



Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council
Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on Tuesday 13 December 2022 at
7.45 pm at Woodah Farm

Present: Cllr W Hole (Chairman), Cllr M Moorhouse, Cllr R Crocker, Cllr S Burdge, District Cllr S Purser and 2 members of the public
Clerk: A Miller

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed everybody and gave a brief overview of the main items of the meeting and of their purpose: planning and discussing the road warden scheme to reduce the number of potholes in the village.

Cllr Sawyer sent his apologies and Cllr Davis could not attend the meeting.

Open Forum

A member of the public agreed that potholes are a real issue and it is important to report them on the website of Devon County Council.

The Parish Council discussed agenda item 4 next.

2 Declarations of Interest / Requests for Dispensations

None.

3 Planning Matters

3.1 To Note Planning Decisions

None.

3.2 To Discuss Feedback Received from Other Parishes in Teignbridge about a Possible Cooperation Regarding Planning Issues

Following the Council's decision at the November meeting, a letter was sent to 39 parish and town councils where Teignbridge District Council is the planning authority. This letter appears at the Appendix to these Minutes. So far 13 parishes indicated that they would be interested in a joint representation regarding planning matters. There might be more answers later when parish councils will have the opportunity to discuss the letter at their next meeting in December or January. One parish offered help with organizing a meeting for interested parishes. As a result of the Chairman's letter, the Parish Council received information about the Planning Enforcement Review Report, which was much anticipated. District Cllr Purser informed the meeting about the steps that the District Council had made to improve the planning service. Teignbridge engaged a private company, Capita, to help with the backlog of 400 cases. This project started last week. There are plans to provide the same planning training for parish councillors as members of the Planning Committee receive at the District Council.

Resolved The Parish Council agreed to send an email to parish and town councils in the area of Teignbridge Planning Authority and organize an initial planning meeting for a date after 20th January, outlining the main points to decide about.

3.3 To Discuss the Need for a Neighbourhood Plan in Doddiscombsleigh

The advantages and the challenges of the project were discussed.

Advantages:

- The neighbourhood plan is a legal document and it has a weight in planning decisions.
- The Parish would get 25% of the CIL money instead of 15%. The CIL fund was very important this year and it is expected to have an important role while it lasts.
- It is possible to receive up to £10,000 grant to produce the plan. If design codes are included in the plan, additional funding can also be available.

Difficulties:

- It takes a lot of time and energy from the community to produce it. The previous attempt to produce a community plan in 2019 was stopped by the pandemic and the process has never started again.
- The parish needs enough volunteers to do it, who have the drive to pull together a plan.
- There is an uncertainty in the planning system and about the future of the CIL.
- The neighbourhood plan needs to fit into the Teignbridge Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework. It cannot go against these documents.

It was discussed that if the Planning Authority would pay more attention to parish council comments, it would not be necessary for small parishes to produce a neighbourhood plan. Small parishes do not necessarily have the resources or enough volunteers with specific knowledge to create such plans. Neighbourhood plans are usually produced by bigger towns or parishes where significant developments are planned and the CIL money is significant or where the plan serves a specific purpose.

Resolved The Parish Council unanimously agreed not to go ahead with the neighbourhood plan at the moment.

3.4 To Discuss How to Deal with Planning Concerns in the Future

There are different approaches to this question in practice.

The first option, which is followed by several councils, is that parish councils do not engage in planning concerns and councils direct residents to the Planning Authority's website, where they can confidentially report their concerns.

The second option was followed by Doddiscombsleigh since lockdown, when planning officers cannot come to the village and conduct a site visit. The general rule is that residents report their concerns to the Planning Authority, but if the Parish Council agrees that a concern affects public interest, the Parish Council report it to the Planning Authority as well. The third option is when the Parish Council agrees to report all the concerns to the Planning Authority on behalf of residents, which requires the most resources and there is a risk that the Parish Council might get involved in neighbours' disputes.

Resolved The Parish Council unanimously agreed to formally adopt the current practice as a policy. As a general rule, planning concerns are reported by residents on the Planning Authority's website. If the Parish Council believes that a planning concern might affect public interest, the Council may refer the concern to the Planning Authority for clarification.

An issue is considered to be in public interest if

- i) The concern is related to the natural environment and/or there is a potential loss of habitat – the Parish Council declared a climate emergency and is concerned about saving the natural environment within the Parish.
- ii) The concern affects the conservation area.
- iii) A great number of residents expressed their concerns and it is known that the issue is important for the community.

4 To Consider the Possibility of Participating in the Road Warden Scheme

This item was discussed after the Open Forum.

The following points were raised.

- If there are volunteers in the village, the parish can get tarmac from Devon Highways and volunteers can repair the potholes – even if the pothole does not meet Devon County Council's safety defect criteria yet.
- Volunteers receive free training from Devon Highways.
- Devon County Council provides public liability insurance for the work done (not for the volunteers).
- Volunteers are covered by the Parish Council's public liability insurance as part of the core cover without extra cost.
- It was clarified that Devon County Council provides cold tarmac and not hot tarmac. Cold tarmac is only a temporary solution and does not last long.

Resolved The Parish Council unanimously agreed to ask for volunteers to come forward to participate in the road warden scheme.

