**THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF PILTON**

**WAS HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

**ON WEDNESDAY 17th APRIL 2019 AT 7.30PM**

Present: Councillors Robert Kearle (Chairman)

Roger Noble (Vice-Chairman)

Jean Foley

Joe King

Andrew Shaw

Debbie Smith

Angela Wynn

Karen Buckley (Clerk/RFO)

17 member of the public were present

1. **APOLOGIES** – Steven Kearle, Dave Drew
2. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** 18th April 2018 were approved.
3. **CHAIRMAN’S REPORT** (incorporating matters arising)

Good evening and welcome.

Another busy year with 56 planning applications and as always most were easy but two were more demanding.

It was really nice to see so many members of the public come to our meetings and air their views and take part in the meetings.

Loads of potholes and blocked drains that sadly never seem to get sorted by the struggling Highways Department.

The last fingerpost is now back up opposite the Old Shop, a big thanks to Karen for all the correspondence with the Foundry.

Sadly the village litter picks have been poorly attended again this year but those who did manage to come did do a great job and still collected over 30 bags of rubbish and were rewarded with bowls of lovely home-made soup by Audrey and Terry, so a big thank you to them.

I would like to thank Dave and Ron for looking after the Burial Ground and the ASBO’s for looking after the Footpath’s and other bits and pieces they take care of for the parish.

I would like to thank all the councillors for all their hard work and commitment and wish all the applicant’s good luck in the election.

I would especially like to thank Karen for all her hard work and for keeping everything in good order, which is always a difficult task and to Jean and Paul who are always at the end of the phone to help. Thanks also to Nigel Hewitt-Cooper foal l he does for Pilton at Mendip and Somerset.

1. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

Burial Fee’s were down £880 this year from £1640 to £760.

The Clerks salary was down £385.04 from £5057.94 to £4693.90.

Sundries were down £564.13 from £2676.94 to £2112.81. Sundries include ink, paper, hall hire, accountancy fees, external audit fees.

Grants were down £225 from £2450 to £2225. Grants were given to:

Mendip Citizens Advice - £100

ASBO’s - £100

West Pennard School Bus - £2000

Somerset Wood - £25

Burial Secretary, groundsman and maintenance of the Burial Ground is up by £120.

Projects were up, spending £600 last year. This year, the spend was £3298.80 spent on the War Memorial and the Fingerpost.

Still need to pay the Post Office Subsidy which is £600.

We are expecting to receive a Tax Rebate of £735.45.

1. **SCHOOL REPORT**

No report was received this year.

1. **FOOTPATH REPORT**

The last year has been an active year ensuring that the Pilton network of footpaths remained open, in good order, and a pleasure to use.

The Parish Council are extremely grateful to the Pilton ASBOs group, who maintain the footpath network in good order under their co-ordinator Barry Fox.

There have been issues with some of finger posts that help to show where the footpaths run. Some of these metal posts have lost the lettering saying "footpath", and Somerset County Council have provided a number of wooden replacements that the ASBOs have then placed. Perhaps a better way in future would be to find a source of appropriate lettering as digging out the origin posts and replacing them is a time- consuming job.

We have responded to the County Council major review of the Footpath network, which is carried out every few years. This gives us an opportunity to put forward major alterations to the system, but this was not proposed for our Pilton network.

Once a year, all the footpaths are walked by Councillors and members of the ASBOs, and any damaged stiles etc are reported to County. Andrew Shaw was particularly involved with this and our thanks go to him.

All in all, the footpath network is in good order, and we can look forward to the 2019 walking season with confidence.

Joe King. Chairman Footpath Committee.

1. **SPEEDWATCH REPORT**

Pilton Speedwatch has had another active year, regular weekly monitoring sessions being carried out on the A361 running through the Village. Because of the concerns expressed by villagers about the dangerous amount of speeding adjacent to the Neat Lane, A361, and B3136 junction at the top of the village a second monitoring site was inspected and authorised by the Avon and Somerset Police. We now regularly monitor traffic speeds from this site, and we continue to use our original monitoring site each month.

We also monitor the use of the A361 by heavy goods vehicles, and this hourly data is collated by Debbie Smith, and informs the Parish Council traffic policy.

