

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24TH APRIL AT 7PM

Present: Parish Council Chairman Cllr Andrew Brewer, the Clerk and approximately 25 members of the public.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (25th APRIL 2013) The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposed Nigel Bundy, seconded by David Harris

2. ANY MATTERS ARISING There were no matters arising.

3. REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

For those of you who have never attended an Annual Parish Meeting you will not be aware that this is usually the least favourite of my duties as Chairman. It is a meeting that we have to convene, by law and invite the electorate to submit questions or debate motions which may be voted on. The nonsense is that any vote is not binding and the questions are answered by myself and do not necessarily reflect the Council's opinions. It is therefore unsurprising that in just over twenty five years the occasions on which questions are submitted could be counted on the fingers of one hand. It does however give my fellow Councillors the opportunity of sitting on the other side of the table and I have received much leg pulling from some of my colleagues. We have been advised many times by Governments of all parties that this is something that will receive attention and new legislation brought forward to do away with the anachronism which is our Annual Parish Meeting. The Annual Meeting of the Council will actually take place next month when all the usual things you would expect at an AGM will take place. If there was no Parish Council this would be the only meeting of the electorate, as is the case in Warmwell. Some of you may think this might be an improvement for Crossways so I would like to take the opportunity of outlining some of the work that we, as Councillors, undertake on your behalf and some of the 'highlights' both good and bad since the last Annual Meeting.

The Council now has nine Councillors with two vacant seats. Next year will see the ending of our terms and Councillors will decide if they wish to stand again. If more nominees are received than seats then an election will be held. If not, then those who put their names forward will be deemed to have been elected unopposed. The only time that all seats were contested at election was when the Council was formed. However two of the Councillors were elected at by elections. The empty seats perhaps indicates contentment with the electorate or, more likely than not, apathy. This has been a constant battle but the last twelve months have raised concerns that all should be aware of.

I refer to the major item which has dominated much of our discussions and debates and that is the District Structure Plan. As we met last year we were in the midst of a consultation and negotiations process. A public meeting had been held in February 2013 when two developers spoke of their plans for Crossways. The hall was packed and residents were given the opportunity of completing a response form in order to give us the idea of which way we should proceed. Whilst we may want Crossways to remain as it is we first of all had to accept that there was going to be some development here. Our fall back position was to get a substantial reduction from the 1,500 to 2,000 dwellings which had been spoken of. The Council met in March to discuss the feedback and agreed that we should convey back to our District colleagues that the majority of the villagers who had communicated favoured 400 -500 dwellings on land south of Warmwell Road. I have to say that we were heartened and encouraged by the positive way our suggestions were received and that the number of proposed dwellings were reduced to something more manageable. We had faced some nightmare scenarios of development for the next 20 years on three sides of our community – we would be hemmed in by a building site.

Those who have followed developments will know that the District proposals very quickly fell foul of the Government appointed inspector and has now been put on hold for six months whilst more research is done, and, worryingly for us, the probability is that the total number of houses to be built in this plan will be substantially increased.

But I hear you all say that we live in the age of the 'big society' when Government have said that Parish Councils, as the first tier of local Government will have more of a voice. Twelve months ago I started to think that perhaps there was something in this. Tonight I have reverted to my cynical opinion. There are some uncomfortable facts for Crossways:-

Firstly, that there is a demand for housing in this part of the world. There is political will from the Government who have made it their mission for their own ends to ramp up the building of more dwellings.

Secondly, this has led to some alterations to planning procedures and guidelines which now favour developers and land owners. Many more appeals are now going the way of developers and we only have to think of Betterment Properties recent victory in the high court as a sobering thought.

Thirdly, Crossways is not an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or Special Scientific interest. We are not a world heritage site, we just happen to adjoin several areas which are all of these things and coupled with a Hardy connection or two does not help us.

