

**Minutes of the Stokenham Annual Parish  
meeting held on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017  
in the Stokenham Parish Hall at 6.30p.m.  
with Cllr Piers Spence presiding**

The Chair welcomed everyone and there were approximately 25 people in attendance.

**APOLOGIES RECEIVED**

John Cadman – Stokenham Parish Hall  
Jean Brooking – Stokenham WI  
Clare Pawley – Stokenham History Society  
Representatives from Chillington Health Centre

**1. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016 were APPROVED as a true record with all present agreeing before they were duly signed by the Chairman.

*The agenda was taken out of order to accommodate speakers who needed to leave to attend other meetings.*

**2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Gill assures me that the APM is an ancient tradition with its origins in medieval times, when all the ratepayers of the district would gather together in a public meeting to grumble about the authorities. So nothing much has changed there in 1000 years.

The past year has been an eventful one in Stokenham Parish, and yet the major themes have been the usual ones: I took a quick look at what I said at 2016's APM before I came out, and sure enough, the issues that concern a community like ours don't change much from year to year. As ever, a fair bit of energy was expended on keeping the forces of nature in check. At Torcross, the sea defences were strengthened and the road rebuilt; further works were carried out at Beesands; at Hallsands, which was the focus of an informative and moving centenary commemoration in January, the coast path was diverted and there were more worrying rockfalls to add to the damage to the car park. Through all this, however, the preponderance of easterly winds have left us with beach levels 1 to 2 meters higher than a year ago. And as if to show that it's not just the coastline that bears the brunt of climate change, the flash flood of 16 June caused serious damage to property in a number of our villages. The fact that this happened on the very day that Council was discussing the Outline Planning Application for Green Park Way, that notoriously flood-prone development site, in a public meeting in Chillington, was not lost on us.

Money, as always, was tight. As central governments progressively cut funding to local govt, so Parish is being encouraged – some would say forced – to take on liabilities, which were previously the responsibility of District. We have no great pot of money so anything we want to do we need to find money for. We were successful in getting funding for a number of initiatives during the year. We secured £4,000 of Heritage Lottery Funding from Growing Community Orchards to improve and increase public use of the three community orchards in the Parish, at Beeson, Stokenham Village Green and Chillington Great Wood. The orchard has always been a significant focus for the community in Devon, as Charles has said. That funding has enabled a program of events through the year, ranging from October's very successful Apple Fayre, which over 200 people attended, and which we have determined will be an annual event, pond building and sign carving at Beeson, a bench-making workshop in Chillington, building a

bug-house with a class from Stokenham School, a bioblitz, a moth safari, and various other events. We are still looking for additional volunteers to join the Chillington group.

Other funding wins included TAP funding of £500 towards providing Portaloos in Hallsands this summer, and £1,500 to alleviate flooding along Summerye Lane; £8,500 from the Community Reinvestment Fund for drainage and surfacing works to be extended up Summerye Lane to allow better access to the Woods and the Orchard; £1,000 from Devon County Highways volunteer works, with a matched contribution of a further £1000 from parish council, to allow problem buddles/drains/grips to be cleared and reduce flooding. And most impressively, a fantastic £39,000 from the Community Reinvestment Fund to enable the Parish Hall Committee to repair and re-roof Stokenham Parish Hall.

There are many other bits and pieces: Bus shelter maintenance, road-sign cleaning, organize weed spraying on verges, grass cutting on permissive paths and highways In August, after many delays, we finally completed the transfer of ownership of the Chillington Playing Field to from District to Parish Council. We are now charged with the duty and cost of maintaining it, which is why, while we continue to encourage public use of the field, we need to levy a charge for any private hire. After the transfer, the parish council negotiated with the Trustees of the previous landowners to remove a restrictive covenant on the land. We are now carrying out a survey of the field in the hope that we can drain the land to ensure all-season use.