In the run up to the 2019 Glastonbury Festival, working in conjunction with G.F.E.L, who manage the Festival, we will be working monitoring the traffic around Neat Lane, Copse Hill, and Mary's Gate. This is used extensively by Festival Staff. Two monitoring sites have been approved by Avon and Somerset Police, and will come into use once the temporary 30mph limits become active.

We are extremely grateful to Ashley Reay, our local coordinator, for all his help and for the support and assistance we receive from Avon and Somerset Police.

A resident asked the Speedwatch Team have noticed an overall reduction in speeding. Councillor King advised that they he believed it has improved however it is worrying that drivers are still not driving at a sensible pace through the village. Every session they see something happen at the Neat Lane junction.

Thanks was given to the Speedwatch Team.

1. **GABRIEL’S ORCHARD REPORT**

2018 has again been a successful year for Gabriel's Orchard, with regular monthly working parties, which have kept the orchard in good order. We have also paid for the northern boundary fence to be replaced as part of our obligation to have effective stock proof fencing around the orchard.

The very hot summer created some very real challenges for the orchard. A large amount of our fruit crop was shed early because of the comparative drought on our south facing slope, and therefore our juicing season was much reduced with only approximately 100 bottles of apple juice being produced in the autumn as compared with our more usual 350 bottles.

However we were part of the very successful village Wassail celebrations in January. Our mulled cider and apple juice was very popular and the Tithe Barn was a magnificent venue for the event.

A major event was the surprise donation of £5000 to the Trustees from the Alan Powell Trust. They liked the way that we run the project and wished to assist us to do more" outreach" work. As part of this developing programme we have already run an Orchard Skills Day at the Orchard for the public led by Les Davies the former Showering's Apple Officer, and we have made contact with both West Pennard and Croscombe Schools to arrange for us to go into school to do work on pollination and also apple juicing.

We would like to thank all our volunteers, who come and help and would like to invite any new volunteers who would like to join us. We are a friendly group that spend an enjoyable amount of time together good company, and light hearted banter, not forgetting the vital coffee and biscuits.

The Managing Trustees are Richard Raynsford, Jim Dowling, Joe King, Mike Mayhew, Chris Hoole, Christine Davies and Christine Nicholson.

1. **SCC REPORT**

Again, this has been a challenging year, and one which has seen criticism of the council at fever pitch, generally by those who were the architects of the financial problems we face. But, we know it’s easy to cause an issue, and then spit venom from the sidelines.

Despite our financial difficulties, which I shall touch upon later, some very good work is carried out by the County, much of it ignored, as it doesn’t tick the ‘insalubrious’ box which so many facets of the media prefer to indulge themselves in.

Back in July, we took the decision to become paperless for our meetings. Printed agendas were costing the council in excess of £60k per year. The payback for the tablets we use is around 18 months, meaning this simple operation will save the council £150k in this quadrennium.

Our Children’s services, deemed inadequate in 2015, continue to improve, with all aspects monitored turning the corner and now moving towards a further improvement at the next inspection. A recent spot-check inspection highlighted this.

In September we were forced to make another £19 million of savings. Remember, our annual grant from government has reduced over the past decade, and is expected to be zero by next year. There is only so much you can do with the money you have, and borrowing for everyday services is no longer allowed. This hard decision meant that the county finances are back on track for this year. Money is, I believe, going to be a perennial issue at the county council, as I feel there seems to have been a lack of forethought and thinking ahead in years gone by, a situation we considered to our advantage at Mendip. For now though, we are heading in the right direction, but are still far from being ‘out the woods’.

The library consultation was a successful exercise, with many respondents. Our nearest libraries in Shepton and Street are safe, though the decision whether to move the Shepton library is pending. Street and Castle Cary have been successfully taken over by a community group.

Council tax has again risen by the maximum 2.99%, with an extra 3% for adult social care. We sit on a social care time bomb, with an aging population, and a lack of families in the villages is exacerbating this problem. 70% of our council tax received at county goes on this, 30% for children, and 40% on the adult provision. If we don’t get more families in our villages soon, we are all destined to suffer. Indeed, West Somerset was recently one of the 12 most socially deprived districts in the country, and has received government money to help with this. It ranked at number 1.

We still grit over 720 miles of roads on a precautionary basis, and after the September tranche of cuts seems to have placed us back on a firm footing, these will again re reviewed for next winter. I am hopeful of some of those routes removed from this programme to be re-instated. I should add that there were no routes in Mendip South affected.

