

# THE ORCHARDS' & MARGARET MARSH PARISH COUNCIL (GROUP)

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT MANSTON VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2024 STARTING AT 6.30PM

**Present:** Cllr T Craven (Chairman), Cllr J Martin, Cllr N McCombe, Cllr G Stokes.

**In attendance:** R. Jacques (Clerk), County Cllr Mrs J Somper and thirteen members of the public.

**Apologies:** Cllr Mrs V Stokes

Cllr T Craven opened the meeting and asked for a volunteer to Chair it. There were no volunteers; Cllr Craven (Parish Council Chairman) Chaired the meeting.

1. **Approval of minutes for 2023 meeting:** The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.
2. There were no matters arising from the minutes.
3. **Chairman's Report:** (Copies of the report were made available prior to the meeting).  
The Chairman presented the following report:

### **Chairman's Report to Annual Parish Meeting May 2024**

#### **General – Funding**

*The expenditure budget for the Financial Year 2024-2025 was set at the November 2023 meeting at £3,284. This is an increase of £251 on the previous year. The increase was largely the result of setting aside a sum of £250 for election costs. All other budgeted costs were in line with previous expenditure. The Council also approved a budgeted cost of one-off grant awards of £250.*

#### **Conferences and Training Attended**

*Cllr G Stokes completed the New Councillor Induction Training and a Networking Conference.*

*Cllr J Martin attended a Northern Area DAPTC meeting.*

*The Chairman attended a Northern Area DAPTC meeting and the AGM of the DAPTC.*

*The Clerk attended the Clerks' Conference and a DAPTC training presentation for Parish Council accounting software.*

#### **Council Business**

##### **Planning**

*Planning applications considered during the past year include:*

- Zinc Barn
- Church of St Thomas
- Tree Preservation Order Church of St Thomas
- Roehill Farm

- Lakesbrook Farm
- Gore Farm
- Copper Trees
- Land East of Orchard Corner
- Tree Preservation Order Land East of Orchard Corner
- Green Farm
- Higher Farm House
- Buildings at Trapdoor Farm
- Pennyclose Farm
- 3 Bleax close
- Land west of Church Hill, and Land off Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane Marnhull
- Step House.
- New House
- Field View Farm
- Land at Church Lane
- Mansfield Farm

### **Footpaths:**

- All footpath issues were reported to Dorset Council.
- Two stiles at West Orchard were in a state of disrepair.
- The Chairman met with members of the Ramblers Association to discuss issues.
- The Chairman investigated an incident where by walkers damaged a land owner's fencing in order to access a footpath.
- A footpath issue was reported at Margaret Marsh.
- All observations or repairs can be reported to Dorset Council on their website: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/>

### **Resignation of Councillors and Co-option of Councillor:**

*Cllr M Bone resigned from the Parish Council at the February 2023 meeting. Cllr G Stokes was Co-opted as a Councillor for East Orchard at the August meeting of the Parish Council.*

### **Change of Payroll Provider:**

*The payroll provider announced a large increase in their charges to provide the payroll service for the Clerk. The Councillors sought an alternative and another provider was appointed at a considerable saving.*

### **Highways:**

*The Highways Officer for the area is now Mr Patrick Carpenter. The issues discussed through the year have related to major flooding at East Orchard and ongoing flooding at Margaret Marsh. Potholes were also discussed as concerns in all three parishes.*

### **Section 137 Grant Awards:**

*Grant Awards were discussed at the February 2024 meeting and it was decided that grants awards would be made to The Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance of £125 and to Children with Cancer Charity of £125.*

### **Parish Wardens:**

*The Parish Wardens litter clearance scheme continues to operate in the three parishes, during the year*

*the Parish Warden for East Orchard is Mr Faulkner, for Margaret Marsh Cllr Mrs V Stokes and for West Orchard Cllr N McCombe. This scheme has now been in operation for a number of years, being one of the first to be implemented by a Parish Council in Dorset. The Parish Wardens have been asked to report any road defects <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/> that they identify when carrying out their duties. In addition, members of the public can also access the link and report directly. A written job description for Parish Wardens is published on the Parish Council website.*

***Chairman's Review of the Year:***

***The council has seen more engagement with DCC this year with excellent support from Cllr Jane Somper and Highways Officer Mr Carpenter. We have had some success and the training and advice given by DAPTC and Neil Wedge has been outstanding. We were commended for our training by DAPTC with being allocated the coveted Star Award.***

