

Blackdown Hills Parish Network

AGM Minutes and Annual Report to the Network held on Friday 24th May 2013 at 7.30pm Culmstock Village Hall

Present:

Chairperson: Heather Stallard (Hemyock PC)	Roy Hare (Culmstock PC)
Catherine Bass (BHPN Co-ordinator)	Cllr. Paul Diviani (AONB/EDDC/DCC)
Lisa Turner (Blackdown Hills AONB)	Cathy Gardner (Clerk Stockland)
Geoffrey Swarder (Dunkeswell PC)	Gary Gardner (Stockland)
Ken Pearson (Clerk Churchstanton)	Alun Tarr (Churchstanton PC)
Ann Papworth (Churchstanton PC)	Graham Long (Upottery PC)
Malcolm Plastow (Culmstock PC)	Margaret Lee (Pitminster PC)
Cllr. Frank Rosamond (Mid Devon DC)	Dave Harris (Culmstock PC)
Alan Palmer (Hemyock)	
John Barrow (Dunkeswell PC)	7 parishes represented

Apologies received from:

Bruce Payne (Wellington w/out PC)
John Cornish (Upottery PC)
Cllr. Andrew Moulding (DCC)

Welcome and Introductions

Heather Stallard welcomed everyone to the meeting, brief introductions were made.

Apologies were received from those noted above.

1. Minutes of the last meeting on 6th November 2012

There being no amendments, the Minutes were agreed as a true record of the previous meeting.

2. Matters arising

Matters arising were taken within the agenda

3. Adoption of the BHPN Constitution agreed following BHPN meeting 24/3/2012

The Chairperson called for comments and further amendments to the previously circulated draft Constitution. None were offered from the floor. There was some discussion regarding proper designation of the person elected to head the network.

*The title 'Chairperson' was proposed by RH and seconded by ML.
The proposal was carried unanimously.*

4. Annual Report from the Chairperson, Heather Stallard

Heather Stallard presented her report, stating that the Blackdown Hills Parish Network had completed its first full year of operation. Funding had been made available from Devon County Council, Devon County Councillors and also from contributing parishes to enable the work to start. She thanked all of these contributors for their support and continued by saying that it is up to the members of the Network to make sure that it achieves its aims. To that end it is important to employ someone to keep agreed actions moving forward. The monies received have enabled the Steering Group to employ a Co-ordinator, Catherine Bass who was thanked for the time she has spent on getting the Network to its current point.

The Steering Group has met several times during the year (members Heather Stallard, Bruce Payne, Ann Papworth, Geoffrey Swarder, Ken Pearson, Lisa Turner, Catherine Bass) and 2 action groups have started work on the agreed high priority issues arising from the Community Plan published in Autumn 2011. The Communications & Website group comprises Catherine Bass, Alun Tarr, Bruce Payne and Ken Pearson, the Traffic Transport & Highways group comprises Ken Pearson, Roy Hare, Malcolm Plastow and Graham Long. The Planning group has faltered a little in its set up, but it is hoped that it will be up and running soon. Each of these groups is to report in this meeting.

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Thanks were expressed to Lisa Turner for her support for the Network through her role at the AONB. The AONB was also acknowledged for generously giving the Steering Group access to its meeting room.

The Chairperson's annual report closed with a call to everyone present to make use of their Network and to encourage as many Blackdown Hills residents as possible to engage with it and to spread the word about its activities.

5. Annual Financial Report: Treasurer /Co-ordinator Catherine Bass

The annual account was presented to the meeting, having been examined by an independent management accountant (Assessors's report, Profit & Loss account with Balance Sheet attached).

The BHPN Bank account was opened in March 2012, and the account presented to the meeting indicates the situation at 31st March 2013, following one complete year of operation.

It was noted that £3,505.23 income in the year from Devon County Council and Councillors' Locality funding is non recurrent, and £450 of the £1,995.00 income derived from Parishes includes contributions from two parishes for both last year and the current year 2013/2014.

Expenditure on website creation (£1410.00) is non-recurrent; annual hosting and domain name registration will cost £150.00 annually.

The Bank balance at the financial year end was £2019.31.

An application to the Voluntary and Community Sector Fund at Taunton Deane Borough Council resulted in a recently received grant of £1,000.00 to support the development of the website through support for the co-ordinator's activities to populate the website, training for volunteers and development of web site advertising revenue.

Current bank balance is £3019.31.

The Treasurer sought the opinion of the meeting regarding development of recurrent parish contributions and new parish supporters for the Network. It was agreed that an invoice should be issued to each parish which had contributed in 2012-2013. The guidelines for contributions will be reissued to the larger parishes within the AONB boundary (ie those with a footprint of 20% or more within the boundary) who have yet to contribute.