Following the announcement late last year of an additional £9.9 million pounds to maintain roads in Somerset the following resurfacing and improvement schemes have now been announced and will be implemented by the end of March.

Here are a few figures concerning finance:

• £780m gross spend on services in the county for the next financial year

• 2.99 percent increase in the County Council’s element of Council Tax

• 91p per week rise in Council Tax for Band D

• General Fund reserves to double to £19m by the end of the next financial

year (previously £5.6m)

• Ringfenced £1m to develop preventative work that will reduce demand

on services.

• An extra £200,000 made available for winter maintenance in 2019/20.

• Savings proposals on gulley clearing and jetting dropped

• Delay on proposals to make savings in flood water management

(£80,000), Dementia support (£100,000) and support to help vulnerable

young people in to work (£50,000).

• £224m in capital projects in the County over the next four years.

1. **MDC REPORT**

Mendip continues to head in the right direction. In spite of the cuts to our budget as a result of the reduction in government settlement (the annual amount we used to receive which accounted for around 40% of our revenue), we are, I believe and recently stated such at full council, on the cusp of being financially independent.

This is very good news on a couple of fronts.

Firstly, the forethought and subsequent hard work over the past decade has paid off. Ten years ago, when I was a portfolio holder, we saw the clouds gathering and guessed the settlement would reduce to zero by 2020. Talk about hit the nail on the head. We were spot on, as the grant ends next year. By thinking in this way and being innovative with our spending and investments, we are now one of the few financially sound authorities in the country.

There is much in the way of talk about cuts to our services at district/county level, but at MDC the only service we no longer have, which we did ten years ago, is the dog warden, which was a discretionary service. Even those other non-statutory services like public lavatories and street cleaning have been maintained. All this has been on the back of careful planning. We have not seen an alternative budget from the main, or other opposition members, for around 8 years now, something I delight in pointing out.

The much-maligned re-fit of the offices, £7 million if you recall, which garnered a lot of criticism, has been a great success. Rather than sell off any of the family silver, as we had too much office space for 180 staff, we borrowed this amount and brought the Shepton site up to date. Then, by moving our staff around and renting out the surplus space, we reduced out site running costs by 50% straight away. The payback was expected to be seven years, but we re-payed the loan this last financial year, four years on. This is the kind of approach we have to take now. You could argue that borrowing to invest is a bad thing, but how else can we generate revenue? Government will give us no more, we cannot raise council tax by more than 2.99% (or £5, whichever is higher), or via retention of business rates. We’ve been afforded this latter luxury this year. Although it sounds good, there’s always a sting in the tail. Once it’s top-sliced by government, we end up with about £1 million. Not to be sniffed at, admittedly, but not the panacea we hoped it would be.

Our investments have succeeded in yielding a net income of approximately 3.5%, and I would point out that we have invested in Mendip, despite suggestions to the contrary, having purchased the long derelict Saxonvale site in Frome, which we are developing.

Planning, my own personal speciality saw over 3500 applications last year, and despite a few agency staff helping out, which caused a few issues, we now have a full complement of planners, something few other authorities in the south west can boast.

Our council tax rise is £5, or 3.28%. Remember, over the last ten years, inflation has run between 2 and 4%, and so any rise is pretty much swallowed by inflationary pressures. A 1% rise raises about £60k in real terms.

We continue to support business start-ups, and encourage business to move to our district. We currently have close to 100% employment.

The number of people in temporary accommodation is around 3, exceptionally low, and we have recently received £80k of government money to help with the comparatively low number of rough sleepers we have.

The waste contract ends next year, and we aim to collect all plastic waste at the kerbside for recycling. The residual waste, which from experience (as I’ve been separating out this plastic and taking it to the recycling centre), is very little, and will be collected every three weeks. As a household of five, we now rarely manage to fill the bin completely.

All in all, and after 12 years as the ward member for Croscombe & Pilton, I can look back and say I am proud of what we have achieved in that time.

A resident asked if there was still a staff shortage in Planning Enforcement, as Nigel Hewitt-Cooper was not present the Clerk will email Nigel.

1. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS/QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

A resident expressed thanks to the Parish Councillors for their hard work as it is very much appreciated.

Meeting closed 7.54pm

Refreshments were served.