

Minehead Area Panel

Notes of Meeting held on 7 December 2016 at The Lawns Committee Room, Townsend Road, Minehead

Present:

Sandra Slade (Chair)	Resident
Tony Murray	Magna West Somerset
Julian Luke	Minehead Museum
Cllr Christine Lawrence	Somerset County Council
Cllr Terry Venner	Somerset County Council & West Somerset Council
Cllr Andy Lewis	Minehead Town Council
James Guscott	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service
Peter Broom	Resident & Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, Queens Road
Ron Blundell	Resident & Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, Queens Road
Steven Heard	Resident
Colin Isherwood	Resident
Bridget O'Brien	Resident
Paul Johnson	Resident
Sarah Wilsher	West Somerset Council

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Sandra Slade welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Diane Bowen (Butlins), James Bramah (Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council), Cllr Mandy Chilcott (West Somerset Council), Anne Clarke (Manor Road/Staunton Lane Neighbourhood Watch), Cllr Gail Everett (Minehead Town Council), Chris Hall (Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council), Julian Highfield (Butlins), Marcus Kravis (Resident), Jenny Lennon-Wood (Minehead Development Trust), David Peake (Somerset County Council Area Highways), PC Joseph Sanderson (Avon & Somerset Police), John Vicary (Resident)

2. Have Your Say – Community Issues/Concerns

There were no issues for Have Your Say.

3. The Progress of the Minehead Museum and Plans for 2017 – Julian Luke, Curator, Minehead Museum

Julian explained that the Minehead Museum had been the idea of the Minehead Conservation Society under the leadership of Oliver Davies. A limited company had been formed in order for the Society to become a legal entity and a partnership with the YMCA at the Beach Hotel and Minehead Development Trust had been entered into. The museum started life as a pop-up museum in the former Visitor Centre on the seafront in 2013 with 2,000 visitors. Offers of artefacts had rolled in.

The Museum has just completed its third season during which there had been over 4,000 visitors, which was 2% up on the 2015 season. Overall there had been 15,000 visitors to the Museum. The aim was to develop an all-weather, all-year round facility and an education provision for schools. The venue in The Beach Hotel was

unfortunately very cramped for space with only a 25ft x 15ft display area for the entire history of Minehead.

The Museum was closed for the winter but would open again in March 2017 with a Maritime Minehead display. This would celebrate Minehead's shipping heritage, when it was second only to Bristol as a shipping port. The 100th anniversary of Arthur C Clarke would also be celebrated.

Julian emphasised that the Museum was an independent organisation and a registered charity, not aligned to any other organisation or local authority.

Julian added that Minehead lacked somewhere to interpret Minehead history, with a guide. The Museum was too small for this. It also lacked storage space and needed a good sized damp-proof area. The Beach Hotel was very good to provide accommodation but more was now needed. Ideally a central space in the town was required as the visitors tended to be 50% locals and 50% non-locals. Julian hoped that the local authorities would be able to assist with helping the Museum in their endeavour to find a solution.

Also it was noted that, due to the lack of a facility in the past for local artefacts, sadly many items had probably been lost to peoples' skips/bins.

The meeting expressed their pleasure with the success of the Museum and Sandra thanked Julian for his talk.

4. The Annual Magna Report – Tony Murray, Director, Magna South West

Tony spoke to his annual report (see attached). Magna West Somerset Housing Association Ltd was based in Williton and mainly had houses in West Somerset, with some in Taunton and Sedgemoor and Devon. Magna Housing Association Ltd was based in Dorchester with houses in Dorset and Devon.

About 25% of the housing stock was in Minehead. During 2016/17 23 new kitchens, 23 new bathrooms, 32 new heating/boilers and 24 new roofs were/would be installed, equating to about £3 million. Thirty-six properties were let through Homefinder in Minehead and Alcombe between April 2015 and March 2016 and 30 properties between April 2016 and 31 October 2016. This was an 8-9% turnover of housing stock.

The Board had reviewed their strategy for 2016 and following the lack of Government grant in 2015, the 1% reduction in rents and the no building policy, it had been decided to start building again. This was due to the early 2016 Government funding programme which stated that there was no grant for new rental affordable housing from 2016 to 2021, only for low-cost home ownership schemes such as shared ownership.

It had therefore been decided to build up to 300 shared ownership homes from 2017 to 2021, subject to the availability of a Government grant. Also Magna planned on building 300 homes for rent and as there had been a recent change in Government policy which would mean a grant for rented properties over 80% rent, Magna would be finding out what this would mean to Magna where their rent was 60% of the market rental value.

