

## Minehead Area Panel

### Notes of meeting held on 9 December 2015 at The Avenue Methodist Church Hall, Minehead

#### Present:

Sandra Slade (Chair)	Resident
James Barrah	Taunton Deane Borough Council & West Somerset Council
Steve Plenty	Taunton Deane Borough Council & West Somerset Council
Tony Murray	Director, Magna West Somerset
Cllr Mandy Chilcott	West Somerset Council
Cllr Terry Venner	Somerset County Council & West Somerset Council
Cllr Christine Lawrence	Somerset County Council (part of meeting)
David Peake	Somerset County Council Area Highways
Karin Harwood	Somerset County Council Highways
Sue Sanders	Minehead Town Council
Bill Howard	Minehead Old Hospital
Ray Tew	Minehead Development Trust
Bernard Maynard-Smith	Minehead Development Trust
Graham Sizer	Minehead Development Trust
PC Mark Curran	Avon & Somerset Police
Chris Jones	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service
James Guscott	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service
Marcus Kravis	The Arkade
Paul Ramsey-Read	Minehead Town Watch Radio Scheme
David Sanders	Resident
Bridget O'Brien	Resident
David Chase	Resident
Colin Isherwood	Resident
Paul Johnson	Resident
Ray Webster	Resident
Sarah Wilsher	West Somerset Council

#### **1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Sandra Slade welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Anne Clarke ((Manor Road/Staunton Lane Neighbourhood Watch), Cllr Gail Everett (Minehead Town Council), Jenny Lennon-Wood (Minehead Development Trust), John Clyde-Smith, Maureen Smith (Minehead Town Council/Minehead Development Trust/Transition Minehead & Alcombe)

#### **2. Have Your Say – Community Issues/Concerns**

Issues for Have Your Say, were as follows:

(a) *Sandra reported that Catherine Horsfield had asked why people with gardens were given allotments when people who don't have a garden can't get one.*

As Catherine was not present at the meeting it was decided to look at this issue at the next Minehead Area Panel meeting in March.

**ACTION: To raise the issue of how allotments are allocated at the Minehead Area Panel meeting on 9 March 2016.**

- (b) *Bridget O'Brien had asked that the issue of loss of local employment opportunities, particularly for young people, be raised.*

With Bridget's consent it was agreed to look at this issue as a separate agenda item at the next Meeting.

**ACTION: To add the loss of local employment opportunities, particularly for young people, to the agenda for the Minehead Area Panel meeting on 9 March 2016.**

- (c) *John Clyde-Smith had asked that the Panel be made aware of his concerns regarding the state of security in the town for small businesses after his experiences following a break-in at The Beach Hut.*

Before the meeting PC Mark Curran had advised John by email to raise his concerns with the Police Force as this was the most effective way of getting his complaints addressed. The issue was therefore not raised at the meeting.

- (d) *Ray Webster raised his concerns regarding the poor standard of surface dressing on Bratton Straight, how a different method of filling trenches, such as aerated concrete, should be used so that they would be less likely to subside in the future and the layby on Periton Road should be relaid with quality tarmac to prevent constant patching. He felt that quality should be demanded from contractors to save money in the long-term.*

David Peake explained that highways in West Somerset were treated to the same standards as elsewhere in the County. Somerset County Council imposed standards on the contractors that they used, but the contractors who undertook highway work on behalf of the statutory undertakers for utilities worked to different legislation, although both were required to comply with certain specifications and duties as laid down by the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC). Statutory undertakers were asked to return to sites in order to do reinstatement work as required, but they could not use concrete for this as it could cause damage to utility pipes, etc.

Mr Webster referred to a claim made by a pedestrian who had been injured whilst walking in the layby as there was no pavement. The Highways representatives were aware of this incident. David explained that Periton Lane up until the 1970s, when it had been realigned as an A road, had been a country lane. The layby was leftover from this period.

Karin Harwood advised that the budget for highways was £28 million which covered highways, lighting, reinstatement works, etc. across the whole of the Somerset and, as such, work had to be prioritised. Highways took priority over laybys.

Karin gave Ray her business card and invited him to contact her to discuss issues further. She was happy to meet him on site or at the Area Highways Office.

- (f) *David Chase expressed his concerns regarding the congestion of vehicles between 8am and 9am on Townsend Road, particularly between Whitegate Road and Kildare Gardens, where he felt 'no parking' lines were needed and asked if the lines could be extended from the Esso Garage southwards. He wished for measures to take place before anyone got hurt.*

David Peake informed Mr Chase to take his request to Minehead Town Council to see if they wished to promote it to Somerset County Council. He added that there had been no accidents in that area in the last five years.

