

MINUTES OF THE CROSSWAYS PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL AT 7PM ON THURSDAY 24TH APRIL 2008

Present: Cllr D Smy, Chairman of the Parish Council and the Clerk.

Also present: 60 residents

Cllr Smy welcomed all present and particularly welcomed a group of young people in attendance.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS PARISH MEETING The Minutes of the previous meeting (Thursday April 26th 2007) were accepted and signed. Proposed Mr Chubb seconded Mr Jane.

2. ANY MATTERS ARISING There were no matters arising.

3. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Introduction

This year the annual parish meeting gathers with a challenge to us all. It's a simple question that faces us; can Crossways Parish Council have the strength, will, and determination to pull its socks up, stop this silly trouble making and stand up and truly speak for you, the villagers?

I have the positive belief and hope that it is within all Parish Councillor to stand back from the brink, and start to work to improve our credibility and standing in the community.

We must never forget who we are to serve, the people of Crossways. I always look for the best in people, believing that when you channel everybody's good points, things get done for the better. Tonight I am going to outline what I feel is the problem facing the Parish Council, outline the achievements of the last year, the future challenges facing the village, how we deal with our staff, and the importance of team work and how we must cherish the values of a good community.

Before I do this I would like to say a few thanks to the professionals and the Vice Chairman Joyce Rhodes and Vice Chairman of Finance Andrew Brewer. Joyce has been a loyal hard working Vice Chairman, and her behind the scenes support to me and the Clerk has been outstanding, thank you Joyce for all your support and commitment. Andrew has looked after our finances and kept us within budget, no mean feat at all! Our clerk Stella Wilson who has worked tirelessly in difficult times, she is a credit to this village. I would also like to thank Kris Hallett from Dorset Community Action, Community Support Officer Vikki Hedges, PC Charlie Dale and Inspector Fry from Dorset Police. I would also like to thank Helen Boyce, Head Teacher at Frome Valley School and the Rev Jacquie Birdseye who serve our community with true passion and diligence. I would also like to thank our County Councillor and District Councillors and ask them to continue to work with the Parish Council, and not talk it down and seek to undermine it!

Our troubles

The last 12 months have not been the best in Crossways history, and as we look back I feel somewhat ashamed of myself that I have not done more to quell the petty back biting and child like behaviour witnessed at our meeting by some councillors. Each and every one of us has nothing to be proud of; we have in no uncertain terms let our community down. We have found it difficult to debate rationally, agree to differ where we can and treat each other as grown adults worthy of mutual respect. I feel that there is too much inter meeting plotting and worry about what is going to hit us next, when after all we should all be concentrating on the issues facing our community. If we put our hands on our hearts, and are honest with ourselves, many Parish Councillors have forgotten why we are here, that being to represent the people of Crossways.

They don't want a bickering council that is bound up on point scoring, fending off standards board enquiries and writing horrible letters to each other. What they want is action for the good of Crossways, a council that looks for the best in every councillor. And I say this now with true conviction, I will not be part of any group that seeks to crush the talents within this council. Let us all work for the good of Crossways!

The Village Achievements in 2007/8

I was so proud when Helen Boyce told me that the school had received an outstanding OFSTED inspection. Having known of all the challenges involved in moving the school from Owermoigne to Crossways I can say in no uncertain terms what a truly magnificent achievement that result was. What pleased me even more was that the School also received outstanding from the Church inspection as well. It gave me great pleasure to join the

children, parents, governors and teachers when the Bishop of Sherborne came to praise the school. Well done Frome Valley School, you are an asset to this community.

We have also renovated the War Memorial which was ready and done by the November Armistice day. I would like to thank Steve Manual and his team for their work, and to all those parish Councillors who helped on the project. I was particularly humbled when we were asked to place a plaque on one of the benches in the memory of Aircraftsman Fred Swainson and his wife Corporal Helen Swainson (WAAF) who were in active service at RAF Warmwell. What a fitting tribute to the work we have done on the War memorial.

