

Draft Minutes of
The Winterborne St Martin
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
held on Friday 19th May 2023
in the Martinstown Village Hall

Present: Chair Col (Retd) Mark Pemberton – Chair of Winterborne St Martin Parish Council; Cllr Roland Tarr (Ward Councillor); Cllrs Richard Eversden, David Hutchings, Andy Daw (Parish Councillors) and 18 Parishioners.

Note: all those named in the minutes have given their permission.

1. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL PARISH MEETING.

The Chair announced that the PC had been unable to locate a copy of last year's minutes and proposed that we minute this and move on. There were no dissenters.

2. AN UPDATE ON PARISH MATTERS BY THE CHAIR OF THE PARISH COUNCIL:

a. The Chair spoke from these notes which will therefore hopefully bear some resemblance to what what he actually said:

"I am required by law to make a report, so if you don't mind I will take any questions at the end.

Parish Council Budget and Precept; A balanced concern about the level of unspecified reserves brought forward through time and a desire to produce a balanced budget moving forwards led to a well below inflation increase in the precept for 23/24. However, this clearly cannot be sustained in the longer term so we have to consider our key cost centres: administration of the Council, maintenance, particularly of our grounds and flood prevention. Dealing with the largest cost – administration - having a Parish Council requires a Clerk, a title not a role – encompassing the Proper Officer to keep us legal as well as our Responsible Financial Officer, as we as a parish have the same legal responsibilities as, for example Dorchester Council which has 18 full-time and 9 part-time staff. DAPTC told me that the average Parish Clerk in Dorset stays in post for 4 months, and this is not surprising to me as the range of responsibilities is worthy of far more money than we can afford to pay. But, given that administration costs us more than half our precept (your money) I think it's worth asking if would we benefit from not having a Parish Council? I think it's debatable; we would lose the close focus that our own PC offers, and of the Parishes that surround us only Steepleton and Abbas has a lower precept, indeed Dorchester's is roughly double ours. However, we might gain from having a louder voice from larger representation if we ever

agreed about anything. However, this question is very much up to you as under LGA 72 you, or at least a group of you, are allowed to call for our dissolution. That said, LGA 72 also requires us to retain a PC (having had one before it's publication) so it would be for Dorset Council to determine who to group us with.

Management of PC business; I was elected Chair in June having been co-opted to the Council in March. I, and therefore we, have made mistakes but we have been open about these and I remain convinced that these are mistakes of omission not commission. Some of our mistakes stem from trying to understand how, and why, things were done in the past, and the loss of many Parish records is regrettable to say the least. I and or Clerks have also received some indifferent advice including selected or amended quotes, so we are learning to seek out primary sources. In terms of new business, our openness in facing difficult decisions has been placed on Agendas and the results minuted. Invariably the tough calls were not to everyone's liking but my standard response is, and will remain, "Come and join us – help shape our decision making". Whilst we still have a vacancy, I consider it my greatest achievement that we now have on the council a working mother of young children, a long term resident entrepreneur, and a local man working the land, but we could be more representative yet if another young person, or someone living in Magna Housing stepped forward, and it remains a defence that whilst we have a vacancy you can't really complain if we do get things wrong.

I'll now cover the PC's approach to a couple of running sores:

- **development and planning;** the PC now has a standing position of objecting to new development until we are convinced that the sewage issues are resolved. I phrase this as "No more bums on seats until it's sorted", and we try to pay attention to what is going on up-sewer in Steepleton and Abbas too. This doesn't mean we are against future development, just that the infrastructure must be in place first. Indeed, though I hesitate to speak for the Council, I think we'd welcome a small development of affordable housing - we want to maintain our character as a village, but would welcome developments that encourage younger people to join us here. Or at least we will once the sewer is fixed!

- **sewage and the relationship with Wessex Water** (WW update expected). Through a robust and evidence based approach we developed a good working relationship with WW, and as I have previously reported I met here with two directors and the Regional Sewage Manager. They have promised action and we must hold them to it by reporting incidents, and taking photographs or videos to support the case. I hope that the PC will produce a simple aide-memoire before the next season, showing who is the best target for reporting each type of occurrence. Also, please copy us in to any communication or report so that we can build the Parish's case. WW have provided a number of Gloop Pots this evening, these are designed to collect oils and fats in order to prevent them contributing to sewer blockages, but unfortunately, they have not provided me with an update on the Hydraulic Survey or Review of Sewer contents. We have battled hard and will stay on the case, particularly now all water companies are on the back foot over sewage releases

Maintenance and Improvement of Parish Council assets and the Parish generally. The PC controls few capital assets, but does hold the Village Green (in all its extent) on a lease and tries to maintain and improve its assets and the parish generally within the limits of available funds. In terms of the unforeseen, we have grouped our previous earmarked reserve funds into one General Reserve and propose to increase this to approximately a year's precept. This is for the unforeseen, but there is much that can be foreseen as needing maintenance or replacement, and there are always things we could do to improve the place (whither the Jubilee Tree do I hear?). I think it's fair to say that the PC carries a range of views on such enhancements and thus far none have survived debate, but we go on with another attempt to gain agreement on replacing benches on the Agenda for next week. Of course we also have a CIL Pot, as yet untouched, and a minor grants pot, specifically for improvements to the Parish. Both have restraints on what they can be used for, but they are there.