Terry Venner advised that this issue had been discussed with Highways and Minehead First School. There was no funding at present, but perhaps could be the subject of a Small Improvement Scheme bid in 2016, depending on the budget.

PC Mark Curran explained that the build-up of traffic slowed traffic down so that there was less chance of an accident occurring. A single yellow 'no parking' line alone would not do this, but congestion could.

It was also noted that since Minehead Middle School had changed their front entrance for students, cars were being parked on the zigzags outside the School.

### **3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 September 2015**

The minutes of the meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

#### **Matters Arising**

*Item 2(b) – An issue of concern was raised regarding a turning area in Regents Way being used by residents/visitors to park their cars which meant that the refuse lorry could not turn around but had to reverse down Regents Way. James to contact Veolia/Somerset Waste Partnership to ask them how they manage the risk of reversing the refuse lorry in Regents Way, when they cannot access the turning area. James advised that he had written to Steve Reed, Director of Somerset Waste Partnership, regarding the protocol of reversing down Regents Way and to date no reply had been received.*

*Item 9 – Highways: Carriageway resurfacing at Station Terrace in September 2015. David Sanders thanked Highways for efficiently and effectively carrying out this work.*

### **4. Council Tax and what happens to it – Steve Plenty, Finance Manager for West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council**

Steve explained that Council Tax bands were based on valuation bands from 1992. A review of this banding, which would be the responsibility of the Valuation Office, had been talked about, but as the bands were relative they still worked for Council Tax purposes. The Council Tax Base of £13,414 was calculated by the total number of properties split across the bands, taking into account exemptions and discounts and coming up with a Band D equivalent, then reducing the sum by 1.5% to allow for a 'bad debt provision'.

Based on a Band D property the average Council Tax payment for 2015/16 was just under £1,500. For every Band 'D' property West Somerset Council keep 9 to 10% (£141), Somerset County Council receive 69-70% (£1,027), Somerset & Avon Police receive 11 to 12% (£75) and Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue receive 7 to 8% (£78). The Parish precepts were decided by the Parish/Town Councils and the average payment was £65. If Parish/Town Councils set a precept at or over £2,000 they receive their precept payments in two instalments during the year (April and September). For Parish/Town Councils who set a precept of less than £2,000, they will receive one precept payment in April.

The precept for 2015/16 for Minehead Town Council was just over £335,000 which was an increase of 1.99% on the 2014/15 precept. This meant that for a Band D property approximately £83 went to Minehead Town Council.

Steve then explained how The Police Commissioner, Fire Authority, Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council and Minehead Town Council spent their contribution of the Council Tax. Somerset County Council used it for: care for the elderly and disabled, education, roads, recycling centres and libraries. West Somerset Council used it for: waste collection, kerbside recycling, housing options, parks and open spaces and street cleaning. Minehead Town Council used it for: administration and town hall, cemetery, grounds and open spaces and other services.

West Somerset Council collected Council Tax of just under £1.9 million for 2015/16, the Government grant and business rate retention came to £2.9 million and the Council were using reserves of £150,000. This provided a net budget for the Council of just under £5million. Steve pointed out that a 1% increase in Council Tax would raise £19,000 and add about £1.40 to the average bill.

Finally, Steve provided a summary of how the revenue budget was spent during 2015/16 and the net income received of £0.256 million from services such as car parks, harbours, tourism and economic development.

The meeting noted that rural areas were disadvantaged as the Government grant was based on the size of the population and there was a low population in rural areas, yet geographically the areas were large and time-consuming and expensive to cover, for instance, in terms of waste/recycling, etc., often requiring expensive specialist vehicles to cope with the narrow roads.

Marcus Kravis asked how West Somerset's Council Tax varied from other Local Authorities' in the south-west. Mandy Chilcott replied that it was currently in the middle, but this could change if Council Tax was put up as then it could be compounded year on year.

Karin Harwood pointed out that Somerset County Council had not put up their Council Tax for the past five years.

Ray Tew asked whether the District Council could impose an administrative charge to the other local authorities/organisations for collecting and distributing their division of the Council Tax. Steve responded that WSC could not impose a charge as it was the District Council's role to be the billing authority.

Christine Lawrence reported that Somerset County Council were lobbying Central Government for more funding, as for instance, it cost £5,000 per week to look after children in care.

Terry Venner informed the meeting that from 2017 another organisation would be added to the list of those in receipt of Council Tax – Somerset Rivers Authority. Currently Central Government paid the Somerset Rivers Authority, but the Environment Agency had insufficient funds to continue.