***An increasing number of planning applications under Q have been submitted. This has been one of the busier years for commenting on applications and I should like to thank Cllr Martin for his studious work in this area.***

***We did attempt to carry out a survey of the parishes' residents to get some import of what issues we could address for them next year. This had very few responses which maybe due to the content of the survey, so no one to blame. The idea of the survey was to engage the public in producing (with the PC) an Emergency Support Plan as suggested by Dorset Council. We do intend to take on board those issues raised from some who replied to the survey in the coming year as routine PC business.***

***As I said last year I, as Chairman, intended standing down last year but continued for another year. It is with regret that other councillors are finding that their day time jobs have become more demanding and they too will be standing down. Cllr Vanessa Stokes has been with the PC for about 20 years, her support to me personally has been outstanding. Our excellent Clerk and RFO Mrs Rosanne Jacques is also moving on to pastures new. The churn of councillors and the Clerk means I am afraid to say, at the time of writing, that The Orchards' and Margaret Marsh PC will have to go into special measures as directed by DCC.***

***I should like to thank my Clerk and all my Councillors for supporting me over the past almost 10 years. It has been a great team and a pleasure to work with.***

***Tim R Craven***

***Chairman The Orchards' and Margaret Marsh PC***

***May 2024***

**4. Public Open Forum:**

The Chairman reminded the attendees of the meeting that it had been called earlier in the year than usual because of concerns regarding the future of the Parish Council (PC) Group. The local elections will take place 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 and there are 7 seats on the PC – 4 for East Orchard, 2 for West Orchard and 1 for Margaret Marsh. To date, the only confirmed nomination submitted is that of Cllr G Stokes for Margaret Marsh. If no further nominations are submitted this will effectively place the PC in

‘Special Measures’. The Chairman invited Cllr J Somper to comment on the situation. Cllr Somper reported that within the Beacon there are 14 Parish Councils and although all are struggling to fill the number of seats they have, none are in the position of The Orchards and Margaret Marsh PC. There has to be a minimum of 3 Councillors elected for a PC to be quorate and be able to function. If there are fewer than 3 nominations the Electoral Services at Dorset Council will allocate County Councillors to make up the Councillor number to 3 which will enable the PC to function temporarily. This will include the Co-opting of local Councillors to fill vacancies. She cautioned that the County Councillors allocated could be from anywhere in the County and will not necessarily be local. The Chairman reminded the attendees of the meeting that the closing date for nominations to be delivered is 5<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 4:00pm.

The following questions were asked and answered by The Chairman and Cllr J Somper:

Q Is there a description available of what Councillors do?

A The Chairman explained he has put together a folder of handover notes; DAPTC has information of their website and provide training for Councillors including Induction. The Local Government Act 1972 is the legislation which governs PCs.

Cllr Somper added that the Chairman has built excellent relationships with Dorset Council officers and these good connections have achieved good results.

Q What is the commitment required?

A The Chairman explained there are 4 meetings per year plus some time spent resolving issues with highways, footpaths, planning applications etc. Councillors do not receive payment but travelling expenses for PC business are reimbursed.

Q How easy will it be to find another Clerk?

A The Chairman advised it is not essential to have a Clerk and expressed the view that it may not be easy but some Clerks do have capacity for more PCs. He reported having spoken with a person from another Dorset village who manages a precept without a PC.

Q Could there be an opportunity to merge with a neighbouring PC?

A Cllr J Somper explained it is possible and one scenario could be that the PC Group is split and the individual parishes merged with other PCs.

The Chairman added that merging with another PC would mean the current PC Group of parishes not being represented at all at least for a while. Would it not be best therefore to maintain the current PC arrangement?

Q Would Cllr G Stokes automatically become the Chairman?

The Chairman advised that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman are elected by the Councillors at the first meeting of the PC.

Q Do the 3 Councillors (required to be quorate) need to be one from each Parish.

A The Chairman confirmed they do not.

General discussion took place about the following:

- Fontmell Magna Neighbourhood Plan including Hartgrove;
- Young families moving into the area;
- The current Councillors standing for re-election.

**The meeting closed at 7.15pm**

Signed.

Date

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Chairman