

[EAST BRENT PARISH COUNCIL](#)

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of East Brent Parish Council, held at the Village Hall on Monday 22nd April 2013. It commenced at 7.30pm.

Present: Cllr E. Champion, Cllr V. Rawles, Cllr J. Bowden, Cllr A. Gilling, Cllr W. Walker, Cllr N. Lloyd-Jones, Cllr J. Webb, Cllr B. Bees, Cllr B. Woodward, Cllr Y. Roscorla and the Clerk to the Council, Mr Martin Shobbrook.

In the public area: Mr Nick Stevens and Mr Matthew Wall from the Axe Brue Drainage Board, County Councillor Mr John Denbee, District Councillor, Mr Bob Filmer, Mr Colin Loader and from the Western Mercury, Mr Alex Evans.

Chairman's opening remarks

The Chairman, Cllr Edward Champion, thanked the assembled meeting for coming to the Annual meeting and he welcomed the speakers and the members of the public who had attended.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr S. McGreavy.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 23rd April 2012 were agreed as an accurate account of the meeting and were proposed and seconded.

Speaker, Mr Nick Stevens from the Local Drainage Board

Mr Stevens described the creation of the present Drainage Board following the amalgamation of the previous Drainage Boards in the area, during April 2012. The newly created Axe Brue and Parrett Drainage Board resulted. The Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board consists of 29 appointed members and has 16 catchments. The Parrett Drainage Board has 23 appointed members and 13 catchments. The combined Somerset Drainage Board covers an area of 55,000 hectares, or approx. 120,000 acres. It has over 1200km of watercourses to maintain.

It is funded by all households in their Council Tax payments and is DEFRA Grant Aided, together with receiving an Agricultural Levy, a Special Levy and other Grant Aids. It has a large "Zone 3" flooding risk, as the land in Somerset is so flat. Generally, the land at the coast is higher than the land in the centre and therefore there is no gradient to clear flooding. There is a height difference of up to 4 metres between the two levels and the water alone provides the necessary energy to flow to the sea. The tidal levels in the Bristol Channel vary by up to 8 metres and recently constructed flood banks are in place to keep the sea water from flooding the hinterland.

Mr Stevens explained that the Drainage Board has to keep the water levels under control and has to balance both Environmental and Flooding Issues. It has to keep the water levels high in one area, but low in others. Flood risk management is important to the Board, as it has to respond quickly to the problems caused by heavy rainfall. Nevertheless, it has to keep the Peat Soils wet to avoid shrinkage and also prevent Carbon Dioxide loss. The Board has to maintain water culverts and water courses which drain the water away from affected areas. He used an overhead projector to show maps of the area, highlighting the particular concerns the Board has in East Brent and the Brent Knoll areas. He showed examples of where "tilting weirs" are being installed to successfully control the water levels.

He also explained that the management of rivers comes under the control of DEFRA but that Riparian land owners were responsible for maintaining water courses on their land. Failure by them to control the water flow could result in enforcement action being taken against them, under legislation such as the Drainage Acts.

Mr Stevens concluded his formal address and the Chairman thanked him for his most enlightening talk. He invited questions from the floor, to Mr Stevens.

Cllr John Denbee asked why the Drainage Board had not been proactive in pushing for funding from the Environment Agency to pay for the dredging of the local drains. He said that the lack of attention to the clearing of the drainage channels had partially lead to the recent flooding of the area. Mr Stevens responded by saying that this area was better off than many areas in Somerset. The amalgamation of the Drainage Boards has resulted in more dredging work being carried out. It had concentrated its efforts on particular needs and he referred to the bad sea flooding which occurred in 1981. Immediately thereafter there had been an emphasis on creating sea defences. He said that the synergy between the two bodies was leading to resolutions of the problems.

Mr Stevens then answered other questions from the floor relating to serving notices on Riparian land owners; Planning law and the review of applications for housing development on flood plain land; and the creation of non porous surfaces on many housing estates, by land owners. He explained that there is no legislation in place to stop or prosecute house owners from paving large areas of their land thereby reducing the ability for the absorption of rainwater. He said that the likely cost of dealing with the flooding problems which effect Church Road and potentially other parts of that area of East Brent would be approximately £100,000, this would be for a scheme to divert water from the large pond by Rossholme. However, an assessment needs to be made of the impact of installing such a scheme, as would this cause issues elsewhere with additional water flow. They have looked at possible funding for this year for such as scheme and that is not possible. The scheme will be further looked into, with the Drainage Board

keeping the PC informed. As for funding there is now more emphasis on 'match funding' which can include local parties contributing to a scheme, this method of collecting the funds needed can indeed assist in obtaining the overall amount required.

A final question was raised by Cllr Denbee, regarding the publishing of emergency telephone numbers for members of the public to use, out of normal business hours. He said that many parishioners had been unable to summon assistance to deal with flooding problems, at night in particular. It was then agreed that these numbers would be made known on the Parish Council's website and in the Parish Magazine.

The Chairman again thanked Mr Stevens for his presentation.

Speaker, County Councillor Mr John Denbee

Cllr Denbee started his address by saying that he was mindful of the time of the evening and he would therefore restrict his presentation accordingly.