The Memorial Hall/Reading Room Speaking of CIL brings me to the Reading Room, Parish Office, Old Store (as the 1915 sale document describes it) or "Memorial Hall" as the indenture of 1921 setting it in Trust describes it. The ancient history is clear – it was left in trust for the benefit of various groups of parishioners (not least Veterans!), but what happened later is lost but it ended up in the care of three now aging locals who have had enough of it. The Parish Council may have appointed these people or their predecessors, and indeed the accounts that we do have show the close and perhaps even incestuous, relationship that existed until the PC was "advised" by an auditor that it must move away. Now we have been offered it back, and a majority of the Council are in favour of taking it. We will therefore be setting up a Sub-Committee or Working Group to lead us through the process, and we would welcome support through membership from the wider community. The first step will be to ensure our taking it is legal, and we will vote on a motion to fund this advice next week. Ultimately there will have to be a decision what to do with it, but it is not serving the Parish whilst sitting empty.

Finally, a plug for our website. We, like many other Councils are trying to move towards a paperless existence. We will still post more than the absolute minimum in the bus shelter but most documents will be posted electronically. In addition we try to upload all new Dorset Council Notices that affect the Parish – Road Closures, Planning applications and the like and it's very simple to sign up for a notification when things are posted".

The Chair then answered a number of questions relating to the PC Budget, Community Infrastructure levy, Maintenance of Road and Right of Ways.

b. Update by Ward Councillor - Cllr Tarr:

Cllr Roland Tarr [RT] spoke about his work with Dorset Council, explaining that he has 12 PC's in his constituency, and rehearsed his part in terms of bypass drainage and the cycle path, which he felt might bring economic benefit to the village.

He also spoke about his and the PC's interaction with Wessex Water and about the possibility of creating reedbeds east of Martinstown to dissipate sewage at times of high rainfall.

Parish Cllr Eversden suggested that it would help if a reedbed could also be created downstream from Steepleton to hold back some floodwater heading towards Martinstown: RT agreed to look into this.

3. UPDATES BY PARISH AND VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS AND BUSINESSES:

Note: In addition to those reporting the following were invited: Martinstown Cricket Club; Mother and Toddler; The Brewers Arms; Beavers, Cubs and Scouts.

b. The Village Hall

Jan Griffiths [JG] spoke on behalf of the Village Hall:

JG said that they had received grants for the kitchen re-fit and Play Area upgrade, but that both these had only been possible by the huge amount of work carried out by volunteers.

JG said that, while ArtsReach, the monthly Village Lunch and other events raised some income for the hall, she relied upon the support of her volunteers.

JG also spoke on behalf of the Village's Open Garden Weekend.

b. Martinstown WI

Rosemarie Duke spoke on behalf of Martinstown W.I (which formed in 1947) and of their role in support of other organisations, particularly the Village Hall.

c. The Valley Club

Richard Benson spoke briefly on behalf of Valley Club describing its membership, meetings and the forthcoming trip to Beaulieu.

e. The Village Shop (The Merchant of Martinstown)

Michaela Siemens-Howat [MS-H] spoke on behalf of The Village Shop:

After one year of trading the shop is still making a loss.

All salaried staff apart from one volunteer.

Seen as a central meeting-point for the village.

MS-H asked for feedback in order to make improvements ... and to survive!

f. Green Martinstown

Dave Gilmore [DG] spoke on behalf of Green Martinstown:

Ongoing projects: composting; recycling bins; planting; Jubilee trees; Telephone Box (books & seed-swap); Village Hall hedge planting; bird-boxes & hedgehog-houses.

Stream water quality analysis is about to start as part of the Citizen Science campaign.

About to start scheme to provide materials for people to construct a pond in their gardens.

Surveying the parish hedges has begun as part of a national survey.

As with other organisations, all work is carried out by volunteers.

The renewable energy scheme now has c30 people registered.

The Chair asked asked DG to look at schemes that could be funded by the PC's CIL money.

g. Martinstown Mileaters

The Chair read Nick Priddle's statement on behalf of the Martinstown Mile-eaters.

Regular outings and now with c50 members.

h. WASTE Watch

Andy Daw [AD] spoke on behalf of Waste Watch.

Newspapers & magazines still being collected and sold to a company that shreds it and sells it on for pet bedding.

This only raises c£150 p.a., but AD reluctant to stop and intends to carry on.

i. Village Lunches

JG also spoke on behalf of the Village Lunch.

Any profits go towards the upkeep of the Village Hall.

Lunches normally held on the first Friday of the month.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being none the Chair closed the meeting at 1940hrs and adjourned to the pub.

Afternote: The Chair is grateful to Mr Scarth for providing notes to assist in drafting these minutes.

Mark Pemberton

Chair

Winterborne St Martin Parish Council