

## WEST MOORS PARISH COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of the **ANNUAL PUBLIC PARISH MEETING** held on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2008 at the West Moors Youth Club, Fryer Field, West Moors at 7.30pm.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr. B. E. Wye - Chairman		
Cllr. Mrs C. Holmes - Vice-Chairman		
Cllr J Bartley	Cllr. A. Clarke	Cllr Mrs M Hall
Cllr P Holden	Cllr. J M Price	Cllr. M. Shine
Cllr. J. Young	Cllr. Ms S. Zyga	

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Ms. J. Weedon (Clerk)  
Mrs P Holloway (Assistant Clerk)  
9 members of the public

**APOLOGIES:**

Cllr P Gausson	Cllr. D. Knight	Cllr. K. Warren
Cllr. R. Watson		

**1      SIGNING OF APPROVED MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on 5<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2007**

Having been circulated and previously approved on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007 (minute no 07/11), the minutes were signed as a true and correct record by the Chairman of the Council.

**2      Matters Arising for information**

None

**3      COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**a) Finance and General Purpose Committee – Chairman Cllr A. Clarke**

As its name suggests, the Finance & General Purposes Committee has two main roles: to oversee the finances of the Parish Council and to deal with general matters that are not covered by the other committees. These matters may relate to council policies, codes of conduct, personnel issues, meetings' schedules, etc, as well as a response to wider matters such as the changes to library hours by Dorset County Council.

But it is the financial issues that occupy most of the business. The committee examines the budget proposals put forward by the Highways Committee and the Playing Fields & Cemetery Committee in the autumn as well as those areas covered by the committee itself, for example staff salaries, office costs, grants to village groups and organisations.

In November the committee then recommends to the full Parish Council the amount of 'precept' to be included in the Council Tax for West Moors, that is the amount to be spent in support of the facilities run by the Parish Council. This year (2007/8) the precept was agreed at a total of £24.40p for the year for a Band D property. (As with the rest of the Council Tax, the amount payable falls proportionately for properties in Bands A – C and rises for Bands E – H). For 2008/9, this will be £26.51p. This figure supports the provision and maintenance of the cemetery, playing fields, pavilion, Petwyn, Parish Office, small grants, staff salaries, etc.

There is, of course, income as well as expenditure, particularly from cemetery/burial fees and from the hire of the sports facilities. Overall, the parish council expects to have spent £95,600 in 2007/8, including income amounting to about £15,600. Final accounts will be presented to the next meeting, the first in the new financial year.

One of the pleasant tasks of the committee is to award grants to support local groups in response to an application. The Youth Club receives an annual grant towards their

running costs (£3,000 this year). Other grants were made this year to a variety of groups and activities, including the Skatefest, Youth Club summer holiday events, Skatepark equipment, Age Concern, Vitalise, West Moors Youth Football Club, St Mary's First School PTA, local Citizens Advice Bureaux. Some of these relate to awards made under the Daphne Harrison Fund (money left to the village by the former councillor) in response to an open invitation for community groups to bid for up to £500 for worthy projects or activities.

The Parish Finance Committee welcomes questions from the public either at its committee meetings or at full Parish Council. Dates can be checked on parish notice boards or with the Clerk in the parish office.

I would like to thank Judi Weedon, our clerk, for the detailed preparation of accounts and other matters for each meeting.

### **b) Planning Committee – Chairman Cllr D. Knight (report given by Cllr Mrs C Holmes**

Your Parish Council Planning Committee have considered 107 planning applications since May 2007. Most applications were straightforward, complied with planning law and were, therefore, finally approved by East Dorset District Council.

West Moors Parish Council **can only make recommendations for approval or not** to East Dorset District Council who are the decision - makers on applications. The Government wants quicker, more predictable and efficient planning and has now introduced a new standard application form ( 1 APP )

In law, there is a presumption that development is 'good' and laws govern the District Council's decision making. The Parish Council's views on individual applications are just part of the District Council's consultations with interested parties e.g. Highways Dept. We cannot just say "We don't like it, we don't want it."

