

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY OF WEST DEAN
HELD AT THE WEST DEAN CENTRE
WEDNESDAY 11th May 2022 AT 7.00pm**

PRESENT

Parish Cllrs: S Crick (Chair), A Moore, B Gayler, P Dunford, B Evans, J Richmond, M Costley, S Yeates, A Bruce, J Dale, and F McGuinness

Panel Speakers: B Hoyland (County Cllr) and T Sagar (Forestry England) 3 Parish residents

There were apologies from: Cllrs: A Grant, S Dunford and D Oliver and C Ambury (PCSO)

I INTRODUCTIONS: The Chairman welcomed Cllrs, guest speakers and public to the meeting.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST ASSEMBLY Approved

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MMEETING No matters arising.

4.1 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: Received.

He welcomed Cllr F McGuinness to his first meeting after being co-opted onto the Council in April 2022.

He talked about the difficulties and challenges of the last year including the ongoing Covid Crisis, Staffing and Cllr Changes.

He went on to say that it is important that we celebrate all the achievements made in the past year. He was impressed by all the hard work done by all committees of the Council, including Governance, Highways and Footpaths, Planning, Climate and Biodiversity and the West Dean Management Committee all of whom have done a tremendous amount.

He gave a vote of thanks for the Clerk who has in the last year undertaken at least 2 jobs at the same time as training. He then welcomed the new Deputy Clerk who joined the Council in January 2022.

He then said the biggest thanks should be given to the Cllrs who are unpaid volunteers on behalf of the Communities in their represented Wards and he thanked all Cllrs on their behalf.

He felt that we had reached an Invictus Point, knowing that the coming year is going to continue to be challenging for areas of the Community and we as a Parish Council should work together, with a common vision, to ensure that West Dean remains a wonderful place to live, work and thrive.

Cllr Bruce suggested all in attendance should introduce themselves, all Cllrs did so, stating which Ward they represented, T Sagar (Forestry England), B Hoyland (County Cllr) both clerks introduced themselves along with E Highfield and Mr and Mrs Taylor (members of the public).

The Chair then asked for thanks to be given to those employees and Cllr's who have left in the past year, these include:

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D Kent

C Hooper

P Sims

A Summers and

B Garside

He finished by asking that anyone with ideas for projects that they would like West Dean Parish to work with them on please get in touch.

4.2 PARISH COMMITTEE CHAIRS – WRITTEN REPORT – Received

The chair asked if there were any comments on this report: -

Cllr Dale stated she had done a longer report on the Climate and Biodiversity Committee, which had been condensed, she requested that as this Committee was a recent addition to West Dean Parish Council the full report be put onto the Parish Website.

It was also noted that the Police Report was very Bream centric, Cllr Costley echoed this. It was asked that we contact the Police to see if there was any other information about the wider issues across the Parish.

Cllr Gayler gave further details with regard to the works by West Dean Centre Committee which included: -

A hearing loop in the Main Hall

Solar Panels for the roof of the Centre

Ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the West Dean Centre

And an increase in the height of the gutter entrance due to illegal access being made to the roof.

He also asked that if anyone had any thoughts regarding improvements to please contact him.

Cllr P Dunford referred to the Dean Forest Greenway and all the hard work the steering group had put in over the past year to get planning for this across the line. Cllr Moore endorsed this.

Cllr Bruce commented that everyone had worked together to ensure Policies were up to date but commented that the work done by Cllr Francis was very important. Cllr Bruce asked if an apology had been received from Cllr Francis for nonattendance (at the time of the meeting Cllr Francis' email sent to the Deputy Clerk had not been seen).

Chair thanked Cllr Grant, in his absence, for all his work both as Vice Chair and Chair of Finance and Staffing.

The Clerk thanked all Cllrs for their support and expertise shown to her since joining the Council.

The Deputy Clerk also thanked all Cllrs for their support and advice since joining the team in January 2022.

4.3 COUNTY CLLR REPORT – Received

Cllr Hoyland stated that she had been on a steep learning curve since becoming a County Cllr in the last 12 months. She has learnt a lot on subjects such as Children's Social Services, Highways and Footpaths law and Public Rights of Ways. She has been amazed by the work people put into improving the area.

She has been responsible for a funding pot which has been used to support those in the district who are trying to support locals, groups such as Cricket, Football and Rugby Clubs, which give access to sports to children. Village Halls and Community Groups trying to support older residents, the funding lasts for 4 years, and Cllr Hoyland stated that all the money has now been ringfenced but not all has been paid out yet, it is grass roots work that can really make a difference.

Cllr Dunford asked what the priorities and challenges would be for the next 12 months?

