

MERTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Monday 14th May 2018 in The Clinton Hall

Councillors Present: Steve Papworth, Tim Horner, Jill Malcolm, Philip Collins, Robert Nancekivell, Bill Brown and County Councillor Andrew Saywell

Parish Clerk: Zena Tett

Absent: Cllrs Chris Laughton and Paul Scantlebury

Also in attendance: 4 members of the public were present

1. **Welcome and address by Steve Papworth**

You may remember that at last year's Annual Parish Meeting, we kicked off the idea of erecting a landing light on the playing field, so that the Air Ambulance could land in the village at any time, day or night.

We are indebted to the Merton Moncks, who rather brilliantly suggested to members of organisations that helped at the Vintage Rally that they may wish to direct the money they would have received towards the cost of the light. We are thrilled that enough organisations chose to do that, with the result that we were able to completely pay for the light, and the installation was completed with little delay. In fact, the light was operational within 6 months.

We are also grateful to the Merton Moncks for the organisation of our annual Vintage Rally - already in its 11th year. And this year, we were blessed with great weather, making it, I am sure, a hugely successful event.

The Parish Council continues to organise grass cutting alongside the main road in the village, and I would like to thank Steve Jennings for his work as our contractor. I would also like to thank all those other people who cut grassy areas around the village. Some of these may not be as immediately noticeable as others, but they all contribute to the good appearance of the village.

I would like to thank Cedric and Wendy Askew who continue to look after the planted tyres at the northern entrance to the village, which makes a lovely entrance to our village for anyone coming from Great Torrington.

The playground committee has completed phase I of the new playground and the old play area has been cleared. Our thanks go to all those involved in the fund raising and arranging the installation.

Finally, I would like to note that we have celebrated the 20th anniversary of the building and opening of the Clinton Hall. On behalf of all of the parish, I would like to thank the Clinton Hall committee for running and maintaining the hall, which continues to be a terrific asset to the Village.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting** – held on Monday 8th May 2017 were agreed and signed as a true record. Proposed by Cllr Brown, seconded by Cllr Horner and all agreed.

3. **Waste & Recycling**

Waste and Recycling Manager, TDC, Richard Haste spoke about the changes to waste and recycling services. As of the 4th June 2018 the current waste and recycling services will be changing; this is the first change to collections in 30 years.

There is black bag refuse which will be collected fortnightly; a caddy for food waste (indoor) and an outdoor (lockable) caddy for the food waste collection; separate bags for paper and cardboard; a black box for glass and a green box for plastic and tins. It will be possible to recycle a wider range of plastics, including margarine tubs (all plastics will have to be recyclable by 2025) and the glass box is designed to stack into the plastics box to save space. The changes should result in a more efficient and tidier service and help to reduce litter. There will also be the option to subscribe to a garden waste collection and this will be a chargeable service, costing £35.00 annually. The reason for the charge is this is not a statutory service and until now, while other districts have charged for this collection, Torridge has offered it free; the charge for this service is still the cheapest in Devon. Torridge District Council has to hit a 50% recycling rate by 2020 and is currently at 43%. Householders will receive through the post, a comprehensive list of what can be recycled as well as a calendar, detailing collection dates. Richard Haste also highlighted the need for traceability with waste and the fact that the waste and recycling service is rigorously regulated. There is currently not enough waste in Devon for a waste Energy plant. Cllr Collins thanked Richard Haste and his team who provide an excellent service to the community.

4. **County Councillor Report**

It is a pleasure to be presenting a report to Merton Annual Parish Meeting. As it is coming up to nearly a year since my election I would like to place on record my thanks to the people of Merton for their support and kindness both at the election and afterwards. I regard it as a great honour to represent this Parish at County Hall and I strived during the past year to do my best for this village and the 17 other Parishes that I represent as part of the Torrington Rural division.

As most of you know I am a regular attendee of Merton Parish Council meetings and one of the issues I've been working on in particular is the state of the roads, in particular the A386 which I am glad to see has now been resurfaced!

As this is an Annual Parish Meeting I wanted to a broader overview of what I have been up to and what has been happening with DCC during the past year.

When I was elected my main priorities were to help kick start efforts to revitalise Torrington's economy, in particular to see a 24 hour cash machine put back into the town centre after the closure of Lloyds, ensure that our main rural roads are properly maintained, fight for fairer funding for Devon's schools, and oppose any downgrades to our local health services, particularly at North Devon District Hospital.

I am pleased that I can report progress on all of these. Thanks to Mark Duffy at Duffy's Hardware store there is now a 24 hour cash machine in the town centre, and there is also a cash machine in the old phone box by Sydney House Car Park. M&S has even come to Torrington.

I was also pleased, working with Torridge District Council's Regeneration Officer Sean Kearny, to be able to secure a meeting with the Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership, Chris Garcia, in Torrington itself to discuss some of the challenges the town faces, show him the derelict Creamery site, and also what opportunities there are for economic development within the Torridge area.

