

Hazelbury Bryan Bytes

Parish Council Newsletter – Issue 28 - September 2016

Chairman's introduction

There are articles in this edition on highways maintenance, the future of local government in Dorset, the community pavilion on the Recreation Ground, the parish council budget and Precept for 2017/18 and the community defibrillator. In addition you will see a separate "flyer" delivered with this edition that relates entirely to the Neighbourhood Plan. Please take the time to look at this. A Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to shape how our village will develop and look over the next 15 years or so. For this to happen we need to know what YOU want and need from the village. Without YOUR input and views we cannot develop a credible Plan that will reflect the views of the entire community. So please try and come along to the consultation day on 8th October and fill out one of the questionnaires. You might be lucky and win a case of wine!

Steve Murcer, Chairman, Hazelbury Bryan Parish Council

Highways maintenance – less for more?

Dorset County council is cutting back on what it regards as non-essential routine maintenance because of a lack of money. Services at risk include verge cutting, gully emptying, weed killing, sign cleaning, road sweeping, fingerpost repairs, village gateway signage, non-essential sign replacement, clearing leaves and undergrowth from surface water gullies amongst others. If local communities want this work done they will have to do it themselves. This could be in three ways – pay DCC to do it; employ a "suitably qualified" contractor (with £5m public liability insurance) to do the work; or organise a group of volunteers to do it with DCC providing equipment and a supervising chargehand. DCC has provided some indicative costs if we want it to do work for us – a mechanical side verging team for a day will be £1,200 and cut between 2 to 4 miles of verge; a flail mower for a day is £375 and will cut 5 miles of verge; a two man general maintenance team is £400 a day. These are not insignificant costs out of our annual precept of £15,000. Maybe volunteers will come forward to do these tasks – as DCC cheerily says in its publicity – "We hope you will get involved.....you may be surprised at what can be achieved by working together!" We'll see how this pans out in practice.

Local Government in Dorset

A major public consultation on the future of local government in Dorset is underway as the status quo is not an option. Left to its own devices North Dorset District Council will eventually run out of money. The likely way ahead is for two unitary authorities for Dorset, with one potentially centred on Bournemouth and Poole (and possibly Christchurch), and one for the more rural areas. Whilst these changes will save considerable money (and seem to work in places like Wiltshire and Cornwall) it will have implications at the local level. Given there will be far fewer councillors, it will be harder for them to provide the same level of support to parishes and have as much knowledge of local issues. Council tax will also rise and at a faster rate. Currently NDDC can only increase its element of council tax by 2% per annum; Dorset County Council can increase its element of council tax by 4%. Any unitary authority will thus be able to increase the entire council tax by the higher amount. Additionally, there will need to be a harmonisation of council tax rates across the new authority – given council tax is lower in North Dorset than most of the other councils in Dorset our council tax will need to be further increased. The extra funding will not feed back into local services like libraries, verge cutting, footpath maintenance etc, but will fund the soaring costs of adult social care and children's services, both of which are now a local responsibility. Once a strategy is set after the consultation, individual district councils will not have any power of veto and will have to join in the new arrangement. The consultation runs until 25th October. There are local presentation events (including Blandford Market Square 9am – 1 pm on 14th October and Sturminster Newton in The Exchange at 9.30 am – 1.30 pm on 17th October) and you are urged to read the public information and have your say. Go to the dorsetforyou web site and search for “consultations” to give your views on-line.

Recreation Ground – new community building

In the last edition we made reference to the progress being made in developing this new community building. At the parish council meeting in September it was agreed to provide the remaining finance to enable development to start. Tenders have been received from 3 contractors and we are now working on the formalities to enable construction to begin as soon as possible. Including contingencies and professional fees, the cost will be £113k. The community has raised the best part of £55k over the years, a fantastic effort from all those involved. To bridge the gap the parish council decided to use £25k of its reserves towards the project and finance the remainder with a fixed rate Public Works Loan Board loan from the Government. This will be over 25 years with repayments coming from the Precept. We will continue to seek whatever grant funding, donations etc we can to mitigate the cost and potentially repay the loan, or a portion of it, at an early stage. This will be a great asset for the community and hopefully will encourage cricket and football teams to flourish/reform and be another venue for the community to hire for childrens parties, events etc. We expect the running costs to be offset by fees from sport and casual users.

Precept for 2017/18

We've started to look ahead to our budget for 2017/18 and the impact on the Precept. We've mentioned the PWLB loan repayment above; we've also had to allow for extra grass cutting costs at the cemetery and around the play area as we can no longer rely on the services of long-standing volunteers who have had to give up for a variety of reasons. We control expenditure very tightly but we do see the likely need to increase the Precept by a few percent next year. We haven't yet finalised the budget but to put this into context, a 3% rise would mean households in a Band D Council Tax bracket would pay an extra 90 pence a year, while even a 10% increase would only mean a rise of £3.10 a year, or 6 pence a week. We don't think this is too much to bear.

Community Defibrillator

For some time this has been housed in the Antelope public house. We've been very grateful for the pub's support but felt it ought to be readily available at any hour of the day or night. We've worked with the village hall committee and are pleased to say it is now located outside the village hall, next to the parish notice board. It is likely some refresher training sessions will be held locally in the near future.

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