MINUTES OF SPARKWELL PARISH COUNCIL VIRTUAL MEETING

held on 8th December 2020

**Present**: Cllrs May, Harvey, Lee, McEwing, Milford, Peacham, Pearson-Bunt,

Dawn Johnson (Clerk)

**In attendance**: Max Denning, Mark Thompson (Tungsten West), x1MoP

**Part 1** (Open to the Public)

**137/20 Apologies for Absence**

Cllr Ansell, Cllr Harvey will be joining later.

**138/20 Agreement of the Agenda between Parts I and II**

Councillors noted that one item of business would be considered in Part II of the meeting.

**139/20 Declarations of Interest**

None

**140/20 County Councillor’s Business**

Cllr Hart was not in attendance.

**141/20 District Councillor’s Business**

Neither Cllr Baldry or Thomas were in attendance.

Cllr May reported that there had been problems at Birchland with recycling bins not been collected for a month. A smaller vehicle had been used in the past and this may be part of the problem and/or the recent publicised delays.

***Action*** *– Clerk will report to District Cllrs*

**142/20 Public Form**

x1 member of the public (MoP) from Lee Mill were present who asked whether the PC had yet responded to the new A38 slip road consultation. She had attended the web seminar on 24th November, and there were a few residents present who wanted to particularly understand about public transport and the timescales. DCC have yet to raise the budget so timescales are unknow.

One resident raised a point about keeping the existing slip road to service the houses as access only even though this wasn’t the current intention. It was felt that this could cause problems as it might be used to cut through the village. DCC said they would look at option.

With regard to the (Falcon) bus service, they would need a quick get on get off (the A38) otherwise, they might not continue. There needs to be provision on the roundabout to facilitate access. This also applies to the school bus that picks up opposite the Westward Inn. DCC has said that it will meet with public transport provider.

Cllr May thanked the MoP for their comments saying that they were very valid points and her local knowledge can be used to feed back.

This would be a good time to take the opportunity to do something with the bus stop on the A38 slip road as it is not readily accessible. We could ask DCC to see if they could do something safer with that bus stop as well.

Cllr Peacham said the PC reinforced everything raised as the MoP has the local knowledge. The Lee Mill representative, Cllr Ansell, is not present at the meeting but he felt sure that she would support the views.

There is a virtual drop in tomorrow between 12 and 2pm tomorrow.

Cllr Pearson-Bunt asked whether the MoP could liaise a with Cllr Ansell as she has such great local knowledge.

The MoP said that she thought the Wildflower initiative sounded excellent. She is doing a wildflower garden in her garden and can align to the Parish if that helps.

**143/20 Climate Change projects**

It was agreed to change the order of this Agenda item so that Cllr Pearson-Bunt could update for the MoP

1. Wildlife initiative -

Cllr Pearson-bunt explained the background of the project; that it was part of our climate change plan and that we received a locality fund grant from Devon CC which enabled us to make a small start on some wildlife initiatives.

One project is in Sparkwell which has been started off with a range of planting through the corridor of the village which includes meadow planting and has generated a lot of community interest and activity. There are about 15 sites, of varying sizes, across Sparkwell village and about half of those are meadow initiatives. It is hoped to do more in the Spring but this is dependent on budget.

Another project is in Lee Mill, which includes a community orchard in Bottle Park. They have identified 7 types of trees to plant which will go in in January/February and they hope to have wildlife planting underneath. Hedging has been planted around the storage container area. They will be involving the local community with the orchard planting, maintenance and crop. They may be able to plant more but again this is dependent on budget.

Overall there had been a very positive response from the community.

Cllr May thanked Cllrs Pearson-Bunt, McEwing and Ansell for their hard work on this project.

The MoP said that the road on the entrance to Langage Farm would benefit with being improved with some planting.

MoP left the meeting at 7.20pm

1. Boringdon Camp

Cllr Peacham said that that there had not been any developments since the last meeting as we were still waiting for a meeting to be arranged with SHDC. Obviously lockdown had an effect on this.

He had circulated information on the Poole Farm project in Plymouth and said that this is an excellent resource for help and information.

