

Parish Network Steering Group

MINUTES BHPN STEERING GROUP

Thursday August 13th 2020 via Zoom

Attendance:

Heather Stallard	Chair, Hemyock parish rep	Mike Canham	Otterford PC
Catherine Bass	Co-ordinator	Alison Weekes	Clayhidon PC
Roger Habgood	Cllr Monument, SW&TD	Alex Stevens	Upottery PC
Graham Long	Upottery PC	Apologies	
Daniel Lazar	Membury PC	Bob Nelson	Broadhembury PC
Ken Pearson	Clerk to Stockland PC		

1. **Apologies:** Apologies from BN. RH joined during item 5. AS remained in the meeting until item 6
2. **Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**
 Minutes of meeting Feb 2 2020 were approved
Matters arising: to complete from previous minutes
 - a. Case studies to be received from
 - **MC** - Yarcombe estate study (Devon/Somerset county boundary issue) *Post meeting: now received.*
 - **HS** - Community housing funding study
 - **BN** - Broadhembury installation of e-car charger points at the Memorial Hall **MC/HS/BN**
 - b. AONB management group reps (MC, GL & BN) have all agreed to continue until the next round of elections. Post meeting addendum: the next round of elections will be held before the next local govt elections in 2024. AONB will circulate nomination forms in December 2023 in order that partner groups have elected their reps prior to May 2024).
3. **Minutes of General meeting February 27 2020**
 Minutes were approved, all agreed that the presentation from Giles Perkins of WSP was most stimulating.
4. **Finances**
 Current balance £1437.72
 - a. Accounts for 2019-2020 were previously circulated.
 - b. Parish subscriptions are fewer than last year, Pitminster not renewing, Upottery still to contribute, no indication from Buckland St Mary.
5. **Reports**
 - a. Parish activity in lockdown.
 Covid pandemic halted all activity in March. Many PCs have taken to online meetings on a variety of platforms, some have relied on email and phone
 General impression is that online meetings have been largely efficient, there may well be a call to continue this mode of operation beyond the May 2021 deadline. MDDC has applied to the Govt to extend the facility indefinitely. **AW** reported that some important decisions had happened outside meetings without due process. **KP** noted that executive decisions cannot be made without the involvement of three councillors, otherwise powers must be delegated to the clerk. **HS** noted that the situation has highlighted the importance of good broadband connectivity, although the importance of personal interactions and ideas generation must not be forgotten. **MC** commented that there had been very little public interest in the online PC presence in Otterford. **GL** noted that Broadhembury has streamed meetings on YouTube.
 - b. Rural Strategy.
 - i. Somerset & Devon climate emergency responses.
 Letter from DCC to Govt was seen as a grandstanding exercise, contained nothing new. Agreed that the Climate subgroup should meet again to come up with some suggestions to share with parishes **DL DL**

organise with a view to pushing harder on the broadband issue; extremely important for the survival and success of SMEs, UK has a higher ratio of SMEs than the EU and the Govt call to return to the office may well not be answered. **GL** noted that the U of Exeter parish carbon footprint calculator is due to be available soon and we should reiterate the offer to use the AONB as a test for larger areas. **RH** suggested that the capacity to work in rural areas could be improved by set up of micro work units. **KP** alerted group to a fund being made available in Somerset for climate change projects, but very few guidelines or application details. Clerks to receive info packs. Requires 50% match funding. *Post meeting update: this fund will now be launched on October 1st*

c. Planning

i. Outcomes of significant applications: Culmstock has successfully supported the refusal of an application for 140 houses (effective doubling of the number of village dwellings). A second application substantially outside the planning envelope is still with the planning dept at MDDC. Clayhidon has had a development plan approved on delegated powers for a large build on a newly available estate. Blackborough House outcome to be announced (*since published, not approved*)

ii New Govt Planning announcements: **KP** considers that AONBs and NPs may be marginally affected.. Developers will not have to supply affordable housing and S106 funding will no longer be required for rural areas. Design statements will need to be strengthened. The CPRE is not wholly in favour of the plan. Great deal of concern regarding CIL , general view that this is a backward step. There will be a need for very strong local plans with future proofing core to new development plans. Agreed to ask Lisa Turner to share her views for the AONB and surrounding villages. Must not appear negative, however the aim is to build housing to high standards and to the benefit of the community. **GL** pointed out that the new plans call for zoning of development potential which could be managed down to a granular scale and be of benefit to the AONB.

CB

d. Traffic/Transport/Highways.

Much discussion regarding traffic volumes during and post Covid lock down. The marked increase in staycation traffic to the SW has brought much congestion in villages either side of the A30 in the AONB for a variety of reasons, some traffic police related, some due to satnav anticipation of congestion leading to traffic heading off main roads well in advance of any hold up. It is important to support measures to maintain lower traffic volumes and improve public transport.

Doing what Matters initiative from Devon Highways aims to identify and prioritise all roads in parishes for maintenance work. Some parishes have reported back and maintenance teams have undertaken some repair work. Funding has been reduced, not always possible for parish lengthsman to achieve what is needed.

e. Communications

Steering Group open letter to DCMS in April was followed up by news items and interviews in May on BBC SouthWest. There was a reply from the dept in June. Currently CDS has narrowed the field of tendering companies to 6, bidding for 9 lots. The outcome is due in December. CDS have commissioned a commercial risk management agency to advise on risk mitigation for contract awards. Minister Warman and Justin Leese are promoting the BT voucher scheme as a way to obtain higher speed broad band in awkward areas, despite having £38m available to supply it without consumer cost.

f. Environment Land Management Scheme

This is being rolled out as the replacement for the current Rural Payments Scheme, to encourage better land use at whatever scale, rather than funding based simply on land area owned. Govt requires land improvement, which in some instances could be managed on a cooperative basis which is not a usual

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way of working for UK farmers. **AS** reported that the NFU is preparing a draft response to the proposed Govt ELMS which he shared and is happy to discuss with the Steering Group. AONB is running three projects with landowners on Bolham, Yarty and Otter catchments designed to reduce nitrate runoff and improve water quality. Do landowners see ELMS as a viable alternative to RPA? Discuss with AS at a future meeting.

6. AOB Proposal for Unitary Status for Somerset.

Councillors in the 4 districts have been briefed. There are currently 2 Unitary proposals on the table, one county wide, the other dividing west from east Soms. The outcome if agreed will result in more devolved responsibility for Parish Councils. This has previously led to issues of funding for the lowest tier; eg support for existing infrastructure is left out of the funding equation for parish councils. Could require development of strong networks among parishes to ensure continuity of provision, however insufficient democratic responsibility is offered to the lower tiers. **RH** is of the opinion that the status quo, with four district councils will not remain, **MC** has experience of working in both systems, and suggested that 2 tier is very complex.

7. Date of future meetings:

- a. BHPN AGM
 - i. HS suggested a very short official Zoom meeting without a speaker. Date tba
- b. Next meeting with MPs will be via Zoom
 - i. Items for discussion from this meeting , other topics tba from steering group members.
 - ii. BN had indicated prior to this meeting that he would be willing to chair the MP meeting as per 2019, offer gratefully accepted.
- c. Next Steering Group mtg date TBA
- d. CB to check availabilities for all above

The meeting closed at 11 45