Steve finished by advising that notes of his talk would be distributed with the minutes (please find these attached, together with the Council Tax leaflet for 2015/16).

## **5. The Annual Magna Report – Tony Murray, Director of Magna West Somerset**

Tony spoke to the Annual Magna West Somerset report which had been previously circulated (please find attached). He reported that Magna owned 539 properties in Minehead which equalled about 25% of the properties Magna owned in West Somerset. £3 million would be spent on major repairs and maintenance in the 12 months ending 31 March 2016 including the old inefficient electric storage heaters being replaced with air source heat pumps.

From April 2014 to March 2015 26 properties were let in the Minehead area, but unfortunately supply did not meet demand. The Homefinder Choice Based Letting Scheme was used for the whole of Somerset. There used to be 1400 people registered on the Scheme for West Somerset, but this has now been reduced by about half due to the requirement to live in West Somerset for three years in order to qualify, by reviewing the list of those registered more frequently and by building new affordable properties to house people.

The level of Government grant available for building houses to rent had reduced over the years. Low cost ownership and shared ownership was becoming more fashionable. S106 monies obtained via planning obligations and reserves could be used for building rented properties, but the lack of Government grant was causing Magna concern.

From April 2016 Housing Associations and Councils (social landlords) would have to reduce their rents by 1% each year for every tenant for the next four years. This was social landlords' contribution to reducing the Welfare Bill and was announced in the July 2015 budget by Central Government.

In answer to a query, Tony explained that rents were tied to a formula, set by Central Government, so could not be raised independently by Magna, and after the four years had passed it was not known what the situation would be, particularly as by this time there may be a different Government.

The impact of reduced grants and rents means that Magna could not afford to borrow more money to buy new homes. The last foreseeable new affordable housing scheme was in Ellicombe for nine 1-bed flats to be let at social rent levels in early 2016. Magna would now concentrate on paying off its debts of £52 million.

Tony then explained the background to Magna's existence in West Somerset: Seventeen years ago as a result of West Somerset Council not being able to afford to raise the rents to undertake repairs to its council houses, their tenants moved to a new landlord. Magna paid £24 million to West Somerset Council for its housing stock and £60 million for repairs. Magna was a charitable Housing Association and could raise private finances and collect public money. It was regulated by a Government body, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

Magna had two areas of operation – one was based in Somerset, mid Devon, Bridgwater and Taunton. The second was based in West Dorset, North Dorset, Devon and West Somerset. Magna had over 2,300 properties to maintain.

In answer to a question 'can you buy existing houses?' Tony explained that Magna did so if it was cost-effective to do so. High house prices at the moment tended to prevent this.

Magna had some redundant garage sites which it had been trying to develop for housing, but this was not financially viable so it was working on selling these sites to local people to build houses on. They were redundant garages as residents tended to prefer to park their cars outside their own houses where they could see them. Where there was a demand for garages these were being refurbished.

In order to try and maintain high standards – above the Government's Decent Homes standard – whilst at the same time having to reduce rents by 1% and trying to reduce their debt, 75 properties in mid and north Devon were to be sold to other housing associations to raise money and meet the shortfall. The non-standard construction houses would also be sold as they became empty as they were expensive to repair. They were sold at depressed values but for more than the price of the land. Staffing and the quality of repairs would also be reduced.

Tony advised that 87% of residents were satisfied with the way Magna dealt with repairs and maintenance – this was the same as two years ago.

Tony reported that another new policy introduced by the Government was the 'Pay to Stay' scheme where if a tenant household's income (whether joint or individual was not yet known) was over £30,000 the tenant would be expected to pay a near market rent rather than a social rent to stay in their home. At present Magna did not know their individual tenants' household incomes and awaited further details from the Government on how this would operate.

The Government was introducing a 'Right to Buy' for all Housing Association tenants with a high level of discount. Tony explained that traditionally the protected right to buy was held by those people who were tenants when the Council sold their housing stock. From 1998 when Magna took over the houses new tenants had no right to buy. The new legislation would give all tenants the right to buy. If properties were sold to tenants then Magna (and other housing associations) would be compensated by Central Government so that they could purchase new properties. Magna would be introducing this scheme on a voluntary basis.

Two weeks ago the Government announced a pilot of six housing associations' Right to Buy schemes where 300 homes were to be sold to tenants, eligibility being based on a minimum length of tenancy of ten years.

Tony further added that in the July 2015 budget a freeze on housing benefit and other benefits was introduced for a four year period from April 2016. Also a new household benefit cap of £20,000 per year for working aged families from the current £26,000 pa would be imposed. This would all impact on tenants' ability to pay their rents and could potentially affect Magna's main source of income.