He said that hedges are being cut at the moment which means that hedgerows that are full of berries are being destroyed. These hedges are not stock proof so in theory could be left. There was discussion about whether we could ask landowners/farmers not to cut some hedges, in effect to do less. We should investigate whether there are any incentives for landowners/farmers.

It was decided that we would approach several landowners/farmers and ask them to identify some hedges to leave wild and providing berries and habitat for wildlife. Suggestions were the Hemerdon and Newnham Estates.

Cllr Harvey joined at 7.24pm

Cllr Harvey said there are subsidies for stock proof fencing in an old fashioned way to protect hedges.

Mark Thompson of Tungsten West joined the meeting at 7.28pm

***Action*** *– Clerk to draft an email and circulate to the PC containing links to schemes. Once approved, we would contact Hemerdon and Newnham Estates.*

1. The Clerk had circulated a letter received from the Chair of Staverton Parish Council on behalf of our Climate Action Group regarding an initiative with Transition Town Totnes to jointly host a climate fair in Totnes next September. A provisional date of 18 September 2021 has now been set.

***Action*** *– Clerk will contact the group to say that we are happy to advertise the event.*

Cllr Peacham said that we should have an item on the agenda to help to encourage locals to form a climate change action group.

***Action*** *– Clerk to add to the January agenda to discuss in more detail.*

**144/20 Hemerdon** **Mine**

Cllr May said there had been a virtual meeting on Thursday with a video presentation from TW on Low Frequency Noise (LFN). However he was unable to connect so he asked Cllr Peacham to report to the PC.

Cllr Peacham said that the presentation was from a sound expert on how the LFN was generated in the mine and how it was propagated out into the environment. The plan is to fix the noise at source. He had learned a lot and felt confident that the plan is going to massively reduce the noise at source possibly to the point that it won’t be an issue at all.

There are two ways this can be done - screens will be reduced and outside the existing plant there will be a new process and sorter, so that only a third of what was previously processed will be processed which will reduce the loading on the screens. Fixing the noise at source is the main priority. There is a backup plan of some giant noise cancelling machinery, and there is a small trial plant at the mine at the moment, which could be brought in if the plan fails. The Presentation was very professional and informative. He had learned that the Wolf plan would not have worked.

Max Denning (MD), Tungsten West (TW), said that beyond the issues with LFN, Wolf were stuck as they weren’t making any money and only way out was to try to produce as much as they could. That meant that they didn’t have any options to mitigate against the LFN issue. In order to solve the problems, they would have had to change out some screens that they had installed, for something that would not generate the LFN. They could not do that as it would have meant closing the mine down for several months which would have resulted in their lenders would pulling the plug. They therefore decided not to attack issue at source, but work around it by installing the cladding option which almost certainly would not have worked. For cladding to work, you need to ensure that the building is completely water tight so no air can travel inside and out. This would be impossible for a processing plant with so many shoots.

Wolf were sending all of their ore through the plant, aiming to produce an amount of metal which meant they had to feed the entire concentrate with a tonnage over 3M tonnes per annum, and in doing that you have to crush all the material down to a size where you can liberate the tungsten minerals and go through a concentration process. The optimal crushing size is anything below 8mm. By doing that you are increasing the load size on the screens which basically turns all the screens turn in to an industrial drum, and when they are operating in unison, means you end up generating a massive LFN issue.

TW will not be concentrating the 3M tonnes pa. They are installing an x-ray transmission ore sorter. The material is scanned for density and the barren material is rejected. It deals with fist size pieces of stone which means rejecting a lot of material. This enables them to only need to crush down material to a smaller size, which would be half or a third of what Wolf was doing.

The major offenders of LFN are the screens in plant. Some of these are being removed and new screens will be installed. The concentrator plant itself had two different circuits running and they will only need half of it. This will reduce the amount of screens required to produce the same amount of metal.

Even if they just made all those changes by themselves they deem that those changes would be so great that LFN would not be generated to a level that would affect Sparkwell and Hemerdon. However they are able to go a step further which is by installing mitigation techniques at source.

