

Sydenham Damerel Annual Parish Meeting
Thursday 30th May 2024
7pm in St Mary's Sydenham Damerel

Agenda:

1. *Election of Chairperson.*
2. *Minutes of last year's meeting.*
3. *Update on the progress of the Governance Review.*
4. *Parish Assets – making best use of parish funds.*
 - a. *Defibrillators, maintenance, and addition units.*
5. *Communication – using email to notify of Parish Affairs.*
6. *Use of St Mary's for the Community.*
7. *Update from WDBC Cllr Jory.*
 - a. *Lamerton Planning.*
 - b. *Milton Abbot Village Hall.*
 - c. *Potholes – reporting.*
8. *Any Other Business.*

Minutes

Attendees: West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) Cllr Neil Jory and 20 parishioners. No apologies were received.

1. Election of Chairperson

Neil Jory, as WDBC member for Milton Ford Ward and de-facto chair of the Sydenham Damerel Parish Council (SDPC) took the chair.

2. Minutes of last year's meeting

The minutes of the previous parish meeting held on Thursday 20 March 2023 are posted on the SDPC website. It was agreed that these minutes would be taken as read and approved.

3. Update on the progress of the Governance Review

The Chair advised that, following due process, the transition from a parish council to a parish meeting had been considered and approved by WDBC. This approval is final.

The last election for SDPC was due in May 2023 but no candidates came forward. A subsequent special notice was posted asking for candidates to step forward, but this also resulted in no candidates. As a result, and pending the establishment of the Parish Meeting, WDBC has appointed Cllr. Jory as chairman together with Cllr. Chris Edmonds WDBC, member for Tamarside Ward and Cllr. Lois Samuel the Devon County, member for Okehampton Rural ward as an interim parish council.

The normal process for transition from a parish council to a parish meeting requires transition to take place at the end of the present term of the council in May 2027. However, in view of the lack of candidates in the parish, the interim SDPC is endeavouring to expedite the process. This may need special approval from the Secretary of State, but this would probably be a simple formality.

Other possible options for the period to May 2027 would be for the interim SDPC to co-opt members or to establish some form of hybrid arrangement. Neither alternative is preferred

by the interim SDPC and the target is to expedite the transition through WDBC's legal advisers.

The Chair will report further on progress in due course.

Action: Neil Jory

Questions

- Q. Mike Forster asked if changes to SDPC bank signatories were being organised. There are several charges such as insurance, Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) membership, website fees and defibrillator maintenance which will become due.
- A. The Chair advised that the matter is in hand and some bills are paid by direct debit. The website fee had been paid. The Chair will investigate progress on the change of bank signatories and report back as soon as possible.

Action: Neil Jory

4. Parish Assets – making best use of parish funds:

The Chair advised that SDPC has circa £5,500 in its bank account and this would increase with payment of this year's precept of £600 (paid in two tranches of £300 of which the first has already been received). The 2024 precept agreed by SDPC has been set simply for 'holding the fort' pending the transition to a parish meeting. (Note: in previous years the major element of the precept has been the salary of a parish clerk which is not required for a parish meeting).

The Chair asked parishioners to put forward ideas for how the financial reserve might be spent.

Action: All parishioners

- a. Defibrillators, maintenance, and addition units

Mike Forster advised that he has taken responsibility for maintenance of defibs and the next, for the unit by the 'phone box in Sydenham Damerel, is due on 19 August. This will require new pads and a battery pack. It was agreed that this work should go ahead, and the costs charged to SDPC. The Chair advised that he was not aware of any separate WDBC budget for consolidating defib maintenance costs, and it should be handled at SDPC level.

The Chair and Mike Forster will liaise on defib maintenance.

Action: Neil Jory and Mike Forster

Also on the subject of defibs, it was mentioned that prior to the demise of the old SDPC, there were plans under consideration for the location of a new defib at Townlake. A suitable site and a power source had been identified. This matter is likely to be an important topic for the new parish meeting to address.

- Q. Barry Isaacs asked if there was a limited range of items on which a parish meeting could spend its money.
- A. The Chair advised that there is such a list and that a parish meeting can do many of the things that a parish council can do. He would investigate and provide an answer.

Action: Neil Jory

- Q. A parishioner stated that a parish council requires four meetings each year.
- A. The Chair advised that he was waiting for the outcome from the annual parish meeting before setting the schedule for the coming year

Action: Neil Jory

- Q. John Hearn advised that the SDPC noticeboard at Horsebridge was leaning and needed urgent repair. Other comments were made by parishioners about the difficulty of accessing the board. There was a general discussion on whether the notice board (which cost SDPC more than £1,000) was required. See notes on Agenda item 5 Communication.
- A. The Chair said he would investigate the noticeboard and it would be addressed at the next SDPC meeting. Neil Martin from Horsebridge kindly offered to make the required repairs.

Action: Neil Jory and Neil Martin

- Q. Neil Martin advised that the public footpath from Townlake down to Horsebridge was in a terrible state, overgrown and flooded and requires urgent attention.
- A. The Chair said he would investigate the problem and explore solutions at the next SDPC meeting.

Action: Cllr. Jory

- Q. A parishioner asked who is responsible for maintenance of the telephone box in Sydenham Damerel.
- A. John Hearn advised that this is the responsibility of BT and that they had previously been very responsive and efficient in effecting repairs within a few weeks of being notified.