He highlighted topics which were relevant at the present moment and these included the freezing of the Council Tax demands generally throughout Somerset. He told the meeting that the County Council has debts of over £350m which is generating massive interest payments which restricts spending budgets. He promised that he, "would be very careful with your money".

He reported that the go ahead for Hinkley Point "C" power station has been given and the consultation process for the routes of the transmission cable lines was taking place. These would be placed under ground in areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. He also mentioned that the planning applications for wind turbines had been refused by the County Council, but that an appeal has been lodged in respect of the West Huntspill wind farm.

He reported that the A370 and the A38 were becoming busier each year and as a result of much heavier vehicles and a greater volume of vehicles using these roads, they were in need of repair. The likely increase in the movement of aggregate from Cheddar quarry to Hinkley Point together with increased usage by construction teams will make the situation worse. He said he will do all he can to address this.

During the last year he has not received any complaints about the running of any schools in the area, which pleased him.

Flooding has caused serious problems to many residents and he has received calls from numerous parishioners. He asked that householders separate the drainage of rainwater coming from roofs away from foul water sewers. The combination of both going through our drainage systems has exasperated the problem recently.

He was pleased to report that a Sea Cadets group was being established at the old station at the Axbridge bypass. Finally, he stressed the need for householders to recycle as much of their waste as they can. The cost of dealing with this was very expensive.

The Chairman invited questions from the floor and Cllr John Bowden asked if work was proposed towards road repairs in the area. He has seen a large number of pot holes on roads. Cllr Denbee replied that the maintenance of the road structure was "close to his heart" and he will do all he can to ensure these repairs are carried out as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Denbee for his address.

The Chairman's address

Cllr Champion started by saying that he was also mindful of the time of the evening and that he would restrict his speaking time accordingly and only outline some of the more important events of the last year.

He said that it had been a difficult year for the running of the Parish Council in that the previous Clerk, Mr Bob Strachan, had resigned due to his relocation back to Scotland and two Councillors had also resigned. He thanked Bob Strachan and Councillors Lynn Spokes and Gill Willoughby for all their hard work and efforts on behalf of the Parish Council and said that they would all be greatly missed. He then reported that the new Clerk, Martin Shobbrook has been in office since June 2012 and he had taken over without the usual "handover provision", because of Bob Strachan's new geographical location. He thanked Martin Shobbrook for his work during these difficult times. He also said that he was pleased to welcome Councillor Nigel Lloyd-Jones to the Committee, together with the return once more of Councillor Bob Bees, who has served on the Committee before. They were both worthy members of the Parish Council.

The Chairman mentioned the very successful Jubilee celebrations which took place in June of last year and he particularly thanked Councillor Judy Webb, for all her efforts in organising the events. He said that she has also been responsible for the fund raising of the cost of installing two Defibrillators in the Village, which will hopefully save the lives of patients suffering from heart attacks. She has done a very good job in raising both the money needed to fund the project and also making people aware of the benefits of the scheme.

He referred to the setting up of the Parish Council's website and how successful it has already proved to have been. He thanked his brother Mr Ron Champion together with Cllr Bill Walker for the long and hard hours they had spent in setting it up.

The Parish Council has dealt with many planning applications during the last year which were non controversial, with the exception of the Pilrow Wind farm application. The parishioners had been able to make their opinions known and as a result, the application has been rejected by the Parish Council, the District Council and finally by the County Council.

Probably the biggest problem the Parish Council has faced during the last year is flooding and the Chairman said that as much that could be done to help those affected has been done. Plans to prevent similar problems occurring again are being implemented by the creation of a supply of sand bags and other equipment, for use by Parishioners.

He then thanked Councillor John Bowden, the Chairman of the Cemetery Committee, for all his hard work in connection with the administration of the Cemetery during the last year. It was a valuable asset which the Village should be proud to have, he said.

He mentioned the present building of Affordable Housing at Rooksbridge and thanked the hard work carried out by Mary Chorley and Phil Yorke in particular. This was a very worthy project as it assisted both the young and older members of the community.

The Parish Council has part funded the installation of new Village signs depicting the "Home of Harvest Home" emblem. These are hoped to be in position by the start of the holiday season. Also, the play equipment for children on the Village green is being renewed in conjunction with the District Council.

He said that he was pleased to be able to report that the Parish has achieved the status as a "Sustainable Development", under a recent review by the District Council. This will assist the Parish in the funding of various projects, in the future.

Finally, he thanked Councillors Val Rawles and Yvonne Roscorla, for providing the refreshments during the evening.

After he had finished his address, the Chairman was himself thanked by Councillor John Bowden for, "steering the Parish Council through a difficult year in its history". "He has worked very hard to keep things ticking over smoothly", said Cllr Bowden.

Any other business

Cllr Judy Webb asked that a plan to use the triangular piece of land adjoining the war memorial for a "Village Garden" is placed on the Agenda of the next Committee meeting, for debate.

Cllr John Bowden reported that signs have now been placed on the gates of the Cemetery advising the public that the gates will be locked at night. This follows problems with unsuitable usage of the car park facilities at the Cemetery, at nighttimes. He asked that any further problems in the area are reported to him.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed, at 9.00pm.

The next Parish Council meeting will be on Thursday 9th May 2013 (being a special Planning Meeting) at the Village Hall at 7.30pm.