West Moors, like all other settlements in the area is under great pressure for land use and 'windfall' developments are positively encouraged by Central Government.

Although we are lucky in some respects to be bounded by the A31, the Forestry Commission land, the Army land and several Special Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI's) this puts even more pressure on house building so often the only way to go is upwards. Many applicants purely want to enlarge existing homes with extensions, conservatories and loft extensions, however, there have been some contentious decisions by the District Council or the Appeals System of independent arbitrators.

100, 112 and 114 Station Road, which your Council advised against, are cases in point. These developments have been designed to studiously avoid having more than 14 dwellings, as once that number is exceeded affordable housing has to be included in the plans.

Two further sites which your Council opposed in their current form are the Old Post Office site in Station Road and two blocks of 14 flats in Highfield Road. Both have gone to Appeal.

Affordable Housing is a largely unresolved issue in our village, the district and the county. House prices and land values have risen to such an extent that the pool of affordable housing is virtually non-existent.

At a district level East Dorset District Council is undertaking a public consultation to help shape a new Local Development Framework. Its Core Strategy will set out the vision for how our area will develop over the next 20 years. It will cover key issues like housing, economic growth, protecting the environment and supporting local communities.

West Moors Parish Council always has the interests of our village when considering planning applications. Plans can be viewed at the Parish Office and the public are welcome to attend planning meetings

### **c) Playing Field and Cemetery Committee – Chairman Cllr M Shine**

The Cemetery – Looking around the grounds it is evident that the extension opened in 1995 will soon be filled which I believe will bring the new extension into use sometime

this year. Once opened, as stated in last years report we should start as we mean to go on ensuring that the regulations are adhered to so that the grounds could be more easily maintained thus enabling it to be a lawned area once again.

Our Clerk, Judi Weedon placed an order and is in receipt of metal grave markers so hopefully the new extension will have a more tidy and resemblance of order.

Towards the end of last year, John Stevens, Pastor of Pinehurst Road Chapel volunteered with his team to clear away the overhanging trees and hedges around the cemetery fencing fronting Priory Road. This was done and the fences repaired and painted. With thanks, expenses were paid and a donation made to the chapel funds.

Playing Fields – The fields continue to be well maintained under groundsman Hugo White who is currently off sick, who also has the dual role of looking after the cemetery grounds. In my opinion things have greatly improved! Improvements and lighting in and around the hard play areas are items in hand so positive action should be taken in the near future. The children's play area on Fryer Field has recently been replenished with a good supply of bark chippings and repairs carried out on play equipment signage. The basketball wall has been removed so that more use can be made of the field it occupied. Five a side football matches maybe? On the subject of football I have to report that the goal posts to the rear left of the field have twice been vandalised by being pushed over. The Homewatch has a recordable camera that is available. I could liaise with Hugo to find a suitable siting of the equipment to catch the people responsible.

It has been observed that water from recent rainfall is draining well in to the ditches.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the playing fields and cemetery committee members for the support given to me during the past year.

May thanks also to the Parish Clerk Judi, and Pauline for their help and consideration during the same period.

#### **d) Highways and Environment Committee – Chairman Cllr K Warren (report given by Cllr B Wye)**

2007/08 has seen a continuing run of ground works in the area of the shop pavements and parking lay-bys. These are rapidly destroying the pleasing aesthetics of the High Street scene. We hope that this can soon be improved by legislation on the various contractors. The Parish Council has made every endeavour to restrict the volume of vehicles coming onto Station Road from more and more flat development, but invariably overruled by demand for more affordable accommodation. The problem of speeding along our through roads and several straight residential roads continues and we will continue to try and resolve it.

The new mini roundabout at Station Road/Pinehurst Road junction is not without criticism by many but the majority of users via Pinehurst Road have given it full approval.

Rejuvenation of seating, bus shelters, Petwyn surfaces etc have been improved and will continue into next year. Likewise, new village centre notice boards and refurbishment of other notice boards is in hand. Leaf cleaning and tidying will continue.

#### **4 CHAIRMANS REPORT**

The year since our last Annual Parish Meeting has been a very busy, and in many ways, a frustrating one.

