

SHEBBEAR PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting held at 7-30 pm on Tuesday February 10th 2009 in the Church Room. Shebbear.

Present: Chairman: R Johns. Cllrs: H Davis. G Slade. L Quance. E Haste. P Lomax.
R Gliddon. N Jeffers. District Cllr A Saywell. Clerk: David Walker.
PC 3569 Dick Rowlands. 5 Members of the Public.

Agenda. 2009. Commenced at 7-30 pm. (As the representatives from Torrridge D.C. had not yet arrived.)

11. Apologies for Absence.

Cllr R.Clark.(Prev Eng). Cllr S.Hillier.(Delayed at work). PCSO M.Baker. (Off Duty.)

At this point Chairman suspended official business and invited PC Rowlands to present the Police Report.

After introducing himself, this being his first visit to the parish council, PC Rowlands told the meeting that it was his intention to have a Police presence at the fortnightly Pop-In coffee morning in the Church Room to make contact with any parishioners with matters to discuss. The next date being February 20th. There had been 2 recorded crimes during the last month, 1 domestic assault and 1 theft of heating oil. PC Rowlands asked everybody to be vigilant as thefts of fuels are likely to become more prevalent during the current financial situation. There had also been instances of nuisance drivers around the College grounds and the Police and College will find the reporting of details of any vehicles involved to be very useful.

Cllr Quance asked if passing attention could be paid to the skateboard ramp where instances of motorcycles being used had been reported. Cllr Lomax said that local crimes and occurrences were not being relayed to Neighbourhood Watch coordinators, all we seemed to hear about were occasional incidents in places like Torrington or South Molton.

After being thanked for his attendance by Chairman, PC Rowlands left the meeting.

7-40 pm. Chairman welcomed Maria Bailey and Gill Makin from Torrridge District Council.

Maria, who is the Community Planning and Development Manager, began by describing how the planning system has been in a some turmoil over the past few years and that a lot of effort has been put in to improve the procedures. The department is now fully staffed and trained to apply the new policies that are now in place, one of which is to include the public more fully in the planning process. The department is aware that in the past decisions made by the parish councils have sometimes been overruled and no feedback has been given as to why this has happened. This is one area where improvements are to be made. Case officers will in future work with, and keep councils informed of the progress of applications. Gill, as the Enabling Officer for the Department, added that it would be necessary to help them to carry out these new intentions for councils to contact them straight away if problems arise in order that prompt action can be taken to resolve the problem. There have recently been training sessions for councils on planning procedures which were well received and it is intended to hold more of these in future. Maria continued by saying that, since the introduction of the 2004 Planning Act, there has been more emphasis on community involvement rather than the former "top down" system which tended to impose government guidelines too rigidly. The intentions set out in Parish Plans are being taken into account now, not only by Planners but by other bodies, such as Health, Police and Fire departments. Chairman pointed out that as a rule if people don't complain it can be assumed that they are happy. One common complaint has been that Government guidelines have been used as rules to be obeyed at all costs. Maria agreed and said that the intention is now to challenge more vigorously any recommendations that have been overturned on appeal or in court, but to do this they need more grounds to justify the opposition, which is why we will see case officers coming back to applicants for more written evidence with which to prove a need. There are indications that local needs are now being respected provided there is the justification, because in the past, if matters were taken on by the Gov Office S.W. it was obvious that they didn't have a clue about local interests. But now that Torrridge is recognised as being unique in its way and that the new LDF plan is giving more up to date information there is scope for Torrridge to implement the new intentions successfully. Cllr Quance asked if Marias department had any involvement in maintaining the roads, which are in a terrible state. Maria said that maintenance is solely the responsibility of Highways, but there was an opportunity, when plans were being considered, for road improvements to be included in the decision making process. Cllr Davis asked if it was good practice to throw out an application on a technicality which could have been sorted out early in the process, avoiding the need for a reapplication. Gill said that this was an aspect which is included in the current changes. Case Officers are now expected to discuss plans with applicants and iron out any problems at an early stage if at all possible. Chairman said that the present policy

