

MEETING AW.07:1213
DATE 21:11:12

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of a meeting of the **Area West Committee** held at the Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne on **Wednesday, 21st November 2012.**

(5.30 p.m. – 6. 55 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Cllr. Angie Singleton (in the Chair)

Dave Bulmer	Sue Osborne (from 6.10 p.m.)
John Dyke	Ric Pallister
Jenny Kenton	Ros Roderigo
Paul Maxwell	Andrew Turpin
Nigel Mermagen	Martin Wale

Officers:

Andrew Gillespie	Area Development Manager (West)
Paul Philpott	Community Development Officer
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

(**Note:** Where an executive or key decision is made, a reason will be noted immediately beneath the Committee's resolution.)

Prior to the start of the meeting a minute silence was held as a mark of respect for the former councillor Tony Dowse-Brennan.

74. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17th October 2012, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

75. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Mike Best, Carol Goodall, Brennie Halse, Kim Turner and Linda Vijeh.

76. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

77. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

Mr H N Best representing CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) addressed the Committee with the following question:

Does South Somerset District Council take seriously its Policy EC1, saved from the 2006 Local Plan, which seeks to save best and most versatile agricultural land from development “except where other sustainability considerations outweigh the agricultural land value”?

This question is necessary because at the last Area West meeting on 17th October an application was approved for a solar array on 37 acres of arable land without it being known what the agricultural grading of the land might be. The draft minutes record “The Planning Officer was unable to provide a definitive opinion on the land classification matter as the maps held by the Planning Department were not up to date, however the Council held no evidence to dispute the claimed classification”; doubtless a reference to the previous meeting when the applicant had claimed that a report done in 2002 by Cranfield University showed the land was largely Grade 3b. A copy of that report had been sent to the relevant part of Natural England, which had commented that it was “not suitable for determining the quality of the agricultural land affected by the proposed Solar Array” and this information was available on 17th October. In other words there was good reason to doubt the claimed classification.

A further point is that the Development Management Guidance Note (informal guidance on large-scale solar PV arrays) states at para. 3.2 that “land classified as the best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) should be avoided for PV arrays unless the developer can make an over-riding justification”. No such justification was made.

Clearly the decision made by Area West Committee on 17th October must be accepted. What CPRE seeks is a clear indication of the Council’s policy, which can in the future be taken into account when considering other applications. In its letter to the Spatial Policy Team commenting on Local Plan 2006-2028 CPRE has made clear its regret that no specific policy is proposed for protecting best and most versatile land, because population continues to grow and it is essential to protect good agricultural land in the interests of food security. It is hoped that this issue might be discussed at the Examination in Public.

Mr Best commented that one way of dealing with the issue would be for the applicant to supply convincing evidence of what the land grading may be. He felt that the applicant should pay to have the land properly assessed.

The Chairman responded that a reply would be sent direct to Mr Best.

78. Chairman’s Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

Free Car Parking

Members were informed that there would be free parking in Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster on 15th and 22nd December 2012 and that a press release would be issued in early December.

Planning Site Visit

The Chairman announced that a site visit had been arranged for Thursday 13th December 2012 at 10.00am on site at land adjacent to Minchingtons Close, Norton Sub Hamdon. A planning application for the erection of 10 dwellings on the site was due to be considered at the Area West Committee meeting on 19th December 2012.

79. Area West Committee - Forward Plan (Agenda Item 6)

Reference was made to the agenda report, which informed members of the proposed Area West Committee Forward Plan.

The Area Development Manager (West) reported the following amendments to the Forward Plan:

- The demonstration of the TEN Performance Management System expected at the December meeting would now take place at the January meeting.
- The report on Historic Buildings at Risk expected in January would now be considered at the February meeting.

With reference to the Promoting Community Safety in Area West item due in January, members were informed that by this time the new area Sergeant, Richard Barnett would be in post.

RESOLVED: That the Area West Forward Plan be noted as attached to the agenda subject to the above amendments being taken into account.