Marcus asked if Magna questioned people as to why they wanted to move between areas. Tony replied that the reasons for transfers were asked and it was common for people to want to move from the villages to the towns, particularly the coastal strip of Minehead and Watchet.

Tony further added that research had been undertaken on the impact of the social welfare reform (2010) on the tenants of 16 housing associations across the country and 200 tenants from deprived areas in the south west had been interviewed. The findings could be found in a report dated June 2014 at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk>

Sandra thanked both Steve and Tony for their very interesting and enlightening talks.

## **6. Minehead Visioning Group – An Update**

Sue Sanders advised that the Group was now called the Coastal Communities Team. A consultant had been commissioned to undertake an economic plan.

## 7. Minehead Development Trust – An Update

In Jenny Lennon-Wood's absence, Ray Tew reported the following:

- The launch meeting of the community campaign on 21 October 2015 at the Beach Hotel had been very successful. The venue had been packed. Other ways of communicating with the public were now being looked into to ensure that everyone knew what was going on.
- Bill Howard explained that the majority of the old hospital would be for public use, with a small amount being for residential. A planning application would be submitted to West Somerset Council imminently and it was hoped to get some parts of the hospital into use by mid-March 2016.

## 8. Police Report

Mark Curran reported that Vehicles were not allowed to park on chevrons and chevrons around all schools were being reviewed. The Police were working with Minehead First School on a campaign to prevent people parking on the chevrons/zig-zags near the School when dropping off and collecting students. Banners, sponsored by Active Signs, would be going up at the School.

It was noted that since the change of entrance at the Middle School crossing Townsend Road safely was becoming more of a concern. The general feeling was that a pedestrian crossing was required. David Peake suggested that this would require a bid to the Small Improvements Scheme but advised that such crossings were very expensive.

The meeting agreed to support Mark Curran and the Police in their efforts regarding School zig-zags and Karin suggested that in this regard the Panel should write to Bev Norman, Manager for Traffic Management at Somerset Council Council, asking for a Traffic Regulation Order to be imposed.

**ACTION: Sandra Slade to write to Bev Norman, Manager for Traffic Management at Somerset County Council, with regard to a Traffic Regulation Order being raised for School zig-zags.**

## 9. Highways Matters

David Peake provided the following report:

### **Completed Highway Works:**

- Footway repairs at Quay West.
- Carriageway resurfacing at Old Farm Close, Station Terrace, Parks Lane and Bampton Street.
- The upgrading of 15 highway drainage gullies at various locations in the Alexandra Road/Queens Road area.

### **Ongoing Highway Works:**

- Construction of new roundabout at Washford Cross, with a temporary road closure of the B3190 north bound. Completion due on 18 December 2015.

### **Future Highway Works:**

- Drainage works on the B3190 Sticklepath in Nettlecombe with a temporary road closure during the day from 22 February to 24 March 2016.
- Drainage works and Carriageway resurfacing on the A39 Minehead Road at Luccombe with a temporary road closure in the evening/at night over two weeks in March 2016.

**Other:**

- Vegetation clearance, drainage survey and ground investigation being undertaken to inform repair works to road damaged by deep-seated landslip on the A39 near Wibble Farm in West Quantoxhead.

**Road Traffic Regulation Order**

Somerset County Council were consulting on proposals to make an Order, which would result in changes to the parking and waiting restrictions in the following locations:

Carhampton: A39

Dulverton: Jury Road, Amory Road, Bank Square, Union Street, Vicarage Hill, Lady Street, The Paddock, Northmoor Road.

Dunster: Church Street, High Street, Park Street, West Close, West Street.

Minehead: Bancks Street, Bernard Crescent, Church Street, Manor Road, Holloway Road, Orchard Road, Paganel Road, Park Terrace, Selbourne Place, Tregonwell Road, Tythings Court.

Watchet: Market Street, Mill Lane.

Williton: Fore Street, Robert Street.

A copy of the draft Regulation Order and associated plans could be examined at 'B' Block Reception, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY or the West Somerset Area Highways Office, Mart Road Industrial Estate, Minehead, TA24 5BJ during normal office hours or online at [www.somerset.gov.uk/TRO](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/TRO)

**10. Burning Issues**

Chris Jones of Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue provided the following report:

**Operational News for Community information**

Since the last Area Panel meeting held in September, Minehead Crews attended 46 operational calls during the last quarter. These included three Road Traffic Collisions, nine property fires, which were accidental or electrical related, one vehicle fire and five special service calls to assist other agencies including a mud rescue. Crews also attended three fires in the open that were unattended or poorly controlled bonfires spreading to other property or land. Crews also attended a number of domestic smoke alarm calls and calls made with good intent that did not require our attendance.