It was also proposed to amalgamate the two housing associations in Magna (one in Somerset and one in Dorset) into one organisation, Magna Housing, by 1 April 2017. This would reduce duplication and inefficiency, lead to one Director and one set of audited accounts, etc. There would be no change to services and frontline staff would in the main be the same people as currently. A consultation exercise amongst

residents had taken place which had mainly been in favour of the merger, staff had been consulted and Local Authorities had been advised. The latter were happy as long as there was no affect to services.

The Board also proposed to have 99% of Magna's homes in their seven core local authority areas of West Somerset, Taunton Deane, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, North Devon, West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland, which would result in Magna selling houses in Devon to another housing association.

Questions/comments were then made by those attending.

Cllr Christine Lawrence pointed out that the Hinkley C project would lead to more people needing housing. However, it was noted that private landlords were increasing their rents to meet this demand.

In response to questions, Tony advised that a mixture of different sized homes would be built, depending upon demand. Currently in the towns demand exceeded supply whereas there was less demand in the villages.

Terry Venner commented that rents had been reduced by 1% by Central Government in 2015, which was the Housing Association's contribution to reducing the housing bill, but this had caused a greater gap between social housing rent and private rent as private landlords were not under the same Government obligations.

In response to the question – why was Magna rent 60% of the market rent and not 80%, Tony advised that 60% of the rent was more affordable as wages in West Somerset were low. Some rents were 80% of the market rent and Magna were talking to Government about the 80/60% reduction.

Tony further advised that Universal Credit had been introduced from October 2016 in West Somerset and Taunton Deane. Universal Credit combined benefits into one benefit and aimed to encourage people back into work. Universal Credit was paid in arrears and to the individual rather than the Housing Association so it was felt that rent arrears would increase as a result.

There were about 8,500 Magna homes across Dorset and Somerset. About one-third had been built by Magna and two-thirds had been as a result of transfer of Council houses. In 1988 West Somerset District Council had transferred their housing stock to Magna and in 1993 West Dorset District Council had followed suit.

Sandra thanked Tony for his interesting and informative talk.

5. Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 September 2016

The minutes of the meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting, subject to the date of the meeting being changed from 8 June 2016 to 14 September 2016.

Matters Arising

Item 2(a) –Diane Partridge expressed her concern regarding possible Winter flooding in Alcombe at the bottom end of Manor Road and Combeland Road close to the Britannia Inn which was caused by debris and overgrowth building up at the edge of the stream and the stream overflowing. The 'sheep wash' at the junction of Staunton Lane and Manor Road used to be cleared to prevent flooding and Diane requested that it be cleared again – Sandra to write to David Peake at SCC to ask if the stream in Alcombe could be cleared again. Sandra had written to David and he had replied as follows: The Somerset County Council Flood and Surface Water Management

team had again funded a clearance of the 'Sheep wash' just up from the Staunton Lane bridge. This work would be carried out during the remainder of the 2016/17 financial year (to 31 March 2017).

Item 2(a) continued - A resident had also advised that the gutter at the junction of Warden Road and Alexandra Road often became full of leaves and debris after heavy rain and asked if it could also be cleared – Sandra to write to David Peake at SCC to ask if the gutter at the junction of Warden Road and Alexandra Road could be cleared. Sandra had written to David and he had replied as follows: West Somerset Council are the street sweeping authority and requests for the clearance of gutters such as this should be directed to them.

ACTION: Sandra to write to Customer Services at West Somerset Council (WSC) to instruct the relevant contractor to clear the gutter at the junction of Warden Road and Alexandra Road.

Sandra had written to Customer Services at WSC in December 2016.

The meeting noted that the gutters were difficult to access due to car parking along Warden Road/Alexandra Road. Ron Blundell advised that 'fixmystreet' was an app that worked well for these types of instructions.

Item 2(a) continued - The resident also advised that the street name sign for Warden Road, which had been located outside no. 1, had disappeared – Sandra to write to David Peake at SCC to ask if the street name sign could be reinstated. Sandra had written to David Peake who had replied as follows: West Somerset Council are the street sweeping authority and requests for repairs/replacement such as this should be directed to them.

ACTION: Sandra to write to Customer Services at West Somerset Council to instruct the relevant contractor to replace the street name sign for Warden Road.