(Resolution passed without dissent)

*(Andrew Gillespie, Area Development Manager (West) – 01460 260426)
(andrew.gillespie@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

80. Request for Community Grant (Agenda Item 7)

The Community Development Officer introduced the report, which asked Members to consider an application from West and Middle Chinnock Village Hall Committee for financial assistance towards the replacement of outdated kitchen facilities. He explained that the village hall had an active fundraising committee and had already completed a number of projects including the recent refurbishment of the hall floor and the production of a coloured montage displayed on the stage. Members were shown a number of photographs illustrating the current kitchen facilities, which were very dated, making cleaning to an adequate standard of hygiene for the preparation of food and drink extremely difficult.

Mr Norman Ford, representing West and Middle Chinnock Village Hall Committee addressed the Committee. He informed members that the village hall was regularly used on weekdays and most weekends. He explained the types of events that took place in the hall including tea and cake afternoons, church luncheon club and a family barbeque & treasure hunt. He said that the clubs were struggling with the current kitchen facilities and had to bring food in for a number of events. With improved facilities the hall would be capable of attracting new bookings such as cookery classes for the village school children.

Ward Member, Cllr. Ric Pallister, expressed his full support for the application. He commented that the village lunches were very popular with the older community and could not be provided without proper facilities.

In response to a member question, Norman Ford informed members that a representative from the South Somerset Disability Forum was due to visit the hall at the end of the month and that the Village Hall Committee was keen for the hall to be fully accessible.

Members unanimously supported the Officer's recommendation to award the grant in full.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £4,775 be awarded to West and Middle Chinnock Village Hall Committee towards the replacement of outdated kitchen facilities.

Reason: To determine an application received by the Council for financial assistance.

(Voting: Unanimous)

*(Paul Philpott, Community Development Officer – 01460 260359)
(paul.philpott@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

81. County Highway Report (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman informed members that due to the number of call outs received as a result of the recent bad weather and the current road conditions, the Assistant Highway Service Manager had sent his apologies for the meeting. She asked members to pass any specific questions, comments or complaints to the Area Development Manager (West) who would forward them to the Assistant Highway Service Manager en bloc.

The Area Development Manager (West) referred to the issue of new locations for grit bins as outlined in the agenda report and explained that town and parish councils were required to confirm any new locations for grit bins with the County Highway Authority.

During the ensuing discussion, members highlighted the following issues:

- The increasing problems caused by blocked gullies within the area due to the recent bad weather;
- The need for the County Highway Authority to prioritise maintenance of drainage grips and gullies on main roads and for an audit to be undertaken;
- The possibility of further budget cuts at Somerset County Council to the gully emptying service;
- One member expressed his gratitude to the Streetscene staff at Lufton Depot responsible for dealing with roadside debris clearance;
- The need for appropriate signage to warn drivers of road obstructions due to blocked gullies and flooding;
- It was suggested that the Assistant Highway Service Manager be invited to a meeting of the Area West Committee to make him aware of members' concerns;
- The increasing problem of mud on the road adding to the cause of blocked gullies, as a result of farmers trying to get their farm equipment off the fields in wet weather conditions;
- A suggestion was made to invite Roger Meecham, SSDC's Engineer to a future meeting of the Area West Committee to give a report on Flood Alleviation Schemes in the area;
- A request was made for written correspondence to be sent to Somerset County Council and the local MP outlining the concerns raised by members of the Area West Committee in relation to the increasing problem of blocked gullies.

NOTED.