Fourthly and perhaps the most chilling thought of all is the huge amount of money which is involved. We are talking millions of pounds. That is why developers are prepared to throw considerable resources into appeals, judicial reviews and high court cases. The profits are staggering.

So we have a structure plan 'on hold'. What it could mean is that any developer with an eye on building more houses in the village can submit an application. With Government pressure for housing to be delivered and huge sums of money involved we are in a very precarious position. All we can do is see what develops and hold to our position. We may need to consider, how unpalatable that is, the maximum benefit we can secure for Crossways on the back of any development. This is where we have to tread a delicate path between working with developers but not too closely.

An example, I feel, of an excellent planning opportunity is the Silverlakes Development. During the year we have met several times with the developer of this substantial project which will see the moonscape running between Crossways and West Knighton transformed into a natural habitat, managed and protected. Once established, the construction of upmarket holiday dwellings which will not be permanent homes. They will be accompanied by a range of facilities which will be open to Crossways residents. The outline planning consent has been achieved and Habitat First are working to satisfy planners conditions. On the Council's agenda this evening are some of the modifications to the planning which are as a result. I apologise once again to anyone whose lunch was spoiled last summer by my appearance on BBC South Today. It was, however, good to be speaking about Crossways in a positive context and as I said at the time how refreshing to use a sentence with 'Crossways' and 'upmarket' and 'prestigious' all strung together.

We faced the prospect of a Rock Festival taking place directly adjacent to our parish boundary. We made representation to Purbeck District Council on a variety of grounds and enlisted the support of several of our neighbouring councils. We were very concerned that tickets were being sold prior to the grant of a licence and were even more alarmed when the details of the event came to light. Purbeck did refuse the licence after the police authority objected.

Now, what could be more alarming than fighting a rock concert, well of course the dreaded 'f' word cropped into Council meetings. We discovered that an oil company were going to carry out seismic surveys in and around our parish. I say found out because, we did not receive any notification. With all the hype and protest on fracking (the f word) we contacted the Company concerned straight away. Having already arranged a briefing meeting to hear more about Silverlakes we also were able to get a representative to come along and run through what was going to happen. Once again we were joined by colleagues from neighbouring Parish Councils. The surveys took place without incident although we gather the data is going to take possibly over a year to process. Whilst the company concerned said they were not interested in shale gas only oil we may have to be vigilant if the results indicate that it is down there.

I spoke previously about the need to ensure that any development should maximise the benefit to the community structure. We recognise that a new village hall is going to be needed but we are also anxious that this building is preserved as one of the last remaining structures from RAF Warmwell. This will be some stage down the line. Any development will have to include contributions to the extension of the First School, possibly in the future it would become a primary school if the local

authority goes two tier. In the queue also would be the health centre with a requirement that their premises are enlarged. Contributions into road infrastructure as well as street lighting, play areas, open spaces and so on. In the past, and I think that it is scandalous, development has taken place in this village with properties being built and the section 106 set aside for schemes which even at the outset were unlikely to take place. There was a considerable sum from the traffic calming that was returned to the developer plus interest. There are contributions to cycle ways that probably will never be built and so on. The result is we have the building but the benefit to the village is nominal. Grand schemes and high ideas are all very well but it is this Council's responsibility to ensure that this never happens again. We have met with Habitat First Group with a view to obtaining some land to increase the allotments and possibly a community orchard too.

During the course of the year the process of revising standing orders has taken place. We have introduced new policies and procedures in line with changes in legislation. It is difficult keeping up at times. So as well as the exciting headline grabbing business we have more mundane house keeping duties to attend to. In this I commend all my fellow Councillors for their diligence.

I am pleased to say that as the result of a suggestion from this Council and several meetings we now have a representative sitting on the Board of Governors of Frome Valley First School. Cllr. Dave Harris has undertaken this on behalf of the Council. Councillors Stenning and Bundy have visited the school and the Playgroup and reported back to us on what they had seen. This Council has also been presented with the Playgroup's Ofsted Inspection report and congratulated them on their improvement to the 'good; category.

