VALE OF ALLEN PARISH COUNCIL

WITCHAMPTON, MANSWOOD AND CRITCHEL WARDS

Minutes of the annual meeting, held at Witchampton Village Hall

Thursday 18 May at 7:30pm.

Present Councillors:

Cllr T Read

Cllr D Burford-May

Cllr K Lannon

Members of the public:

F. Read

T. Benson

J. Hancock

G. Wayman

H. Smape

H. de Mattos

J. Raymond

S. Allen

S. Vaughan

A. Hayter

L. Morris-Bourne

J. Coda

J. Conner

K. Pearce

J. Buchanan

C. Buchanan

S. Hodges

K. Elias

**MINUTES**

The meeting agreed the minutes

the annual general meeting held 12 May 2022

**Financial Report 2022-23**

**Income**

Our two wards had two principal sources of income:

1. Precept (money received from Dorset Council – raised as an addition to Council Tax)

The process is that we produce a budget and then submit a request to Dorset

Estimated Estimated Total

Ward Expenses General Expenses Precept 22/23

Total VOAPC £5,676 £14,872 £20,548

of which

Witchampton £2,516 £3,813 £6,329

Crichel £900 £2,298 £3,198

Witchampton % 44.3% 25.6% 30.8%

Crichel % 15.8% 15.5% 15.6%

1. Burial & Internment Fees

Witchampton Burial Ground –

Fees for Burials and Internment of Ashes were £1,349.

So total income in 22/23 was £7,678 for Witchampton (£6,329 + £1,349) and £3,198 for Crichel

In addition, Witchampton had earmarked funds\* brought forward of £8,343

and Crichel had £3,601.

\* Previously allocated from reserves but unspent

**Ward Expenditures**

Witchampton’s big expenditure in 2022/23 was the Millenium Avenue, amounted to £2,025 spent on both strimming and tree surgery. This was covered from funds previously earmarked in reserves for this purpose. We propose that this will be an ongoing expenditure.

The Witchampton Burial Ground had gross costs of £2,423 which was made up of £1620 of routine maintenance (mowing) and £803 of longer term expenditures (fencing, signage etc). Net of the above mentioned income of £1,349, the Burial Ground cost us £1,074 which was more than covered by the allocation made in the Precept.

Otherwise, expenditures were pretty light amounting to £494, largely regular maintenance of the bus shelters and the R&BT seat.

Last year we told you that we intended to commence remedial work on the four Witchampton and Manswood bus shelters. We were unable to do this because of our inability to identify a suitable contractor to carry out the work. We do hope that we will be able to start this year.

We also flagged last year that we would be taking the fingerpost programme back under VoAPC control with the retirement of Marion Cook. The transfer of the residual funds was successfully executed. With the renovation of the Lawrence Lane finger post and two more in Crichel, we are nearing the end of the programme. The one remaining post to be replaced, is that at the top of Pound Hill which was previously renovated to a lower standard than the rest of those in the VoAPC.

In Crichel, ward expenditures amounted to £1,519 of which £1,464 comprised fingerpost expenditure.

**Central VoAPC Expenditures**

Central costs for the Parish Council amounted to £14,166 which represented only a 1.8% increase on the previous year. Given that some 2/3 of overheads comprised the Clerks salary and PAYE which increased by 5%. Economies were made in both training and general overheads in order to constrain overall costs.

**Expectations for 2023/24**

Iin the current year, we are planning to continue work on the Millennium Avenue, repair the bus shelters and replace the Pound Hill fingerpost. We may also embark upon work on a Neighbourhood Plan for the VoAPC, which should attract grants from Central Government and the County but these will be insufficient to cover the full cost. There are other potential expenditures on road signage which will require more discussion in the Council and in the community as a whole.

The earmarked balances carried forward to 2023/24 were £8,372 for Witchampton and £3,682 for Crichel. Given these unspent balances we are keeping a tight lid on the 2023/4 precept request. Overall the VoAPC is requesting 2.2% increase in the Precept to £20,996. Witchampton’s share is rising 8.9% to £2,741 and Crichel, now the fingerpost programme is complete, has reduced its share by 62% to £350.

**Issues addressed in 2022/23**

**Traffic and Roadways**

This area is under the exclusive management of Dorset Council Highways, which has a very restricted budget. Our role is therefore limited to identifying issues, bringing them to the notice of Dorset Council and then continuing to put pressure on them to effect change, largely through our 2 local Councillors.

The Vale of Allen Parish area is crossed by two major roads, the Cranborne-Wimborne and the C2 running from Horton Inn to the A354. We have continued to lobby hard for a tightening of speed restrictions at High Leas, but I regret to advice that it will probably require a serious RTA before any material change is implemented as has been the case at Horton Inn.

We have been much more successful in encouraging Dorset to fast-track the resurfacing of the C2 and tackling the subsidence at Stanbridge Mill. They are also now taking a serious look at the single track pinch point at the eastern end of this road. We continue to raise the problems of oversized agricultural vehicles and the destruction of verges. The best we can expect is a recalibration of commercial GPS systems to avoid tight junctions.