Our frustrations have arisen because of the proposed cuts in library hours, the curtailment of the bus services in West Moors and a feeling of dissatisfaction with some planning decisions affecting our village.

The cut in library hours are part of the County Council response for its need to cut back on its budget and recoup money. The Parish Council decided to hold back from the path of volunteer help in the Library. This decision was made because of the lack of detail regarding training, health and safety and the way in which volunteers would be used in conjunction with professional library staff.

The solutions to some of these issues have become clearer as the year has progressed.

We still feel uneasy about certain issues such as volunteers taking responsibility for providing a library service outside the core hours proposed by the Cultural Services Library and Arts Service of the Dorset County Council. There is also the possibility that volunteers will be asked to undertake lone working hours which is also a cause of unease. We are also unsure of the responsibility falling on the Parish Council should a volunteer fail to report for duty. It is also certain that volunteers will withdraw from the scheme for perfectly valid reasons. This raises the question of who will be responsible for the rolling recruitment of volunteers. So far we have not committed West Moors to taking part in this scheme and we will not make a final decision until after a meeting with the head of the C.S.L and Arts Service in Dorchester on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> April. In view of the temporary nature of the library building in West Moors we did not feel justified in taking over responsibility for the building. To accept such an uncertain financial commitment was felt to be unwise. The core hours for West Moors Library proposed by DCC have just been released and reflect the proposals put forward by the Parish Council after having regard for the statistical information regarding its use and after consulting with the library staff. These proposals represent the loss of some four hours a week and if we have to lose hours it was felt that the proposed opening hours were the most acceptable.

The cut in bus services to West Moors and other parishes was a unilateral decision made by the Wilts and Dorset Company without, as far as we have been able to ascertain, any consultation with Dorset County Council. We protested by letter and as part of a deputation to the company about the proposed cuts. The increase of some subsidies by the DCC resulted in a partial restoration of services but left West Moors residents without a direct link to Bournemouth or the Royal Bournemouth Hospital. The bus company has based its decisions on the number of passengers using the services, figures provided by themselves, and the fact that many of the users are travelling on concessionary travel passes.

The company argues that the remuneration they receive for such journeys is inadequate. The withdrawal and curtailment of these services has led to some buses being overcrowded for part of their journey. We are dealing with a private commercial company engaged in a legitimate profit making business. If they find that they are unable to run those services at a profit they have a right to withdraw them. If we accept the figures provided by Wilts and Dorset it would seem that usage of those services withdrawn in January was very low.

For some time members of the Parish Council have been concerned at the lack of response from East Dorset District Council to our comments regarding some planning applications. Quite often the EDDC Planning Department does agree with the objections that we put forward to some building schemes. Many planning applications are passed both by the Parish Planning Committee and the District Planning Committee without any problem.

However, there has been concern for some time over the number of applications to demolish single dwellings and replace them with blocks of flats. Fortunately the size of these blocks has been limited but several issues have arisen. It is possible that the eastern side of Station Road from a point opposite King's Close to Park Way could be lined with some seven blocks of flats. Although the blocks themselves may not be too obtrusive it is the amount of traffic and associated parking that they are likely to generate on this busy stretch of road that is of concern.

Our second concern with regard to planning has been the erosion of Areas of Special Character that is like to occur if some planning applications are allowed to proceed. Another concern has been the lack of the provision of affordable housing. The rule enforced by the EDDC at the moment is that any development over 15 units must provide some affordable or social housing. Most of the proposed building schemes in West Moors are for 14 units. In a recent article in the local press the need for affordable housing in this region has been seen as being equal to the need for similar housing in London.

Some progress has been made with regard to the wishes of the inhabitants of West Moors as expressed in the Village Plan. A multi-pronged approach to the DCC Highways Department has resulted in a mini roundabout at the junction of Pinehurst Road and Station Road. This provision has been on our 'wish list' for some thirty years and it does allow drivers exiting Pinehurst Road some help and it has slowed down the speed of vehicles in Station Road. Some modifications to the scheme are necessary and these are in hand by DCC Highways Dept. It is very pleasing that this measure has finally been achieved.