Thanks in part to the very generous donation of £1000 from G Crook & Sons we have been able to make improvements to the Sports pavilion, including two lovely new windows, the locks fixed and soffits repaired. We will continue to keep a close eye on the Sports Pavilion to ensure it is cared for.

We have I hope had very good consultation and involved residents in significant planning applications. We have received favourable feedback from residents and applicants on how we dealt with consultation on the Hippy Field and Wood Store application at Redbridge Road.

We have continued quite rightly to support the Bridge Community Magazine, and I would like to congratulate Andrew Brewer who has now clocked up 20 years of dedicated editorship of this magazine, well done!

Working with Kris Hallett and others we have embarked on one of the most extensive consultations on future sports and young people initiatives in the history of Crossways Parish Council. Public meetings, exhibitions, surveys, site visits and plenty of debate at Parish Council meetings has taken place, and tonight the Parish Council needs to decide if it is ready to push ahead with the project and ensure that progress is made as outlined in the recent Village Plan Action Plan.

One thing that has particularly made me proud has been the continued support of the Young People in Crossways affairs. We have seen good attendance by our young people at Parish Council meetings, an excellent presentation at a public meeting in November and I will be proud to present Village Praise Certificates to all those young people who have engaged with us all. You all deserve the facilities you are campaigning hard for!

Outside of the parish Council, the community continues to thrive with, examples being the outstanding Local Play group, so ably led by Mary Brewer, the Crossways Scout Group, who I hope will be able to move the Methodist Chapel with all our help, The Crossway Hand Bells Ringers, The Local History Group, Crafts and activities for the more mature people in our community, The Archers, Crossway Football Club, well done by the way on coming top of the league, your village is very proud of you!

The Future

In the sure hope and optimism that the Council can move forward more united in purpose, we have a lot of things to working on in the coming 12 months. We need to ensure that when the Library reduces its hours, that it is used by as many of our villagers as possible. The Parish Council is working with the Library staff and other volunteers to drum up support for our beloved Library. I certainly would never like to see it closed, and although saddened by the reduction in hours was pleased to see it remain open. I think we all need to be very conscious that the local community have a responsibility to keep the Library open as well, and this is a challenge for us to deal with. The time has come, as we were reminded by David Clarke, Chief Executive of West Dorset District Council to consider reviewing the Actions Plan of the Village Plan which was published some 2/4 years ago now. I hope very much that the Council will commit to such a review and look at implementing some of the very good action points within the plan.

The next 12 months will if the Council support it this evening, see the project for a Multi Use Games Area, Skate Bowl and Youth Shelter for the field come to fruition. This will bring a lot of hard work and further consultation with residents.

We will also have to re-consult with the residents to solicit views and give our response to the latest full planning application, which is now back on the Agenda, the Hippy Field. I think we also need to open more dialogue with the Youth Centre to see how we can get the building used by more for our young people.

We also need to keep a continued eye on Tree Protection, we are still waiting to hear what WDDC intend to do about our request for protection of Trees on Magna Land. We need to work closer in better partnership with Magna housing Corporation to ensure that the residents and the wider village get the best from this major land owner.

We also need to replace the bus shelter in Dick O th Bank Road and clean up and revamp the current shelter in Mount Skippett Way.

We also have to continue to look into ways of reducing litter and keeping our village as tidy as possible.

Like never before has there been a need for a constructive, hard working happy Parish Council please lets have the optimism to take the lead on these challenges that we face in the coming years.

Our Staff

Stella Wilson has loyally served this council for some 8 years now and has built up over that time a good reputation for herself which she deserves. I say what I am going to say in good faith but I mean every word, please can I make a plea to respect the work of Stella, she is our proper officer, fully trained. Speak to her first before you go to others and I reiterate that Stella is neutral and can be approached by everyone. The time has come for some in our village to stop undermining her good work and show her the respect she deserves. I can tell you now the Parish Council would be a great loss without her!

Team Work

Quite simply team work is the essence of a good functional council. Team work is what achieves results. No one person can really make a difference unless they have a team of people working with them.

