

LOPEN PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOM

At 7pm Monday 21st January 2013

MINUTES

Present : Cllr. B. Davolls (Chairman)
Cllr. P. Finlayson
Cllr. N. Norman

Cllr. P Maxwell SCC
Cllr. Paul Thompson SSSC

Ms. Kim McDonald (Clerk)

Members of the public: 7

1/13 Apologies

Received from: Cllr. Barry Walker SSSC and Cllr. Teresa Sienkiewicz

2/13 Declaration of Interests

As there could be a pecuniary interest in respect of the precept discussions and budget setting, all attending councillors signed a Request for a Dispensation for setting the Precept for the Parish. This is on file with the Clerk.

Cllr. Finlayson also announced an interest in respect of planning application 12/04756/FUL Oswalds, Church Street which is a neighbouring property.

3/13 To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2012

The Minutes were agreed as a true record. This was proposed by Cllr. Norman, seconded by Cllr. Finlayson and duly signed by the Chairman Barry Davolls.

4/13 Matters arising from the minutes

There were none.

5/13 County Councillor's report

Cllr. Maxwell updated the meeting on the following:

Watergore Traffic Calming – measures have been agreed. Phase 1 will be road markings; phase 2 measures will be reported further but could be gateways or road islands and were discussed at a meeting early January.

SID – northbound in Lopen from 14 January. SID data from this and southbound SID (to follow) will be used by Highways to assess what measures can be taken to provide traffic calming for Lopen. Cllr. Davolls will forward to Cllr. Maxwell currently existing SID data to add to this. It was noted by the meeting that the local concerns were as much for creating pavements along Holloway as they were for traffic calming measures. Street lighting in Lopen was not generally viewed as acceptable.

Moorlands Farm, Merriott – This comprises a Doctor's Surgery and 24 new houses and was approved by Area West meeting in December. Cllr. Maxwell reported that the majority of residents were very pro the surgery but there was a real disquiet regarding the houses, but more people were for the proposal than against it, due to the Doctor's surgery and improvements to a derelict site. Cllr. Davolls noted that it did represent a significant development for a rural settlement and would have traffic implications for Lopen. Cllr. Maxwell was asked about the covenant of the land. He was unsure what this was. The Doctor's Surgery was thought to be leasehold, the houses, freehold.

Eggwood update – covered in 10/13 below.

Defibrillator for Lopen – Cllr. Maxwell confirmed that it was likely there would be a positive outcome to the decision on a grant towards the cost of a defibrillator for the village and should be able to confirm this within the week.

A303 (A358) Improvements - Cllr. Maxwell reported that there was an aspiration to complete dualling the entire length of the A303 including the stretch at Stonehenge by all the councils involved (Wiltshire, Somerset and Devon). No specific scheme was drawn up as yet, so there could be no confirmation that Hayes End Roundabout could be affected. The strong local feeling was noted and Cllr. Maxwell said that SCC would call for the highest level of environmental mitigation for a future scheme. He said there was more support for improvements to the link to the motorway via the A358.

No.81 Bus Route – This route takes in South Petherton Hospital and is currently under threat following a review of the bus services and the requirements for a further 50% cuts from April 2013.

Warden Scheme – The numbers of applications for this scheme submitted by PCs in the area was not known. Cllr. Davolls reported that South Petherton had submitted an expression of interest, so as the largest local PC, it was thought they would probably become the lead (as they had been for the Lengthsman Scheme). The scheme would provide funding of £3000 per area scheme

6/13 District Councillors' report

Cllr. Paul Thompson updated the meeting on:

SSDCs response to Gov't changes to Council Tax Funding for Housing Benefit - 86% of people surveyed believed that everyone should contribute something towards their council tax. The SSDC scheme proposed was thought to be cost neutral overall with people on benefit being asked to contribute 15% towards their CT bill (some councils had adopted schemes for 20 or 25 % contributions). This would represent 1-2 pounds each week for most, but should be seen in light of income allowance increases due to take place. The system would be monitored and pensionable aged people would not be included in any new scheme and therefore would not be affected.

SSLP Local Plan 2006 – 2028 – Minor amends had been made at the Full Council meeting held on 17th January and was submitted to the Plan Inspector on 21 January. Councillors voted 32 to 20 on the revised plan submitted. (Liberals v Conservatives).

Cllr. Davolls queried what amendments had been made. Cllr. Thompson did not have that detail but said they were considered minor. Cllr. Davolls believed the evidence base to be still flawed and the projected growth between rural settlements and rural centres skewed. He felt if this had not been addressed then the plan had been misrepresented to Councillors. It would present a plan that appeared to be more sustainable than it was in fact.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) distribution levels have been provisionally agreed at 25% share to Parishes with a Neighbourhood Plan 25% and 15% for those without although, SSDC may yet agree that all Parishes may receive 25%. Implementation date is not yet established but it will follow adoption of South Somerset's Local Plan (SSLP) 2006-2028.

7/13 Internal Auditor vacancy

Ian Benfield has accepted the role of internal auditor. Our thanks once again to Nick George for his assistance with last year's audit.

