

**Minstead Parish Council - Annual Parish Meeting
Wednesday 10 March 2021 at 19.30**

Meeting held virtually via Zoom in accordance with Covid-19 Regulations

Present: Cllrs W Andrews (Chair), H Bennett, M Causton, G Hough, G Saunders, J Smith, R Taylor, Cllr Mrs Andrews (NFDC), CI New Forest Helen Andrews (Hampshire Constabulary), PCSO Richard Williams (Hampshire Constabulary), P Osborne (Clerk) + 9 public.

1. Attendance Register and Apologies

None

2. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting, 20 March 2019 (*Annual Meeting 2020 was cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic.*)

These had been published and were agreed and signed.

3. Matters Arising

None

[Items 6 and 9 were taken at this point]

4. Report by Chairman

Cllr Bill Andrews reported:

Whilst life in general has changed dramatically for us all since our last Annual Parish Meeting in 2019 many local issues have remained much the same.

Fabric

- We are delighted that the Minstead Community Shop is well established and patronised, with an ever-increasing menu of items to attract us all. Many thanks to all the team involved in that.
- The housing for the village clock on the old shop building has still not been replaced, and the clock is still stopped.
- Our Parish Lengthsman, Stephen Short, still carries out regular maintenance checks of bus shelters, seats, war memorial area, flagpole, footpath signs, PC-owned trees etc. with repairs and maintenance as required. He cleans our road signs, drains and gullies, monitors the condition of our Roadways, Hedges and Ditches and works on our footpaths and their drainage.
- We continue to receive support from Hampshire County Highways both directly and through the good offices of Cllr Heron. Please use the HCC website to report road issues directly.
- Some of the eroded road edges are filled quite effectively, but inevitably others are developing.
- Please remember that property owners are responsible under Riparian Rights for keeping their hedges cut back and ditches cleared alongside their properties, even if these are outside their garden boundary.
- Blackwater Road, aka "Mill Lane" continues to be a through-traffic problem despite more than 20 years of seeking resolutions. New road signs and restrictions may have been some help. The Working Group with members from Minstead & Lyndhurst PCs continues to co-ordinate efforts.

Community

- A local Pandemic Resilience operation was launched to support people where needed, and our sincere thanks to all involved in its organisation, and to the volunteers who made a great difference to many in our Parish.
- We remain well pleased with the useful and much-visited Minstead Community website, and the ever-expanding reach of our Facebook page.
- Continued efforts to bring Ultrafast Fibre Broadband to the whole Parish have borne some fruit – stay for that Agenda item.
- Our Monthly eNewsletter is distributed to nearly 300 addresses (plus hard copies kindly printed and delivered to neighbours who are not connected to email).
- Minstead Mail, two or three issues each year, hard copy distributed to ALL households, first one for this year probably coming soon.
- Your PC currently grants financial support to Citizens Advice New Forest, and to All Saints PCC for churchyard maintenance.
- Regular Litter-picking in and around the village and car parks is carried out by Councillors and public, special thanks to Sean Hayward our Postie for all his efforts in this respect.
- We have continued liaison with local police and see quite a bit of our police Community Support officer as he goes about his business.
- Your Council represents the interests of Minstead parishioners at various meetings, and we continue to offer support and advice in planning and other matters.
- We look forward to when Minstead Community Speedwatch can again be active in encouraging all to drive at safe speeds. Our thanks to Dave Donawa for coordinating this and to his team of volunteers.

Council

- Elections for the Police & Crime Commissioner and County Councillors are scheduled for 6th May.
- Your Parish Council said farewell to Steve Cattell who retired after more than 40 years' service, and to both Alan Ferguson and Dawn Wakelin. We welcomed Cllrs Nib Saunders, Miranda Causton and Jack Smith.
- At the end of May our Clerk, Polly Osborne will retire after more than 10 years' service.

Finally, my thanks to all Parish Councillors past and present, and our Clerk for their support, industry and effectivity, to both County and District Councillors for their continued support, AND most importantly to you, our Parishioners, for giving us the opportunity to continue to serve you.

I am happy to take brief questions on my report now, there is a space for public items in today's Agenda.