**Community Safety news and activities**

Since the last Area Panel meeting, community safety work was carried out at various events in and around Minehead. These included a bespoke session for West Somerset College Sixth Form students on the importance of wearing seat belts. This was different from traditional approaches with behavioural change techniques used and the emphasis put on positive rather than negative outcomes.

A local Chimney Fire and Carbon Monoxide Campaign for the Winter months was also being run, with the emphasis being on having information available at a variety of key locations, including fuel suppliers at Jewson Ltd and Minehead Service (Esso) Station. The campaign also had the support of a local wood burning stove installer – Ben Bowmans Ltd on Mart Road. These businesses had kindly offered to hold a supply of leaflets on both chimney fire safety and carbon monoxide awareness that



were free for local residents to collect. Information was also available on: [www.dsfire.gov.uk/yoursafety](http://www.dsfire.gov.uk/yoursafety) and the Service's community facebook page Minehead Fire Station.

Fire Safety Officers were also in the process of carrying out random and organised checks on licensed premises and residential care homes across the Minehead area.

Sue Sanders asked about electric blanket testing as the Town Council receive queries regarding this from local residents. Chris advised that electric blanket testing takes place every two years and a slot needed to be booked through the Fire Service. Usually it was held in the Church Hall in Bancks Street.

## **11. Town Council Update**

Sue Sanders reported the following:

- New swings were now up in Irnham Road recreation ground.
- The Town Hall had been purchased by Steve Wells and the appropriate Committee were looking for properties to use as a new Town Hall.

## **12. District Council Update**

James Barrah provided the following report:

### **Minehead Harbour**

- The contract was being finalised for the Harbour Master post and interviews took place last week for the Assistant Harbour Master post.

### **Shingle Accumulation**

- Following representations from users of Minehead Harbour with regards to the shingle bed at the entrance, a meeting was held between operational staff and external advisers, CF Spencer, to discuss an appropriate way forward.
- Works to remove an initial shingle bank had taken place in April 2015 where the shingle was moved further along the foreshore and to an area near the sea defences following discussions with local fishermen and residents.
- The current shingle bank had been dragged along the coast by prevailing weather and tidal conditions and had been deposited at the entrance to the harbour. This accumulation was far larger than previous amounts and, having discussed this with local residents, the last time such an amount was deposited by sea conditions was some 40 years ago.
- The Council had met with a specialist excavation contractor who deals with dredging issues and were currently looking at their available options.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

- All flower beds had been planted with annual bedding.
- Works would start shortly on clearing all the streams (Winter works).
- Work had taken place on clearing sand from the seafront.
- Work would take place over the Winter to make the zigzag area more accessible.
- Britain in Bloom judging for Blenheim Gardens and Parks Walk was to take place in February.

## **Public Conveniences**

- The public conveniences in Blenheim Gardens and below The Arkade on the seafront had now closed for the Winter. Normally the two unisex toilets at The Arkade were left open over the Winter, however, as there were some electrical issues these were also closed for the present.

## **Bins**

- Complaints had been received recently regarding full bins; this was due to staff shortages due to sickness.

## **Community Payback**

- The Community Payback Service Team had painted the seafront 'bombs' in heritage colours.

### **13. County Council Update**

Terry Venner reported that he had recently hand-delivered letters and leaflets regarding the use of A boards to outlets within the town centre (copy attached). There were currently public consultations ongoing relating to public transport in West Somerset and parking permits on the seafront and he urged people to go online with their comments. It was proposed to cut the subsidy provided by Somerset County Council to the bus companies from 50p in the £1 to 25p in the £1.

The application put in to the Small Improvement Scheme for a pelican crossing to go outside West Somerset College on Bircham Road had been awarded and approval from Minehead Town Council and West Somerset Council obtained. A feasibility study including costings, etc. was to be undertaken.

Christine Lawrence reported that in celebration of the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2016, it was hoped that there would be street and park parties, etc. over the weekend of 11 and 12 June 2016.

### **14. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **15. Date & Venue of Future Meetings**

#### **Future meetings to be held on:**

Wednesday, 9 March 2016 at 6.30pm – The Hub, Hopcott Road, Minehead.

Wednesday, 15 June 2016 at 6.30pm – St Michael the Archangel Church Hall, Quarry Close, Alcombe, Minehead

Wednesday, 14 September 2016 at 6.30pm – Venue to be decided.

Wednesday, 7 December 2016 at 6.30pm – Venue to be decided.