

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF CHARMOUTH
HELD ON TUESDAY 9 APRIL 2024 AT THE VILLAGE HALL, WESLEY CLOSE

30 electors, 8 Councillors, Dorset Councillor Belinda Bawden, guest speakers were present.

1. The Chair, Cllr Jane Bremner, welcomed Charmouth parishioners to the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting.
2. Apologies were received from Cllr Katie Moore.
3. The Chair explained that the meeting had been advertised in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 using the Statutory Notice.
4. The Minutes of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting had been displayed on the website and were also available around the room. The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.
5. Matters arising from the minutes – Jan Coleman was pleased that the boundary fence between the private car park and the footpath to the bridge had been repaired; Jan asked about the progress on the rockfall signs and Jane confirmed that these are now in the final design stages.
6. Jane Bremner introduced the 8 Councillors present (Jane Bremner, Melanie Harvey, Julie Leah, Andrew Lightfoot, Peter Noel, Sally Roberts, Martin Sayers and Judith Sheppard).
7. Guest Speakers gave presentations:
 - Eden Thomson from the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre spoke about the forthcoming Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme (CTAP) which consists of an amount of money (£3m shared between Charmouth and Swanage) from Defra towards community resilience in view of the 2010 Shoreline Management Plan policy to not provide any further coastal defence for Charmouth after the end of 2025. A combined submission has been made by a collaboration of village groups including the Parish Council and CHCC and a meeting subsequently held with CTAP reps (DC, Dorset Coast Forum, Env Agency and Jacobs (Consultants)). An outline business case will be made by Dorset Council to Defra by this summer with community engagement imminently. The money must be spent by the end of 2027. Questions were received regarding the proposed Beach Access Ramp which was confirmed was one of the options being considered. It was also confirmed that although planning permission is in place for the ramp, which is also currently in the process of being renewed, this isn't something the Parish Council is in a position to progress alone due to the costs involved.
 - Chris Loder MP spoke about his work for the people of Charmouth and his priorities to ensure that West Dorset gets its "fair share". These priorities include healthcare, clean rivers, safety on the highway network.

Questions were received regarding

 - The level of A&E care at Bridport Community Hospital and whether this would be upgraded – Chris Loder confirmed that this isn't an option due to the level of expertise which would be required, but that Dorset County Hospital is undergoing £65m worth of construction work to improved facilities at its emergency department by the end of this year. The issue of lack of transport to Dorchester for weekend appointments was also raised as now being an issue. Chris Loder suggested that the Parish Council take the issue of upgrading the Bridport minor injuries unit to the NHS.
 - Whether the fines from SW Water could be diverted to CTAP – Chris Loder explained that this isn't possible as Charmouth falls within the Wessex Water geographical boundary rather than SW Water.
 - The disarray nationally of Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) and the deficit budgets for local schools – Chris Loder explained what he is doing regarding education and offered to speak directly to Mr Gillan about this separately.
 - The lack of NHS dental care locally – Chris Loder confirmed that he had led a debate in Westminster about this ([link available](#)) due to the massive underspend of the budget in Dorset. He also confirmed that there are plans to have a dental school in Poole to provide "home grown" dentists for Dorset so, is hopeful that improvements are now moving forward. He would also provide a link to a map showing which practices are now taking NHS patients.

- Dr Stan Dolan of the Charmouth Local History Society spoke about the recent Lottery Grant and the Society's growing membership. He talked about the three future ventures of the Society – to develop the website into a virtual museum; Investigation of evidence of a Roman road at Charmouth; Exploration of the “free borough” afforded to Charmouth by the Abbot of Forde and the characteristics of this life that are still completely visible in Charmouth. There were no questions for Dr Dolan.
- Dorset Councillor Belinda Bawden, spoke about excellent cross-party agreement at Dorset Council, eg, the proposal to make the separation of surface water and sewerage a priority; support of the 2nd home surcharge with income being set aside for social housing; support for the abolition of the 2 child benefit cap. Belinda confirmed that the Council tax would increase by the maximum 5% for Dorset Council. Belinda stated that her surgeries in the Library had been well attended and she thanked the Parish Council for its support and stated how blessed Charmouth were. She also praised the local MP for his conscientiousness. With elections looming, many issues were on hold during the pre-election period. It was confirmed that the seat for the Ward of Lyme Regis and Charmouth is contested with 4 people standing for election.
Questions were received about when the additional 100% council tax for second homes would start and how much this would raise. Belinda confirmed that it starts in the 2025/6 financial year and is anticipated to raise £7-9m.
Chris Loder thanked Belinda for being such a diligent, hard working local Councillor.

