



Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting (formerly Annual Parish Assembly) of Sandleheath Parish Council (SPC) held on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2015 at 7.30pm at St Aldhelm's.

PRESENT:                      Chairman    Mr D. Wright  
   Councillors    Mr B. Martin, Mr K. Andrews and Mr S. Daykin  
   Clerk to the Council    Mrs V Eden

Also in attendance were District Councillor Ann Sevier, District Councillor Roxanne Bellows and County Councillor Edward Heron. There were 9 village residents in attendance.

A speaker for Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance was also in attendance as the guest speaker.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all to the Annual Parish Meeting.

15.70 Apologies for absence

Received from Cllr Fenn and village resident, Sarah Schomberg.

15.71 Presentation by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance

The Chairman introduced the guest speaker from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance. The speaker gave a talk covering a brief history of the voluntary organisation to the challenges that the service was facing in the present day. Further information and merchandise were on display. The speaker was then happy to take questions from the parish councillors and villagers. The Chairman thanked Linda Clarke for her informative and interesting speech.

15.72 To Approve Minutes of Previous Annual Parish Meeting (formerly known as Annual Parish Assembly) held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014 were read, approved and signed as a correct record.

15.73 Matters to be Raised by the Public

No matters were raised by members of the public.

15.74 Chairman's Report to the Parish Electors

The Chairman advised that the Parish Council is required by law to hold an annual meeting when the Chairman reports on what the Council has done in the past year and provide an opportunity for residents to ask questions of Councillors.

The Chairman advised that Sandleheath is fortunate in that there is usually good turnout of villagers at Council meetings and there is a tradition of being much more relaxed than many councils, allowing contributions from the floor. This means that the actions of the Council are always open and subject to scrutiny by the village: effectively a running audit.

It was noted that present Councillors are mainly long-serving and the Chairman paid tribute to them for their hard work throughout the past year, be it attending meetings, deliberating planning applications, managing the environment, picking up rubbish, repairing the bus shelter or acting as Speedwatch volunteers. A newcomer last year was Councillor Ken Andrews who volunteered to be co-opted to fill the vacancy left by the death of Derek Dean. Other regular attendees at meetings have been

our County and District representatives and the Chairman thanked them for their help and support.

The Chairman then summarised what happened in the past year.

After a great deal of work over several years, primarily by Councillor Stockton, the Village Design Statement was submitted to NFDC for approval. Following a public consultation exercise, the Statement was formally adopted by NFDC as a supplementary planning document. However the VDS was then challenged and NFDC, for a number of reasons, decided to withdraw the document.

Sandleheath Parish Council is still deciding what to do next. The options are:

- a. To review the VDS and re-submit it to NFDC for adoption
- b. To review the VDS and adopt it as a Parish Council document. (This would still be taken into account by NFDC for planning matters but would not have the formality of a supplementary planning document).
- c. To write a Neighbourhood Plan incorporating much of the VDS content.

The Chairman reminded the villagers of the presentation on Neighbourhood planning given by Chris Elliot, Head of Planning at NFDC at the council meeting dated 19 February 2015 which answered many questions and gave much food for thought. The matter will be addressed again after the election.

The event of most concern to the village last year was the arrival of a group of travellers on the Common in September. Thanks to a lot of work by Councillors and Clerk, and the support of a duty Inspector who was prepared to invoke a robust interpretation of the law the travellers were moved on after only 3 nights by invoking Sect 61 of the Criminal Damage Act. The Council's procedures and defences against future incursions are now being reviewed. The ditch around part of the Upper Common is to be deepened and it is under consideration as to whether a stronger gate or barrier should be installed. The problem, of course, is to deter unauthorised access while not inhibiting that of residents. The Chairman reassured that when the ditches are deepened, the Council will preserve present footpath access and have earmarked funding from our District Council to make these wheelchair and pushchair friendly.

