

**SEAVINGTON ST MARY / MICHAEL PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD AT THE SEAVINGTON MILLENNIUM HALL
ON TUESDAY 21st MARCH 2017**

ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

Present Mr N Loxton [Chair] Mrs E Edwards Mr N England Mrs P Parsons
Mr C Reyland Mr C Turner
Christopher Le Hardy (County Councillor) Mr A Dance (District Councillor)

Apologies Mr Crispin Raikes (District Councillor)

Also Present 3 members of the public

ANY QUESTION TIME – No questions had been submitted to the Parish Council and none were raised at the meeting

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 22nd MARCH 2016 were agreed as correct and signed.

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Chairman – Nick Loxton welcomed all present and introduced Parish, County and District Councillors.

The Chair also confirmed that the Parish Council had a vacancy, caused by the resignation of Dennis Smith. At this point the Chair thanked Dennis for all the hard work he had done for the Parish Council and the new Community Land Trust. As residents of Seavington St Mary have not requested an election the Parish Council will be co-opting a new Councillor at their next meeting.

Planning and the C5021 speeding issues

Last year I reported upon two external planning applications which could affect our community, namely Frog Mary Green Farm, and the proposed Shudrick Lane development in Ilminster. At present the decision over latter application in Ilminster is pending the result of an appeal inquiry and the former at Frog Mary Green has been approved with a number of conditions.

Currently (and I'm aware of the concern it is causing) an application has been submitted for change of use of land to allow access and parking to the rear of Southernways Cottage in St Mary. Along with many residents, your Parish Council has considerable concern from a Road Safety perspective of this application and has expressed these and other worries to SSDC, the submission is pending a decision from the District Council.

In addition to the above within the villages last year, there were two applications which would affect us all namely Pond Farm currently under development, and the former Lift West Site-more of this in a minute.

All of these applications were identified by your Parish Council to have the potential to alter traffic patterns within the villages with their consequential impact upon road safety, to which end in consultation with our County Councillor Christopher Le Hardy, we are in the process of submitting a Small Improvement Scheme (SIS) to the County Council whose overall aim is to reduce speeding through the villages. Various measures are being proposed within this SIS, including along the C5021

- alteration of some of the white-lining

- moving some of the 30mph speed limit boundaries

- relocation of bollards in the village

- some surface refurbishments

- improved signage at Boxstone Cross

Highways and the Village Ranger

As I'm sure you will have noticed County Highways have made some changes to the white lining within our community mainly to the west of our villages, and we are in dialogue with them to redo some parts of their work. On the other side of the coin, I'm sure you will have noticed the replacement of faulty manhole covers on the path above Seavington House towards Gummers Castle.

This brings me on to mention the sterling work done by our village ranger, keeping our Community tidy over the year, and particularly recently the work done in tidying up the edge of the path eastwards up the hill out of the village. The Parish Council has yet to decide our annual expenditure but anticipate that our spending on our Ranger may have to increase.

Car Parking

Last year I devoted nearly a side of A4 to my report on this issue,(this year I am devoting 6 lines!) and I must now admit to thinking that, although not everywhere in our villages, people are generally beginning to park more responsibly. I don't think the problem has in any way been solved, but I think things are better now and hopefully with the soon to be completed white lining in the village Car Park, the trend will continue.

Community Land Trust

On Thursday 2nd March 2017 an Open Village Meeting was held in the Millennium Hall to update residents about the Village Community Land Trust (CLT) project. As interim acting Chair, I welcomed all present and announced that the meeting had been called essentially to update residents of recent events concerning the Seavingtons' Community Land Trust Limited and to give notice of the first Special General Meeting of Members. (SGM) I advised that the Contract had been signed between

Andrew Whitehouse and the developer [Mark Thomas of Acorn Developments] and following successful completion at the end of April, it was likely that the development of the site would begin in early May 2017 and works could be completed within 12 months. A Deed of Covenant would also be signed between Andrew Whitehouse and the Developer to ensure that Andrew's wishes, with regard to the gifting of 3 houses to The Seavingtons' CLT, free of encumbrances, would be carried out. So having had little to report since almost this time last year, things are moving apace and the CLT now needs to gather momentum quickly if we are to be in a position to take on this exciting project.

It was emphasised at the Open Meeting that the Seavingtons' Community Land Trust was completely separate from the Seavington Parish Council, the only apparent connection was because in the first instance Andrew Whitehouse had made his first approach to the village by contacting the Parish Council, and it was reiterated that at the open meeting in April 2016 residents had voted for this separation and the formation of a CLT.