of allowing holiday lets was all very well, but the area was awash with holiday lets, what are needed are proper homes for local people. Maria said that the policy couldn't be changed immediately but as soon as the new procedures are in place and flexibility is used, then local needs can be addressed provided that there is proven justification. Cllr Haste said that there has been a trend for people to apply for retrospective permission after carrying out work and it seemed that they almost always got away with it which is very unfair on those who do things the proper way and brings the system into disrepute. Maria agreed that in the past the system had slipped and there had been a reluctance to enforce infringements, mainly due to the fear of the cost of losing cases that were disputed, but now that there were 2 Enforcement Officers and resources in place to fight cases there would be a change in policy which would see infringements cracked down on. Cllr Jeffers stated that the administration side of the department was far too slow, it was on occasion taking months to process cases with no feedback in the meantime, causing real difficulty and expense for people. Maria said that this will all change. As well as the staff levels being up to strength there had been a huge drop in the number of applications recently which meant that cases could be dealt with more efficiently and without unnecessary delay. Assurances were given that decisions were not made by individual officers alone, there was a system in place which ensured that cases were considered by senior staff as well and any queries were followed up by return site visits. There was some frustration at the delay in introducing the Regional Spatial Strategy but this was down to Government dithering which hopefully would be resolved by July this year. A lot more effort will be put into ensuring that community facilities will benefit from any developments in future, as this has been neglected in the past, with the reminder that Section 106 applications are not restricted to domestic projects. There will also be more emphasis placed on the concept of Sustainable Communities, with factors such as local employment being taken into account when developments are being proposed. Chairman thanked Maria and Gill for their attendance.

8-28pm Official agenda business resumed.

12. Declarations of Interest in items on the Agenda/ Any variations to Members Registration of Interests.

None received.

16. District Councillors Report.

As Mr Saywell had an early engagement the following morning and had to return to Exeter after the meeting his report was made earlier in the agenda. There is good news to report on this years Council Tax which is to be pegged at last years level, as it is thought to be inappropriate to inflict any increase under present circumstances. This will be paid for by dipping into reserves and by economies where possible. The grants for the Village Hall and Little Bears were about to be given final approval. The Boundary Commission report has been put back again due to unforeseen circumstances. S.M.C at Endford have still not applied for a licence despite only having a 6 month period before the matter goes to court. The topic of potholes in local roads was discussed with Cllr Davis reporting that he had some success in getting the defects between Battledown Cross and New Inn repaired yet again. This had only been achieved through some persistent Emailing. A number of persons present reported a selection of holes elsewhere in the parish which Clerk was asked to report.

13. Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday January 13th 2009, which had been previously circulated, were approved and signed.

14. Any matters arising from the Minutes.

None raised.

15. Agenda items for Discussion and Resolution.

- (a) Replacement seats. Councillors, having previously opted to obtain recycled material seats, had seen local examples at Okehampton and Bideford and decided they were not of a style to suit Shebbear and no other products were available to be physically seen. Cllr Haste said that we could spend forever debating the best way forward and suggested that we obtain one seat from Solway Products with a view to having more if found suitable. It was proposed by Cllr Quance and seconded by Cllr Haste with all in favour that this be done. Clerk will carry out the ordering procedure.
- (b) Road defects had been discussed earlier during District Councillors report.

17. Planning.

- (a) New Applications. 1/1291/2008/REM. 3 Industrial units at Lake.(Considered at Chairmans discretion to meet decision deadline.) This is a variation of 0462/2008 to enable Unit C to be moved away from power lines. No Objections.
- (b) Applications Granted. Received by councillors.
- (c) There were no relevant adjacent applications.

18. Finance.

- (a) Councillors recommended that the letter detailing the Section 106 contribution of £16,064 made by Midas Homes (Ackland Close), towards play area facilities, be referred to the Village Hall & P.F committee.
- (b) Councillors received the annual P3 Summary of expenditure, which was nil, also the P3 account balance figure of £1718.36 (which is held within the overall Shebbear parish council reserves.) All were in agreement that these returns be made to P3 in Exeter.

Bank Balances. Current a/c. £229.37. Reserve a/c. £17,796.08.

19. Correspondence.

- (a) Royal Garden Party. All were agreed that Chairman should be nominated for inclusion in the County ballot for tickets.
- (b) Geoffrey Cox MP. Surgery dates, placed on notice board.
- (c) DAPC. County Committee casual vacancy details received by councillors.
- (d) Details of the Credit Crunch Forum which was held in Bideford on Jan 27th were not received until the 21st leaving no time for circulation. However, if successful the event would be repeated elsewhere in future.
- (e) TDC. Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. This is a questionnaire which awaits the arrival of a missing page before it can be worked on.

At Chairmans discretion two letters from Shebbear Village Hall and P.F. Committee were read to council. The first thanked the parish council in anticipation of the agreed local grant for the coming year. The second asked that consideration be given to assisting the village hall to pay for the improvements currently under way. This matter will be placed on the March 10th Agenda.

20. Items for next Meetings Agenda on Tuesday March 10th 2009 , and any other business at the Chairmans discretion.

- (1) Proposed Social Housing Development at New Inn for Shebbear Methodist Circuit,
- (2) Request for grant towards village hall improvements.

There being no other Business the Meeting ended at 9-29 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....