

SEAVINGTON PARISH COUNCIL - OPEN PARISH MEETING

Held in Seavington Millennium Hall – Monday 11th January 2016 – 7.00pm start

PRESENT:-

Parish Councillors, Nick Loxton [Chair], Dennis Smith [Vice Chair], Elaine Edwards, Nigel England, Chris Reyland, Pauline Parsons, Colin Turner.

County Councillor – Christopher Le-Hardy was present for part of the meeting.

45 Members of the public

APOLGIES:-

Laura Gowers, Sally Gough, Simon Madge, Clive Reeves, George and Joy Willerton, Peter and Mary Wyatt.

The Chair of the Parish Council, Nick Loxton, opened the meeting by welcoming all those present and echoing the thanks to the past Chairman – Simon Madge – as in the December Seavingtons' News. Thanks were also given to all those volunteers for their continued hard work within the community for the enhancement of our Villages. Particular thanks were given to members of The Community Shop and SPFA for their efforts in arranging the anniversary celebrations last July and also special thanks to those who managed The History Project. Although this has now been completed, however History is never complete, contributions are still welcome. Information on how to do this can be found on the village web-site.

Parish Councillors were then introduced to the audience.

The Agenda for the meeting was displayed on a notice board and in his introduction Councillor Loxton made it clear that the Parish Council was fully aware that some agenda items to be discussed might 'stir up a hornet's nest' but the main purpose of the meeting was to air as many views as possible but that no hard and fast decisions would be made without further Council deliberation.

AGENDA

1. Continued use of the SSDC Ranger – Councillor Loxton itemised the areas that the Ranger has been responsible for:- helping with grass cutting in the summer months as well as general tidying up in the villages including cutting back overhanging vegetation, removing flytipped items and keeping sight lines clear at major road junctions as well as tidying the two village entrance stones at Boxstone Cross and Gummers Castle. Further discussion of the topic indicated that the Parish should continue to pay into this scheme and perhaps increase the number of days the Ranger is employed during the winter months.
2. Telephone Box in Village Car Park – This box is now owned by The Parish and all equipment has been removed. The question was asked as to what should happen now. Suggestions made were that it could be used for a book exchange, a post for a defibrillator or perhaps even flowers. Further ideas should be sent to The Parish Council.
3. Up-date on Parish Plan – Apologies were made that this has taken much longer to produce than originally envisaged. However, during the up-date Central Government changed the rules and the Local Plan by District Council had to be re-submitted which also affected the timings. However, the Plan is almost complete and is only awaiting some graphics. Thanks were given to David Froome for agreeing that this would be printed and published by The Seavingtons' News.
4. Maintenance of general areas in the village [including footpaths] - Thanks were given to Andrew Gillard and Phil Gordon-Smith for all the work they do in keeping our footpaths clear. Thanks were also expressed to Jamie Gillard who cuts many areas on behalf of the Parish. Many favourable comments are regularly received by those who use our paths and all who assist in their upkeep and tidiness are to be commended. The Ranger has also been used to cut some of the paths that are less used. Should there be any areas that you feel are neglected then please let The Parish Council know.
5. Maintenance of areas no longer supported by either District or County Council – Verges used to be cut at least twice a year but this has been reduced to one cut a year – this includes the C5021. Drains are only cleared by County Highways in villages every two years. In fact the Parish Council has been advised that if there is water flowing down the Highway and it passes over two drains due to their blockage, but goes down the third, Highways still will not deem this to need urgent attention. Also pavements are no longer an important item and will only be investigated if there is deemed to be a Health and Safety risk. Our County Councillor, Christopher Le Hardy, who was present at the meeting, advised all those present that Central Government was advocating the devolution of more and more things down to a local level due to the lack of funding and of course the buck stops at Parish Council level. Consequently increasingly, Parish monies will have to be used to get things done. It was also suggested that residents should go out and cut down overhanging vegetation etc. It was felt that this was unfair on rural communities as residents in towns would not be asked to do this. It was felt that these were situations where more use of the Village Ranger would be appropriate. If you know of any areas that are still neglected please let us know. The state of the path in Church Lane was discussed and although the Ranger has been used in this area the paving slabs are continually broken by the heavy vehicles that use this narrow lane. Although the viability of its continued use and therefore upkeep was discussed, the meeting was informed that the original rationale for raising

the path above road surface level was to allow dry-shod passage for pedestrians even when the lane is flooded. The path between Gummers Castle and Seavington House was also discussed and it was pointed out that Highways have been advised of its condition, particularly the rusting manhole covers.