Cllr Hoyland answered that Children and Family Security was a high priority as she felt that she was a "Corporate Parent" for all children in the County as more and more are coming into the care system. Her focus is to ensure that Gloucestershire County Council continues to improve the early help offered. It is not easy when funding is being cut due to austerity but feels it is important to support community groups offering help.

She mentioned the work done by BREATHE who have mentors for young people and the Dean Forest Greenway project which will make Active Travel accessible for all.

Cllr Dunford mentioned the Cost-of-Living Crisis and how this is putting more stress on families and asked about more funding into early help.

Cllr Hoyland stated that the Social Services Team have a wide knowledge and are committed to their roles, they know life is not easy for young people at this time.

Cllr Crick mentioned several, who are not Cllrs, who have given a lot of support and engage with the community on a regular basis. He then thanked E Highfield for work she has done on the Dean Forest Greenway project and F McGuiness for the work he has done with Foresters Forest.

4.4 DISTRICT CLLR REPORT

Cllr Gwilliam was unable to attend so Cllr Moore was asked by the Chair to speak as a District Cllr at this time.

Cllr Moore said that this was a great parish (best in forest) with a focus on Climate Emergency and not afraid to take on big projects such as Dean Forest Greenway.

Cllr Evans asked if he knew anything about the £150.00 energy rebate that the Government has been advertising on the TV.

In the discussion that followed it was pointed out that those in Council Tax Bands A to D would be those given this rebate, for those who pay by Direct Debit it automatically goes back into the bank, all others who are entitled will be written to.

4.5 FORESTRY ENGLAND REPORT

T Sagar thanked the Deputy Clerk for the invitation to speak, she introduced herself giving her job title as Public Engagement/Community Ranger.

She went on to confirm that there are 3 different harvesting contracts in the Bream Area at this time.

Before continuing T Sagar gave a brief history of the Forestry Commission: -

1803 - Nelson made a whirlwind tour of the Wye Valley and Forest, he was expecting to find more woodland, but the area was barren from the area being used for the coal and steel industry. This is not officially an Ancient Forest.

1808 – Reforestation Act – Edward Machen replanted the area with Larch, Sweet Chestnut, and Oak

1914 – World War 1 – the timber was used for the trenches

1919 – The Forestry Act - introduced to address severe timber shortages following the First World War and increase British woodland cover, which was at an all-time low of 5%. The Act establishes the Forestry Commission to create state owned woods and forests and promote and develop forestry.

1934 – World War 2 – Forestry moved away from broadleaf to Pine for more sustainable wood production to help rebuild at the end of the war.

1960s – Cold War – the forest was split to fast growing conifers.

1970s – Keepers of Time Document – the land was clear felled and if indicators of ancient woodland were found 20% or less conifer was replanted. There was a mix of broadleaf reintroduced.

Present day – Bromley Area (Parkend, Sling and Milkwall) – harvesting works were scheduled for 2018/19 but due to unforeseen circumstances they are still going on.

There are 2 thinning coups in the area, but the contractors were pulled off them to clear fell areas where diseased trees had been identified, this included an area in Yorkley. “Statutory Plant Health Notice” to clear areas means that

because of the limited work force available it has had a knock-on effect with timings, they use 3 local contractors who have had to adjust where they were working due to wildlife constraints as well as storm damage.

They are limited to when they can work due to nesting seasons, flowering seasons, and other wildlife constraints, usually they avoid works from Mid-February to July due to Goshawks nesting in the area.

There is no “Risk Free” time to harvest trees if it is done in bad weather this can hard the soil and throw out the ecology of the woodland. There is an Ecology Survey done before any works are started, smaller birds tend to nest in the scrub, whereas larger raptors nest in the trees. The felling keeps the Eco System healthy, and this can be seen in “State of Nature 2019” documents on human impacts driving sweeping changes in wildlife.

Knox – 2020 – This has still to be done due to contractor availability and the Goshawk breeding, Beat Forestry give their apologies to the residents of Parkhill, Bromley, and Clements End for these delays. Although the Forestry do put signs up, they are often removed by persons unknown.

With all harvesting the contractors do their best to reinstate all the main tracks and paths but cannot put all off shoots back in place, please remember this is a “Working” forest.

1 million trees were harvested and the Forestry plant millions more back, the wood is taken to a local sawmill, Woodgate Sawmill processed 20,000 cubic metres of softwood and 40,000 cubic metres of hardwood. This is a sustainable commodity and responsibly managed and is audited every year. It is Forest Stewardship Council Certified.