Sandra had written to Customer Services at WSC in December 2016

6. Issues of Policing and Community Safety

Sandra reported back from the Williton, Watchet and the Quantocks Area Panel meeting, which had held a special meeting on 6 December, with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Sue Mountstevens.

Although open to the public, the meeting had been predominantly attended by District and Parish Councillors, with about 35-40 people in total.

The Commissioner had explained her role as being someone who listened. As an elected Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) she was the bridge between the community and the Police Force. She had spoken of the problems of reducing budgets and staffing numbers – a further £20million budget reduction had to be found before 2020. She had said that she was committed to protecting staffing levels and services, however, the Government were looking at a new funding formula. At present Somerset and Avon were the second worst funded force in the country in terms of funding per head of population, and as always the sparsity of population in relation to the size of the area worked against West Somerset – but as PCC she was working hard to get a fairer deal.

Sue Mountstevens had also spoken of her commitment to being a non-politically aligned PCC, one of only a few in the country and already she felt that there was conflict in some areas because the Commissioner was affiliated to a particular

political party. Her aim was always to be impartial. At present she was working on a new Police and Crime Plan, which had four main aims:

- i. Protection of the vulnerable.
- ii. Strengthening the local Police teams.
- iii. Promoting the right equipment and culture for officers.
- iv. Partnership working.

In talking about these she had mentioned, amongst other things, the problems of missing persons (8,000 per year in Somerset, of which 5,000 were children and young people); that all Police and PCSOs were currently being issued with body video cameras; the need to recruit the right people, including ethnic minorities in areas of the County where applicable; and a new Police area hub which was being set up in West Somerset House, the District Council offices, in Williton.

The meeting with the PCC had then been opened for questions, including:

- The role of PCSOs and it had been stressed that they did valuable community work, complementing the work of Police officers.
- The blurring of lines between social work and policing, particularly the way in which crimes were changing (eg, more child protection issues, cyber-crime, etc.) and the need for the Police to be more pro-active rather than reactive in combatting crime.
- Minehead Police Station – the building would be sold and the Police were actively seeking new premises, either combined with the Fire and Ambulance services or a smaller dedicated Police office within the town.
- The excellently run Minehead CCTV team, currently situated in the Police Station, being housed in new premises and it was hoped that they would benefit from an upgrade in their facilities.
- Somerset were bidding to be part of a pilot scheme to trial the use of body cameras for filmed statements from witnesses, etc. This would cut time and paperwork and if recognised by the Court could save witnesses having to appear in person.
- Minehead currently had a team of four uniformed officers plus PCSOs.
- Response times varied according to the perception of the urgency of the reported crime, eg, a burglary in process rated higher than coming home from holiday and finding a burglary had taken place.
- Partnership working included working more closely with the Fire and Ambulance services, eg a reported body in a locked house might be answered initially by the Fire service and then Police or Ambulance called as appropriate.

Sandra advised that the meeting had covered many areas and that as the press had been present she expected that a comprehensive report of the meeting would be included in the local paper. She had brought copies of the Avon & Somerset Police & Crime Commissioner Newsletter Summer 2016, issue 8 to the meeting, if anyone was interested.

Paul Johnson informed the meeting that he had recently witnessed a fight outside of Chanin & Thomas in The Parade in the middle of the day. A man had jumped out of a BMW and started pushing around three men in the street accusing them of damaging his car. Mr Johnson had reported it a week later using the 101 service. He had heard nothing further from the Police. Christine Lawrence advised that the CCTV would have been looked at, but CCTV videos were not kept indefinitely and crimes should be reported as soon as possible. She and Sandra stressed that it was essential for crimes to be reported as a Police presence was based on the number of crimes in the area. It was noted that Butlins paid for the Police to put two extra officers on the streets during the adult/music weekends.

7. Minehead Coastal Community Team - An Update

Sue Sanders had provided a written report which was circulated in advance of the meeting (see attached) and read by Sandra to those present. It was noted that the Team were seeking funding to enhance the seafront.

8. Minehead Development Trust – An Update

Jenny Lennon-Wood had provided a written report which was circulated in advance of the meeting (see attached) and read by Sandra to those present.

9. Police Report

PC Joseph Sanderson had provided a written report which was circulated in advance of the meeting (see attached) and read by Sandra to those present.

10. Highway Matters

There was no highways report as currently very little to report on. However, Terry Venner added that The Avenue would be closed for a short period of time for highway works.

