

DUNCHIDEOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes from the Annual Parish meeting on Tuesday 16th May 2017 at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall, Dunchideock

Present – Cllr P Goodchild (Acting Chairman), Cllr. Baker, Cllr Dow, Cllr Ellis, Cllr. Eveleigh and Cllr. Swain.

Also in attendance Cllr K Lake and Cllr J Goodey (TDC), Mrs C Retallick (clerk) and 9 member of the public

1. Apologies for Absence

None received

2. Minutes – to approve the minutes from the last meeting held on 9th May 2016

These were signed as a true record of that meeting.

3. Chairman’s report from 2016/17

– see Cllr Goodchild’ report.

4. Reports from local organisations and clubs

None were offered.

5. Open discussion.

A parishioner asked for an update on the planning application of Penn Hill, the clerk was able to tell the meeting the latest information and the explained the process. Also advised the meeting that if the council wished to add anything further comments this would be accepted. There was a lengthy discussion. Cllr Lake noted that after the March meeting he was confident that there was no need to take the matter further. Since then following the feelings within the parish and the objections which have been lodged at TDC would suggest further comments would be useful.

Cllr Swain enquired about the caravan at Lyalls. It is reported not to be occupied or used for any purpose. The district councillors noted they would mention it to the TDC enforcement officer.

There were general concerns expressed that developers are not advertising their planning applications enough and definitely not ensuring neighbouring properties are fully informed. It was agreed that proactive councils and joint council meetings could improve this situation as the law does not ensure this happens.

Signed

Date.....

CHAIRMANS REPORT

This last year has been by far the most difficult of those I have experienced in my 14 years as a councillor.

At the beginning of the year, there was a widely held view in the Council that having the same Chairman for the fifth year in succession was not good, and that we also needed new and younger councillors. This was a view also shared by the chairman of four years, Dudley Swain, but he did offer to continue if there were again no takers. This time, however there was a possible candidate, Councillor Karen Roberts. She was a new and lively member of the Council and with good experience of local government. She was approached and after talking it over with past chairmen and councillors, she agreed to stand.

Councillor Swain stood down before the annual meeting, not without regrets it must be said, and Councillor Roberts was elected. Councillor Swain was thanked for all his good work over the past few years, work which included everything from the 2012 and 2015 Jubilee celebrations to considerable improvements in the council's archiving and IT.

At the same time as this, however the Council's new Clerk of four months standing, Sarah Sharp, a retired senior police officer, decided to give in her notice. There had been problems over her use of the IT, and then over payment of remuneration due. Initially the Council withheld payment but Sarah stood her ground, writing a full account of events as she saw them. At this point, the Council was advised that withholding payment could lead to legal action and so payment was made. The final part of this issue occurred during Karen's first meeting as chairman. The heat generated was intense, and the following morning, Karen resigned.

It was a considerable blow to the Council, leaving myself, Karen's vice chairman, in charge. Over the next month, in some difficult meetings, the council was to lose another clerk, but by good fortune Penny Clapham, clerk to Kenn was prepared to take on the role temporarily.

It was my feeling that the council at this time needed an experienced and steady hand in the chair and I approached Ray Mallett, who had been chair for eight years up to 2010 and worked with both myself and Councillor Swain. He agreed to take on the task and he was co-opted back onto the council and once again took the chair.

It was not an easy time for either him or Penny Clapham but in November it was learnt that Carol Retallick, a highly experienced clerk with 17 years with the busy Ilington parish would be prepared to take over as permanent clerk. At much the same time, Trevor Baker, another ex-councillor, was co-opted onto the council and the council was now up to full strength – but only for a short time. Ray Mallett had found the chairmanship wearing. Also he found that there were expectations in the council which went beyond his belief that small councils like ours should have the welfare of the village as its main aim.

All those who attended the March 21st meeting chaired by Councillor Mallett thought it was a good meeting, good-tempered – like old times for the District Councillors and older members. However, it did come to a split decision over the tourist development at Penn Hill Farm. Over the following two weeks there was a strong reaction to the application from the village. Some of the criticism was personal and Councillor Mallett resigned both as Chairman and Councillor.

Once more, as vice-chairman, I was left holding the baby, but determined to put our own Annus Horribilis behind us. We now have a clerk who is proactive in dealing with her charges on the council. There is new blood joining to bring us back to 7 members and perhaps ease the feeling that we have become too self-centred. Hopefully we can face the second two years of our tenure in office that much the wiser for the experience of the past year.