As explained at this open meeting, the CLT had been set up as a Benefit Society bound by a set of rules registered with the FCA [Financial Conduct Authority]. Under those rules, an SGM is required to be held within six months. The steering committee will stand down, and then a new Board of Directors will be voted in by members of the CLT. At the open meeting, it was suggested that a maximum of 9 Directors might be required to be elected by members.

After the meeting the date of the SGM was confirmed as Thursday 30th March – 7.00pm in The Millennium Hall. At this Meeting, open to all village residents, all paid-up members will elect the Board. Opportunity exists for residents to apply for membership at any time before or after the meeting but not during it. Remember that if you're not a member you cannot vote. Membership of the CLT is open to any resident of either Seavington St Michael or Seavington St Mary or anyone who works in either of the parishes, on payment of at least £1 for one share. No Member [share-holder] will benefit from the CLT. A Member only has one vote despite the number of shares held. The Chair explained that only Members of the CLT could propose and second a Director. These Directors would be elected at the SGM by Members. **At the Annual General Meeting (AGM)** which must be held within 15 months of formation of the CLT, at least one-third of the Directors will stand down, but can be re-elected. At the meeting questions were asked with regard to the day-to-day management of the 3 properties; all were advised that it is currently envisaged that the Board will appoint a housing association in common with many other CLTs, but this and many more points would have to be discussed by the new Board of Directors and their decisions conveyed to the Membership. My final point made is to urge residents to sign up to become members of the CLT, and help the current membership carry this project forward.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

Once again Parish Councillors unanimously agreed that they would continue to increase the Precept as there were still concerns that in the future it could be capped by Central Government and that works that had been carried out by both District and County may be passed over to Parishes.

This financial year the Precept applied for was £14,120 but because of the Council Support Grant [£780] paid by South Somerset District Council the actual amount received was £14,900. As stated previously these monies stay within the Parishes to be spent on local projects. At present the Current Account stands at £337.37 and the Business Reserve at £20,805.76. Total monies spent this year to date are £13,711.26. However there are outstanding invoices due for grass cutting of the playing field – some £1,650, works to our footpaths which could amount to £400, works completed under the Ranger scheme for March – say £300.00, and Millennium Hall fees of £320. This totals £2,670 still to be paid. This in fact means that during the past year the Parish Council has dipped into its reserves by some £1,500. Within the present reserves are ring-fenced monies of £2,600 grant to SPFA for a new piece of play equipment still not spent and £1,000 for the Community Shop in connection with an air conditioning system.

The main areas of expenditure are - The new Ranger Scheme has cost some £4,500. However, I am sure you will agree that buying into this scheme is worthwhile. I am sure you have all noticed the improvement on the footpath from Gummers Castle to Seavington House. Cutting of the Playing Field, maintenance of the footpaths and the cutting of the two play areas, Cafe picnic area and strimming various parts that the gang mowers cannot do on the playing field and other areas around the village have totalled £3,128. ie over £7,500 has been spent on keeping the villages looking tidy.

The grant paid to Seavington Parochial Church Council was increased to £1,250 towards Churchyard maintenance. Other grants paid are as follows - £500 [for rent due to SPFA], £300 [for provision of Broadband and WiFi] to the Shop/Cafe. Seavington Youth Club also received a grant of £250. There is some £1,200+ of VAT to be reclaimed at the end of the financial year.

A grant has been received totalling £1,000 from Wessex Water for tidying and re-planting of the orchard area behind St Mary's Close. I am sure that we would all like to thank Karen Sutton and her band of willing helpers for all the hard work in bringing this scheme to fruition. The grant plus a donation towards one of the seats means there is still a small balance of some £79 waiting to be spent. Also there is a possibility of a donation being received for a further seat to be sited in the orchard.

My thanks go to Tony Beresford who has agreed to continue to be the Internal Auditor for the Parish Council.

Pauline Parsons [Responsible Financial Officer].

REPORT FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH CO-ORDINATOR –Parish Council is still waiting for someone to take this over.

REPORT FROM VILLAGE TREE WARDENS – The Tree wardens have only done some maintenance work around existing trees and have planted a new copse totalling six trees. The tree at the end of Dark Lane looks as if it has died, the top certainly hand and has been cut back to see if fresh growth will appear from the trunk.

REPORT FROM PARISH PATHS LIAISON OFFICER – County Footpaths' team have been contacted with regard to concerns of a blocked up footpath in West Street and also concerns with some of the footpaths around Meade Farm, particularly the steps around the farm yard. New finger posts have also been requested from County to replace some that were vandalised.