5. Financial Statement

Polly Osborne, as Responsible Financial Officer, reported on Parish Council finance:

- a) The Audit of the governance of Minstead Parish Council and the accounts for financial year ending 31 March 2020 was successful.
- b) Council has maintained the precept at £11,500 for the coming year, 2021-2022; i.e. no change from last year.
- c) Council finances are particularly healthy with a current balance in excess of £27,000, but this includes Covid-19 support funding received from New Forest District Council that will be distributed to local organisations - there is a form on the Minstead Village website to apply for support funding. Council expenditure is often unpredictable. Once again this winter we were fortunate that no snow ploughing was needed and also, with all council meetings being conducted virtually due to covid

restrictions, there have been no payments for room hire. There have been the usual costs relating to council administration and fabric maintenance within the parish.

- d) Grants were received this year from HCC and NFDC for projects within the parish:
 - o HCC Parish Lengthsman Scheme - £1,100 towards Lengthsman salary; we have been warned that this funding will be withdrawn so it was a pleasant surprise to receive it in full again.
 - o NFDC Covid Support Grants: total £18,131
- e) Parish Council has made donations so far this year to:
 - o Minstead Flower Show Society: £378 towards cost of the Flower Show in September 2020.
 - o Students who volunteered during lockdown to do shopping and collect prescriptions: £100

Parish Council finances are available to all on the Minstead website: details published monthly in the minutes.

6. Presentation by Chief Inspector New Forest Helen Andrews, Hampshire Constabulary

- a) Easing of lockdown restrictions presents challenges for the police who deploy extra resources where needed and work closely with other agencies. They issue fines for blatant abuse of rules. Schools are now open and pubs due to re-open in April. Police work with communities, mindful of the need that covid restrictions must be balanced against normal daily work.
- b) They have taken on additional staff and New Forest manpower is satisfactory at present. Police are not always visible, for example if working overnight.
- c) The New Forest always gets busy in summer but may be a bit busier this year, presenting further challenges with tourists and covid this summer:

In response to a question about the encampment on A31 at Stoney Cross, she said that the matter was work in progress.

7. Report by Hampshire County Councillor Edward Heron

Cllr Heron was not present.

8. Report by New Forest District Councillor Mrs Diane Andrews

I am reporting from the New Forest District Council on the last year. What a year and where to start? I cannot say anything without first acknowledging the work of the National Health Service and the courageous people who worked throughout this distressing last year. They have my heartfelt gratitude.

The last year, a year of Covid has been impressive, I use the word impressive because of the way the council responded effectively and promptly after lockdown and once into the planning for the recovery process. In a really short space of time a Local Response Centre was opened to deliver food parcels for those shielding or in need. Staff volunteered from many departments to pack the boxes and deliver them each week. Other staff from the closed Health and Leisure Centres worked alongside the refuse collectors to make up the extra number needed to complete the collections in a distanced and safe way. Extra vehicles were hired so that refuse collectors did not have to sit in the confined space of the cabins in their vehicles. Refuse and recycling was collected throughout the year with no interruption. More recently staff volunteered to become Covid Marshalls to guide the public through lockdown as they visited high streets, railway stations and coastal hot spots.

There was a great deal of cooperation with our partner agencies and charities, so much so that we have developed future plans to continue this working as we embrace the recovery process. The effect on families, organisations and businesses as the pandemic continued cannot be understated, the Finance department were aware of this and worked incredibly hard to ensure that every grant or benefit given by the Government to the public and businesses should get to them as quickly as possible. The Finance department were also working from home and with reduced staff. There have been so many employees who have gone the extra mile to deliver the services expected from the council in this difficult time, I cannot name them all but I am grateful to them all.

Fortuitously in early 2020 a new IT system had recently been introduced, training was speedily prepared for councillors on the new computer systems and the introduction to Skype, Teams and

Zoom. I will say here, some councillors were a bit faster than others to embrace this new world of technology. It did however enable the business of the council to continue.

