

Minutes of the Annual East Harptree Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 16th April 2019 at The Theatre.

Present: Members of the Parish Council and five members of the public. The meeting was chaired by Cllr Mike Jennings.

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter King and one other.

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th April 2018 were read by the clerk, agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

The Parish Council report by the Chairman was read out and is attached to these minutes.

Other reports:

The Village Environment group reported on matters concerning a recent survey of swifts in the village and the provision of nest boxes at various locations around the village. It was hoped that nest boxes could be incorporated into new developments.

It was also reported that eleven species of bat have been identified in and around the proposed Water Street development. There was a need to abide by the relevant legislation when carrying out building works. There had been a bat walk around the village and records of bat movements made.

There had also been a survey of wildlife in the village and a record kept, a wildlife map was to be prepared. There had been a good response in the village to getting involved and helping with surveys.

Ash Dieback was occurring in the village and the Parish Council had been involved in locating instances of the disease. It was possible that up to 90% of trees could be affected. There was a discussion about replacing trees around the village. Matter to be considered by the Parish Council.

Works taking place on the River Chew were mentioned and it was noted that the Parish Council Chairman had discussed ways of slowing surface water run off from the Mendips with B&NES.

Councillor Tim Warren gave the following report:

Thank you for inviting me to speak.

We're now coming to the end of this political cycle so, I thought it may be apt to give you a brief reflection of the last four years in Banes.

It's not been the easiest run financially in local government - in fact we've had to make unprecedented savings. This on top of the recurring £1.7m recurring gap that was left by the previous administration.

In total we have had cuts or added pressures of £50m.

Some of this through reduced funding, some inflation and a large increase in adults and children's care. People are living longer although not necessarily better and with the improvements in medicine, children are now living with conditions that in the past, they may not have done.

Our mantra is to look after the most vulnerable first, so we've had to make some unpopular decisions. I came in for some flak for cutting the arts budget, however given the choice between that or someone's care package - the arts budget goes.

We've been able to make these savings by being prudent with your money. We've made considerable staff redundancies, we've changed ways of providing services - for instance libraries. By supporting community libraries we have actually increased the amount of libraries and when completed these changes will make an annual saving of around £800k per annum.

We've changed the waste services which is going well. We've saved a considerable amount of money and increased recycling hugely.

We've formed an arms length property company which is bringing unused buildings ie space above shops back to life for much needed homes. We also have a development arm, the largest site at present being Riverside in Keynsham.

So you can see that despite having to make these huge savings it's not all bad news and the council is still making strides forward.

Some of the good news

88% of Banes schools are now good or outstanding, compared to 79% in 2014.

The best amongst our neighbouring authorities. 2nd in the entire South West.

Our Children's services are top in the Southwest.

Equalities and inclusion - may not seem important to everyone, that's unless you are one of the people being victimised - then it is.. We were rated the number one authority in the country.

Although fly tipping has dropped by 40%, there is still a problem with littering. To help try and extinguish this, we have employed a private company - at no cost to us. This has been controversial with other parties as they will be levying fines of £150 to people caught blatantly littering. We have been accused of targeting the less well off, which I think is an injustice to them, as it implies if you are less well off you are more likely to litter, which I think absolute rubbish. It's quite simple, don't litter and you won't be fined.

There's plenty more to tell, but I have limited time so I will finish on one more controversial item.

I was at the forefront of setting up the West of England combined authority. The Government made it clear at the time that any major capital funding would come through combined authorities. They have been true to their word and money is now coming through.

You will have received leaflets telling you that the Metro Mayor costs £2m a year. Not true that his office costs £1.2m per year, any more is funding made up for specific projects. £1.2m is still not an insignificant amount, but when you look at what we are getting back, no one in their right mind cannot think it a good move.

We have received around £60m in funding towards the Bath quays and Somerset valley enterprise areas. These will produce thousands of highly paid local jobs. Without WECA - it doesn't happen.

Add to this a housing fund, traffic improvements (locally - two headed man and garage at Marksbury) skills funding to ready people for jobs that are needed.

We had the best per capita deal in the country, and as I said before, to dismiss this funding would have been totally negligent.

Finally to finish, I'd like to thank you all for your support over the last four years, and more so for all of the hours of unpaid selfless work that you have put in for the community.

Other Business:

Cllr Pam Carver reported on the Parish Liaison meeting and advised that a record number of affordable homes, about 1200, had been built in the last year both for social rent and shared ownership.

The format of the Annual Parish Meeting for 2020 was discussed and a suggestion to move away from the current format to a “brunch” style of meeting made. Parish Council to consider the matter before the next annual meeting.

There were no other public comments and the meeting closed at 8pm.

Signed 4th April 2020