

ST BEES PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 18 May 2015 at 6.30pm in St Bees Village Hall

PRESENT: Cllr D Sim in the Chair and 31 local residents & members of the public
In attendance: Cllr H Wormstrup (County Councillor for Egremont North/St Bees division)
Cllr I Hill (Copeland Borough Councillor for St Bees Ward)

2015/1 CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that this would be the 120th annual meeting of the parish. The Chairman stated that the annual meeting of the parish council, which was a separate meeting, would take place immediately after the annual parish meeting and was open to members of the public to observe. The Chairman noted that it was probably the best attended annual parish meeting in his experience.

2015/2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies for absence were received from Grant Gilmour, Chris Robson and Maxine Riley.

2015/3 MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 20 June 2014 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

2015/4 CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman presented a summary of his report on Parish Council activities for 2014/15. A copy of the full report would be published in the July/August edition of the parish magazine and would be available on the web-site. –

Beach

The new play area had been opened in July 2014 with almost 400 children and adults present. This was a major project costing £138,000 and would not have been possible without help from funders (WREN, Copeland Community Fund, CBC and CCC)

The parish council continued to manage the toilets – a major financial commitment but one which was essential to provide facilities for visitors.

New interpretation and information boards were now in place at the beach shelter.

Traffic & Parking

The volume and speed of traffic through the village continued to be a serious concern. A Speedwatch group had been set up with volunteers using a speed gun to monitor traffic and reporting to the police those found to be exceeding the speed limit.

The parish council was seeking to join the Sellafield Stakeholders Group and was part of an informal liaison group. The impact of Sellafield traffic travelling through local villages was raised at every opportunity.

The parish council was working on a plan to extend the parking at Station car park but this was still at an early stage.

Infrastructure improvements

Whilst work was taking place on the level crossing CCC had taken the opportunity to carry out resurfacing of Main Street and some drainage improvements had been completed.

Superfast broadband was now available in many parts of the main village as part of the Connecting Cumbria project.

Footway lighting

The ownership of street lights was a complex issue with some lights being the responsibility of CBC and others belonging to CCC. CBC had a policy of non-replacement when a light became beyond economic repair and the parish council was pressing CBC to work with CCC to come up

with a policy which would ensure a satisfactory level of lighting was maintained. Pole mounted lights were being removed as part of a new policy by Electricity North West and this had resulted in the loss of two lights in Rottington. The parish council was continuing to work with CBC to try to secure the replacement of the lights.

Wind turbines

There had been a number of applications for wind turbines in the parish. The parish council's policy was to object to any application which created an unacceptable visual impact on the landscape.

Community projects

A Santa parade took place in December to coincide with the RNLI Carol Concert and a Fireworks event took place in November in conjunction with St Bees School. There had also been a beach event in August.

Mining

West Cumbria Mining Ltd gave a public presentation in the Whitelaw Building to explain their plans to mine high quality coking coal. Initial investigations had shown that there were substantial reserves and further on-shore and off-shore exploratory drilling would now be taking place.

St Bees Village Hall

The Village Hall Committee had negotiated a new 50 year lease on the building which is well used for a variety of functions. The Committee was looking to recruit new members and would be pleased to hear from anyone interested.

Stakeholder communications

The web-site (www.stbees.org.uk) continued to attract a huge number of hits – over 4 million annually. The parish council now had a community Facebook page which was proving an excellent way of disseminating information, and the initial news concerning the closure of St Bees School had been received by 35,000 people.

St Bees School

More than 300 hundred trees had been planted by the parish council, in St Bees School grounds and elsewhere. This was an example of the improved liaison between the School and parish in recent times. However, the sudden announcement of the closure of the school had come as a great shock to everyone and presented a major challenge for the parish in the coming year.

2015/5 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MOTIONS

No motions had been received.

2015/6 PUBLIC FORUM ON PARISH ISSUES

The Chairman invited those present to raise matters for discussion. The only item raised was the closure of St Bees School.

The Chairman explained that the news that the school was to close had come completely without warning. It would have far reaching implications as the school was a major employer and was an important part of the local community. The Rescue Team and Save St Bees School Group continued to do good work to try to prevent the closure of the school but the parish council needed to consider the implications for the wider community and to work to minimise the effects. He invited residents to state their particular interest in the closure of the school and it was clear that those present represented a wide variety of interested groups – employees, parents of existing and past pupils, and residents with no close connection with the school who were concerned about the impact on the local community.

The meeting identified a number of ways in which the local community might be adversely affected:-

- Loss of employment
- Disruption to the education of current pupils and loss of educational provision for future generations
- Loss of trade for local businesses
- Loss of the parish vicar & threat to the future of the vicarage
- Loss of facilities currently open to the public, e.g. swimming pool, sports hall, lecture theatre and golf course
- Loss of key professionals e.g. doctors who might leave the area to find other schools for their children
- St Bees may become a less attractive place to live as people are at present attracted here because of the school
- Key workers will not move their families here but will just stay locally from Monday-Friday each week
- Drop in property prices
- Skills gap from loss of pupils at a time when well-qualified young people will be needed for new developments in the area
- Development of school buildings and land for other purposes
- Emotional stress for those families personally affected

A question was raised about the extent of the School's ownership of land and buildings in the parish. Cllr Sim replied that this remained unknown as much of the land was not registered with the Land Registry but the parish council would remain vigilant should any development proposals come forward.

A number of people questioned the lack of consultation by the Governors. The Chairman confirmed that there had been no prior consultation with the parish council and Cllrs Hill and Wormstrup confirmed that neither CBC nor CCC had been consulted in advance of the closure announcement. It was suggested that this would be a breach of Charity Commission rules and several of those present urged the parish council to take up the matter with the Charity Commissioners. Cllr Sim offered the view that the parish council should look forwards rather than concentrate on matters in the past.

The Governors had recognised the parish council's role as representatives of the community and had undertaken to meet with stakeholders by mid-June at the latest. The parish council would take up the offer of involvement in such discussions and would act as a voice for the local community. Many of those present expressed a view that there had been a lack of transparency about how the Governors had reached their decisions and it was suggested that there needed to be more openness and transparency if the parish council's engagement was to be productive.

As there were no other items for discussion, the Chairman declared the meeting closed.

SIGNED.....

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