

Newnham on Severn Parish Council

Notes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 23rd APRIL 2018 at 7pm in the Armoury Hall, Newnham on Severn – Page 1

Notes from the Parish meeting of 10TH April 2017

The notes of the previous meeting were circulated.

In attendance were 7 councillors, 3 members of the public and County and District Cllr R Boyles

To receive the report of the Vice Chairman

Cllr Weeden welcomed those present to the meeting and made clear that this was an informal meeting where no standing orders applied.

2017 had been a busy one for council and a number of projects were undertaken. 2017 also saw the launch of the facebook page complementing the newsletter and website. As a result it is felt all three medias greatly improve communications in the village.

Cllr I Walker - The resignation of Ian Walker as chair and from council as a whole had been received by all councillors (and many parishioners) with great disappointment. He once again thanked Ian for his dedication during his time as a councillor and chair.

Budget – The coming year's budget had been set and the precept of £28,500 had been increased by 5% to £29,450. The clerk advised this was due to non discretionary spend now exceeding the income of council. This is however the first increase since 2011

Loss of commercial activity in the village – The general loss of business within the village is causing concern to many. The recent closure of both the railway public house and the George café has prompted the establishment of a working party to look into the issues relating to business loss. Regular meeting will be held.

Victoria Hotel – Still a cause for major concern with the building still looking unsightly and with no indication of any future plans regarding redevelopment.

Parking – Continues to be an issue with several suggestions being explored. It is recognised by most people that the cost of any proposals would be prohibitive at the current time.

Highways – Working relationships with Highways are good and regular meetings take place to identify issues and improve village infrastructure. However, budget constraints are a constant issue. The speed sign recently purchased using S106 monies from Sheens Meadow is in full operation and is regularly moved around the village. It is hoped that it is having the desired effect on reducing traffic speeds.

Casual vacancies – A number of changes in councilors has taken place during the year. Cllrs Anderson, Firman & Walker all resigned from council, being replaced by Cllrs Love, Hughes and Shaw.

Clock Tower – Significant repairs had been made to the bells in the clock tower to ensure they continue to chime for years to come.

Tree works – Further tree works are planned for the forthcoming year, including the pollarding of the limes in the chains. Quotations are to be reviewed at the April council meeting.

Finance – The clerk advised that council had performed well against budget during the financial year with income and expenditure being almost the same. Reserves had therefore not fallen compared to 2016/17. However, projects such as the pollarding of the limes in the chains were not completed within the financial year as planned and would therefore roll over into 2017/18. This would add £2650 to a budget already set to reduce reserves by over £5,000.

This further supported councils decision to raise the precept due to non discretionary spend equalling expected income.

To receive County Council and District Council reports.

County Cllr Boyles updated those present on a number of issues.

County community charges - will rise by 4.49% to cover increased spending demands particularly in the area of adult social care. It should however be noted that this is one of the smallest county rises seen across the country as a whole.

Childrens services - have undergone a significant structural change releasing the managers from having a case load of their own, allowing them to concentrate on managing the departments.

Highways - £150 M investment in an effort to considerably improve road conditions across the county. A project has been agreed to complete the last remaining single carriageway section of the by-pass (by the Abbey and Sainsburys). Discussions on the purchase of land required are ongoing but if these fail compulsory purchase will be pursued. £500 M has also been approved by central government to relieve the congestion at the Air Balloon ensuring the link between the M4 and M5 is dual carriageway for its entire length. Further investment is also being made to make Junction 10 of the M5 a two way junction. Various Highways contracts are up for renewal this year including the general maintenance (7 year contract) Road surfacing (2 year contract). He also advised that professional services (new road schemes etc) are being taken back in house under the control of the County Council. Snow clearance has seen a significant increase in activity on previous years. Twice as many journeys had been made by the ploughs in an effort to keep the county moving. To put it into perspective the county has 3.3k of roads and the ploughing activity completed equates to 4x around the earth has a whole over the winter months. The success of the lighthouse scheme is being recognised by an allocation of an additional £500k during this financial year.

Ward Funding – Each ward has a fund of £30K to be spent over the coming 3 years on youth projects. Any potential projects within the parish should be identified to the PC for discussion.

School projects - £50M is being allocated for capital projects.

Hospital projects - £40M has been allocated for public space improvements at the two main hospitals in Gloucester and Cheltenham.

LED Lighting – currently 73% complete across the county.

District council

Boundary changes – have been approved reducing the number of district councillors from 48 to 38. Thus reducing the costs of running the council. It should be noted that FoDDC are one of the last councils in the country to undertake reductions in numbers.

Housing – There is planning permission for in excess of 1,500 homes that have yet to be built. This is a concern particularly as the removal of tolls from the Severn Bridge will (and has already in Lydney) driven an increase in demand and house prices. Hopefully build increases will be seen as a result of the expected growth.

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Schools, There are concerns that the number of children that are school ready when entering primary school is too low.

Some areas have a school readiness rate of 17 % with children still in nappies, unable to use vocabulary correctly for their age, unable to hold / use a knife and fork, unable to sit still and unable to socialise. This is a serious issue to address as the life chances for children are being eroded from such an early age. There have been schemes and projects to address parental support to children but affecting long term change beyond the project is proving challenging.

Apprenticeship schemes – are also being supported across the area.

Public Consultation.

Apprenticeship schemes – The support for these schemes was welcomed and it was pointed out that with university take up being almost 49% of the eligible population almost 69% failed to achieve a graduate position after qualification. The apprenticeship scheme should help fill the gap needed for vocational occupations.

Commercial and cultural losses – Lengthy discussions on these subjects took place with considerable debate on any financial areas of support for initiatives to retain businesses and encourage younger people not to leave the area. Affordable housing was recognised as being a significant problem. The George Café is considered to be an asset of community value and addition to the register had been applied for. Discussions with the Camp Hill Village Trust (owners of the George café) were ongoing. The working party would continue to meet and act in a transparent manner, with a survey of residents needs being considered. An application for registration of the Railway Inn has already been made by the clerk, with the support of the owner. Concerns were expressed regarding the viability of the Indian Restaurant operating out of the upper floor of the building now that the public house itself had closed. It was pointed out that of the total applications for public houses to be considered as being of community value, only 1.3% were purchased and turned into a successful enterprise.

Street fair – The street fair committee were once again planning to use (with councils permission) the playing field for their annual event. The clerk advised that as this permission is always granted (subject to know terms of use) the committee should plan to continue as normal. He also suggested that council be approached to issue an ongoing letter of permission to save the committee having to ask each year. Availability of the changing rooms and some improvements were also discussed. The clerk advised that the council had now taken full control of the facility as the football club has disbanded. Cllrs Hughes and Larkham were working with the clerk to make some general improvements. A request for an outside power point would be investigated and be the subject of a future PC meeting.

Club/ WI community benefit

The impasse between the club and the WI regarding the proceeds from the sale of the WI land and its investment in the Social Club was discussed in depth. Concern was raised that there is no agreement between the parties despite the S106 agreement entered into by the WI.

Cllr Boyles added that the S106 commitment was key to the support given by the planning committee as the officers had recommended rejection of the scheme. Various scenarios relating to the legality of not acting on the S106 commitment and the eventual outcome (should the Club improvements not be completed) were discussed. It was generally agreed that the best course of action was for agreement to be reached at the earliest opportunity and the upgrade completed.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.20 p.m.