8/13 Neighbourhood Planning

Cllr. Davolls reported on a meeting he had attended with Dave Norris and Charlotte Jones (SSDC), regarding the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans (for both S. Petherton and Lopen). Assurances were given that Lopen didn't need a plan. SSDC was not required to provide funding or prepare the plan; outside agencies would be able to provide some funds, and SSDC would be able to provide some guidance and general assistance. Plans needed to comply with the NPPF, adopted Local Plan and would be submitted to a Planning Inspector.

There was a confusing picture locally as to whether it was necessary for Lopen to embark on a plan. On one hand any such development under the NPPF would be need to be justified under 3 rules: That the development is actually required, sustainable; and importantly – wanted by the local community. That said Merriott had got 24 houses that local residents were not keen on having (but this may have been due to the fact that the Local Plan was not in place and there was an ungoverned window of opportunity for developers). Cllr. Davolls recommended that in light of this confusion and taking into account Lopen's history of unsympathetic developments, it was wise to proceed to the next stage and further reporting back to the council will be made in due course. It was worth noting that a Neighbourhood Plan always goes to a full referendum.

9/13 Local Choices Event (County Council- Warden Scheme) – see also above 5/13. This would replace the Lengthsman scheme as we know it for the next financial year and it would be reviewed after that.

10/13 Update on Eggwood Hill site – Peter Little, who has been asked by all interested parties to oversee this matter, reported to the meeting that negotiations were ongoing, that documents had now passed to the legal department and that a few early queries and amendments to initial statements had been made and now all Parishes had agreed to move to the next stage – the writing of a full contract. Cllr. Davolls said that once this contract was prepared it would be discussed and put before Council during a public meeting so that the detail could be reviewed and a final decision taken. It was noted that the lease term was now a full 999 years. The landlord would be Somerset County Council.

11/13 Update on Lopenhead Industrial site – The planning application for Building E went to the Area North committee in December but the decision was deferred due to a legal challenge.

Concerns have been raised over the validity of Building A planning permission which may have expired as not all planning conditions had been discharged before the expiry date.

Cllr. Maxwell left the meeting at 19.53pm.

12/13 To agree the Parish Council's response to planning applications:

- **12/04756/FUL Oswalds, Church Street.** The erection of a timber summerhouse and cedar greenhouse to rear garden
The meeting was inquorate for this planning application and so, following a brief discussion regarding the application including comments from the applicant, the decision was delegated to the Clerk for subsequent response in consultation with the members.
- **12/04910/FUL Norton Lodge, Frog Street.** The erection of a conservatory
The Councillors accepted this proposal unanimously.
- **To note only, 13/00066/TCA Lopen House, Church Street.** Removal of seven Leylandii trees
This was noted as an advisory only, with no voting required.

13/13 To discuss and agree the Council's budget and provisionally set the Precept for 2013-14

Cllr. Davolls opened the discussions with an explanation of the implications of the local Council Tax Benefits (CTB) scheme that has now been transferred by central Government to be administered by SSDC but with reduction of government funding by 10%. There is an additional grant from Government to help maintain the Parish Precepts, but that has not been passed to Parish Councils in full. Therefore a shortfall 1.70% for local needs is required to be met from the precept.

Although final figures have not been confirmed by SSDC it is thought that they have allowed Lopen PC a transitional total grant of £370.00 towards the shortfall. The amount that LPC would need to find to bridge the gap in funding local CTB need from the precept represents a 1.70% increase to keep our precept the same as last year.

Cllr. Davolls then briefed the meeting on the budget situation for the estimated current year end, the proposals for the budget for 2013-14 and it's impact on the setting of the precept for 2013-14.

The proposal was to increase the precept for 2013-14 by 9.32% (to include the 1.70% increase to cover the local requirement to meet the CTB scheme). This falls in line with recommendations to keep 9-12 months operating costs in reserve and allows Lopen to increase specific cash reserves to cater for the needs of Eggwood Hill legal and maintenance costs, start a fund for Neighbourhood Plans/localism referendum costs and start a contingency reserve (future CTB or other unforeseen costs). The Lengthsman scheme and all other activities would remain unchanged for the forthcoming year.

The proposed increase in the precept would represent an additional cost to Lopen band D households of approximately £4.00 per year.

The meeting was adjourned to take comments from the floor c. 20.15.

Cllr. Davolls proposed that the Lopen Precept for 2013-14 should be increased by 9.32% as indicated above, taking the precept from £4882 to £5220.

All councillors present unanimously agreed the proposal.

The deadline for reporting the Precept for 2013/14 was February 8th.

14/13 Future meeting dates and times

The next scheduled meeting was announced as March 18th at 7.00pm to be held in the Sunday School Room.

15/13 Any other business

The Village Picnic – Cllr. Peggie Finlayson proposed that the village should hold its picnic on August Bank Holiday weekend. 75% of the village attended the last picnic held on this weekend. This was unanimously agreed by the councillors and Cllr. Finlayson was asked to prepare a proposal for the next scheduled meeting to include a suggestion of a venue and the possibilities of using Eggwood.

The meeting closed at 20.40pm