We assisted Beeson Village Community to retain their telephone box: BT will only allow a statutory body, such as a parish council, to take ownership of the boxes, so we hold the Agreement on the village's behalf and they they renovate it and offer volunteers to look after it. The PC is applying for Lottery Funding to cover the cost and provision of defibrillator to go in it – an excellent example of PC-Village co-operation.

I can't finish without mentioning Development, the issue which has caused most consternation and occupied most of our time over the past year. We seem to be caught between the rock of the Government's determination to force hundreds of houses on us, whether we want them or not, at prices that few can afford; and the hard place of a desperate shortage of affordable homes – and by that I mean homes that are actually affordable to local people on a local salary. This was the year of the JLP, heralded as a new and collaborative consultation to solve the problem of what and where to build in the South Hams. Your parish council agreed to engage earnestly in that exercise, to represent the views of local people. We organized numerous public meetings, consultations and community events, to ensure that the authentic voice of local opinion was recorded and made known to the plan makers. To say the outcome was a disappointment would be a massive understatement —many would characterize it as a betrayal – and most of you know that last month, after detailed soundings within the community, your parish council rejected the housing allocations suggested in the Joint Local Plan. Where this will end we do not know: we have not yet registered a victory, but we will continue to fight for a development plan that meets the needs of local people.

Finally: Parish Council met 14 times in full session, with a 90% attendance rate, and in numerous smaller committee meetings and ad-hoc groups. It examined over 50 planning applications and objected to around a fifth. Four councillors resigned during the year and four new ones were appointed. Council is at full strength and in good heart, and for the first time for a while has a representative from almost every village and settlement in the Parish.

### **3. VERBAL REPORTS**

## **POLICE**

Sgt Dave Green Neighbourhood Team Leader, Kingsbridge was in attendance as Stokenham was one of 24 parishes he was responsible for. The report for this parish for this year was as follows:

Total crime Stokenham Parish 23/5/16 -22/5/17 = 30      (total police incidents = 152)  
Total crime Stokenham Parish 23/5/15 -22/5/16 = 19  
Total crime Stokenham Parish 23/5/14 -22/5/15 = 30

Crimes over last 12 months include:

- 1 x blackmail
- 9 x theft
- 6 x criminal damage
- 1 x threatening behaviour
- 1 x distribution of indecent images
- 1 x possession of knife
- 2 x non-dwelling burglary
- 4 x dwelling burglary (all at same time in November)
- 1 x harassment
- 1 x cannabis possession
- 1 x out of control dog
- 2 x drink drive

As with most other parishes there was a rise in crime but statistically the numbers were small. In the broad context around the whole of South Devon crime last year went up by 18%. In cities they were reporting a rise in knife crime so this was a common theme. There were a number of theories/reasons for this but on a practical point comparing crime figures from year to year was fraught with misunderstanding as recording goal posts changed. Practices were increasingly tightening criteria by which they reported crime and Devon and Cornwall police were recently picked up by HMIC about certain policy and systemic failures on their reporting of crime. The HMIC definitions of crime were domestic or non-domestic burglary and year on year the law changed so something that was not recorded previously could become a crime nowadays. Added to this was the social media genre of crime now in existence.

Police dealt with more than just crime with 30 crimes in the parish but attending 152 policing incidents. Non crime matters covered missing persons, vulnerable people, unexplained deaths, child protection, road incidents, flooding, extreme weather assistance to name but a few. All were valid tasks but not crime.

During the next four years the police would be losing a number of PCSOs which would be just over half of those employed over Devon and Cornwall to provide funding to recruit an extra hundred front line police officers. As yet they did not know where PCSOs would be removed and where they would remain and what neighbourhood policing would look like in the future. Also with the provision of 100 new police officers where would they be placed? The Chief office said they would be at the front line but Sgt Green questioned what the future front line would be. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century police officers were highly skilled and a lot sat behind a computer screen dealing with online fraud, child abuse and international terrorism and perhaps this was the modern frontline. They would not necessarily be uniformed 'bobbies' out in the community as things were changing.

