

WITHYCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC OPEN SESSION ON THE 6TH MARCH 2017 IN THE MEMORIAL HALL, WITHYCOMBE at 7pm.

PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

For future reference Councillors and the Clerk will be referred to in these, and subsequent, reports by their initials:

Emma Wright (Chairman) EW / Chris Thomas (Vice Chairman) CT / Stephen Crossman SC / Richard Barnham RB / Amanda Gardiner AJG / Susan Gill SMG / David Tilley DT / Brenda Maitland-Walker (West Somerset District Council) BMW / Christine Lawrence (Somerset County Council) CL / Andy Giles (Clerk) AG.

The meeting was digitally recorded

These notes formulate a record of the Public Open Session held on the 6th March 2017.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.00 p.m. She welcomed those in attendance who included Ms Hester Watson (HW) from West Somerset Community Land Trust. She reported that apologies had been received from the Somerset County Councillor (CL).

West Somerset Community Land Trust

Hester Watson(HW) from the West Somerset Community Land Trust explained that the CLT is a not-for-profit housing trust set up about two years ago, with the aim to provide quality, low cost, sustainable housing solutions for local people. The aim will be to create housing that is cheaper than social housing. A survey of Parish Councils is being carried out to see what parish councils think is lacking in terms of housing in their parish and whether they would like more housing and which groups of people are most in need. The CLT have already carried out a public consultation to find out local people's needs and their thoughts about housing. Messages from the consultation have shown that there are issues around single people needing to downsize to smaller properties and young people unable to afford to leave home especially in the Exmoor villages. The next phase of work is identifying possible sites for development. Possible sites have been identified in Wheddon Cross, Washford and Williton. The CLT has been working closely with Sue Southwell, Housing Co-ordinator at the Exmoor Rural Housing Network (ERHN). In partnership with ERHN, work will be undertaken to identify local housing contacts and to start building a register of those people and households in need.

Councillors raised several issues including the high cost of admin fees to secure private rents, the lack of affordable housing in villages for younger people, the low wage economy and the lack of sites that could be developed.

The Chairman thanked Hester for her informative presentation.

1. Somerset County Councillor Report

CL had tendered her apologies.

2. District Councillor Report

BT Sub-Contractors: BMW has received a letter from Withycombe resident Mr Roger Hurst raising concerns about recent works carried out in West Street. The road had been dug up the road and telegraph poles taken down and the road had been left covered in mud, oil and debris. BMW had replied to Mr Hurst and explained that the district council had no power over BT or other road contractors but she would bring the matter to the attention of the Parish Council. BMW explained that County Council Highways can request that BT come back and clean up the road. The Clerk was instructed to write to Mr Hurst to inform him that the Parish Council was aware of the incident.

Steam Coast Trail: BMW reported that there is an issue over where the line of the footpath runs across land owned by Blue Anchor chalet owners. This section of the footpath has been blocked off by the chalet owners, and walkers are being diverted along the beach. Evidence is being gathered by the Ramblers Association to put in an application to SCC Rights of Way to have the footpath reinstated. Anybody who has walked that route regularly in the past and no longer can should contact Ivor Sutton from the Ramblers Association.

West Somerset Council: BMW reported that on the 22nd February WSC had set a balanced budget for 2017/18. It was becoming harder and harder to achieve because of the reductions in Revenue Support Grant and the way in which the New Homes Bonus is worked out. The Band D council tax rate has been increased by £5/year.

Flood Plan: BMW circulated information and Environment Agency(EA) guidance for drawing up a community flood plan. Maps were circulated to illustrate the parish flooding issues. Withycombe is classed by the EA as being in Flood Zone 2 which means there is a potential flood risk. BMW is happy to assist with the creation of a flood plan for Withycombe.

Transformation / Merger of District Authorities: RB asked for an update regarding the merger of West Somerset and Taunton Deane Councils. BMW advised that a consultation was in progress and that parishes had been written to and invited to submit a parish response. The Clerk had not received any correspondence regarding a parish consultation. Responses from the consultation will form part of evidence that will inform a business case that will go to the Secretary of State. It is not a done deal and nothing would happen until 2019.

Culvert Repair/Watercourse Maintenance: SC asked if any progress had been made with the watercourse maintenance further upstream. At the meeting of the 5th December 2016 Ken Marshall (SCC) had agreed to look into this to see if this could be incorporated into the work programme as part of the culvert repair. BMW to speak to David Peake (SCC) and to also take the matter up through the Flood Group and report any progress to the Clerk.

The Chairman thanked BMW for her input to the meeting.

The Public Open Session ended at 7.45 pm.

_____ Chairman

_____ Date