

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 30TH APRIL 2015
AT 7PM**

Present: Parish Council Chairman Cllr Andrew Brewer; the new Clerk (Kate Allsopp), the outgoing Clerk (Stella Wilson) and approximately 22 members of the public.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (24th APRIL 2014) The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

2. ANY MATTERS ARISING There were no matters arising.

3. REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

No doubt you will have heard that in seven days time this country will go to the polls to vote for the Westminster Parliament and selective councils. In Crossways the District boundaries have been altered but we retain two District Councillors. The Parish Council term of office also finishes at this time but as insufficient candidates have stood all Councillors have been returned unopposed. In my annual report to the electorate of Crossways I shall reflect on the work of the Council during the last twelve months but also refer back five and fifteen years. One of the main election issues has been the subject of housebuilding and this has dominated much of our work for many years and is probably the most major issue before us. My Father, as previous Chairman of the Council was told by a District Officer that Crossways would one day be the size of Blandford and that its days of being a village (it was actually a hamlet then) were very much numbered. It is true to say that in the last 30 years Crossways has doubled in size each 10 years. One of the main political parties have said that if they form the next Government they will force Housing Associations to sell their properties to tenants, similar to the council house sale of a few years ago. The worrying thing for us is Crossways has a disproportionate number of these properties – the policy seems to indicate that for every one sold must be replaced with another in the same community. This could see us having to accommodate another 200 properties on top of what is planned for the moment. All of the parties are engaged in a ‘bidding war’ with house building figures being traded against each other in some sort of perverse auction.

As I have said many times in this room Crossways is at a disadvantage to all our neighbours and historically been seen as a ‘dumping ground’ for houses and projects that neighbouring communities do not want in their back yard. This has been illustrated over the last twelve months in the battle to stop the slurry lagoon which was successfully done in Puddletown, Broadmayne and Martinstown but was agreed in Crossways. We have Councillors openly saying in meetings that houses can be built at Crossways because it doesn’t matter. Part of the role of this Council has been to disabuse the powers that be and we have had some successes and some setbacks. Early on we have had to take a pragmatic approach that to oppose any and all development in the village will not succeed. Our problem is that much of West Dorset is either an area of outstanding natural beauty or heritage, or can claim a link with a Dorset worthy, particularly Thomas Hardy or is an area of special scientific interest. The link with Hardy is particularly ironic for a man who started his career in a Dorchester architects office and whose family made its living by building houses in the area. The consideration of the local structure plan has rumbled on during the last year with it being subjected to public enquiry by an Inspector from the Government and we are in limbo awaiting on the conclusion. To precis our response to the various proposals was to consult with residents who by a large margin said they wanted development on land south of Warmwell Road rather than alongside the Woodsford Fields development. We had been faced with plans for 1,500 plus houses and sought to have this reduced to 400 – it eventually became 490. All of this became embroiled with the pressures on the District to increase numbers in line with Government targets. This is a scenario being replicated right along the south coast of England and is reaching crisis point in the South East. We are still fortunate that the London commuter belt at its furthest point is Bournemouth. However if the train service is enhanced that could change. So we are left with tourism and retirement properties as our dominant forces in development terms. We also need to ensure that there is affordable houses that children who grow up in the village are able to afford to remain in the village. In order for this we need employment opportunities as well as suitable properties. Linked with this was the application made for the commonly known ‘hippy field’ adjoining Oaklands Park. This ran contrary to the structure plan which we had signed up to and our understanding of the strategy for our village. The planning committee has met today and Cllr Bundy will be making a statement during public participation of the meeting which will immediately follow the awards presentation. I would urge you all to remain to hear this news and the implications that it has for Crossways. I gather it will also hit the headlines on local radio tomorrow.

We have been particularly impressed with the Silverlakes plans and the care and attention that Habitat First have put into working with us and I would publicly wish to thank them yet again for showing the 'gold standard' of working with not only this council but the wider community and our neighbouring councils. This culminated for me earlier this year when they stepped in to save the Beaumont Mural – a wall painting discovered behind a freezer in Tree Stores and scheduled to be destroyed as part of the conversion of the property to a new Co-op Supermarket. They responded to our appeal, investing at least £15,000 and ensuring that this part of our heritage will be preserved.