REPORT ON VILLAGE WEB-SITE -

I am sure you will have all noticed the up-dated web-site and the Parish Council's thanks go to Eugene Mulligan for doing this. Several new items are now on the web-site including the Seavingtons' CLT information and up-dated Calendars and information for the SPFA. At present the Parish Council only pay for any necessary software and licence

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS REPORTS

(i) Seavington Playing Fields Association and Millennium Hall – No report received and no-one present to give a verbal report. Parish Councillors understand that the position concerning Trustees has been resolved. A new bookings Clerk was appointed during the year. A resident has agreed to help with any maintenance issues in the Hall and another is helping with the play equipment maintenance. However, the Committee is still short of new members.

(ii) Community Shop

The Store has had another successful year. Together with the Millennium Hall and SPFA the Seavingtons enjoy a range of facilities which are probably unrivalled in a community of our size. Today's villagers are extremely grateful to those who, in the past, had the vision and determination to carry forward these projects and have then not rested on their laurels but continued to maintain and develop our village facilities.

I would now like to report on specific aspects of our operation.

The Shop has continued to fulfil its main function as a convenience shop. We want to cater for customers' basic needs, at competitive prices and especially to provide fresh foods so that journeys to local towns are less frequent.

It has been a challenge to increase turnover in the Shop. We do not benefit from passing trade and we still hear all too often the phrase, "I didn't know you were here". We continue to offer a range of services which can reduce our rural isolation, as well as provide income, e.g. My Hermes and the book exchange. We regularly review stock and have changed suppliers for our greengrocery and dairy products. Both categories have seen a marked improvement in sales. Cheaper milk has been particularly successful. We have tried new stock lines, such as "grab and go" food and our sales of alcohol are up significantly!! Where possible we continue to support local suppliers and producers and we currently deal with 24.

Our till gives limited analysis of our sales and an aspiration is to have an EPOS system. However even if we had the finance for this it would be difficult to implement without having a Shop Manager to learn the system and train volunteers. So many of the issues which arise are because we don't have a Shop Manager. We have made two attempts in the past 15 months to get grant funding, both sadly unsuccessful. On the plus side we are delighted that we have secured three grants to fund the purchase and installation of air conditioning which will not only make working, volunteering and shopping a more comfortable experience, but also produce savings from less wastage of fresh stock and more efficient performance of our chilling equipment.

CAFE

Unlike the Shop, our Cafe customers come mainly from outside the village. Our advertising in the Parish Magazine and a small number of other local publications concentrates on the Cafe as most communities have their own shop. Our spacious premises, facilities for disabled people and adjacent parking and playground help to attract customers.

The Cafe has well established monthly Seniors' Lunches and we have an increasing number of visits from groups such as walkers, cyclists, bell ringers and women's groups. The bi-monthly Midweek Supper Club has been very successful with its varied themes attracting a full house. During the last year there have been issues with coping with the volume of business and to alleviate this Donna was taken on as a part time assistant cook in April last year and in addition Lorraine will be starting in April this year. There is a severe shortage of volunteers to support the Cafe staff. It can be difficult for volunteers to feel they have the skills and stamina to work in the Cafe environment. Cafe sales have increased and now cover the current staff costs. The menu we offer is attractive to customers who want good quality basic fare at a competitive price. Jane's homemade cakes continue to be delicious! The bonus is that Cafe customers also spend in the Shop.

MANAGEMENT

The Management Committee has enjoyed a high degree of stability over the last three years so it was with some trepidation that we received the news of Mark Ellis's resignation at the 2016 AGM. Mark gave unstintingly of his time and his optimistic approach was instrumental in moving the Store onwards and upwards. We offer him our grateful thanks. We were very pleased that Ian Gibson, who was already serving on the committee, agreed to step forward as Chair. Ian is very heavily committed in other directions and we must do all we can to share the responsibilities of the committee. Ray Catling and Yvonne Best joined the committee in autumn 2016 but we have just received Yvonne's resignation so it is with some urgency that we are now seeking new committee members.

VOLUNTEERS

Of course the Store could not exist without volunteers and we are very grateful for the time and energy that our volunteers so willingly give. We rely on them to welcome customers, sort out day to day minor problems, operate the till efficiently, check stock, do purchasing, book keeping, cleaning and a host of other duties. We currently have 35 volunteers. There are never enough! On a weekly basis the rota varies from being reasonably OK to dire. Ideally we would have two volunteers in the shop on each shift. Newcomers to the village have been good at coming forward and they have found volunteering an excellent way to get to know their fellow villagers.