As explained, the LFN is due to the change in air pressure above and below screen so the favoured option is to in effect instal a chimney within the screens allowing air to flow below and above the screen. The chimney will reduce the generation of LFN at source.

They believe that this will put them below the limit for LFN but they can go a step further by installing a technique which is technology like noise cancelling headphones. This uses an equal amount of counter noise to the noise that hits the ear. The same can be done with the screens by installing a set of speakers above each screen which will generate and emit an equal and opposite amount of LFN which counter acts the LFN generation.

There is more work to be done on the modelling but they have been able to accurately use the models so far to identify what the problems were under Wolf, and what they can do to mitigate. They are confident that they have solved the issue

Cllr Pearson-Bunt said that that everything talked about sounds expensive so are they aiming for an acceptable level of LFN under planning or are they trying to neutralise the whole thing - what is their promise?

MD said he believed that the allowance of LFN is 60db at 15Hz level as stipulated by the Environment Agency. There is an acceptable level that no one will ever hear but as soon as it is generated about a certain db is when you start to the vibration effect. There will always be a small generation of LFN but it will be below detectable levels which is the important point. The plant is not going to run long term if there is a big issue with LFN.

TW have already invested hundreds of thousands of pounds into the research of LFN. LFN is the number one risk to the project and that is why they are investing so much money, time and effort into knowing that they have solved the problem before making construction decisions on the rebuilding of the processing plant.

Cllr May, thanked MD and said that he is keen to have base lines in place for LFN so that we all have something that we can “hang our hat on”. We then know what is being generated, it is transparent and everyone is committed to it. He believes that the EA should be happy to do this. As a Parish this is what we would like to do if possible. It gives confidence to the community so they know the levels, to TW so that they know that the mitigation techniques have worked, and confidence that the EA permit issued is correct.

MD said that there is still more modelling to do, but this will only take a couple of weeks. The next step is for them to have a similar open room dialogue with the up to date presentation from the subject matter experts who understand the issue. With regard to base line readings MD will come back on that to see if they can assist us with that and take it forward.

Cllr May thanked MD and TW for their commitment to solving the issues and working with us and the local community. The PC has always been very supportive of the mine but TW have picked up a legacy which means that the more transparency and information we have, the better the chance for sign up.

MD said that it is their commitment to the local community, they knew what they were getting into and this remains the key issue to overcome. He is happy to let us have the presentation from the noise experts because it is very compelling and shows that they have tried to understand the issue in its entirety. Transparency is key; there might be times when they exceed audible noise limits but as long as the data is available then there is transparency with the mine and the local community.

There was discussion regarding presenting to the PC as a whole and importantly to the community?

The PC has a database of some 60 households and 120 people who believed their health was affected by the LFN so these people need to be able to see this.

MD agreed that this could be facilitated using Zoom so they can see what is being done and disclose the information to the local community, there is nothing to hide.

MD said they are looking to submit for the permit to EA this side of Christmas. He would not want them to determine the permit prior to engaging with the local stakeholders, so he would want the presentation mid to end January so there is a sufficient amount of time for dialogue to take place.

Cllr Pearson-Bunt suggested that it might be useful to have a presentation available so that that people can download, look at and then perhaps feedback to co-ordinators so ask the questions. MD said we should let him know what suits us and they will act accordingly.

MD said they wanted to raise another issue which was the suspected arson attack at the weekend on one of the properties, Counts House. It would appear that someone broke into house, lit a fire and burned the house down. Police are investigating and they are in contact with insurers and they asked us to pass on any information that we might have. They might offer a reward to find the culprit.

They have suffered trespassing and breaking in to the properties; they have spent thousands on boarding up and blocking the doors and windows.

They want to ask DCC if they could take some, if not all of the properties out of the s52 if they are used for people working at the mine to stay during the week or change some for commercial use such as office/training centres. The worst option is to leave them empty.

Potentially there is a lesson to be learned in terms of optimal route which is not boarding the properties up and leaving to rot but going back to DCC to see if they can get some utility out of them. They have security 24/7 and do constant runs around the boundary.