One of the unforeseen consequences of the travellers incident was the considerable amount of overtime and travel incurred by the Clerk. The Clerk is paid for 4 hours work a week, though both the present and previous Clerk have often worked beyond this limit. The Council took the view that on this occasion all overtime incurred should be paid for: about £150. This also prompted a review of the terms and conditions of the Clerk's employment and it became apparent that the increasing requirements placed on local Councils for training, reporting and administration meant that the Council would have to extend the paid employment of the Clerk and find more money for courses for councillors.

These increased obligations necessitated a wider review of the Council's budget. For several years the Council has not increased its share of Council Tax but it has now become clear that the Council cannot continue to operate on one of the smallest precepts in the District. Last year spending per head was £7.66, putting Sandleheath Parish Council at 35th out of the 37 parishes in the district. With just over 250 houses in the village, an increase of £1 per household would only bring in about an extra £250 a year – not very much. The Council therefore reluctantly decided to ask for an increase of £6 on a band D property. This still puts Sandleheath Parish Council at 28th in the NFDC list, cheaper than the neighbouring

villages of Damerham, Martin and Rockbourne. If Sandleheath were to re-join Fordingbridge a band D property in Sandleheath now paying £24.61 a year would then have to pay £82.41! It is hoped that taxpayers will understand the need for the increase. Parishioners were reminded that they could apply to be a councillor and affect future decisions if they were disappointed by the increase.

Last year it was mentioned that the owners of the land through which runs the footpath from the Industrial Estate to Marl Lane had kindly agreed that the use could be extended to cycles, providing a safe cycle route between Sandleheath and Fordingbridge. Since then the Council has obtained funding from NFDC and the site has been surveyed and designs approved. NFDC hope soon to go out to tender with the prospect of starting work on the new cycle route in the early summer. It was stressed that none of the money for this will come out of Council Tax.

The villagers attention was then drawn to the re-designed Village website hosted by HugoFox at no charge. Successive governments have been championing openness in local government and the Council will soon be required to publish even more information and documentation on a website which is publicly accessible free of charge. Sandleheath Parish Council now well placed to do this. The Council minutes are already published on the website as well as the village noticeboard by the shop. The website is also a useful reference for village clubs and societies and the Chairman encouraged organisers of these to check that their details are up to date and to notify the webmaster of any amendments. Any recent photographs of the village would be welcomed for inclusion on to the site.

Speedwatch was then mentioned. In the past year 82 vehicles were reported for speeding through the village. The job of Speedwatch is primarily to educate & deter: there is certainly an impression that speeding overall has decreased, though there will always be a few offenders who drive dangerously. Unfortunately there are only three volunteers to carry out checks: all are Councillors & have other commitments so it is often difficult to organise a session when all are available. The villagers were encouraged to spread the word to encourage a few more volunteers for Speedwatch to continue. The commitment can be as little as one or two hours a month. Rockbourne is now in the scheme & is sharing the Council's equipment.

The Sandleheath Community Association, though not part of the Council, has continued to organise a number of events for the village, notably the 5 Nov bonfire and the Fete. The Chairman thanked them for the time and effort donated to making these events so successful. The SCA are also pursuing the lease of St Aldhelm's as a community asset. The Council is not financially involved in this but has provided a grant to assist them with the legal fees and specialist reports involved in reaching agreement with the diocese. The County and District Councillors have also made grants.

On the subject of grants it was mentioned that the Council has a long-standing policy of making small grants to a few local charities and organisations that provide a direct benefit to Sandleheath residents. The Council is very conscious that this is tax money that is being forwarded. As in previous years the Council supported Fordingbridge First Attenders with £180 and gave £60 each to Fordingbridge and District Day Centre and to the Rae Straton Lunch Club. The Chairman hoped that the villagers agreed that these causes are worthy of support.

The Chairman then thanked those who had attended the meeting and opened the floor to any questions.

As no questions were received the Chairman then reminded residents and councillors of the Parish Council Annual Meeting (formerly AGM) on the 21st May 2015 at 7-30pm, in St.Aldhelm's.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.12pm.