I will talk more about Highways later but in so far as main roads are concerned, I was pleased after extensive lobbying to see some of the worst sections of the A386 here and the A3124 get resurfaced. The last section, outside Rosemoor Gardens, which has been in an appalling condition for some time, was resurfaced at the beginning of May.

With regards to schools, Devon County Council has secured an additional £7.5m worth of funding from central government, and although there is still much more to do

and a long way to go until we get parity with the national average – Devon pupils are underfunded approx. £200 less per child – it is still a considerable improvement from 8 years ago when we were the second poorest funded County in the entire country and underfunded by over £400 less per pupil.

Finally with regards to the NHS, the Health authorities announced that there would not be any downgrades to acute service provision at North Devon District Hospital. Regarding my work at Devon County Council, I sit on the Council's Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee (which has oversight on Highways among many things), the Childrens Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee. You'll be pleased to hear that I am not about to give you an in depth talk about the Audit Committee!

Unsurprisingly, the majority of my casework over the last year has related to Highways Issues. It is now easier to report Highways problems online and I would urge everybody to use the DCC 'Report a Problem' website when logging dangerous potholes or other highway defects. The website is - <https://new.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>. Not only is this the quickest way of ensuring problems are logged, I cannot stress enough that this is a numbers game. The more data received at County Hall about Merton and Torrington Rural the more likely it is that a road here, for example, will be resurfaced. However, more still needs to be done. In January I was pleased that my proposal to prioritise more resources for improving drainage on the Highway Network was accepted by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee. After all, we can fix as many potholes as we like but it will be no good if water is still left running on the roads! That recommendation was subsequently adopted by the Council's Cabinet and then the Full Council itself when DCC's Budget was passed. It included an additional increase in the Highways Budget of £6.5m, and will be used specifically to fund improvements to drainage, as well as patching and potholes. Obviously that budget increase was agreed before the 'Beast from the East' arrived, however since then, the Government has announced that they giving DCC a further £4.5m to help fix potholes and the recent winter storm damage. So I am hopeful that the £6.5m increase will not get lost in having to repair storm damage. Having mentioned the website just now, normally DCC has 200-250 potholes reported county wide every day. Following the wintery weather it went up to 600-700! Skanska, the Highways Contractor, have put out extra gangs but the backlog is huge and at the moment they are prioritising the A, B and large C roads first.

Finally, I just want to touch on the other aspects of DCC's Budget. DCC's share of the council tax precept went up by 4.99% - with 2% specifically allocated for Adult Social Care. I know that council tax increases are not welcome; however this rise helps to fund an increase of 6.1% (£13m) in the Adult Care and Health Budget, and a 5.5% increase (£6.5m) in the Childrens Services Budget. It also helped to fund the Highways Budget increase as well. I wanted to mention those figures because I have spent most of this evening talking about Highways. But it is not the only thing that DCC does. DCC's Childrens Services Department for example helps look after some of our most vulnerable children in the County. During my first year in office I have been privileged to spend time with our Childrens Social Workers and I've seen them working in the field, dealing with cases, among others, of children with severe mental health problems through to cases of child sexual exploitation. When I asked the officer how many sexual exploitation cases come through, her response was 'every day'. We have over 700 children in care in Devon and I regard it as our first and most important duty to look after our most vulnerable children in this County. It is ironic though, and perhaps somewhat sobering, that these issues are going on and are affecting our most vulnerable children, yet 90% of the casework I deal with relates to

Highways issues. I am not saying that Highways are not important, but I do want to highlight that there are other aspects to what DCC does other than just potholes and road closures.

The final thing I want to highlight is that on top of my £10,000 Locality Budget, I will have a further £10,000 for capital community projects. I was pleased to award a grant of £500 to the Clinton Hall last year and I hope that another scheme from Merton will benefit from some funding in the not too distant future.

I'd like to thank the Parish Council for all the work that they do for the Parish, and I look forward to the coming year and doing what I can to support Merton at County Hall.

5. **Annual Crime Report – 1st April 2017 to 7th May 2018**

Merton has had 14 crimes during this period:

- 4 crimes of assault a person thereby occasioning them actual bodily harm
- 3 crimes of criminal damage to property under £5000 – vehicle
- 2 crimes of criminal damage to property under £5000 – dwelling
- 1 crime of send letter/communication/article conveying a threatening message
- 1 crime of common assault
- 1 crime of use threatening/abusive/insulting words/behaviour to cause harassment/alarm/distress
- 1 crime of theft – other – including theft by finding
- 1 crime of dog not under proper control – complaint only

6. **Village Hall Management Committee Report**

The hall has run successfully over the past year, we have maintained the Hall so as to be able to be used, kept it repaired, replaced the old boiler with a new condensing boiler (over £7K) fit to run the hall heating when the under floor heating fails as expected, sanded the floor and re-lacquered it (over £3K), fitted emergency LED lights, and replaced some ceiling lights with LED, bought new round tables. The Hall committee wish to thank the Parish Council for their continued support on this important village amenity. We have several weddings and events booked this coming year although the age of the hall does mean more replacements and repairs are becoming necessary to keep it in such good order. We have welcomed some new members on the committee and look forward to a successful year to come.