11. Burning Issues

James Guscott spoke to the written report provided by his colleague, Chris Jones. James explained the flooding issues that had occurred in Dunster on 21 November and Sandra, on behalf of the Minehead Area Panel, thanked the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service for all the extraordinary work they had undertaken on that day. The Panel found it hard to believe that some motorists had been less than polite to those who were working hard to re-open the road.

James also referred to the presentation to the initial Minehead town flood wardens meeting at the Beach Hotel where Chris had volunteered the Fire Service to clear out the gullies in Minehead where flooding had occurred in the past. This offer, however, had not been taken up and ironically such an action could have prevented some of the flooding issues on 21 November.

Andy Lewis stated that he had been disappointed with the public response to the meeting and Pete Broom, who had attended the meeting, said that he would have volunteered to become a flood warden, but no-one had posed the question. Andy apologised and would talk to Pete after the meeting.

Christine Lawrence advised that virtually every village had a flood team for evacuation purposes, drain clearing, etc. and in Alcombe the leaves had been cleared on 21 November and the elderly looked after. She felt that it would be best if Minehead was broken down into smaller more manageable areas.

James advised that the Fire Service would be looking at the blackspots in the area for the future.

James also reported that the Minehead fire crew had been involved in the work of the Fire Service to tackle the blaze at the Clarence Hotel in Exeter in early November

2016 and, although the Hotel could not be saved, everyone had been safely evacuated and the Tudor buildings behind the Hotel had been saved.

12. Town Council Update

Sue Sanders had provided a written report which was circulated in advance of the meeting (see attached) and read by Sandra to those present.

13. District Council Update

A written report had been circulated in advance of the meeting (see attached) and Sandra read it out to those present. It was noted that 25 Brunel Way, Minehead, which had been advertised to let was formerly the home of Webberbus.

A resident asked whether the electricity was left turned on in the closed toilets.

ACTION: Sarah to find out for the next meeting.

A resident had noticed that the lower paths of the Zig Zag path had been cleared, but was disappointed to note that the rubbish was being swept onto Quay Street.

Steven Heard expressed his concern with the dog fouling at Culvercliffe. He had reported it many times in an attempt to get something done about the dog fouling, but had received no communication from the District Council. He had been picking it up and putting it in a bin but had received no thanks. His spray painting and unauthorised signs were to draw attention to the issue. Terry advised that he had discussed the situation with Steven and had applied for funding to put an authorised sign up to direct people to put their dog mess into a dog bin rather than leaving in on Culvercliffe or on the beach, etc. The unauthorised signage and spray painting would be cleared away. The lack of a dog warden was unfortunate, but in the present financial climate it was unlikely that the role of dog warden would recommence. CCTV at Culvercliffe was raised as a possible solution by the meeting, but Christine Lawrence explained that this was too expensive. The meeting agreed that there was a need to educate the public to ensure that dog fouling did not continue.

14. County Council Update

Terry Venner spoke to the written report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting (see attached) and advised the meeting of the following:

- A meeting would be held in the near future regarding the siting of the pedestrian crossing proposed for Bircham Road. It was on course to be installed in October 2017.
- The buses must continue to be used otherwise the funding would end. Peter Broom thanked Terry and Cllr Karen Mills for all their hard work in keeping the buses on the streets in Minehead and Porlock.

Christine Lawrence reported that a meeting would be held during the week commencing 12 December at Williton Hospital regarding the potential closure of the 12 stroke beds. The current NHS thinking was that patients recovered more quickly at home, however, ongoing professional support was required and in rural areas this proved to be expensive. South Petherton had a stroke unit that would be funded whether it was full or not, but people from West Somerset could not easily get there. Christine therefore felt that the stroke beds at Williton Hospital needed to be retained.

Terry added that due to staff numbers being down at Minehead hospital five beds were not being used. The issue was not lack of funding – the money was available to increase the number of staff – but retaining staff and finding new people who were interested in working in a small rural community hospital.

The need to keep public toilets open was in Minehead and Alcombe for visitors was then discussed. Christine advised that coin meters were to be installed in the Dunster toilets which would help to make them self-financing.

15. Any Other Business

Sandra asked if anyone would like to take on the role of Chairman of the Minehead Area Panel. This item would be put on the agenda for the March 2017 meeting.

Sandra thanked Sarah for her input into the Panel meetings.

16. Dates & Venues of Future Meetings

Future meetings to be held on:

Wednesday, 8 March 2017 at 6.30pm at St Michael the Archangel Church Hall, Alcombe, Minehead.

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