

Easterton Parish Council

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY, 24th APRIL, 2017
AT 7.30 PM IN EASTERTON VILLAGE HALL**

Present: Mr. C. Saunders (Chairman), Mr. B. Myerscough (Vice-Chairman), Mr. R. Firth, Mr. R. Bulson, Mr. K. Jenssen, Mrs. V. Turner, Mr. P. Whitehead (WC Cllr), Mr. R. Brooks, Mrs. S. Deegan (Clerk) and 12 Members of the Public.

Apologies: Mr. N. Stovold

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman opened the meeting by extending a warm welcome to all those present and he then invited Richard Brooks to address the meeting.

2. PRESENTATION BY MR. RICHARD BROOKS – “ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT OF THE MOD ESTATE”

Richard introduced himself and his role of Principle Environmental Advisor for the MOD. He explained that his team were responsible for the environmental management of all of the MOD estate both across the UK and Overseas including Kenya, Canada, Belize, Cyprus, Falklands. He indicated that he would keep his presentation focussed locally on environmental management of Salisbury Plain Training Area but that the same methodologies and management were occurring right across the MODs estate. Richard highlighted the specific areas for which his team have responsibility which included ecology, archaeology, historic buildings, public access and recreation, forestry and management planning.

Richard introduced the Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA). At 24 miles x 9 miles (37 800ha) it is the largest of the UK training areas and the only one that can host armoured manoeuvre training up to Brigade level - which could be several thousand troops. It is a major artillery range, hosts mission specific training and has a wide variety of training features which can be adapted to a wide number of training scenarios. Usage of SPTA is very high with some 900 000 man training days undertaken within any one year. Richard played a short film to demonstrate what training looked like.

Having seen the potentially destructive nature of training Richard then explained how his team work with the military to ensure that the training areas remain sustainable and that the environmental designations across the MOD estate are integrated into training programmes. The main areas highlighted were:

1. Protected habitats – 22000 ha of SPTA is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for various habitats but mainly for chalk grassland. This equates to 1% of the UKs SSSI designation. Although designated mainly for the grassland individual species are also features which must be considered including the Marsh Fritillary, Stone Curlew, fairy shrimp and Harriers.

2. Archaeology – SPTA is one of the most significant archaeological landscapes in NW Europe and borders the Stonehenge World Heritage Site. SPTA includes 7 Archaeological Important and Fragile Sites (Romano British occupation), over 350 Scheduled Monuments and in the region of 2500 other known archaeological sites all of which must be considered in relation to any military activity. As SPTA has been in existence as a military training area for over 100 years the military have created their own levels of modern archaeology through early activity such as tented camps, practice trenches, practice tunnels and arborglyphs (tree carvings).

3. Public access and recreation – as well as the above needing to be integrated into military activity so does public activity. SPTA has some 300 miles of Public Rights of Way most of which remain open to the public at all times plus another 250 miles of military roads and stone tracks to which the public also has access to varying degrees. Richard explained that whilst the MOD has a presumption in favour of public access, and he encouraged all to make use of the access on SPTA, public safety is the main concern and exclusions are rightly put in place where the public are potentially at risk. Richard explained the risk that has to be managed where safety restrictions have been ignored. He highlighted some of the other problems relating to irresponsible and illegal access including illegal off-roading, metal theft, hare coursing and removal of unexploded ordnance.

4. The ever changing world – new types of training and equipment have to be integrated into the management of SPTA. All new activity is assessed for its potential environmental impact and suitable mitigation is put in place to ensure that SPTA remains resilient and sustainable for future use. His team have to consider new species arrival and change such as the Great Bustards arrival or the discovery of new protected species.

Richard then spoke about how the integration of these pressures is undertaken through management plans, applying environmental weighting factors to types of training, building environmental avoids into training programmes and plans and through continuous engagement with statutory bodies and local authorities such as Natural England, Historic England and Wiltshire Council. He also spoke about the SPTA Conservation Groups who bring together professional and amateur ecologists and archaeologists to assist with the collection of environmental data and undertaking species monitoring which helps evidence the MODs continued good management.

Richard then gave examples of how the environment is helping train soldiers for overseas operations through teaching them to have respect for cultural heritage by engaging them with archaeology on the ground and embedding archaeology in to training. He finished his talk by highlighting the MODs Operation Nightingale programme led by Richards team. Operation Nightingale engages soldiers and veterans with mental and physical difficulties with archaeology giving them firsthand experience of excavations and research working alongside professional archaeologists. This programme has proven hugely successful and has gained national recognition. Copies of the MODs Sanctuary magazine were made available.

The Chairman thanked Richard for his most interesting and informative presentation and the meeting warmly endorsed these sentiments.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 11th April, 2016, were circulated and agreed as a true and accurate record and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

5. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman stated that he had based his annual report on that given 12 months ago – to draw residents' attention to the progress made and current developments.