STAFF

In the Cafe Jane is employed for 36 hours per week, Donna for 18 and Lorraine will work for 8 hours. In addition Jackie, our cleaner, works for 7 hours per week, assisted by Millie as required. We thank all of them for their contribution to the shop's success.

FUNDRAISING

This year our particular thanks must go to Jo Mills who instigated and ran the art and craft displays until the end of last year, ably assisted by Thandi Wilson. We have enjoyed an amazing array of exhibitions, providing income for the shop as well as the

exhibitors. We are pleased that Carol Talbot has now taken this on with Thandi. We had a lull in fundraising events earlier in the year as our efforts were concentrated on grant applications, but we have recently held the Autumn Fashion Show and Antiques Call My Bluff which both received excellent support. An ongoing source of income is from Easyfundraising, the online shopping portal, which has raised £330 without any effort other than villagers making their purchases via the portal. We have been very grateful to The Seavingtons' News for funding additional and replacement equipment for the Cafe and I must particularly thank the Parish Council for its support for the Shop. The PC makes an annual contribution of £500 to cover rent and over the years has made further financial contributions to support specific projects. Most recently the PC has pledged £1000 to support our grant applications for air conditioning in the Shop. Thank you very much.

FINANCE

A very welcome milestone was reached at the end of the last financial year as for the first time our turnover just exceeded the £100k mark. This produced a surplus of £9k. This was encouraging as we have been very aware that turnover has always fallen well short of the original predictions and turnover in comparable community shops. It seems there is no magic bullet for us but rather that we need to persevere with stock review, reacting to customer feedback and making improvements. Turnover in the period May 2016 to January 2017 is up by 15% compared with the previous year, with both the Shop and Cafe showing steady improvement. Whilst the long term aim is to plough back surplus funds into village projects, the immediate concern is to repay bondholders and £6k outstanding to Somerset County Council. Until those repayments are completed our hands are tied for employing a manager or other major developments without grant help.

IN CONCLUSION

We are a business the same as any other retailer but we are a COMMUNITY shop and that one word conveys the enormous difference between us and regular shops. More than one villager has said that our shop is a "lifeline", others have said how much they value the friendship and helpfulness of the volunteers and staff. Visitors comment on the quality of our customer service and range of goods. Others, including representatives of grant awarding bodies, are amazed at the sheer scale of the enterprise and the achievement of the villagers who have driven the project forward. It is no longer a question of IF the Shop will survive, more a matter of improving further the excellent amenity we already have.

(iii) The Seavingtons' News –

As in previous years the Seavingtons' News Team has continued to produce a monthly issue which has been delivered free of charge to every household and business in the two villages. Our financial state remains healthy although there are signs of a decline in advertising revenue probably caused by local businesses cutting back on expenditure. Fortunately we have been able to retain the monthly waste paper collection which means that we should end the financial year with an increased bank balance over last year. However, should we lose the waste paper revenue the future of our magazine would begin to look cloudy. We are grateful to the SPFA for permitting us to continue parking the skip in the Millennium Hall car park in spite of thoughtlessness on the part of some of the donors who create litter. During the past year we have made one grant to a village organisation and will be able to offer other grants in the coming year. I am grateful to all our contributors for their untiring efforts and loyalty. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of residents who are prepared to contribute articles for the magazine and, as I noted last year, there has been a significant drop in the activities of village clubs and organisations which I see when compiling the "Village Diary". I would like to repeat my thanks to the "behind the scenes" volunteers who make the village magazine possible. These include Tony Beresford, our Treasurer and Advertising Manager, Maria Potts who helps with the editing and compilation of the magazine together with Elaine & Brian Edwards and Ros & Roger Clampitt who collate, staple and deliver the finished magazine to our street distributors. The Street Distributors themselves deserve a special mention and thanks because their anonymous work, whilst below the radar in that no-one sees them at work, is vital to our organisation.

David Froome, Editor.

(iv) Youth Group –

This year the Youth Club has more than doubled its membership – with 22 youngsters regularly attending sessions. We continue to run with just three adult volunteers, one of who will leave the village soon. We have invited parents to volunteer, and are confident we will be able to continue to run the club on a rota system. As well as our usual activities and tuck shop, we have been very grateful to have Craig Rice and Bob Brunt offering fun sporting opportunities (archery, boccia, and handball). We look forward to continuing to offer this club for younger residents of the village and surrounding areas. Any offers of help will be gratefully received.

Janine Lewis – leader

As there was no other business the meeting closed at 7.45pm

Signed

Date