***Sgt Green left the meeting.***

## **CHILLINGTON HEALTH CENTRE**

Genevieve McBride of Chillington Doctors Practice gave apologies on behalf of herself and the partners who were unable to attend. She explained they were always interested in patient views and asked that if any patients were interested in joining their patient participation group they contact the Reception team on 01548580214.

## **COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR**

Cllr. Brazil gave thanks to those who took part in the election especially those that elected him again as County Councillor.

With regard to the County and roads and highway maintenance, as the Chairman mentioned in his report, parish councils had to take up the slack for drains, ditches etc clearance. Resurfacing and potholes was a County responsibility and it was getting worse. A new company, Skanska, had been contracted and took over on 1<sup>st</sup> April and they had yet to see how this worked. The head of highways retired and the acting head was now Meg Booth whom Cllr Brazil had great admiration for. Meg Booth had been the one who just opened the Torcross car park up in order to run the road through whilst works were carried out and he saw her as proactive on all fronts. However the bottom line was that it took £60million p.a. to repair and maintain the entire Devon road network at its current standard but they could only spend £40million p.a. so every year they were £20million down and the roads got worse.

School finance had been highlighted in the national news with regard to cuts and Devon County had overspent its budget on special educational needs due to being demand led. They recouping that £2million overspend by cutting £33 per pupil even though Devon had a worse national financial settlement for schooling. The rates tax went up by 5% with 3% for social care. Funding for this service need and where it came from was a huge issue especially with Devon's aging population. Cllr Brazil felt it was not just money that was the problem for social care but the area did not have enough carers in the community.

With regard to District Council he had just one word, shambles. South Hams District Council was a wealthy council and had millions stashed away. However they were playing the old trick of saying they were running the council in a different way and more efficiently but every so often they were taking money out of reserves to deal with complaints and issues they had not solved. The balance sheet was getting worse but they received income from providing new homes bonus. There was the debacle proposed of a Local Authority Company which they spent £100,000s on lawyers for a system due to fail which thankfully they pulled out of. Now they had a ridiculous idea of borrowing £80million to invest in commercial properties with no knowledge of commercial letting. They were now considering introducing charging for the collection of brown bins at £40 p.a. Also the Totnes Leisure Centre was about to close and now District was talking about a merger with West Devon who paid considerably more council tax each p.a. so on equalizing payment across the two Districts Souths Hams would pay more but this was supposed to remain confidential and councillors must not discuss it! Equally in West Devon they had exactly the same number of councilors as South Hams but they had half the size of population so they would theoretically have double representation for their residents.

The Chairman mentioned the Joint Local Plan consultation and Stokenham Parish Council's response. Cllr Brazil advised that as the District Councillor for this area he would challenge the Local Plan at every opportunity on house numbers, types of housing, location of sites as it was not suitable for any of his parishes. His priority with District would be to get them to transfer all assets to parish councils as soon as possible because inevitably District Council would cease to exist and all assets would be subsumed by Plymouth City. He did not want to see car parks transferred to Plymouth and as District had included some in their Local Plan

they or Plymouth could build on District Council car parks so that the vitality of towns would be ruined by no parking provision.

This could be avoided by transferring assets to parish councils but leasing the use back to District Council at a peppercorn. Then if District Council ceased to exist the assets would remain with the locality. He would work on this as his main aim.

With reference to the play park down at Beesands Cllr Brazil felt that Rob Sekula District Assets tried to do what the community wanted but further up the chain all plans had been stymied. Rob Sekula was present at this meeting but the Chairman and Cllr Brazil urged everyone to remember he was the messenger. Cllr Brazil was as frustrated as many others and had been promised things but his ideas were ignored. He was told the play area would be opened and then it did not and now finally they were advised they could only have half of the play area as District would not spend any money on it. It would take £4000 to open it but the first storm could take it away. Cllr Brazil felt that Stokenham deserved better. On a final point he asked that if anyone had issues could they please get in touch as their District and County Councillor he needed to know what was important so he could represent people.