5 Finance

5.1 To Discuss Possible Projects and Ideas for Next Year's Budget

5.1.1 Coronation

Resolved The Parish Council unanimously agreed that the celebration of the coronation will be organized without the Parish Council's involvement and funds.

5.1.2 Number of Meetings to be Held in 2023/24

Resolved The Parish Council unanimously agreed to hold ten ordinary meetings in the next financial year – one every month except August and December.

5.1.3 New Website

The Clerk reported that the possibility of a shared website with other parishes in the Teign Valley was explored as it was decided at the November meeting. Other parishes either do not need their own website (parish meetings) or they already have one they are content with.

Previously County Cllr J Brook was contacted regarding a potential grant of £1,000 from the Locality Budget for a new website which would be fully compliant with accessibility regulations, but his answer was not promising.

The Parish Council's current earmarked reserves are not sufficient to cover the cost of a new website; the amount would only be enough to cover the higher hosting cost in the first year.

Resolved The Parish Council considered the low number of visitors to the website, the lack of complaints about accessibility issues with the current website and the cost of living crises and unanimously agreed that funding a new fully compliant website solely from precept would be a disproportionate burden for the community. The Parish Council agreed to continue earmarking reserves for a new website and revisit the issue at a later date.

5.1.4 Clerk's Home Working Allowance

Resolved The Parish Council unanimously agreed to increase the clerk's home working allowance in the following way: to increase the general part of the allowance by £20 and to increase by another £20 the second part of the allowance which is paid for providing a laptop for council business.

5.1.5 Fir Tree and Triangle

It was discussed that after Devon County Council has removed the fir tree, the tree trunk will need to be grinded out and the soil will need to be replaced because the soil contains

a lot of concrete and is of poor quality. Then a mature tree can be planted to replace the atlas cedar tree. Improvements at the Triangle can be paid from the CIL fund.

Resolved The Parish Council unanimously agreed to include £1000 for the works at the Triangle in next year’s budget.

5.2 Approval of Expenditure

Venue hire 13 December 2022 £10.00

HSBC fee £8.00

Resolved The Council unanimously approved the expenditures.

6 Clerk’s Correspondence

6.1 Sandbags

Some years ago there were sandbags available for the community in case of flooding. The volunteer, who stored the sandbags, could not keep them in an enclosed space and the bags were quickly deteriorating. An enclosed storage space is necessary if the Council would like to keep this option available for the community.

6.2 Office Printer

The clerk reported that the scanner function of the office printer does not work. If the printer function should stop working as well, the printer needs to be replaced. A new printer would cost about £50.

7 Date of Next Meeting

10 January 2023

8 Chairman’s Remarks

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.30 pm.

Signed.....
Chair

Date

APPENDIX

Letter to the Leaders of Parish and Town Councils in the Area of Teignbridge Planning Authority

The Chairman of Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council (DPC) sends his regards to the other leaders. Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council considers answering planning applications and raising some planning related issues to the Planning Authority (PA) as an important part of their responsibilities and as representing the community during decision making processes which have long lasting effects on their environment. Unfortunately, Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council’s experience is that the voice of community does not have the weight that it should have.

Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council invited a representative of the Planning Authority to come to its last meeting and help with improving the efficiency of the comments made. This invitation was

refused on the basis that Teignbridge PA has 50 parishes and engaging with one of them would create a precedent and might all the other parishes would seek the same.

Therefore, Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council would like to ask other parishes in the area of the Teignbridge PA whether they had a negative experience with the PA and whether they have questions and concerns that they would like to raise. If there is an interest in the subject, Doddiscombsleigh recommends a joint representation, because individual parishes may well be ignored and not heard by the PA.

Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council is aware that there was a Teignbridge Association of Local Councils (TALC) for representing the parishes in Teignbridge, but this organization is currently not functioning. Whether it is a resurrection of TALC, or Chairpersons' Assembly, or Teignbridge Planning Forum or any other body, parishes in Teignbridge need a platform to represent their interest, otherwise parish councils and the communities they represent could be unheard and ignored.

Other parishes might have other circumstances and issues, but Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council would like to share their specific problems.

Doddiscombsleigh is a small village in the Teign Valley, just outside of Dartmoor National Park, in a very rural area. Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council have concerns both with the planning application process and the planning enforcement. Some examples.

1. Planning applications

- For the public the decisions seem to be unpredictable and not necessarily understandable.
- The Parish Council's comments – even when they are material planning considerations – does not seem to have an effect on the decisions.
- The cumulative effects of individual permissions – even if there is not any big development - can slowly erode and change the character of an area in a way that it was never planned or intended.

2. Planning enforcement (PE)

- The current practice does not seem to have enough effect to save the countryside. Both the speed and the reaction of the planning enforcement seems to be insufficient.
- The methods followed by the PE are not seen as independent and unbiased by the public.
- Conditions of controversial applications, which would not have been allowed without these conditions, are not checked. When the Parish Council has brought these to the attention of PE they have still not been enforced.

If your council has concerns regarding planning issues in the area of Teignbridge PA, share our frustration and would like to discuss what can be done, please contact the Clerk of Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council at doddiscombsleighpc@gmail.com.

Kind regards

William Hole

Chairman of Doddiscombsleigh Parish Council