The right of West Moors inhabitants to use the Millhams Recycling facility has been partially restored from 1<sup>st</sup> April and this is welcomed in view of the inability of the DCC to improve the Brook Road site because of financial restraints.

Gatherings of young people in the centre of the village together with the seemingly associated litter have been a cause for concern. Unfortunately quick solutions are not always easily available. The Youth Club provides a focal point for young people between the ages of 11 - 14 ( Currently 30 young people attend on Monday evenings and up to 50 on Tuesday evenings ) but there is often little to do for young people of an older age group (16 -18). A PACT group which brings together various agencies is currently working on ways in which to make provision for this age group.

The provision of a Youth Shelter is also under consideration but once again funding is a problem. To this end Steve Hunt, Chairman of the Youth & Community Club Management Committee, is holding a meeting with the young people to consider their wishes and ways in which they could help with fund raising. He would like any interested adults to attend. This meeting will be held on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> April at the Youth Club at 6 p.m.

In recent weeks there have been outbreaks of vandalism around the Fryer Playing Field Area and some occurrences elsewhere. At this point I would like to thank our grounds man Hugo White for his efforts repairing vandalised equipment. Whenever vandalism occurs please report it to the police. By this means the police can build up a complete picture of what is happening and possibly identify future problem areas.

Steps have been taken to improve communication between the Parish Council and people living in West Moors and this is an on going commitment. It is also hoped to improve relations with the Local Action Group which was formed as a result of the Parish Plan. To help with this we are holding meetings with Officers from the EDDC and with the LAG.

Many proposals in the Parish Plan involve expenditure of large sums of money. Such examples are better Christmas lights, a community building, a drop in centre, the provision of toilets at Fryer Playing Field and better indoor sports facilities. It has to be borne in mind that such expenditure will involve the council taxpayers of West Moors having to pay for a part of these projects even if quite generous grants are obtained. In regard to this, Cllr. Mrs. Carole Holmes is to be congratulated in securing a grant from SITA towards the refurbishment of the Multi Sports Area.

I would like to thank all members of the Parish Council for their support in the past year, to those who have turned out to help salvage fallen Christmas trees, to shovel bark at the children's playgrounds, to collect litter in the main shopping centre, to correct the effects of vandalism and to man the Parish Office on Saturday mornings. My particular thanks to those who have acted as Committee Chairman and to Cllr. Mrs. Holmes as Vice Chairman.

My thanks also to the Youth Club Management Committee for the use of their building for this meeting.

Finally my very sincere thanks to the Parish Clerk and the Assistant Parish Clerk for their untiring efforts to keep me 'on the straight and narrow' and see that things run smoothly

## 5 **REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR**

Cllr Philip Gaussen - Council Tax has been set at a 4.5% increase for 2008/9. This is largely due to a better than expected settlement from central government. Of this increase, 3.8% can be attributed directly to wage and material inflation – and especially fuel costs.

The government 'Comprehensive Performance Assessment' this year resulted in Dorset dropping from an 'excellent' rating to 'good'. The drop was due to under performance in Adult and Social Care services. However, our Environmental services are still deemed 'excellent'.

The County Council is anticipating that there will be a £20 million gap between expenditure and income over the next four years. Action is being taken to close this gap through a 'Fit for the Future' programme. This involves making better use of resources and cutting expenditure – an unpopular but necessary course of action.

New computer services for the County Council are being introduced which will result in reduced expenditure in that area, over the next few years.

### **Changes have already taken place:**

At headquarters, a new centralised telephone system;  
 A review of library services;  
 A review of day centres to ensure full utilisation of resources and staff;  
 Reorganisation of some services to improve efficiency;  
 The continuing modernisation of schools.

The County Council continues to build partnership links with Districts and Parish/Town Councils. There is understanding of the need for more and wider communication with local communities and this is resulting in greater consultation at all levels.

Waste collection and recycling continues to be a headache, with ever rising costs. Although there is strong public opposition, there is a real need to consider incineration as the most efficient and cost effective method of waste disposal in future. This is now happening more frequently in Europe.