The volunteers for the Easterton Spring Clean on Sunday 12th March numbered just 11, possibly because of the threat of rain, however all the public areas were covered and a total of some 7 bags of litter collected. This effort was much appreciated by Parish Councillors.

The condition of bridleways, byways, and footpaths are monitored continually, reported on at each Parish Council meeting very ably by Councillors Turner and Stovold, with action initiated by your Parish Council or, if appropriate, by Wiltshire Council's Rights of Way Warden. Defects were naturally an ongoing issue and reports of such from any Parishioner were welcomed. Also welcome were more ideas for improvements to the Village infrastructure generally.

The Jam Factory housing development, shortly to have new road signage showing its new title of "Strawberry Fields", and after much angst over the drawn out procedures connected with the traffic calming measures, had reached the stage where no more work would be undertaken until Phase 2 is commenced later in the year. Work to reduce the height of part of the retaining wall would take place at that time being part of the planning conditions attached to the building of a further 30 dwellings.

There had been no further approach to the Parish Council regarding any development of any part of The Halstead Farm Field.

The Flood Working Group's (FWG) efforts to safeguard the Village continued – a major success was in obtaining a ruling from the Senior Solicitor at Wiltshire Council confirming that the responsibility for the upkeep and restoration of the two Highways drainage outfalls on Church land did indeed fall on Wiltshire Council and not on the landowner. Although the FWG had proposed two schemes to improve the stream's capacity through the High Street these schemes were way beyond the financial resources of Wiltshire Council without Government funding – which was unlikely to be made available in the short term. The records from the Telemetry stream level warning equipment in place at Eastcott showed that the stream had barely risen towards the first warning trigger point in the last 12 months – for this we had to be thankful, but never complacent where stream bed and bank conditions were concerned. Our ever watchful Flood Warden, Councillor Bob Bulson, showed great diligence and he should be congratulated for his efforts.

Since last October the successful return of the Parish Steward Scheme had been experienced and all concerned had been very pleased with his efforts guided by Councillor Turner.

The possible site for development of a Market Lavington field off Drove Lane next to this Village's boundary was one of many sites still to be determined by Market Lavington's Neighbourhood Plan Committee. They were aware of Easterton's concerns and that we wished to be involved with any relating planning application.

The Village Hall Trustees were shortly to embark on Phase 2 of the improvement work – new toilets and new roof. To learn more the Chairman asked that residents attend their AGM on Wednesday 21st June at 7pm.

The successful Easterton Forum had definitely and regretfully folded, but a new Summer Fête Committee had risen from the ashes at the instigation of Tara Deegan. Please do all you can to help her endeavours (Don't say no if approached! Offer your help in anticipation).

The Chairman reminded everyone that their Parish Councillors freely volunteer their time and energy for the benefit of all, ably advised by the Parish Clerk, Susan Deegan, and if occasionally further assistance was asked for from the Village it is because it is really needed.

6. WILTSHIRE COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – PHILIP WHITEHEAD

Councillor Whitehead introduced his presentation under the title, "Transforming Wiltshire through Innovation". He explained that Wiltshire Council was run on the basis of a mixture of council officers and contractors. Peer reviews were carried out with the aim of establishing efficiency; just 6% was spent on back office costs which was comparable to any private organisation. In recent years staffing numbers had been reduced by approximately 1,000 resulting in a saving of £120m.

Focusing on Highways expenditure from 1993 to 2015 this had increased from just over £15m to over £25m. The effect of investment showed, for example, that in 2014/15 148km of road had been treated and this had increased to 250km in 2016/17. In terms of road network considered to be in poor condition in 2009/10 the figure for Wiltshire's A roads was 6.4% and for Devizes the figure was 8.4% and by 2015/16 these figures had decreased to 3.1% and 2.6% respectively. For B roads in Wiltshire the comparative data was 5% down to 3.4% and for C roads 8.3% down to 6.2%.

The overall statistics in respect of Wiltshire's responsibilities with regard to roads, footways, bridges and lighting were as follows: 4,400 km of road, 2,700 miles; 3.9m sq m of footway; 981 bridges and 50,000 street lights/illuminated signs. Asset replacement value was £5billion and £330m would be required to resurface all of the Council's roads.

On the issue of Devizes' traffic congestion Councillor Whitehead said that there was no simple solution and it was worth noting that the majority of vehicles in Devizes were travelling from, to or within Devizes itself as opposed to 'through' traffic. Having studied the matter Wiltshire Council was planning to change the arrangements at the Windsor Drive junction by increasing the size of the current roundabout and installing traffic lights.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Whitehead for his regular attendance at Parish Council meetings and his supportive actions on behalf of Easterton. This was endorsed by all present.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Jenssen then addressed the meeting and explained that the parish precept had been increased by a small sum for the current year to take account of the ever increasing responsibilities which were being delegated from the Unitary Council (Wiltshire) to the Parish. This was noted.

There being no other business the Chairman warmly thanked all those present and declared the meeting closed at 9.15 p.m.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____