

RATTERY PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
Held Tuesday 12th April 2011 @ Rattery Village Hall 7.45pm

Present - Cllr P Smerdon (Chairman), Cllr Mrs B Palk (Vice-Chair), Cllr J Hampton, Cllr A Coker
Cllr S Levy, D Cllr C Jones, C Cllr T Pennington.

Attended by – 8 members of the Public & WPC Jacqui Hopper & PCSO Chris Pooley, Richard Sheard – Chief Executive – SHDC & West Devon District Council.

Apologies for absence – Cllr B Evans, Cllr M Daymond, Sharon Raggett (Clerk).

- 1) Guest Speaker, Mr Richard Sheard, Chief Executive of SHDC & West Devon Council
Richard joined Local Government in 1971 and has worked with it for all but 5yrs when he moved to Regional Office, before that was discontinued.
He has worked with different councils , some being weaker than others, and considers both SHDC and West Devon Council, being two of the strongest, financially.
Finances – Gross expenditure is £49 million. Net amount has been reduced from £12million to £11.1m. There will be 28% cut in 4yrs, with 15% of that in first 12 months and 12% in following year. Hopefully we shall not see much difference as £1.6m saved by shared council staff, as less managers etc.
Localism – 192 page Bill going through Parliament at this moment, with 140 areas where ministers can intervene and work more with local people and parish councils. Aims to help in areas where needed without incurring too much cost.

- 2) Questions from Public and Councillors present.

Cllr Palk mentioned red tape hindering plans to do things, snow patrol being one of them. Richard responded by saying that a balance needs to be made on both sides and to let him know if Councils are being too “negative”. Funding for “Villages in Action” continues for this year along with “Citizen’s Advice Bureau”, which is especially needed in these tough times.

Charging of rubbish at a recycling centre, where previously free, was mentioned.

County has £55million cuts to make so one way of doing this would be to cut grass verges 4 times instead of 6 per year. Perhaps local farm contractors could use their equipment to do this in off season instead of Council owning machinery.

Richard Sheard was then thanked by the Chairman – Cllr P Smerdon for attending the meeting.

- 3) Chairmans Report – Cllr P Smerdon – It has been a fairly quiet year in the Village , no public enquiries and no contentious planning applications.

The “Unitary System” finally done away with. The main talking point has been the severe weather experienced before and over the Christmas period. The roads were horrendous and we must thank our newly elected “Snow man”, Neil Coaker for his hard work spreading salt. In order to be better prepared, we have bought 4 more salt bins to put around the village. In May 2010, about 40 people took part in “Beating the Bounds”, in good weather conditions. I would like to thank Barbara Palk for providing refreshments and the landowners for allowing us to walk on their land. The village hall has had its photo voltaic panels fitted and is now contributing a significant amount of green energy to the village. The Post Office held there every Tuesday is proving increasingly popular, with regular attendance from the Police, who are keen to talk to parishioners about any issues that concern them. There is also a mouth watering selection of bread, cakes and vegetables for people to buy. As usual I would like to thank the members of the council for their hard work throughout the year. I would like to thank our Clerk, Sharon Raggett for all the things she does on our behalf. Sharon does a lot behind the scenes to keep this council (and others) running smoothly, she always has things done on time and we are very fortunate to have such an efficient clerk. I would also like to thank our County Councillor, Trevor Pennington and District Councillor, Colin Jones for their attendance and support through the last year.

At end of report, member of public, Ms M Bishop thanked Peter Smerdon and Neil Coaker for their efficiency for clearing the roads during extreme winter weather conditions, enabling Rattery people to continue to go about their business.

- 4) County Cllrs Report – C Cllr T Pennington – I serve on the Children and Young persons Scrutiny Committee, School Transport Appeals Committee, County Audit Committee, Policy and Resources Committee and the South Hams Highways and Transport Committee (HATOC). Also represent DCC on the South Devon Healthcare Trust. DCC is undergoing severe financial pressures due to the current national economic situation and has had to make savings in expenditure of over £55 million on the budget for 2011/2012. This equals an 11% reduction for 2011/2012 and there will be a 28% reduction over the next 4 years to equal £130 million. All government grants have been reduced by £40 million a 7% reduction. It has resulted in reductions in a number of services such as subsidised rural bus services a reduction of £1 ½ million from £7 million on 2010/2011, reductions in highway expenditure on road improvements, reductions in the capital programme of £250 million, now £520 million from £770 million in 2010/2011. This will affect new school buildings and highway improvement schemes. There is a shortfall of £5 million on concessionary Bus Fares – Government Grant £7 million but total cost £12 million. Better news – DCC has frozen their portion of the Council Tax this year a Band D property will remain at £1,116. In return the Government has given a grant of £8 ½ million. Also from April the members locality grant will increase from £10,000 to £15,000 for schemes in villages and towns and a further £25,000 will be available to each member of capital schemes in their wards.