6. Grants to Village Organisations - Councillor Parsons advised that during the past year £1,000 was given to the PCC for the maintenance of the Churchyards. The Community Shop has requested continued support - £500 for ground rent due to SPFA and £300 towards the provision of WiFi and Broadband in the Shop/Cafe and Millennium Hall. A grant request has also been received from the newly formed Youth Club. The Parish Council has for many years supported the SPFA by paying for both the main field grass to be cut by SSDC and for the cutting of the large play area by Jamie Gillard. This year responsibility for the upkeep of the small play area outside the Hall and the sitting out area of the cafe will also become that of the Parish Council. Concern was also expressed regarding the Committee of the Association and its lack of members following a number of resignations last year. A suggestion was made to the meeting's attendants that perhaps residents should be asked if the SPFA, as is, should be wound up and the land asset re-registered in the name of the Parish Council as it already pays for the upkeep of the Playing Field. Under the terms of the current constitution of the SPFA, the land is protected from sale. The Parish Council has no interest in managing the Millennium Hall and ways in which this division of the control of the assets of the SPFA might be achieved would have to be investigated. It was made clear that this is a decision for the SPFA and residents of the villages and not the Parish Council. All future grants will be considered at the next Parish Council meeting.

7. Village Precept – It was advised that the Parish Council will be increasing the amount requested by 1.4% to give a total budget requirement of £14,900. This was considered prudent as extra costs are envisaged with regard to general village maintenance and any cost that may be incurred with proposed alterations to The Village Car Park. It was pointed out that the current balance of approximately £20,000 of which £2,000 is earmarked for outstanding invoices, has only been incurred as the Parish Council do not pay for the services of a Clerk.

8 Neighbourhood Watch Scheme - A new co-ordinator of the scheme is required as the present one is about to leave the village. There are also co-ordinators for other parts of the village required. If you are interested please let the Parish Council know.

9 Parking in all areas of the villages – Within the villages we have an ever increasing number of cars to park and consequently action has to be taken now to make the best and most responsible use of the areas that we have. The question was asked if there any more areas in the village that could be used for parking? At present in some areas parking of vehicles is haphazard and irresponsible. It was pointed out that no-one has the right to park in a particular place, just because they have done so for many years, unless they have the land owner's permission or own or rent the land. As the Parish Council now own The Village Car Park [opposite the Volunteer Inn] a decision has been made to mark this area in accordance with national guidelines to try and ensure that the area is fully utilised. It was advised that this was a first step to try and ease local tensions. Other areas in the villages are also becoming choke points especially areas of Water Street and the area of the junction between Townsend and West Street. Motorists in these areas are asked to park their vehicles responsibly and with due regard to the Law.

10 Up-date on Lift West Development and setting up a Community Land Trust -

In March 2014 a planning application was made for 13 dwellings to be built on the Lift West site, New Road, Seavington. This planning application has been conditionally granted. Mr Andrew Whitehouse, the owner of Lift West, has made the completely unexpected but extremely generous offer to gift three completed properties to the community. It is understood that a revised planning application with minor amendments is to be made and that this will be accompanied by an undertaking to provide the three properties, in perpetuity for the community. In view of the timescale within which these properties may be completed, (the end of 2016 or early 2017), it is now necessary to start thinking about their management. A small number of informal meetings have already taken place between Mr Whitehouse, representatives of South Somerset District Council, our Parish Council and Wessex Community Land Trust, to consider what arrangements might be put into place for running these homes. The Parish Council view, which appeared to be widely supported by those in attendance is that this is such a generous offer that we must do everything reasonably possible to ensure that these properties can be accepted for the long term benefit of the community. The overall planning application includes three 2 bedroom dwellings which would be affordable homes in perpetuity, with a priority to make these available for local people. It has been suggested that initially at least these should be for rent. Residents were asked to assist in clarifying what the current requirement/demand for such properties in the Seavingtons' might be. Councillor Smith referred to the Homefinder Register, www.homefindersomerset.co.uk, and requested that all interested parties who might be looking for social housing in the area complete the online application and that this message be circulated as widely as possible within the community. The possibility of conducting a short survey to ascertain perceived demand by local residents was also suggested. Councillor Smith then explained that a Community Land Trust (or CLT) had been suggested as the type of organisation that would be required to operate the homes. A CLT is defined as a not-for-profit organisation created to benefit the community by owning land and property, invariably starting with affordable homes. A CLT must hold its assets for the benefit of the community in perpetuity and membership is open to anyone supporting its

aims. It was explained that this would not involve operating the homes in every detail such as responding to repairs to leaking taps or other maintenance issues. A management/maintenance agency would be engaged for this purpose, usually a Housing Association, and this is the model that seemed to work elsewhere. The CLT would agree policy decisions and direction. Throughout the evening's meeting there had been many requests for more volunteers to help support and run our many established local organisations and here we were now starting a new one!

This is a really exciting project for the exclusive benefit of OUR community and all those interested in learning more about taking an active role should contact the Parish Council.

This was the final agenda item and the meeting closed at 9.10 pm.