In November I laid the wreath on behalf of the Council at the RAF Warmwell Memorial. In a conversation afterwards we realised that this year is the 25th anniversary of the dedication. I am pleased to say that a working party has now been formed to put together a programme of events to mark this occasion. In addition we have committed to some restoration and repair work to both the stone and the surrounding area. I would encourage all to become involved.

During the winter we raised concerns about the flooding on the West Stafford Bypass and the potholes in our local roads. These are ongoing matters but we have been advised that the B3390 Warmwell Road is to be resurfaced from Moreton Station through to Warmwell.

The Playing Field and Recreation Sub Committee has undertaken sterling work. They have made the decision not to spend further capital amounts on keeping the playing field to football match standard as the teams who have played there now go elsewhere. We are not able to compete with the floodlit, astro turf facilities of the Thomas Hardy Leisure Centre. The skate bowl, tennis court, MUGA and trim trail equipment is now becoming used more widely. The landscaped area between Brewer and Blackwell Walk has settled in well and the play area there is very popular and much loved. Councillors will recall we spent a lot of time and effort in the consultation on this project and it has certainly paid off.

If we add into the mix the street lighting, refuse collection, dog fouling and the gradual establishment of which Council is responsible for each bit of land it has been a busy year. Finances are always a worry and we have to exercise great restraint and dare I say it 'prudence' with your money to ensure we produce value for the money you pay. Cllr Bundy as Vice Chairman oversees the finance. Having done the role myself and seeing the changes being made to the relief sum we receive from District I know that this is going to become a real headache for us to weigh services against cost saving. One example is our review of litter picking and if we can afford to provide the service at the level we currently do.

In the course of the year the Council's website was completely revised. We did not receive any response from appeals in the 'Bridge' so a working party of Councillors led by Councillor Thomas took it forward. We have a much 'cleaner' website which contains a lot of highly useful information. May I take this opportunity to thank the outgoing webmaster who undertook the duties, voluntarily for many years even after he had moved away from the village. All our minutes and agendas are there, the parish magazine is accessed many times and organisations can use it to give details about their work.

At the start of my report I referred to the vacant seats and I hope that now I have nearly finished you have some appreciation of what we have done and what lies before us. As Chairman I am enormously proud of this Council but also of the community we represent. I shall be delighted next month to represent us together with my Mother at a Garden Party being held at Buckingham Palace. I shall certainly be wearing the badge of office with great pride that day.

Recognition of our community is one thing but it is down to many people who work, often unseen, to make a lot of these good things happen. I am delighted to be presenting awards to people and groups who have been nominated for their work for Crossways. Before I do, and on your behalf, can I thank all the Parish Councillors and especially my Vice Chairman, Cllr Nigel Bundy for his help and support; to Cllr Dave Harris for Chairing the Sports Field and Recreation sub committee. Also to each and every Councillor who, in your own ways and areas have contributed so much to the work of the council. In addition I would like to thank our District Councillors Teresa Seall and Peter Stein and County Councillor, Andy Canning for their help and support during the past year.

All of this work and much more has been overseen and guided by our clerk and Proper Officer Stella Wilson and on behalf of Crossways Parish Council may I take this opportunity of thanking her for her due diligence, help and assistance.

I continue to try and give of my best – as a Chairman I make every effort to ensure that all opinions are heard and noted. As a Council we know that we cannot please every single resident but we do listen and try, wherever possible, to act on suggestions. In some cases the things raised are outside our jurisdiction but we try and make our opinions heard in the ears that matter. If you feel you have something to offer then please get involved.

I commend my report to this gathering and thank you for your attendance and for listening.

4. NOTICES OF MOTION – To consider any motions of which due notice has been given (in writing) at least three days before the meeting. No motions were received.

5. QUESTIONS – to deal with questions (which should have been submitted in writing at least 48 hours before the meeting) No questions were received.

6. ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Signed (Chairman) 2015