What creates a good team?

Mutual respect for each other. The ability to listen to each other's arguments and agree the best way forward. A clear vision and plan of where we are going and what needs to be achieved Diverse talents, being grown up and sensible, being reasonable and practical.

These principles are what the Council needs to focus on, and unless in the coming 12 months we can build on our team working skills I am hesitant that we will be able to move on constructively.

Community

This community needs a strong and united Parish Council, that stands up and campaigns for its residents. They want a village to look clean and tidy, well maintained, where young and old can live alongside each other happily. They want a community which tolerates and offers support to those who are less advantaged as us, yet still equally fellow residents. A good community is a village where people enjoy doing good work and making the necessary improvements we all want to see.

My Chairmanship

I now turn to my chairmanship. Bearing in mind the difficulties facing the Council I hope fellow villagers will recognise it has not been the easiest job in the world chairing Crossways Parish Council of late. I have tried to chair meetings to the best of my ability, showing respect but ensuring that business is transacted professionally and to good practice. At some times I have left Parish Council meetings wondering if I should carry on, if the Council might be better off with me standing down. However I have found it in myself to carry on and lead this council through troubled waters. I don't think I have the energy, or even want to have the energy to carry on leading this council if it is to continue to self destruct itself and not draw a line in the sand, recognise our faults, learn from them and move on. Next month the Parish Council must elect its chairman for the following year. I have thought long and hard about whether I want to carry on as Chairman, and have decided that should I be so gracious as to be proposed and seconded, and subsequently elected, I will put my name forward to carry on as Chairman.

Conclusion

And this leads me on to my concluding remarks. I want all parish Councillors to seriously consider their positions on this Council.

If you are genuinely committed to drawing a line under the sand of recent events and make every effort to move on in a more constructive and friendly manner then stay on and work with me for the good of Crossways. If you can be brave enough to try hard to work as a true team, concentrating on the work in hand, let's work together. If you can't forget the past, or refuse to work as a team then please for the good of our village, and reputation of this Council stand down and let others come forward who can.

Enough is enough, we need to learn from our mistakes and move on. I don't have the energy to chair a council that will not come together as one team, please don't let me down. Crossways needs decent hard working

councillors, who put aside self interest and concentrate on the greater good. I ask all villagers to help us as we help ourselves to pull our socks up and climb forward with you all for the good of the community I care for. We all deserve much better!

4. **NOTICES OF MOTION** There were no notices of motion received.
5. **QUESTIONS** The following questions were put to the Chairman.

a. Question from Abi Scard

Given that almost £465 of precept monies seems to have been allocated to the interests of Mr Andrew Brewer, I would like to ask what the Parish Council receives in benefits for the Parish's grant to The Bridge publication. Secondly, why is the Parish Council the actual applicant for a building, (the relocation of the Methodist chapel to Brown John's campsite on behalf of the Scouts), which it neither owns, nor will ever benefit from?

Response Cllr Smy

Quite simply this matter was debated and resolved at last month's meeting of the Parish Council. Many distinguished and long standing residents spoke of their support for the Parish Council to continue its long established financial support to the Bridge Magazine.

I am satisfied, as recent published accounts for the Bridge show that Mr Brewer does not benefit in any financial way from the dedicated time and work he puts into editing the Bridge. I would ask all Parish Councillors and residents to ask themselves one single question – How much time do you dedicate to community life and organisation in this village? I can tell you now that few, if any dedicate so much hard work and commitment to our community in Crossways as does Andrew Brewer, and I regret deeply saddens me that there seems a few villagers who do not value and respect Andrew's work for the community. Crossways would be a great loss if he and his mother decided to give up their community work, and hope very much tonight the meeting will stand with me and applaud these very two special people who do so much for Crossways!