Cllr Rogers expressed his frustration and concern that the Beesands play area was installed when he was Chairman of the council and parish council had diverted £25,000 of capital funding there for this project. The advice taken from District and the play equipment companies never highlighted any concerns in relation to the matting nor joints of the equipment and yet just a few years down the line it was closed. Why was this matting and not wet pour used and why could the area by the council houses not become the alternative site.

Rob Sekula Assets Team advised that he was responsible for looking after public open space, improvements, new open space and day to day maintenance. He acknowledged that District closed a couple of pieces of equipment a year ago due to the annual inspection from civil engineers who effectively provided a list of defects, A – immediate, B – advisory but serious, C – maintenance in due course. If all A rated problems are restored quickly District Council insurance remains valid.

Last year the assessors were brutal with Beesands and said all safety matting was not meeting any regulations and the critical heights for safety matting was completely ineffective. They needed to remove all safety matting and suggested the only type of matting to work in this location would be wet pour. For multi play and the roundabout the fall heights meant the matter was ineffective due to contamination, there was corrosion on the slide and swings so even the slide had a limited life now. The decision was taken to fence them off fairly quickly. The type of safety matting grid system with holes and grass growing up was initially installed but gravel from the beach and sand meant there was no turf and they could not maintain it by sweeping or Hoovering. The only option was to rip up and replace. The roundabout had been out of use more than working as gravel was gumming it up so this piece of equipment was completely unsuitable for this area. At that time no one thought of ingress of sea. They had bounced options with their engineers and looked at a range of surfacing types but the only one that had any chance of success was wet pour. It would cost £4/5000 to go around the equipment but would need to be maintained regularly so if there was a storm and any gravel got in they would have to send someone to sweep it immediately and it might only last a few years.

They then considered alternative sites in Beesands including the site behind the toilets but because of a community housing project consideration which was proposed the site was not available. District could have tried to get funding for the play area but as discussions went forward it was felt any installation had to go ahead with the housing scheme. Sewerage for the

houses just above lay underneath this area so to remedy this site able to take the play equipment District said it would cost £100,000 up front so this threatened the housing project as well as play area. District did not want to pump any more funds into the current site so wished it closed as not a sustainable location. There was however a need for play in Beesands and they did suggest another location which was shot down by parish council but there were no other areas. District would remove the two bits of equipment, the roundabout and multiplay as not suitable in that location. They could keep the slide, swing and spinning saucer there for as long as it was safe to keep the area operating. At the same time they suggested parish might want to start exploring any other possible area in Beesands. He had secured monies so might have District funding of £25,000 and parish council could take ownership in future.

The Chairman thanked him for a full and detailed account. Cllr Rogers noted that this information was known a year ago so why when the play area was put in did District not state it was not suitable so parish council had lost £25,000. The matting was not queried then but all of a sudden District was dashing all hopes. Rob Sekula questioned the officers who made the decisions then but no one thought of these issues then. Cllr Rogers continued that he did not understand why the play area could not be relocated below the fishermen's cottages and felt this was just a get out clause. Rob Sekula advised that their drainage expert said that in no uncertain terms it could not go on top of the sewerage tank but Cllr Ansell noted that the sewerage only took up a corner of the site.

The Chairman noted that sewerage was not plausible reason and sounded like a reason that had been put forward as there was another use for that site. It was suggested that a review of the pipe and tank charts showing run off drainage would illustrate that there was ample space for the equipment to be placed on ground that did not have drainage under it. Cllr Rogers asked why parish council was being fobbed off and whether it was a health hazard due to smell. If so why was there a public footpath through the middle of this area. With regard to maps of the drainage Rob Sekula would have a conversation with colleagues and Cllr Rogers agreed that he must go away and get a proper answer. There was no sewerage leakage coming through the ground and it was quite safe where it ran under the ground and did not pose any health hazard. An engineer had said this because of the sewerage and it appeared an open and shut case. There was sewerage under peoples feet everywhere and there were not any great footings from play equipment that went deep enough to affect the pipes. The Chairman asked if this matter had been considered in isolation of any other anticipated use that other people had for this site as experts reports could be made to fit the facts that people wanted it to appear. Had anybody spelt out why it could not be done with measurements and plans or was it just a very curt – it cannot be done. Rob Sekula explained he was happy to receive the questions and take these back for clarity. Cllr Mrs Rowland noted that many people had sewerage running through their gardens and also had decking over it. Presently the closed site was an eyesore and embarrassment and the parish had requested Chris Brook previously to remove the equipment and store it safely until a site could be provided.