This links in with one of the major events of the last twelve months which was the weekend of events commemorating the anniversary of the unveiling of the RAF Warmwell Memorial. The stone was refurbished and a special service was held with hundreds of people joining the Deputy Lord Lieutenant. We had a Big Band dance in this hall and an exhibition put together by our good friend Anthony Cooke who has been a support to us for so many years. We were fortunate that the weather held good with a replica Spitfire on the playing field in Dick O'Th Banks which was really evocative. The 40s fete was opened by Eric Westrope who had been stationed here in the war. Not only did he make a very good opening speech but he toured the site with such enthusiasm that didn't reflect the fact that he was in his 90s and had not been in very good health. When we got to the Spitfire he posed for photographs and patted it like he was being reunited with an old friend. A few months later he sadly passed away and the Council was represented at his funeral by our good friend Roy Dean who had been instrumental in tracing and organising Eric's appearance as well as all the military logistics of the service on the Saturday. There was a small team of dedicated volunteers who ensured that the events were well presented and a credit to this village.

The Council now stands at eight Councillors which is one less than last year. Since the last Annual Parish Meeting we have received the resignation of two councillors and one seat was declared vacant as the councillor concerned had not attended for six months without apology. One of the resignations was from a long serving Councillor, Elaine Stenning who sadly passed away following a long battle with cancer. In her last weeks she was delighted to receive the recognition of one of the inaugural community awards which was delivered to her. It was proudly displayed at the gathering which followed her funeral at the Spitfire Club. Elaine has been really missed for her wisdom and practicality which she gave this Council as well as the Oaklands Park perspective which she represented with great aplomb. We have co-opted two Councillors in the last year namely Cllr Bob Light and Cllr Joe Gibson. Unfortunately the nomination papers for Cllr Gibson were lost in transit as the office moved recently and although he had completed them to stand it wasn't registered with the returning officer. A minor technicality which means his co-option is item 1 of our next meeting which will be the Annual General meeting. Please can I mention that this is on Thursday 14 May and not the last Thursday – this is down to electoral law that the Council has to meet within a certain number of days of the election. Interestingly enough all Councillors terms of office are deemed to have finished on 7 May except one who remains in office until the first meeting is held even if he or she hasn't chosen to stand again. I make my annual plea for any resident who feel that they may be able to work as a Parish Councillor to come forward and find out more. It really is a crucial time for this village. We are faced with the revision of the Purbeck structure plan which has the possibility of over 1,000 houses being built in Moreton Parish but adjoining Crossways forming a butterfly shaped community with no integrated infrastructure. Money will go to Moreton Parish and Purbeck District whilst the pressure and stress will be placed on our facilities, our roads and our services.

Last May I had the honour to be the first Parish Council Chairman to attend a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. I was accompanied by my Mother who was recognised for her work in the community and we had a memorable day. It was crowned if you will pardon the pun by Mum's photo being on the front cover of the 'Times'. Having taken the day away from Playgroup which was unusual in itself one of the children when asked where Mary was had replied 'she has gone to London to see the Queen' to which the Mother enquired if it was to frighten the mice under her chair. The Mum then had to eat her words when she saw a beaming Mary looking out of the newspaper the following day!

The year has seen the West Stafford bypass flooded again but not as bad as previous years but only because we didn't have the same pattern of rainfall. We have also had the problems with the West Dorset Waste Partnership who decided to stop emptying our bins without notice meaning that the first we knew was that they were overflowing. Councillors will be aware that I have expressed concerns during the course of the year about the standard of service received from West Dorset District Planning Department. Too many times we have received applications with an unrealistic turn round time. As

with the slurry lagoon, officers dealing with the case are invariably part time and that cases are not being dealt with on a daily basis – we have had incidents when objections lodged in good time are not showing on the website. I do hope that the new District council will grasp the nettle and we will see a drastic improvement as this is an area which is of vital importance to Crossways.