With regard to the Methodist Chapel, it is still early days regarding any planning application and the vote last month was simply an opportunity to give the local Scouts a steer as to whether we would support them in their attempts to save this building. Just like our neighbouring Parish Council in Owermoigne, it is quite in order for named Parish Councillors to seek dispensation from the local Standards Board to discuss planning applications on issues it has an interest in. I therefore intend not to pre-determine this issue any further and suggest that other parish Councillors do the same. I would hope that Parish Councillors and others will support the efforts to save the Methodist Chapel which has a lot of sentimental value to many who live in Crossways. I am afraid I can only read into this question that any persons who seek to undermine the Scouting movement in Crossways in their bid to save the chapel may well in the end bear the label that they were responsible for its demolition. Please can I ask parish Councillors and others to think carefully before submitting such questions they may ultimately wish they had never asked!

b. Question from Fleur Chitson:

Why is the Chairman's policy to repress the conclusions of investigations into alleged misconduct of Crossways Parish Councillors when these investigations form a vital part of public information in assessing Councillors' individual performance and the collective performance of the whole Council?

As two recent reports have concluded that there are collective lessons to be learned by this Parish Council, why has the Chairman not acted prudently and objectively, by disallowing time for this to be debated?

Can the Parish Council Chairman confirm that the conciliation and mediation process initiated by West Dorset District Council with the aim of improving the unacceptable culture of hostility and factionalism within Crossways Parish Council has irretrievably broken down?

Response Cllr Smy

I have worked tirelessly since last November to try and ensure that the mediation and conciliation process, so kindly assisted by David Clarke, Chief Executive of WDDC might help resolve the personality difficulties facing the Parish Council. I have personally listened to all councillors concerns in private, undertaken further chairmanship training and coaching as promised, and I do believe we are starting to notice some green shoots of improvements in the quality and discussion at our meetings. I fully support and will hopefully show clear leadership in an attempt to end the culture of hostility and factionalism which so regrettable plagues the

Council at present. I hope in my speech earlier I outlined some of the ways we can improve things, however for this to work we need the help and support of the residents and others in stopping this petty point scoring, plotting and counter attacks. There is only one way ahead, and it is down to all of us to follow the right and correct way forward! So let's get on with it.

With regard to matters relating to the Standards Board, I do not think the villagers of Crossways want its council locked into further decisive discussion regarding complaints made to the board. What they want, again as I outlined in my speech earlier is for the Parish Council to move on and get on with its work, that being the protection and further improvement of the village and its community. However I have taken on board the question from Mrs Chitson, and at the May meeting of the Parish Council, in the interest of openness and transparency, I will in public list all the complaints that have been against Parish Councillors in the last year, who the complainant was, and the outcome that the Standards Board determined. I will not in the interest of village unity allow further debate as is suggested in this letter, as the floor of the Parish Council is not the right place, these matters are resolved at the district level, and that is where they must be debated.

I welcome West Dorset Districts Council's Standards Board offer to help us with team building coaching, and further training on the code of conduct and am in discussions with Alan Muir, the monitoring Officer to set up this training. I hope very much that all Parish Councillors will embrace the training that is being planned for them, it will be vital in helping to resolve our present difficulties.

Can I also ask in good faith, that residents and our District Councillor Peter Read supports this effort, and offers all their help, and support as we try and move forward more constructively. A little more constructive help and support from those who are critical will go a long way in helping to make improvements.

c. Question from Mr Graham Walker

In view of the present press reports of dysfunctionality of Crossways Parish Council, is there a commitment to achieve Quality Council accreditation and if so, confirm the timescale to achieve this standard? Should the Parish Council not consider this accreditation an appropriate action, what are the reasons for not doing so?"

Reply from Cllr Smy

Can I thank Mr Walker for his question which I acknowledge in good faith as a constructive suggestion as a possible means to focus Parish Councillors on the positives of good practice, in contrast to its present inward looking dysfunctionality as he rightly points out in his question. So far in Dorset as a whole I can report that only 5 Councils have successfully achieved Quality Council accreditation. May I suggest that the Council, with the full support of its residents spend the next few months concentrating on rebuilding its confidence and professionalism following months of what I can only describe as rather unpleasant behaviour. However, I must restate that the idea of Quality parish Council accreditation will only be achievable if the wider community, other elected representatives for Crossways and the Parish Council can find it in themselves to work in partnership for the good of Crossways. I think Mr Walker's suggestion could be a positive thing for us to consider in the near future.

d. Question from Mrs Linda Crowe

Following recent events, I would like to ask if all the members of the Parish Council and the District Council would be prepared to now put aside all personal agendas and issues they may have and instead work together for the benefit of our community at Crossways and make this a village to be proud of for both young and old alike.