5. Communication – using email to notify of Parish Affairs

John Hearn advised that, to date, notification of upcoming formal SDPC meetings, the Annual Parish Meeting and other events was by a combination of the SD Community e-mail list (roughly 50% of the parish with some outside the boundary) and a leaflet drop. Leaflet drops are time consuming and environmentally unfriendly, and the small group of volunteers are reluctant to continue. The only legal obligation for SDPC or SD parish meeting is to put a notice on the notice boards. The parish meeting has no legal obligation to have a website.

After general discussion, it was concluded that the e-mail distribution was the best solution and leaflet drops should cease. The notice boards would continue to be used as legally obligatory. The parish would be advised of this decision and strongly encouraged to subscribe to the e-mail list in one final leaflet drop. (*Post Meeting Note: reasonable endeavours should be made to ensure the very small number of parishioners not having e-mails receive such notifications*)

John Hearn will draft the final leaflet and coordinate the final leaflet drop.

Action: John Hearn

6. Use of St Mary's for the Community

Mike Forster and John Hearn reported on progress towards modifications required to widen the use of St. Mary's for community events with the overriding principle being that the building's primary purpose must always be as a place for Christian worship and service.

Any substantial changes in the building require approval through the church's equivalent of planning permission known as a 'faculty'. Some of the planned modifications such as removal of pews, new heating and upgrading the electrical supply system require that faculty. Work is underway to make the application. This has involved special 3D modelling of the interior which specialist task has very kindly been done by Viv Williams free of charge.

It is anticipated that the overall cost of the planned changes to the building including purchase of new seats, heater and tables will be around £20,000 and this will require a special fund-raising effort.

In the meantime, some initial investments have already been made in items which do not require the faculty. These comprise the purchase of 8 folding tables and a modern infra-red heater.

Gail Cullen stated that at the Friends of St. Mary's meeting some concerns had been expressed regarding the maintenance of the integrity of St. Mary's for its principal purpose. It was agreed that these concerns would be recognised in any of the proposed changes and consultation and an acceptable balance would be maintained throughout.

7. Update from WDBC Cllr Jory

a. Lamerton Planning

This referred to the Greenhill site at Lamerton where it appears that controversy has continued for a considerable time. In brief summary:

- Lamerton has been designated as a 'thriving village'
- Concerns centre on the mix of 60% 'affordable' and 40% other / commercial housing. Apparently, the developer had used some 'self-build' plots below market price to try to circumvent the 'affordable' conditions.
- Planning has been granted for 10 homes and outline permission for a further 19.

A similar type of development is most unlikely to occur in Sydenham Damerel as the village has been designated unsuitable for development.

b. Milton Abbot Village Hall

The hall was closed owing to a serious dry rot outbreak. Rectification is likely to cost in excess of £100,000 and fundraising / grants will be necessary.

A new committee has been appointed.

Ownership of the plot and buildings, donated by the Bedford estate to the village, is complex.

Limited reopening of part of the building has been achieved and the new committee is making progress, but it is likely to be many months before the work can be completed and reopening is possible

c. Potholes – reporting

The chair advised that all potholes should be reported on the DCC app.

Two key problem areas on important routes are identified in the parish:

- The Lane End Farm entrance
- The Horsebridge up to Townlake via Lamerhooe road

The chair will endeavour to add some weight to expedite the rectification of these two.

Action: Neil Jory

8. Any Other Business

- Neil Martin expressed concern over damage to Horsebridge caused by vehicles / tractors. Speeding is one cause. The meeting noted the issue, and a watching brief is necessary, but no specific action was placed at this point.

- Peter Hurdwell advised that the long-running campaign to complete broadband infrastructure for the whole parish was still not achieved as Lamerhooe remained unconnected. WDBC and Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) had pledged funding of £25k which would be sufficient to achieve this final connection, but Openreach are unable to accept funding except from Building Digital UK (BDUK) or from private individuals apparently owing to state aid and government procurement rules. This situation is invidious when the duplication of network coverage in Townlake and (probably) Collacombe funded by CDS using public funding is taken into consideration. The problem was created / exacerbated owing to CDS ignoring all communications from the SD Community Fibre Partnership during 2020 and 21. All attempts to get BDUK and the National Audit Office to intervene have also failed to date for unknown reasons. The apparent secrecy of these public bodies is, in Peter Hurdwell's view, completely unacceptable.

Two key questions require answers:

- Why is funding from WDBC / CDS deemed state aid and unacceptable to Openreach?
- Why have the nine or more new poles erected by CDS for Airband at Collacombe been installed more than nine months ago and remain unused? Do they duplicate the Openreach network and if so, why is that duplication allowed under public funding?

The Chair agreed to raise these issues with the funding bodies of CDS, Somerset and Devon County Council.

Action: Neil Jory

- Peter Hurdwell advised that the anti-litter campaign in the parish appeared to be working well thanks to the support of a team of 28 volunteer Community Litter Wardens in a parish of only around 110 properties. The contrast with other areas of West Devon was very noticeable. Litter picking should not be necessary as dropping litter is a crime and those that do it are criminals, but our parish leads the fight to keep the lanes clear and we are most grateful for the exceptional engagement of our parishioners.

The meeting closed at 20.05