Concern has been raised about excessive speeds in the Newtown area, especially in the vicinity of the Little Owls nursery, a survey was conducted of Newtown residents’ opinions which was found to be overwhelmingly in favour of a reduction of speed limits from the current 60mph and some signage around Little Owls. We seem to have agreement from Dorset to implement some change that takes into account any risk of “urban-creep”.

**Changes in the Parish Boundaries**

On May 11th, the Dorset Council ratified a change to the boundaries of the Witchampton & Manswood ward. From April 1st 2024 our eastern boundary will be at the start of the Millenium Avenue previously the boundary started at the bridge over the Allen and our southern boundary will incorporate the whole of the hamlet of Bradford. The 11 households in Bradford will therefore, next May, be able to vote in Witchampton rather than Pamphill and any children of junior school age will now, as a right, have access to Witchampton CoE First School.

**The Millenium Avenue**

Last year we started a much-needed clean-up of the Avenue. In May, volunteers cleared ivy from the trees and this was followed up by strimming and hedging in July and pollarding of the trees in October. We will strim and hedge in July after the nesting season and probably pollard again next year. We have one or two dead trees which will be replaced this year.

Once Witchampton’s eastern boundary has moved to the far end of the Avenue, the parish sign will need to be moved, we are looking at whether village gateways should be installed there, welcoming visitors to the village and requesting careful driving.

There were mixed views from those present some commented that these would look nice, whilst another thought it was a waste of money.

**Other parish assets**

We have already discussed the fingerposts and bus shelters, but I should mention the remedial work done on the telephone box outside the club by a group of volunteers led by Tony Benson. We have taken full control of the burial ground extension, which was gifted to the village by Georgina Marten. We completed a clean-up of the area and the installation of signage.

**Planning and Development**

VoAPC has considered a number of planning applications relevant to our two wards but there has not been any for greenfield development. We have however seen some examples of “creeping development” and retrospective applications which cause us some concern, particularly as the Dorset Planning Department seems unprepared to take a robust line on them. We have written to the Council expressing our concerns.

We have also expressed support for the Cranborne Chase AONB’s initiative on Dark Skies, as affected by Velux windows, conservatories and security lighting.

The evolution of the Dorset Plan rumbles on but its completion has now been put back to 2025/26. In view of this delay, the VoAPC has been actively looking at the possibility of preparing our own Neighbourhood Plan which will look at housing needs, infrastructural improvements, and preferred areas for any future development. The reason for doing this is to ensure that we take control of the discussion rather than have important planning decisions imposed upon us. We are of the view that any development should be driven by local needs rather than speculative supply. Above all, it should be appropriate to the evolutionary nature of development in our two communities.

**Issues to be addressed in 2023/24**

**Traffic and Roadways**

We shall apply for a 20 mph speed limit for Newtown from the bottom of Lawrence Lane but have low expectations of achieving this given Dorset’s stance and resources. We shall also apply for an extension of the 20mph to the end of the Conservation Area below Mount Pleasant. We shall continue to push for a de-bottlenecking of the C2 and for extra safeguards at High Leas

One member of the public present raised concerns that they do not want to see signage overload in rural areas.

**Infrastructure**

Millennium Avenue work, bus shelters refurbishment and the Pound Hill fingerpost replacement in Witchampton and a VoAPC noticeboard in Moor Crichel

**Vale of Allen Neighbourhood Plan**

We will continue to research the feasibility of executing such a plan, but it was emphasised that it would not be run by VoAPC but by the communities themselves with assistance and input from us, so we would look for volunteers to guide its development assisted by a professional planning consultant.

The following questions were raised by members of the public:

Is there a deadline for a VoAPC neighbourhood plan?

The chair advised; we would want to have it completed before the completion of the Dorset neighbourhood plan.

Will there be a cost involved?

The chair advised; that there would be a large cost involved, but grants are available, but most importantly for the plan to succeed a number of volunteers from the parish would be needed. Although we are only at the investigation stage, we would probably be looking at five separate parts of the plan, one for each parish with an overarching plan for the whole of the VoAPC.

Cllr K Lannon, advised that he had previous experience of working on a neighbourhood plan and explained that it would require questionnaires and a lot of consultation and work.

**Witchampton & Manswood and Crichel Representation**

We have been pleased to welcome Ken Lannon, who was co-opted onto the Council as a representative for Crichel. WE still, however, have one vacancy for each of the Witchampton & Manswood and the Crichel wards of the Council. We would urge anyone interested in serving on the Council to contact one of us or our Council Clerk Ian Hanstead. All our contact details are on our website <http://valeofallen-pc.gov.uk>. It is important that the interests of our communities are properly looked after and that there is a full diversity of opinion in our discussions.

**General.**

The Chair thanked the members of the public for giving up their evening to attend the meeting. As several representatives were present from the different organisations, groups and clubs within the Parish they were asked if they would like to give an update on what happened over the last year and plans going forward. The details of these discussions have not been formally minuted within the meeting.

**The formal AGM finished at 8:20 the overall meeting closed at 9:10**