Cllr Evans thanked T Sagar for the history lesson but made the point that he was disappointed she had not mentioned another historical local figure. He also asked How many trees had been removed from Clements End as it looked as if the heart had been torn out of the area, T Sagar was unable to give a figure.

Cllr Dale asked how long the land is left after clear felling for indicators of ancient woodland? 6 – 9 months? T Sagar stated that a survey prior to and after clear felling was done and it was normally a season before indicators showed.

Cllr Crick asked if the introduction of the boar had increased the biodiversity? T Sagar answered that it was dependant on numbers. In low numbers they could have an adverse impact on the local ecology but in higher numbers they can be a means of dispersal.

Cllr Dale then asked with all the felling around Bream, how do you decide where? T Sagar answered that the Forest is split into coupes and there they are harvested in a rotational basis, this being 10 years for Hardwood and 5 years for Softwood. Although this area is being done now due to the time delays it may be due to be looked at again soon, however if the ecologist says that it is not ready, they will not harvest.

Cllr Hoyland asked about the prognosis of Phytophthora Ramorum (this affects Oak Ash and Elm) and Phytophthora Pyro (red band needle blight -this has now been detected in the Forest of Dean area and affect conifers).

T Sagar answered that Forest research is being done to mitigate this happening in the future. They are beginning to plant different species of tree to help combat loss due to climate change. They are doing climate change mapping to see which tree species are likely to resistant to the coming changes over the next 100 years, they have for instance started to plant Spanish Oak.

Cllr Richmond commented on a couple of phone apps which have been developed to show areas of interest, one such being one developed by Foresters Forest, and suggested that it would be a good way for Forestry England to get information about the Felling Scheduling out to the public or a page on their website. T Sagar answered that this sort of thing has been discussed before at Forestry England but can be very time consuming will all the changes to the schedule which may arise.

Cllr Crick commented that he does not see Jays in the area as he used to and wondered if this was caused by a change in the biodiversity? T Sagar answered that Jays are normally seen in the Spring during their breeding season. Cllr Crick then asked if bird predators are managed by Forestry England? T Sagar answered that only Boar and Deer numbers are managed due to the damage they can cause by vegetation and soil, they do not manage any other wildlife. Cllr Crick asked if there were going to be more drives for carbon capture in the forest and T Sagar was unaware of any at this time.

Cllr Dale commented that perhaps it should be more of a priority to build in wood in the area and perhaps it was time to change practices, Larch and Cedar are great timber for cladding. T Sagar commented that they were moving to continuous cover forestry and moving away from planting. She also stated that the Forest Plans can be viewed on the Forestry England Web Site. They do plant a lot of species such as Rowan, Hazel, and Wild Cherry on the outskirts of the woodlands.

4.6 POLICE – WRITTEN REPORT

It was noted that the report from the Police was on this occasion very Bream centric, and it was suggested that we ask for more information on the other areas of West Dean.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

The Chair then opened the meeting for public comments, questions, and for the raising of any issues.

E Highfield – Thanked the chair and then asked why none of the major projects from the last year were on the agenda, there was no mention of Dean Forest Greenway, Neighbourhood Development Plan or Canopy.? This was a shame as there had been a lot of work done on these projects. Also asked was a question about the Communication Policy as there was nothing being displayed on the Parish Notice Boards?

E Highfield stated that the NDP was nearly complete, Design Codes etc. and she would like to have this put on the next Agenda for Full Council so that a report can be given.

Cllr Evans stated that there is not a meeting goes by in which Dean Forest Greenway is not discussed and all Cllrs are passionate about getting the Multi Use Track through to fruition.

It was advised that Canopy was now a Stand-Alone entity and no longer a Parish Project and Canopy was to be commended for their work in getting to this stage.

Cllr Gayler answered that he printed out and posted items onto the 4 notice boards in the Sling Ward

Cllr Dale answered that she had been told by residents to put items in the local shop windows rather than in the noticeboard.

Cllr Richmond answered that he posted the notices on the board in Crowash.

Cllr Moore answered that he had no objection to dealing with the notice boards near him.

Cllr Costley had previously requested for a noticeboard to be placed in the Christchurch bus shelter, there is potential to relocate one from Parkend Road Bream to this location.

E Highfield said that it should be the office which printed items out not the Cllrs.

Cllr Gayler asked if the Telephone Kiosks and Bus Shelters where still maintained by the Council?

He was advised that the Kiosks have now been taken over, in the most part, by parish residents and have been turned into book swaps and defib locations. The Bus Shelters are cleaned by the Council's contractor and any damage reported back to the Council.

It will be ensured that all Major Projects will be put on the Annual Parish Assembly Agenda for 2023.

Cllr Crick thank everyone for coming and closed the meeting at 8.15pm.