The adoption of the Annual ReportS BY TEH Chairperson and Treasurer together with endorsement of regular invoicing to contributing parishes was proposed by PD and seconded by GL. The proposal was carried unanimously.

6. Endorsement of the Steering Group

The current members of the Steering Group were all prepared to continue with the exception of Ann Papworth who stood down. Cathy Gardner (Stockland Clerk) volunteered to join the steering group. The Co-ordinator suggested that the Steering Group was elected en bloc.

Motion proposed by AT, seconded by RH, unanimously agreed.

7. Reports from Action Groups

a. Communications and Website (Catherine Bass)

The website is now live and slowly gaining users, with some events being posted in the diary and two parishes have already taken advantage of the very economical rate (£15 pa) being charged to set up independent parish pages within www.blackdownsonline.org.uk. Other parishes without an independent website are encouraged to follow this example.

The free training offered by Cosmic Ethical (website designers) has now been used and there are now six registered website users with the ability to post and edit pages . Further

training will be charged at standard hourly rates, although it is hoped that current users will be able to share their expertise.

Communications in general are a persistent problem across the area. The free newspaper, View from the Blackdowns, has become less amenable to sharing public information since a change of ownership, postage costs are becoming prohibitive, so the only real medium of choice is email and internet use. The co-ordinator noted that it is still very hard to know whether information sent for the information of parish residents via Parish Clerks is being shared in all cases. This is a common problem for the Network and Action Group leaders must work together to improve this situation (a one-off targeted card drop via the Royal Mail has been suggested).

In discussion following the report, it was suggested that a Facebook page is set up for the Network using the BlackdownsOnline presence as a way to draw in a younger user profile and to draw in potential advertisers. The example of Culmstock News' Facebook page was cited, where the usage has been entirely responsible since it was launched in December. Using the Facebook 'like' function to link with existing parish websites, diary events, community facilities, services and businesses, accommodation, leisure activities, clubs and societies activities could be a very effective way to raise the profile of the website which is designed to complement those of the AONB and Blackdown Hills Business Association. GL noted that some of the diary functions could be automated through Google Drive, since events calendar is a Google based product. The Co-ordinator will investigate both these opportunities.

ACTION CB

b. Traffic, Transport & Highways (Ken Pearson)

The TTH group has met three times since its launch in December 2012, since when a questionnaire has been circulated to all parishes to try to gain more detailed information about specific problems and locations from individual parishes. The idea is to use the information gained to map problems to an online interactive mapping facility, to pinpoint all categories of TTH related problems. This will provide greater weight of evidence at local authority and county level when issues of concern to residents are brought to their attention. Unfortunately the questionnaire met with the problem outlined by the Communications group, in that only 8 responses have been received, most of which lacked sufficient detail to map. The TTH group has acquired a free licence to use an online mapping tool which was demonstrated to the meeting by RH.

KP suggested that a further attempt to get more completed questionnaires is made. The groups meets next in July.

c. Planning group (Geoffrey Sworder)

GS has been unable to move forward with launching the planning group for personal reasons, however he, LT and CB will work toward identifying a group (preferably with representation from all relevant LA districts) to share best practice and identify the urgent issues facing some parishes as LA Strategic plans are developed. TDBC has recently published the results of consultations and planning decisions, MDCC and EDDC are currently opening consultations.

ACTION GS/LT/CB

8. Discussion Topic – Planning

Several contributions were made from the floor regarding planning issues facing some parishes, and the clear evidence of inconsistency between neighbouring AONB parishes in different LA areas. TDBC has recently announced planning decisions which will introduce 17,000 new houses in the Borough, some of which have been allocated in Churchinford (the only allocation in the AONB) to designs which will be entirely out of keeping with the village.

This prompted general discussion about the distribution of new housing to some areas of the Blackdowns not taking account of additional traffic that will be introduced in neighbouring areas, the lack of local jobs and the fact that in many cases the housing is not allocated to local people

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with an identified need. It is clear that parishes need to be fully informed of potential planning consultations right from the start and to respond at all opportunities and to take full advantage of the best practice gained by other parishes. It is clear that LAs operate to very different policy guidelines with respect to low cost housing with very different outcomes inconsistent with the AONB guidelines and local preferences.

9. The meeting closed at 9.45 pm.

Next meeting dates to TBA:

AGM Spring 2014

BHPN meeting September/October 2013

BHPN Steering Group meeting June 2013