

Spreyton Parish Annual Meeting 25th March 2015

– Chairman's Report

Against the background of a very difficult economic year for local government and its services (more on this from our WDBC and DCC Councillors), the Parish Council has managed its activities again without the need to increase its precept, which has been held constant during its present four year term of office that ends with forthcoming elections on May 7th.

In terms of keeping abreast of topical issues, the Council continues to seek out speakers for parish meetings:

Karen Bridgeford, DCC Economic Development Officer, spoke about the rural roll out of superfast broadband at our last Annual Parish Meeting. I am pleased to say this roll out has now reached Spreyton village, with the first installation of a fibre-enabled cabinet, ready for testing and eventual activation.

Alex Rehaag, WDBC Affordable Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer, was invited to hold a public consultation at Spreyton prior to our May Parish Council AGM. This proved a very helpful event in enlightening parishioners about how affordable housing is managed in West Devon, in particular, the criteria for selecting prospective tenants, ways to improve parishioners' awareness of housing vacancies and vice versa, the need to ensure WDBC is advised of interested potential tenants.

This evening, I am pleased to welcome Keri Ross of the NHS Northern, Eastern & Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, who will be informing us about the activities of a planning group set up with community health representatives and local councillors to transform small rural hospitals into 'health and social care hubs'. In our case, we shall be particularly interested in the provision of such services at Moretonhampstead and Okehampton.

The Parish Council continues to work closely with Spreyton Village Trust on community projects to improve village facilities. The village website, hosted by the Parish Council, has been updated through the voluntary

and fundraising work of Lucy Cudlip, to whom we are indebted, and who gave a talk on this subject at our September PC Meeting. 'Parish Council News' articles in the Village Trust 'Spreyton Flyer' continue to keep the community informed of both PC and local government activities.

Community match-funding was applied for and successfully obtained from WDBC under its Section 106 Grant Scheme arising from the Chapel Park housing development. This money, along with financial contributions from the Parish Council and the Community Shop, has funded the newly completed concrete pathway from the village hall to the shop, as well as the drainage of the car park, and the purchase of a new playground swing. A further funding application is planned for a replacement more substantial shed for the playing field mower.

Despite the drastic cuts in local authority budgets, the Parish Council is grateful to Devon Highways for eventually allocating funds to complete recent major patching and resurfacing of the village main street. Furthermore, a micro asphalt top dressing is to be budgeted for possibly later this year. This road resurfacing and extensive drainage work by Devon Highways during the year to alleviate persistent flooding in the centre of the village, will greatly improve the infrastructure quality of the village.

Wind turbines still feature prominently on the planning front. Our council members continue to represent the overwhelming view of parishioners that further planning applications (post Den Brook) for commercial size wind turbines within the parish should be resisted, on grounds of scale, noise, visual impact on landscape and residential amenity, cumulative impact with Den Brook, and setting precedent for a continuing degradation and industrialisation of our rural parish.

Accordingly, the Parish Council formally objected (4 Feb 2015) to a further planning application registered with WDBC 9 Jan 2015, for a relocated single commercial wind turbine on land at North Beer Farm near Downhayes.

Construction of the approved Den Brook Wind Farm continues to be delayed whilst the adequacies of the noise protection conditions are

debated. WDBC has accepted the developers' revised proposals, but these are still being contested and are subject to further Judicial Review. At present therefore, this wind farm is not likely to be operational before 2016.

Apart from the spread of wind turbines, the Parish Council is concerned that recent relaxations in planning guidelines under a 'Prior Notification Application' are allowing agricultural buildings to be approved for change of use to dwellings, in a piecemeal manner subject to fulfilling certain conditions, without due consultation with the local parish council. Furthermore, a recent case in Spreyton shows WDBC Planning is not particularly concerned with such developments exceeding the present boundaries of the village.

Finally, as we approach Parish Council elections in May, I would like to thank my fellow Spreyton Councillors, who after many years of service to our community, are standing down and not seeking re-election, namely Eve Collins, Bill Porrit and Rob Henderson (vote of thanks).

Ken Whitaker