The Chairman thanked Rob for attending and also for taking questions and passing them on.  
***Dist Cllr Brazil and Rob Sekula left the meeting.***

#### **4. OPEN FORUM**

No one wished to ask any questions nor contribute a verbal report.

#### **5. CHARLES STANILAND – ORCHARD LINK**

Charles explained that Orchards in Devon survived due mainly to what service or need there was for the apples. He explained that he was Chairman of Orchard Link and during the last 5 to 10 years they became aware that there were a variety of community groups involved with orchards and in order to assist they felt they could try and get some funding to help these

groups. Nearly two years ago they applied for Heritage Lottery Funding and there was an inaugural meeting at Sharpham to launch the project which included the Orchard Group of Stokenham, Chillington and Besson along with 20 other groups across the South Hams from Noss Mayo to Goodrington to Newton Abbot. The regeneration of orchards was quite surprising and they were growing in number all the time. Some 10 – 20 years ago there was a community orchard at Stoke Gabriel and Ashprington but this was pretty much all. There was a difference between servicing needs for private people with orchards and community groups so it appeared that maybe history was coming full circle to what orchard management used to be. From maps up until the 1920/30s the area was riddled with orchards but this declined and now they were quietly expanding.

Another indicator of the success of the Orchard Link movement was that there were small places popping up to enable people to buy trees.

He was pleased that the Stokenham cluster was part of this movement. Community Orchard groups were very diverse and different as with Transition Totnes where part of their orchards was in the graveyard. It became apparent when they started that the main issues were around people, communications and skills and if the people and trees were already there it would be a success. Some places people had an area and planted trees but by the time they grew to be able to fruit the people disappeared. Trying to get people involved when they were not involved already took much longer. A community orchard was like a Village Green as it enabled people to be involved and empowered them with a supply of fruit for activities, personal needs and fun. Coupled with this was the wildlife, flora and fauna. At the edge of Dartmoor where he lived he still managed to grow trees. Developing fruits and varying signs of a 60 year old apple tree was about as diverse as a 100 year old oak tree for fungi, birds, etc contributing to diversity. He advised he also belonged to a meadow group/wildflower with events such as a bumble bee talk at Lustley where people came together and talked about them. People however tended to focus on the honeybee too much but there was also the wild bee and solitary bees who worked longer hours and harder. He was extremely impressed to hear of the work on the Stokenham bug hotel to fit into this natural cycle.

He then went through and explained various orchards around Devon and the information and equipment sharing gained by being members of Orchard Link, as Stokenham Parish is. Open access and leaving areas with longer grass which takes less moisture from the trees was to be encouraged as was signage and involving the whole community.

Further discussion was around questions raised on natural products used like garlic sprays and also seaweed. Problems with a pear tree with a lot of upright bare very fine shoots and action to be taken to encourage its health such as chop it down or leave it and see were raised? General discussion on late cutting of grasses or sheep eating in the area till end April/May could produce great different wildflowers and animals.

The Orchard Link Heritage Lottery project finished in about July and then they would put the paperwork together but there would still be annual meetings of Orchard Link and they wanted orchard groups to provide a representative to help other orchards.

The Chairman thanked Charles for an extremely entertaining, informative and thought provoking talk. This showed just how wonderful it was to have an orchard on your doorstep open access to visit; amazingly diverse bio environment for many species but the most important and vital thing was the opportunity to use them to bring communities together. Total benefit with no downsides.

Meeting closed: 8.45p.m.

All present were invited to remain discuss ideas and issues over wine and nibbles.