5) District Cllrs Report – D Cllr C Jones –

2010/11 has been another busy year for SHDC – just like the last two or three ! And a year of change too I serve on Full Council, Licensing Committee (not just about pubs, but alcohol is involved in many applications), Environment Policy Group.

1. As well as a new Chairman, John Baverstock, taking over in May, a new ‘Shared Chief Executive (with West Devon Borough Council) arrived in November – Richard Sheard, who replaced the retiring David Incoll. Richard was previously Deputy Chief Executive of the Government Office for the South West, but prior to that had served as Chief Executive of Salisbury District Council. His experience is considerable and he has already made his mark

2. Since his arrival, his new Vision for ‘Shared Services and Beyond’ has been agreed. This will consolidate and complete the progress towards shared services with West Devon, and will explore convergence of many areas of work, but will not push for a merger of the two councils. The need is recognised for the Council to work more closely and effectively with parish and town councils, the business sector, and local voluntary and community organisations – and to find ways to encourage ‘the Big Society’ and respond wholeheartedly to the Localism Bill.

3. The financial climate has become much tougher, with the Coalition Government forcing Councils like South Hams to reduce their spending by up to 30% in only 2/3 years. Through shared services and other economies, the Council has managed to balance its budget for 2011/12 without the need for serious cuts in services, but further spending reductions will be needed next year. With this in mind, the Council has now undertaken a radical change in its senior management structure, involving a reduction of 50% in senior managers (Strategic Directors and Heads of Service) this year as the process of sharing services reaches completion. The Chief Executive and the Council’s ruling Executive are confident that this new much slimmer structure will work – others like me just hope they’re right !

4. Not everything in the garden is rosy. Progress on providing more affordable housing has remained slow – and will not be helped by the new government moving the goalposts and greatly reducing public subsidy for affordable housing. But I will continue to push the case for SHDC supporting - financially as well as in principle - the case for small developments of affordable homes where there is demand for them and where suitable sites can be identified

5. My biggest challenge generally as a District Councillor is to get my fellow councillors to recognise the particular needs of small rural parishes such as Rattery. Such areas already suffer disadvantage due to rural isolation, and distances from services such as shops, schools, workplaces, leisure facilities etc as well as from generally less well insulated but more expensive housing etc, and incomes for most locals are lower than in urban areas. SHDC currently allocates far more of its capital and revenue money and its staff resources to the 40% of the District population that live in the four main towns (Totnes, Ivybridge, Kingsbridge and Dartmouth) than on the 60% of the population who live in smaller settlements. This needs to change – and when I saw reference in a recent committee

report to the concept of 'rural-proofing' SHDC policies, I felt that maybe someone had started to listen !

6. There are of course elections again this year – for parish and town councils, and for all 40 seats on SHDC. I have decided to stand for re-election, though I know (as you do) that 'other candidates are available'. However, if I am re-elected, I will continue to work hard to 'put Rattery on the map' and try to get a fair proportion of SHDC's considerable resources directed towards this parish. But if not re-elected, then I wish both my successor and Rattery PC well for the future, and thank you for listening to me over the past 4 years ! I am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve as your District Cllr.

6) Village Hall Report - Mrs R Coaker - (Chairman of RVH Committee).

Rachael reported that the Photo Voltaic Panels on the hall roof were producing enough Green electricity with "Feed in Tariffs" to gain a £6,000 income for the hall She had had sleepless nights when it was thought these tariffs might not happen.

Hiring of the hall continues to rise with even the County Council using facilities.

Tuesday Post Office continues to thrive with 60 pensioners coming now where it used to be 6!

Produce such as cakes, bread, organic vegetables and meat are on sale, with coffee and biscuits at a very cheap price available. The highlight of several peoples week.

Also coming up is a Village Party on Royal Wedding day.

Rachael was thanked for all her continuing hard work by Angela Smerdon (Standing in for parish clerk)

7) Village Green Report – He is standing down from Parish Council at next election but is happy to still cut grass fortnightly on the Green and footpath by Old PO. He will keep equipment locked in his shed until a successor is found.

8) Badminton Club Report – Cllr S Levy - still going could do with some new members.

9) Playing Field Report – Cllr S Levy - Fencing will soon need replacing/repairing. Some painting of the area has been done. See-Saw is ongoing issue.

When asked about grounds maintenance, Mr Richard Sheard replied that local council should continue to keep same standards.

Mrs Rachael Coaker asked if local people would be able to help with building a wall for children to kick a ball against, it was decided to ask permission from Dartington Hall. Maybe County Council could be approached after May 6th 2011 for some funding

10) Annual Report to all Parishioners - now to be distributed May 2011.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.30pm to be followed by a Parish Council meeting.