*(Mike Fear, Assistant Highway Service Manager, South Somerset Highways - 0845 3459155)
(Countyroads-south@somerset.gov.uk)*

82. Area West Development Work Programme Overview 2012-13 (Agenda Item 9)

The Area Development Manager (West) summarised the agenda report and with the aid of photographs and slides presented an overview of projects in the Area Development Work Programme 2012-13. He made particular reference to the following projects:

- Iminster Forum
- Chard Regeneration Scheme
- Chard Town Team
- Parish Plans
- Hinton St George Housing Needs Survey
- Community Grants Programme

The Area Development Manager (West) highlighted that the Area Development Team was able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Every project was always in response to opportunities that could arise at any time, to meet local priorities and needs. The Area Development Team maintain a good working knowledge of local priorities and needs as expressed by local elected members, in community led plans and other proposals. He also stressed the value of investing time and effort at a local level to build greater capacity in the community.

During the ensuing discussion, comments expressed included the following:

- In response to a comment, the Area Development Manager (West) informed members that the District Council was the accountable body responsible for all tranches of Portas Town Centre funding and an audit trail was in place as recommended by guidance produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG);
- Chard Town Team was a newly formed body which had come together at a time of great opportunities. They were in a good position to apply for external grant funding and were also involved in the Community £s project encouraging residents of Chard to sign up and pledge to lose weight and, in turn, raise money for their community;
- In referring to the completion of Housing Needs Surveys, one member commented that the Community Land Trust had some excellent information available to energise and encourage local parishes that could be used by the District Council;
- In response to a question regarding the use of Portas funding, the Area Development Manager (West) indicated that ideas coming forward included upgrading and extending the local markets and improving the visual appearance of empty spaces and shops within the market towns.

In referring to the Area West Community Grant Scheme, Cllr. Sue Osborne informed members that Chaffcombe Village Hall was extremely grateful for their recent award and the newly installed windows and doors had made a significant difference to the village hall.

The Chairman expressed her thanks to the Area Development Manager (West) and his team for all the work undertaken in getting the projects off the ground. The projects had a huge effect on a lot of people within the area and cost very little to get off the ground.

The Committee was content to note the details of the report.

NOTED.

*(Andrew Gillespie, Area Development Manager (West) – 01460 260426)
(andrew.gillespie@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

83. Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th September 2012 (Agenda Item 10)

The Area Development Manager (West) introduced the agenda report, which updated members on the current financial position of the Area West budgets as at the end of September 2012.

The Area Development Manager (West) agreed to provide the Chairman with further information on the remaining spend figure for Chard Cricket Club as outlined in the appendix to the report.

Members were content to approve the recommendation outlined in the report.

RESOLVED: That the current financial position of the Area West Budgets for the period ending 30th September 2012 be noted.

*(Catherine Hood, Corporate Accountant – 01935 462157)
(catherine.hood@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

84. Area West – Reports from Members on Outside Bodies (Agenda Item 11)

Stop Line Way Steering Group

Cllr. Andrew Turpin was pleased to report that the Stop Line Way project was progressing well and thanked the partners involved. He also referred to the economic benefits of the project.

Meeting House Arts Centre, Ilminster

Cllr. Sue Osborne gave an update on the Meeting House Arts Centre, Ilminster. Members were informed about recent and future activities and projects including a successful programme of children's workshop held during the school holidays, redecoration of the building over the Christmas period and improved marketing.

NOTED.

85. Feedback on Planning Applications Referred to the Regulation Committee (Agenda Item 12)

There was no feedback to report as there were no planning applications that had been referred recently by the Committee to the Regulation Committee.

NOTED.

*(David Norris, Development Manager – 01935 462382)
(david.norris@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

86. Planning Appeals (Agenda Item 13)

The Committee noted the details contained in the agenda report, which informed members of planning appeals lodged, dismissed and allowed.

Cllr. Paul Maxwell requested his disappointment over the appeal decision for the provision of an access from the highway for use by agricultural machinery at the field between Greenways and Farmhouse Cottage, Boozer Pit, Merriott to be recorded in the minutes.

NOTED.

*(David Norris, Development Manager – 01935 462382)
(david.norris@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

87. Date and Venue for Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 19th December 2012 at the Shrubbery Hotel, Station Road, Ilminster.

NOTED.

*(Jo Morris, Committee Administrator – 01935 462055)
(jo.morris@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

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Chairman