At the election next week we will lose both our District Councillors and I wish to pay tribute to them both. Cllr. Teresa Seall has for many years been a staunch advocate for the people of Crossways and has helped us immeasurably. She was closely involved in our campaign to build the MUGA and skate bowl. On the larger planning applications and the detailed negotiations that have taken place with the officers of West Dorset on so many topics she has been an excellent facilitator and adviser and has done this not only in these private meetings but in the District Council meetings. Unfortunately Cllr. Seall cannot be with us this evening but I shall be asking Councillors in our meeting to send a formal letter of thanks.

Cllr Stein has not been with us for as long but has also represented the interests of this Council and our resident and has taken forward many questions and queries, knocking on the doors in South Walks House and getting answers. Our District Councillors have ensured that they are either here for each of our meetings or we receive reports and information. Thank you so much for all that you have done for us, the community and the Youth Centre.

Thanks also to our County Councillor, Andy Canning who is continuing in office, for his help, information and advice.

I am, as always, most grateful to my Vice-Chairman, Nigel Bundy for his help and support over the course of the year. As ever, you have taken the most incomprehensible of reports, questionnaires and submissions and made them logical to us. You have co-ordinated our responses to some of the more controversial planning applications over the course of the years.

So finally and without apology to the most important item in my report for this year. I mentioned that I would refer to events of the past 5 and 15 years. Over the term of office of this Council I believe we have demonstrated ourselves to be an efficient and forward thinking body of people. We don't always agree but when we disagree it is with respect and without recrimination. We have undertaken projects large and small and improved the environment in Crossways. We can't do everything but we have done a lot and when issues are raised concerning things which are not in our remit we make sure that the appropriate people are contacted and, if necessary, called to account. This is down to many people who work, often unseen, to make a lot of these good things happen. Once again 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 to Cllr Dave Harris in his absence 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.

Fifteen years ago, one of the newer Councillors found himself sitting on an interview panel for the post of Clerk to this Council. Never did I think that all these years later I would be doing the same thing again. When Stella first indicated that she wished to retire it was a most daunting prospect as for much of my time as a Councillor she has been there and we have been through a lot together. Whilst the paid employee and proper officer she has quite often gone well beyond that which her duties specify. With a sense of humour, most of the time, she has made the role her own and I suspect she will miss it as much as we will miss her. Stella quite rightly was given a Crossways Community Award a year ago. However the interview panel was unanimous in our appointment of Kate Allsopp as our new clerk and she took over her post officially on 1st April. Stella has kindly agreed to sit alongside during the coming weeks as we deal with elections, annual meetings and end of year accounts and audits. However the transition has been incredibly smooth with Cllr Gibson's nomination papers perhaps the only casualty. I wonder if Stella is getting used to rattling around her empty office and I know that she will be readily on hand to advise and help in the future. In the years we have gone through I think most eventualities have been experienced – certainly more than standing orders would indicate and I wonder if we turned the clock back if, with the benefit of hindsight Stella would have taken the job on. I hope that she thinks she would because, on balance, in the words of a famous Dorsetman 'it'twern't all bad!'

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

Lynne Avery addressed the meeting to introduce herself and the Dorset County Council/Help and Care ‘Wayfinder’ partnership. Lynne lives in Crossways and works 9 hours a week for Wayfinder providing care and support to the over 50s in the community, allowing them to stay in their own homes. Wayfinder can put people in touch with social clubs, such as lunch and keep fit clubs, as well as specialist agencies, for instance police or fire brigade visits to make sure their homes are safe.

Lynne works in the Crossways area and her colleague Dorothy Gold covers the Tolpuddle and Puddletown area. Councillor Light reported that Lyn is also a driver for Crossways Car Link.

There are central numbers to contact where there is always someone to provide help. Tel 01305 548111 or Tel 01202 946111.

Signed (Chairman) 2015