Jane Bremner thanked all the speakers for their informative reports and she thanked Belinda and Chris Loder for their support.

8. Reports from Chairs of Parish Council Committees:

- Foreshore Committee (Judith Sheppard, Chair) – Judith spoke about a busy year at the Foreshore with the car park takings rising which is good for, not only the Council, but the village as a whole and the Heritage Centre. She praised the dedicated team of staff who go “above and beyond” to ensure the foreshore is looking at its best, particularly following the recent storms. Initiatives this year had included a nurdle clean, a survey of the reed bed and improved signage. Judith stated that water quality information is received daily from the Environmental Agency through the season and notices regarding not swimming are displayed accordingly. She reiterated how exciting the CTAP money is and that community engagement will take place shortly for ideas and thoughts on project delivery. Judith commended all Councillors as a great group of dedicated people all working together to keep Charmouth the very special place it is.
Questions were received about the amount of income the Foreshore Car Park generates – it was confirmed that this was just over £100,000 net for 22/23.
- Playing Field, Cemetery and Street Management Committee (Martin Sayers, Vice Chair) – Martin talked about the different areas of responsibility of the Committee:
 - Cemetery: Chapel re-roofing complete; continuation of the ongoing arboricultural assessment; general maintenance;
 - Playing Field: refurbishment of the outdoor gym equipment and climbing frame; replacement of the largest piece of equipment (wooden tower ensemble) with help from a National Lottery grant and the inclusion of an additional basket swing specifically for children with additional needs; tree planting and the inclusion of commemorative plaques;
 - Street Management: further interest in 20mph limits with the introduction of a local Speedwatch group.

The Council was thanked for helping to get the path along Axminster Road to the roundabout tidied up.

- Finance and General Purposes Committee (Peter Noel, Chair) – Peter explained how the budgets are set and administered and how stringently the Council is audited.
- Planning Committee (Andrew Lightfoot, Chair) – Andrew highlighted the following issues:
 - Number of applications and outcomes;
 - Dorset Council slowness and lack of communication regarding decisions;
 - Revision of Local Plan;
 - Value of Design and Access Statements in summarising rationale of applications;
 - Future plans – relaxation of some planning rules but tightening of others – Biodiversity Net Gain;
 - Importance of tree protection and the increased role of Tree Warden.

Questions were received about the relationship between the Parish Council and Dorset Council with regard to planning.

9. Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan performance – Andrew Lightfoot spoke about how helpful the Neighbourhood Plan is with regard to making the Committees job easier when formulating comments as it is able to refer to the policies. The Plan itself is well structured and is also referred to by Dorset Council.
10. South West in Bloom update – Jane Bremner confirmed that Charmouth would be entered in the South West in Bloom competition again this year for the third time, with businesses being encouraged to take part as well as smaller areas of the community in the “It’s Your Neighbourhood” section. Charmouth Library and St Andrew’s House Residents were awarded certificates in this category for 2023. Judging will once again take place in July.
11. Report from the Chair of the Parish Council – Jane Bremner spoke about:
 - The Council’s website and directed parishioners to look at the huge amount of information held there;
 - The forthcoming elections that we now know won’t be contested in Charmouth, with 9 nominations for 11 seats – 8 existing Councillors are re-standing together with Matt Smith who lives and has a business in the village. Andrew Lightfoot is the only existing Councillor not re-standing and Jane thanked him for his contribution over the last few years, particularly with regard to planning expertise, and hoped he would continue with the Environment WG;
 - How lucky Charmouth is to have such a thriving community with many organisations run by volunteers, all of which make Charmouth the wonderful place it is.
12. Q&A Session – for residents to address the meeting in respect of any matter relevant to the Parish as a whole
 - Q. What the annual Parish Council income is – it was confirmed that this was circa £300,000 for 2022/23.
 - Q. Belinda asked if the Council had received many complaints about the DC Car Park charges – it was confirmed that no official complaints had been received at the office.
 - Q. Whether the Council had any plans for youth representation/cultural diversity moving forward – there doesn’t seem to be anyone currently but ideas of how to create interest would be very welcome.
13. Jane Bremner thanked everyone for coming and mentioned the following up and coming events:
 - A meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioners in the village hall this coming Thursday 11 April;
 - Tree planting at the Foreshore on Saturday 13 April at 10am – everybody welcome.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm. Coffee was served.