

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 24 August 2015 at 2.00 pm

Present

Councillors

F J Rosamond (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs J B Binks,
Mrs C P Daw, Mrs S Griggs, T G Hughes,
B A Moore, Mrs J Roach, Mrs E J Slade,
T W Snow, N A Way and R M Deed

Apologies

Councillor(s)

Mrs N Woollatt

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R Dolley

Also Present

Officer(s):

Liz Reeves (Head of Customer Services) and Julia Stuckey
(Member Services Officer)

42 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs N Woollatt who was substituted by Cllr R M Deed and from Cllr N A Way.

43 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from members of the public present.

44 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

45 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that the agenda for the next meeting was very light and that he did not consider it necessary for the Committee to meet.

It was **RESOLVED** that the meeting scheduled for 7th September 2015 be cancelled.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note:- Cllr Mrs J Roach requested that her vote against be recorded.

46 NEIL PARISH MP

The Chairman welcomed the Member of Parliament for the Tiverton and Honiton Constituency, Neil Parish, to the meeting.

Cllr Mrs E Slade asked Mr Parish for his views on the proposed development at Junction 27. She asked if he considered that it would be beneficial overall to Tiverton, bringing in more investment/tourists or have a negative affect in taking trade/investment away from the town.

Mr Parish explained that he was in favour of the development but felt strongly that any proposal needed to benefit Tiverton and the whole area. There was a lot of passing traffic and it was a good location for either retail or leisure. He did not feel that it needed to be detrimental to Tiverton or Cullompton as a lot of traffic passing Junction 27 wouldn't have entered the towns anyway. The MP stressed that it was up to the planning authority to make sure that the right facility was put there and that each application should be looked at on its own merit. There was also a need for housing for those to be employed there and he considered that this would be best placed towards Cullompton, rather than at the junction.

Cllr T Snow asked if the potential development of J27 was appropriate without the provision of adequate infrastructure.

Mr Parish replied that recent improvements to Junction 27 had proved successful with traffic flowing well. Discussion took place regarding the time it took for developers to pay Section 106 monies and contributions. Mr Parish said that he would look into this and that perhaps a system could be put in place whereby the local authority led on the infrastructure with a claw back from the developer.

Mr Parish stressed that any development needed to be of benefit to the local area, to local people and to the nearby towns and businesses.

Cllr Mrs J Roach asked Mr Parish if he agreed that enormous sums of public money were being wasted because District and County Councils were all spending money on running their own websites. She said that the functions of County, District and Parish Councils whilst separate at each level were in fact similar in respect of their responsibilities. Could he justify such spending when basic services were being cut?

Mr Parish replied that he did not consider it to be Governments role to tell local authorities how much to spend on websites. He said that he didn't know how much Mid Devon spent on its website but that the authority did need to let the public know what facilities were available and how to pay for services such as Council Tax. If the money spent was excessive he would be happy to discuss this with the Chief Executive.

Cllr Mrs Roach then asked for the MP's view on proposed changes to the Right to Buy Scheme for Housing Associations. Mr Parish replied that he was a great believer in people owning their own homes, but he did consider that the policy of previous governments had not helped this. He felt that an amendment from the House of Lords would result in some social housing, in smaller villages, being excluded from the scheme.

Cllr Mrs Roach asked Mr Parish if he would ask the Government to consider finding a solution to the problem that elected members did not have recourse to anybody other than the courts when they felt that they had been treated unfairly or in exceptional cases when they suspected that the Council had broken the law. Mr Parish confirmed that he would speak to Ministers to report that whistle-blowing for Councillors was difficult.

Cllr Mrs Berry was not in attendance but had asked for Mr Parish's view on Chinese Lanterns. Mr Parish replied that he had a robust view that they should be banned. He informed the Committee that a lot of work had been done to ensure that lanterns being sold had less metal in them and that he had personal experience of dealing with livestock that had ingested metal. He understood that the lanterns were fashionable to use but considered that there should be a ban or a restriction on how they were produced or how many were released. He considered that if they became more expensive they would be used less. He also said that local authorities could have some impact by advertising the risks and dangers to animals when they are used.

Cllr Mrs J B Binks asked Mr Parish what was being done to improve Broadband and mobile phone signal coverage for rural locations. Mr Parish replied that there was a link between wireless and broadband connections, and that he wanted to see a more flexible approach to this with more companies involved, rather than just BT, in order to speed up delivery. He said that funds were available to encourage mobile phone companies to put up masts and that local people needed to be encouraged to accept those masts. He agreed that poor broadband and mobile coverage created both social and employment issues. Mr Parish informed the committee that himself and the Minister Ed Veysey had been putting pressure on BT to deliver the contract, and that he was fully aware of the situation.

Cllr Moore asked why there were no limits on the scale of anaerobic digestion green energy farm schemes to distinguish between low-impact, local diversification (treated as farm businesses with farming rules) and high-impact, industrial-scale projects (which should be treated accordingly with greater rigour as standard, non-farming businesses). Mr Parish replied that he considered on farm schemes could work very well but in larger cases the infrastructure needed to be put in place. He suggested that he was happy to discuss a specific case with Cllr Moore at another time. He felt that DEFRA could also look at this and he agreed to take this forward.

The Chairman asked Mr Parish if he considered that austerity measures were having an impact on people's lives with Police no longer responding to some reported crimes and public conveniences being closed. Mr Parish replied that he was happy to take this up with the Police to find out why particular crimes reported had not been investigated. When discussing the amount of paperwork that Officers needed to complete he said that he felt that the Police would need to continue spending large amounts of time form-filling in order to protect themselves from being sued. He informed the Committee that he considered that the role of the Police Commissioner was to make the Police Force more accountable, but at this stage he was not convinced that this had resulted in more efficient policing. He felt that the Police Commissioner needed to be very independent and to be a scrutineer; this needed to take place in order for the role to be successful.

The Chairman also asked the MP how he felt about A Level education no longer being available in Tiverton. Mr Parish stated that he was not aware of this but he would discuss the matter with the Headmaster of Tiverton High School, Mr Lovett.

Cllr Mrs N Woollatt was not at the meeting but had asked Cllr R M Deed to put her question to Mr Parish. Following a recent issue with travellers camping on a local recreation field in Cullompton she asked if it was fair that the local community had to cover the cost of the removal and clear up operation. Mr Parish replied that the Government had carried out a lot of work to put in place a procedure whereby the Police and Councils had the power to evict travellers, but the costs involved had not been looked at. He offered to discuss this matter with the Police and Devon County Council.

The Chairman thanked the MP for his attendance.

(The meeting ended at 4.12 pm)

CHAIRMAN