From 01.04.08.countrywide free bus passes have been introduced for the over 60s and the disabled. Negotiations are continuing with bus companies to try and improve local services. However, this is proving difficult as the companies claim they are inadequately recompensed for services they provide for senior citizens and disabled passengers and are threatening more cuts in Dorset and Hampshire.

## 6 **REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR - Cllr Alex Clarke**

A major issue affecting the whole of East Dorset in 2007/8 was the outcome of the **Regional Spatial Strategy**.

The Regional Panel ruling on the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) has now reported and overruled EDDC by reinstating the figure of 2,400 new dwellings in the coming years. They have also added 1,000 more on the basis that 'one participant' at the hearing said he knew of several small sites that would be suitable for development. He was acting on behalf of interested parties! The crucial change is that growth has been set as a

priority above environment - reversal of EDDC's previous (unanimously supported) position. The panel recommends loss of greenbelt, which is inevitable. One benefit of the new building would be the provision of affordable housing (probably about 35-40% of dwellings).

East Dorset District council is lobbying the secretary of State to reduce the number. This applies particularly to the imposition of the 1,000 additional dwellings. The Council is challenging the whole basis for the 'predict and provide' methodology.

However, EDDC is putting in place arrangements for work to commence as soon as possible for implementing the proposals if they are ratified. This includes employing additional staff in strategic planning and use of external consultant experts.

If the arrangements are not put in place, the Council would find itself in the position of not having a clear, approved policy in time. This would open the door to haphazard submissions by developers and landowners in search of profit which might well succeed on appeal.

**Developers**, who have presumably followed the inquiry and that of the regional spatial strategy, are already putting forward parcels of land for affordable – or predominantly affordable – housing. One such area is in Colehill for some 60 dwellings. West Moors District Councillors and the Parish Clerk have received a proposal on the green belt adjacent to West Moors. Under current rules it is difficult to see how these can progress.

A thorough, detailed inquiry into **affordable housing** has been carried out over the last 6 months by the Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee, producing a large number of recommendations on how the very difficult situation can be improved. This will pass to Policy & Resources and full Council in due course.

The EDDC portion of the **Council Tax** was increased by 4.9% for 2008/9, making a Band D property charge £178.27p for the year. Part of the increase funds a £50,000 shortfall in the Government grant for the statutory national concessionary fares scheme for the over 60's. The scheme and the funding mechanism has led to negative consequences in many areas, not just parts of East Dorset but also across southern England.

In West Moors, the withdrawal of the **direct bus service to Bournemouth** has caused great concern to residents. I have secured the agreement of EDDC to put on a detailed briefing for councillors on the whole financial framework of the service. This will include particular analysis of the bus pass scheme and the issue of the 62p per £1 payment to the bus company who claim that the bus pass holders lose them money. Some external adjudication has recently taken place in disputes between bus companies and DCC. In one, Damory (a subsidiary of Wilts & Dorset) were disputing the level of subsidy. Whilst they were not entirely successful, an increase was judged appropriate. One fundamental issue is that there appears to be no contractual definition of the bus companies being 'no better or worse off' under the bus pass scheme.

Some partial coverage of the Bournemouth route has returned via another company but work continues to regain what was lost.

The service of delivering **black refuse sacks** without further charge has been discontinued for 2008/9 to avoid raising the Council Tax to pay for the statutory extension of kerbside recycling to all dwellings. However, the cost of purchasing sacks (via the Parish or EDDC offices) has been reduced from £3 to £2 a roll.

The District Council, working with Dorset CC, has successfully negotiated the reopening of access to local residents, including West Moors, to Millhams Household Recycling Centre at Longham. Residents can apply for vouchers for use of the site.

The problems of the deteriorating road and pavement surfaces in the **Pinehurst Road shopping area** have been discussed at Parish Council a number of times. Several residents also contacted me direct on this matter and for some months I worked with the Head of Environmental Services at EDDC on measures to address the problems of these privately owned areas.

It was pleasing to see some progress, particularly in the area outside Martin's, whose Head Office has spent several thousand pounds on resurfacing. Martin's agreed to act voluntarily but a number of landlords were served with enforcement notices and some action was taken but the quality of work was not always satisfactory. Further notices are being issued.

