity along the beach and she asked how the need in their area against Beesands defences had been assessed. It was Environment Agency criteria and was all about property and whilst Cllr Brazil acknowledged the amount of properties there Fordsworth Cottages were not in danger. District had not asked the Environment Agency to look at Beesands and not include Hallsands. The Environment Agency had a hold the line policy at Beesands but not at Hallsands in view of historic events. He was then asked how the District budget was allocated fairly and he responded that Local Government was clear and transparent as to how it was distributed. How did District Council propose to deal with an emergency if it happened. Did they have a duty if someone was in a house that was burning and emergency services needed to get through and the access was not there. At the time of planning application there were a few new houses at the front and this would have been down to the solicitor carrying out searches. When asked about no parking signs as the area now got congested with those using the beach he noted that some local people would say that there had always been parking down on that beach so it would be a legal view to be sought. Further questions involved local employment, local fishermen from this parish using the beach for their livelihood and in Cllr Brazil's view they still could use it. It was wrong to say they could not use it as Beesands could not use their slipways due to beach level dropping so they moved up to the Cellars to launch. Cllr Brazil

would encourage and assert that they always can launch from there but the road was gone and inevitably the car park would go and probably the houses. Building a house there in view of the beach level was stupid.

Cllr Rogers noted that currently South West Highways had the County Contract and asked who was getting the contract next time. County Council had put this out to tender but who checked South West Highway works. Cllr Brazil had requested a list to know when they were doing works in his parishes but they would not provide this information. He believed they were being obstructive. On the main road out of Beesands, Beeson Pool, a resident noted a pothole. That pothole at Beeson Pool was in fact a British Telecom fault and it would 'outlive all of us' as the water was running down the ducting and making a well.

OPEN FORUM

Mr Edwards from Lamacraft wanted to raise the issue of rural broadband as for them it was close to non-existent. It was noted that the nearest cabinet was at Chivelstone. Cllr Brazil noted Stokenham was connected and Chivelstone was to be done and there was a sub duct at Kellaton and they were on the way to Start Point. The Broadband provision contact details of someone who had spoken at the Coleridge Association meeting would be provided.

Steve Manchip of Coleridge Bus advised their service had been going for 36 years and was not just for old people as any age could get on. It was a 22 seater so users needed to contact the controller as they operated under a Department of Transport licence and needed to know numbers and collection points. They used to pick 5 or 6 people up from Hallsands. He urged everyone that the bus was a good way to go shopping and Hallsands, Beesands and other around were collected on a Friday. They were founded by the Coleridge Group of Councils and had kept it going but the problem was demographic because of the population of older people in villages and younger people were using the car. The bus was far more social and convenient and when there was an emergency if residents did not have the bus they were stuck so please use it.

Torrige, Totnes Ring and Ride and Crediton buses had gone because they all relied on Devon County funding whereas this bus was self-supporting. He was asked 'Where do you collect from Hallsands' and he advised the car park if they could turn. It was easier to get a seat nowadays than it used to be but do book. They cared about their passengers but it was not a little game as there were lots of regulations just the same as public buses. It was also cheap to hire the whole bus too and they were all right for drivers. Always they had lots of lady drivers as they are good and the bus committee only asked drivers to do two drives a month so please also come forward and train. Bus passes can be used on this bus and a lady present advised she did not know it could be used on the Coleridge bus. Fares were in line with other bus companies as they could not undercut them and the Coleridge bus was running along the A379 Torcross to Strete even when the road was restricted. Thanks were given to Stokenham Parish Council for their generosity towards running the bus.

Meeting closed: 8.09p.m.

All present were invited to remain and peruse the amenity project ideas.