Our first Cabinet meeting which was and remains public on YouTube was a stilted affair but we have become slightly more relaxed in that medium. I can say that we have not yet descended into the chaos of Jackie Weaver and Handforth Parish council. I have missed the day to day interaction with my colleagues and it has been solitary working in a vacuum when the ability to discuss Agenda items and the diverse issues arising from daily council life has been lost. I am proud at how our council responded during the last year and it is in a stronger place and ready for the recovery ahead.

As far as Minstead is concerned, I am disappointed that I have not been able to make any headway in certain areas, some outstanding for a year or more. Sean the postman is still at risk everyday he delivers mail along the A31: letters have been written by this council to Royal Mail and to Highways but nothing has improved and if anything it is worse than ever. If you have ever walked along that road (why would you??), but I have and it is terrifying. I would like to visit this problem again. Thank you Sean for all you do for the village.

Mill Lane is a real headache and our hands are tied until Highways can agree a way forward. I fear that this summer it will be worse than ever.

Fly tipping is worse as is parking on the verges at the top of the C17 near Andrews Mare and Thrifty gate. A problem that is widespread around the National Park.

I will close now promising to liaise with the Parish Council and to continue to support this parish and the others that I represent while I am your District Councillor.

In response to a query about the *Waste Strategy*, Cllr Dane Andrews replied that the Government had been moving the goal posts which made it difficult to see a way forward at this time. It is early days yet, the main reason for the strategy is to be able to increase the number of items that can be recycled. Watch this space!

9. Police report by PCSO Richard Williams

- Reviewing the year, the most common local crime is theft from vehicles, the greatest number from Travel Lodge at Stoney Cross on A31, but also from Castle Malwood Lodge and a couple more in the village. Thefts from vehicles used to occur mainly in forest car parks. There have also been some thefts from gardens, of garden furniture.
- It has not been possible to carry out Speedwatch during Covid restrictions but PCSO Williams said he will go out and do some monitoring on C17.

10. Update on Minstead Community Shop

- George Dibben, Chairman, reported that the Community Shop opened on 1 June 2020. Thanks are due especially to Tim Nicholson who worked tirelessly to achieve this.
- Funds were raised within the community. There are 37 Volunteers and in the first nine months there were £40,000 sales.
- When the regulations are eased people will be allowed into the shop, so two volunteers will be needed to serve. This means that more volunteers will be needed.

He was asked whether there are problems anticipated when pub re-opens? In reply George said that there were no problems when it was open last summer. Mrs Lewis, landlady of Trusty Servant, is supportive and intends to reinstate tables with umbrellas on the gravel area for use by shop customers as well as pub customers.

11. Update on superfast broadband

Cllr Taylor reported that the current position is understood to be:

Existing schemes Wave 2 and Acres Down should be completed by end 2021. Progress by Openreach has been delayed by their problems with working in the New Forest. For the former Community Scheme (now fully funded by HCC) the backstop for completion is mid-2022. But there is the possibility of completion before these dates.

Efforts are being made to get full fibre broadband to other areas using Gigabit Voucher Schemes. However, applicants must be householders, the parish council cannot apply. Some applications have

been submitted, including three applications for the top of the village (towards A3!) that might be merged into one. Openreach has a list of 214 Minstead properties eligible.

The existing Government scheme ends 31/03/2021; there will be a new scheme for which we will be eligible but no details are available yet.

Parish Council is doing all it can to get whole village covered.

In response to a question Cllr Taylor explained that householders cannot connect into the fibre duct that runs through village because it merely carries fibre down to the centre for distribution – fibre cannot be spliced into.

Mr Dibben reported from the floor that an Openreach engineer had told him that the lower end of Minstead would be supplied from Lyndhurst end rather than Minstead.

12. Items requested by the Public

- a) Possibility of a cycle track alongside A337 Cadnam to Lyndhurst given the excellent work clearing vegetation that has been carried out recently. When this matter was raised previously, Highways said a Feasibility Study would cost £100K.
- b) Appreciation of the Community Shop: a parishioner expressed thanks for the really excellent Community Shop.
- c) Speeding through the village: Parish Council is looking at ways to reduce vehicle speeds, especially in the centre of the village. It may be possible to erect '20 is Plenty' signs.

The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be on Monday 12 April 2020 at 19.30.

Meeting closed at 20.33