I would also like them to think about their futures with regard to serving our community and to remember that they became councillors' for the benefit of the community and not to benefit themselves.

Reply by Cllr Smy

I acknowledge the points raised by Mrs. Crowe and genuinely hope that individuals will heed your words of advice in the spirit in which you raised your question. I have asked the clerk to send your question to every Parish Councillor and ask them to personally respond to you with their response to your question. I hope you receive a positive response outlining their personal commitment to undertake to behave themselves in the manner you outline above. You have my personal commitment tonight that I will do all I can to draw a line in the sand of recent unpleasant events, and move on for the good of Crossways, it is the only way ahead!

e. Question from Mrs Sue Dullaway

Following the Standards Board Hearing that absolved Andrew of any wrong doing but recommended training for all parish councillors, I would like to ask a question about the training, What will it entail, when will it take place and will the chairman report back at a parish meeting so we are all aware who successfully completes the training. Also I would like to know if the cost of the Standards Board enquiry is borne by the residents of Crossways, and if so, on whose authority was it instigated. Do we as residents of Crossways have some redress in claiming these costs back from the instigators as there was no case to answer?

Reply by Cllr Smy

I am already in early discussions with Alan Muir, the monitoring officer to arrange the training that has been requested by the Chairman of the Standards Committee Mr. May. The training will be based on team building coaching and more formal training on the code of conduct. As soon as I have more details I will outline how the training will be programmed. I hope very much that all Parish Councillors will successfully complete the training and will report back on those who attend to the public at a future Parish Council meeting.

With regard to the costs involved, I cannot answer the question on how much the investigation has cost. The bill for the two cases that went to investigation will be picked up by West Dorset District Council, which all residents pay Council Tax to. The costs clocked up by the Standards Board over the last year dealing with the 10 cases that have been referred are not known, but I will ask the clerk to write and ask the question.

All in all, valuable tax payers' money has been spent on dealing with these complaints to the Standards Board, and I leave it to you all to make judgment as to whether your tax payers' money could have been better spent!

f. Question from Mrs Angela Webb

"I would like to know what regulations apply to the declaring of a personal interest by councillors. I was present at the last council meeting and noted that one councillor declared an interest, said they would not enter into the discussion and would not vote. A second declared an interest, said they would enter the discussion but would not vote. Yet another declared an interest, said they would enter the discussion and would vote. It seems somewhat iniquitous that a declaration of interest should not preclude councillors from voting! This could mean personal agendas overriding the overall good of the parish. Please clarify the position and if appropriate outline what steps can be taken to prevent a situation where a councillor can vote for the furtherance of his or her private agenda."

Reply by Clerk

The present Code of Conduct allows for a Councillors to declare a personal interest and vote. This vote becomes a breach of the Code of Conduct when it becomes prejudicial. A prejudicial interest is described thus:

A Councillor's interest become prejudicial if a member of the public, who knows the relevant facts, would reasonably think your personal interest is so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgment of the public interest.

If a Councillor declares a personal interest and votes that it is in order. It takes a challenge from a third party, a Councillor of any member of the public, if they so wish to enter a complaint to the Standards Committee.

The Standards Committee will then decide on the appropriate action if a breach is proven or warrants further investigation.

6. GUEST SPEAKER – PRESENTATION BY MR ROB WESTELL, AREA ESTATES MANAGER, AGGREGATE INDUSTRIES ON THE FUTURE OF QUARRYING AT WARMWELL. Mr Westrell unable to attend.

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

There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting and declared a 10 minute interval before convening the Full Council meeting.

Signed Chairman 2008