7. **Play Equipment Committee Report**

The committee celebrated the opening of phase 1 of the new playground in June, with a grand opening by Lady Clinton. It was a beautiful sunny day with lots of children enjoying the new equipment. Thanks must go to all those who helped with fundraising, donating wonderful promises for the Auction of Promises and in many other ways.

The old playground has finally been cleared and we are now looking forward to working towards phase 2. Our AGM was held in April with some changes to the committee. Tim Horner has resigned as Chairman but will remain on the committee, thanks must go to Tim for steering us through phase 1, Michelle Stacey has taken over leadership and the next step is more fundraising. As soon as we have some more funds in the bank we can start applying for grants.

8. **Merton & Huish Wildlife Report**

During the last year the group has made continued progress in siting and refurbishing bird boxes, both in Slaughterhouse Wood and around the village. A larger project is envisaged in Slaughterhouse Wood but this is dependent on the Clinton Estate's

programme of thinning and felling the evergreen trees in the wood. Our programme of events has included talks by local experts on hedgehogs and bees and several walks, which have been well attended, including a walk to Greatwood to observe the heronry and a farm walk at Higher Winscott. Membership has remained steady and our forthcoming events include:

Braunton Burrows guided walk/talk (wild orchids) – Sunday 17th June, – meet Braunton Burrows car park, 2.00.

Beam Weir walk – Sunday 30th Sept. – meet Merton Square, 2.30.

New members and guests very welcome.

9. **Merton Moncks Committee Report**

The Merton Vintage & Classic Vehicle Rally was held on Sunday 30th April 2017 and a grand total of £4,000 was raised.

Once again we invited local groups/clubs to apply for a share of this if they were in need of some financial support. We also took this opportunity to propose that if they so wished they could have their share allocated to help raise money to enable the implementation of a DAAT Night Landing Site, the choice being entirely theirs.

We were quite amazed with the response that we received and confirm that the local community raised the £2794.20 being the full amount required to purchase the necessary equipment for the Devon Air Ambulance Trust to go ahead and install the lighting and enable the Night Landing Site to become fully operational.

We, as a committee, are extremely grateful to the local groups/clubs who donated their share to make this possible and we extend our thanks to them for this generosity and for their continued help and support at the Rally. Those who chose to request a grant for their group/club received a share of the remaining monies.

10. **Merton & Petrockstowe Heritage Group Report**

Throughout 2017 members enjoyed a varied and interesting programme of speakers. Topics have included Lis Shakespeare on Edward Capern, the postman poet from Littleham, smuggling in Devon by Robert Hesketh and 2 of our members gave their own reminiscences, growing up in Germany during WW2 and farming in Kent during the 1950s and 1960s. John Crocker came at the beginning of 2018 to tell us about growing up at Huish. We also heard of Lewis Burfitt born in Ilfracombe who was interned by the Japanese in Hong Kong during WW2 and kept detailed diaries.

Trips have included a walk around Hatherleigh and a look around Holsworthy Museum with a talk on the town by two of their volunteers. This year we are booked to visit Tapley House and Lew Trenchard Manor in the summer months.

An exhibition was staged at the Baxter Hall, Petrockstowe in October concentrating on the 50s and 60s in both villages. Many photos and artefacts of the period were on display which was enjoyed by a goodly number of visitors.

A suggestion was put forward at the AGM that the group make their own film documenting events in both villages during 2018. The best way of doing this is still being discussed.

Membership has increased over the last twelve months and meetings are split between both village halls.

11. **Football Club Report**

No report had been received.

12. **Finance Report**

Correction to the figures read out on the night – the Clerks confirms the Parish Council opened the year with a balance of £29,054. Total income over the last year

was £45,518 and total spend was £55,942 giving the Parish Council a closing balance of £16,697 for the 2017/18 financial year.

13. **Churchyard Committee**

I can report that Mr Steve Jennings has agreed to cut the whole churchyard on the schedule as before.

The annual meeting of the Churchyard committee is yet to be held when I can arrange it.

The accounts show annual income of £4183.93 – expenses of £2276.07 and a closing balance of £1907.86 Income was much higher due late arrival of last years' grant from Parish Council and the grant for a mower from TDC. Normal grass cutting expenses were £802.07. Disregarding grant payment times and mower grant the underlying figures are roughly in line with past years figures.

If the churchyard is to continue to be cut to a similar level into the future the continued support of the Parish Council is vitally important. The Parish Council has regularly supported the Churchyard Fund which it has representatives sitting on the joint committee with a grant. I take this opportunity to request this matter be put on the agenda for the next appropriate Parish Council meeting. Regular income is the most important factor in maintaining the churchyard at its present regime.

I suggest a grant of £400 continues as a fair and reasonable sum to subsidise the parish council support. For many years now we do not receive any income from burial fees although some years ago Rev Martin Warren did agreed to re-instate but it is still be seen.

14. **Open Forum**

No speakers

Meeting closed at 8:47pm

SIGNED AS A TRUE RECORD: (Chair)

NAME: **DATE:**