Cllr Pearson-Bunt asked whether the property was listed. Cllr May said that Count House was the old count house where miners were paid and it is a great shame. It is very difficult to police in the remote areas.

TW argument is to take audible noise readings once operations restart and see where they sit where each of the properties are located and see whether there is anything in planning to allow mine employees to use the properties during the week. They also have ideas with regard to training centres linked with Camborne School of Mines/Exeter University.

They have several ideas but LFN is top of the risk register to re-start the mine and understanding what they can and can’t do with properties is lower down the list.

Cllr Milford said that he would be concerned about traffic coming through the village of Hemerdon.

There was a discussion about traffic and access. The mine used to employ 200 people, but they didn’t go through the village. The properties are at the side of the hill away from Plympton. Access would be from the road near the scrap yard on the Lee Moor road.

Cllr Peacham said that his understanding is that daytime use would be ok for DCC, the only issue is with staying overnight. MD said that they would need to change to commercial use.

Cllr Pearson-Bunt said that local authorities have an approach for their own key workers, called key worder voids, where they put people in for 6 month contracts especially in areas identified for re-development. There are well trodden paths for temporary accommodation to keep properties safe but they need to get around the issue of over overnight use.

Mark Thompson (MT) asked whether the PC had any information on who it could be? It is believed that word gets around Plymouth that there are empty properties around the mine and bored kids go up there.

MT said they are concerned that this could escalate to trespass on the mine, falling in to the pit, damaging the plant etc. They are very keen to be harsh on this, security are aggressive in dealing with trespassers and are thinking about offering a reward.

It doesn’t pay to speculate but the PC will “keep their ear to the ground”. The PC thought that a reward might be a good idea. The PC could circulate security contact information to Facebook and the Parish Pump, also the crime number for people to report.

Discussion around installation of security cameras and obtaining information from existing cameras.

MD and MT left the meeting at 8.25pm

**145/20 Fibre Broadband project**

Cllr Pearson-Bunt reported that the provisional go live date is now mid-February which is two months early. Two from the core list of subscribers are no longer in place but they have contacted reserves and five have volunteered so they still have a sufficient list of subscribers.

The PC adjourned for a short break.

**146/20 Notice of Vacancy**

The Clerk reported that the Notice of vacancy due to the retirement of Cllr Taylor was dated and published on the 16th November 2020. No request for election has been received by the District so we can fill the vacancy by co-option. We currently have a total three vacancies.

***Action*** *– Clerk will advertise on Facebook and the Parish Pump*

**147/20 Banking arrangements**

Cllrs considered the current banking arrangements on the retirement of Cllr Taylor.

**RESOLVED** that the Signatories to the account are Cllrs Robin May, Ruth Pearson-Bunt, Glen Peacham and Clare Lee

X2 signatures required for cheques

X2 approvals required for online payments

The Clerk has the new mandate form which needs to be signed; this will be done as soon as practically possible

**148/20 Cllr responsibilities**

Further discussed, present again in January.

Cllr Harvey said his family may be able to have salt bins on their land and will liaise with Cllr Peacham over this.

Cllr Pearson-Bunt will make contact with Langage Power Station.

***Action*** *-Cllr May will inform Cllr Pearson-Bunt of a contact at Langage Power Station.*

**149/20 Terms of Reference for Projects ­**

Councillors considered and **RESOLVED** to approve the Terms of Reference to be used for projects in the future.

Cllr Pearson-Bunt abstained.

**150/20 Policy reviews**

1. Grievance Policy
2. Disciplinary Policy

***Action*** *- Amend to include a clause for Covid-19/pandemic and look at in January.*

**151/20 Minutes**

Councillors considered the minutes of the meeting on the 10th November 2020

**RESOLVED** unanimously that the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 10th November 2020 be approved and signed at a later date.