The underlying problem is that these areas are privately owned by the various landlords and not the responsibility of any council in terms of maintenance. Any council pressure has to focus on safety. Customers can exert economic pressure but the shopkeepers, etc., do not necessarily have any direct authority if they are tenants.

At a senior meeting at EDDC I argued strongly on behalf of the village and the traders that the possible reintroduction of **car parking charges** for the Parkway car park should be withdrawn. This was agreed and it was not a recommendation to the Policy & Resources committee on 30 January when car park charges were reviewed. If local circumstances change, e.g. the car park is used for long term parking or other uses restrictive on local residents, the Parish Council will doubtless review the issue.

All District Councils (and Unitary & County) are required by law to submit an annual **Best Value Performance Plan** by 30 June. The Plan at EDDC comes under my responsibility as the Lead Member for Performance and it was duly considered and approved in June.

The Plan shows progress against the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan and against nationally required measures. It also includes feedback from auditors and inspectors. The latter have confirmed significant further improvement since the inspection grading of 'good' (the highest among Dorset Districts) in 2004.

The Policy & Resources committee approved draft **responses to Parish Plans** and the response for West Moors has been passed to the LAG. The West Moors LAG have considered the response. The categories are: endorse action/implement, investigate, support/lobby, not support, take no position, put forward, reject.

The **Grants Panel awarded the Skate Park** £5,000 towards additional equipment following their visit in July.

The Council has committed itself to extending **partnership working** with other Dorset authorities, including Dorset County Council, to increase standards and efficiency of service delivery further. The authorities have been awarded 'Pathfinder' status, one of five nationally, under a new government scheme. I am involved in the groups on waste management, procurement, review of the 'Dorset for You' website and joint working with Christchurch Borough Council.

Finally, the **building of flats**, either in conversion schemes or in new-build, continues to cause concern locally in certain locations. Two schemes (on the site of the old Post Office and at 34 Highfield Road) were turned down but are currently under appeal by the

developers. On other sites, approval was given on the basis that national and local planning law and guidance did not provide sufficient grounds to refuse. Parking issues seem of little concern to central government.

District Councillor Pete Holden added further comments on the reduction of bus services, the use of free bus passes, the withdrawal of refuse sacks and matters regarding affordable housing.

**7 INFORMATION FROM MEMBERS**

a) Cllr Bartley informed members and the public that the Memorial Hall AGM will take place on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008 at 7.30pm. Also that A Community Open day in the Memorial Hall is scheduled for 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008, representatives from the bus company had been invited to attend. As part of the Connecting Dorset Scheme computer lessons at the Memorial Hall are due to start in mid April.

**8 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

a) Mr Steve Hunt asked how much money was left in the Daphne Harrison Fund and how many small grants to local organisations had been awarded. He was informed that 5 small grants have been awarded to date and the balance in the DH Fund at the end of February was approximately £10,000

b) Mrs Long informed the meeting that the bus petition recently sent to Parliament has been returned. Also that the tachograph issues surrounding buses will be looked into by the government.

c) Mrs Long asked if the local council had any discretion to charge people with bus passes in order to help improve services. It was explained that the bus pass scheme is a nationwide government policy and the Parish Council believe that charges cannot be made. A question regarding the embargo on travel before 9.30 was asked and it was explained that this was placed on the bus pass users by East Dorset District Council, other Local authorities in Dorset do not have the embargo. Members were also informed that new proposals are being discussed in Parliament to give all people up to the age of 21 a bus pass to allow free travel.

d) A question of planning applications for the building of flats under the limit (14 dwellings) that requires that affordable housing is supplied was asked. Under current policies it does not allow for any movement on this matter and therefore nothing can be done at this time to stop such developments.

e) Members commented on the volume of traffic through the village and enquired about plans for the bypass. The by pass is now a regional issue and no information is available at this time.

f) A member of the public suggested that the print on some of the notices displayed on the notice board was too small to see clearly. Any Parish Council notice is available in large type if requested.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.40

SIGNED ..... DATE .....  
Chairman