**152/20 Planning**

1. Neighbourhood Plan

The Clerk reported that the SHDC Officer responsible for neighbourhood planning would present to the Parish Council at their meeting on 9th February 2021

1. Planning Application Ref: 3766/20/FUL

Description: Replacement agricultural barn

Address: Land at SX 588 584 adjacent to Mill Stream Barn Sparkwell

**RESOLVED** that the application is supported by the Parish Council with a comment that the footpath must be preserved

1. Planning Application Ref: 3857/20/ARC

Description: Application for approval of details reserved by conditions 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 20 for planning application 1878/19/FUL

Address: Land at SX568555 South of Langage Business Park Plympton Devon

**RESOLVED** that the Parish Council has no comment to make on this application.

1. Planning Application Ref: 3595/20/FUL

Description: Retrospective application for refurbishment of existing industrial building

Address: Choakford Farm Plympton PL7 5BB

**RESOLVED** that the application is supported by the Parish Council with a comment regarding the need for planning ahead of changes rather than retrospective planning.

1. Planning Application Ref: 3596/20/VAR

Description: Application for removal of condition 8 and variation of condition 2 of planning permission 49/2204/03/F

Address: Choakford Farm Plympton Devon

**RESOLVED** that the Parish Council objects to the removal of condition 8 but does not object to the variation of condition 2.

Cllr May confirmed that he had visited the site at Ford Farm, planning application 3276/20/FUL and had no issue with this.

Cllr May said that he had been on the road to the Recycling centre at Lee Mill at the weekend and Dorton lorries were using the road. He did not believe this was allowed.

*Action – Clerk and Cllr May to investigate and report back.*

**153/20 Road and Snow Warden**

We have salt. Gritters have been out this evening and early hours of the morning.

**154/20 Chairman’s Business**

1. The Chair had received a call with regard to the footpath at Lee Mill across from the new recycling plant (under the flyover opposite the bus shelter into the woods). There are issues with the gates that need to be checked.

***Action*** *– Cllr May will inspect and speak to Cllr Ansell.*

**155/20 Correspondence**

1. We received a message from Shaugh Prior PC regarding the condition of a cattle grid to the north of the mine which was full of debris and livestock were getting across. The Clerk had contacted the mine who are going to clear it.
2. Devon County Council Road Closure Notice

Wednesday 16th December 2020 for a maximum of 5 days until Saturday 19th December (inclusive). Road affected – road heading south from Choakford Cross, Plympton. Alternative route will signed.

Closure to carry out cabling work to provide new fibre.

1. Office for National Statistics regarding the 2021 census. They have asked for various

contact information (Parish Pump) and have offered Council Talks or presentations. We will ask for a summary.

1. The consultation of the Interim Devon Carbon Plan went live on the 7th of December. It is a 10 week consultation allowing residents to have the chance to shape the county’s roadmap to creating a net-zero Devon, where people and nature thrive. We have published the information on our website and FB and have sent through to the Parish Pump.

**156/20 Finance**

1. Councillors present received and considered the draft Budget for 2021/22 which had been circulated.

**RESOLVED** unanimously that the report be approved.

1. Councillors present received and considered the draft Precept Demand for 2021/22 which had been circulated.

After much deliberation the Parish Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve the Precept Demand at £11,313.00 which represents a 15% increase that amounts to £2.71 per annum per household.

The Parish Council did not take the decision to increase the precept lightly, but it had worked hard to maintain the precept at a zero-percentage increase for the last two financial years. However, as Devon County Highways were unable to maintain the drainage to a satisfactory level, the PC was now using the services of a Lengthsman which had resulted in a considerable improvement to the drainage on the roads in the Parish. This was met from reserves in the financial year 20/21, but now had to be budgeted for.

The PC had to also include a budget to investigate neighbourhood planning.

1. Councillors present considered the budget analysis report and bank reconciliation for November 2020

**RESOLVED** unanimously that the reports be approved.

**157/20 Payments and Receipts**

1. Cllrs reviewed and **RESOLVED** to approve the list of payments for November 2020

**158/20 Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on 12th January 2021 at 7pm - remote meeting using Zoom.

Meeting closed at 9.35 pm

This is a true and accurate record of the meeting

Signed ……………………………………………………………….

Name ……………………………………………………………….. Date …………………………………………..