

WEMBURY PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Councillors	D Drought A Cammack M Doody P Filby M Gage J Hart N Martin R Newnham R Rowland L Scoble J Squire C Tarsky	Chairman County Councillor Vice Chairman District Councillor
Clerk	R Fairclough	

Minutes of the Wembury Parish Council meeting held at the Silver Jubilee Hall, Down Thomas, on Monday 20 August 2007.

07-099 OPENING THE MEETING

The Chairman opened the meeting at 8.30 pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to resolve current planning issues and then to discuss with Gary Streeter MP the problems with the current planning procedures, which allowed properties to be built out of character with their location and against the wishes of the local residents.

Cllrs Cammack, Doody, Gage, Martin, Hart, Newnham and Scoble were present. Thirteen members of the public were also present.

07-100 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Filby, Rowland, Squire & Tarsky.

07-101 TO RECEIVE THE MONTHLY PLANNING REPORT AT ANNEX A TO THESE MINUTES

The Chairman went through the planning report shown in Annex A of the Agenda.

RESOLVED: To accept the Planning Report with resolutions as detailed in ANNEX A to these minutes.

07-102 THE BUSINESS OF THE COUNCIL WAS SUSPENDED FOR THE PUBLIC TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS OR PUT QUESTIONS TO THE COUNCIL

The Chairman suspended the business of the Council and opened this session to the public at 8.35 pm.

He then explained that immediately prior to the meeting he had taken Gary Streeter around the area to view three locations to show him the problems being experienced by local residents, where three properties out of keeping with the location had been approved by the planning process.

One had been approved by South Hams District Council, the concern being that councillors from other parts of the district had been instrumental in the approval and did not know the local area. The other two had been approved upon appeal where one person had visited the sites from Bristol and made a decision, which overturned the decision of the local population, the Parish Council and the District Council.

The Chairman then introduced Gary Streeter MP and asked the public for questions.

SWISS COTTAGE, ANDURN

The Chairman and Secretary both declared an interest and did not take part in the debate about this property.

A local resident expressed their concern about how the local planning system can be overridden by one person from Bristol, which will allow a house to be built which is not in keeping with the other properties in the row. It also contradicted the Devon County Structure Plan.

Gary Streeter agreed that the current planning system has been around for ages and needs reforming. He explained that there is currently a debate in Westminster and alternatives are being considered, such as having three inspectors instead of one, similar to appeal judges. Also, the possibility of reviewing the current appeal system or, an appeal against the appeal to give the local objectors a final say.

Although not the highest priority, he did feel that there was some prospect of the planning system being changed over the next few years.

He believed that the large decisions about planning should be made at Westminster, such as the Sherford development, but that smaller schemes need a new way. He agreed that the building was ugly and that such local planning decisions should be made by the local council.

Another resident explained that the conditions laid down by the planning inspector included one where a landscaping scheme should have been approved prior to the building starting, but the owner doesn't seem to know this. No landscaping scheme has been prepared and the building is nearly complete; how did we stand legally?

Gary Streeter understood that the planning department at South Hams DC were overwhelmed by planning applications, in addition to several large developments such as Sherford. However, the planning department should be enforcing planning conditions and it was up to the local councillors to help achieve this. He was concerned about the planting scheme and said that he would speak to South Hams DC about this case and work with the local councillors regarding the enforcing of planning conditions.

PENDYCE, HEYBROOK BAY

Several local residents expressed concern about this planning application, which was refused by South Hams DC. At the appeal, it appears that South Hams DC did a turnaround and accepted the two houses. However, the residents are concerned that the plans have been changed and that they did not have a chance to comment on them. It appears that since approval by the Planning Inspector there have been further changes and the local residents are still not aware of the final agreed plan.

The Clerk showed the plan initially rejected by the Parish Council that appeared to be different from the one the residents had.

There was also concern about two trees on the site which have Tree Preservation Orders on them but the owner is seeking to have them removed and has arranged an inspection by a tree specialist.

A further concern was expressed about the narrow road access and the supply of local services to the site.

Gary Streeter was aware that this site was split into four and he felt that South Hams DC might have agreed to two houses instead of the four possible.

However, he considered that if changes had been made during the appeal process, then plans should have been circulated for comments by both the Parish Council and the local residents. He would try to find out from South Hams DC what plans had actually been approved and how the plans had changed.

If South Hams DC have got their procedures wrong, then there can be a local challenge and he agreed to check on the statutory obligations.

ROUND HOUSE, HEYBROOK BAY

Again, members of the public wondered how such a house could have been approved for construction. The Chairman informed members that he had spoken to the local planning officer about this application and had been informed that there was no legal reason for objection.

GENERAL

A member of the public expressed concern about South Hams DC having site meetings to discuss planning applications with councillors from other parts of the district, who had no knowledge of the local area, yet they could vote to approve a scheme.

Gary Streeter said that it was the same in every local authority and if planning was left to the local people all the time, then he felt that no new houses would ever be built. However, local communities are now accepting that new and affordable houses need to be built in their village if the village community is to survive and attract younger people.

Cllr Cammack was concerned about 'creeping extensions' which were gaining planning approval, either incrementally, or in some cases, by retrospective application once the work has been done. He cited a case in Knighton Road which had been not been constructed to the plans, then a further application was made which allowed more development on what had already been constructed. This was again not built to the plans but was subsequently accepted by a retrospective application.

Gary Streeter said that unfortunately, some people know how to play the system; they tend to build first and ask for permission afterwards. The clever people also tend to wear down the planning officers. He will liaise with the local councillors to remind them that people submitting planning applications should be playing by the rules.

Cllr Newnham explained about a local scheme, which has not yet been built where councillors met on site to approve an application. The councillors were from all over South Hams DC and the advice given by the planning officer was that if they opposed the application it would probably be overturned on appeal and South Hams DC couldn't afford the appeal costs. The planning officer recommended no objection to the councillors and the application was a 'rubber stamp' approval. He felt that the local councillors should be able to speak at such meetings and the system changed so that local authorities can afford to defend applications at appeal.

Cllr Hart said that the planning officer required a good reason to turn down a planning application these days.

Gary Streeter said that the Local Authority role was to set up a local planning framework and planning policy for the area. Then the decisions should be made at the local level.

He felt that the current system of Government reward for Planning Departments who process a planning application within the set timescale, is counterproductive and a retrograde step. He thought it was a disincentive to look at planning applications properly and to study each application in detail.

The Chairman said that he was encouraged that the Government were looking at these planning issues and hoped that the Parish Council had given Gary Streeter some ammunition to help the debate in Westminster.

Gary Streeter said that South Hams DC was inundated with planning applications and there are too few planning officers to deal with the applications properly to provide a balanced judgement. However, he would raise the issues discussed with South Hams DC and considered that he had received suitable information for the ongoing debate at Westminster.

The Chairman thanked Gary Streeter for attending the meeting and for backing up the Parish Council's general views. He also thanked everyone for attending and for taking part in the discussions.

As there were no further questions, the Chairman closed the open session at 9.15 pm.

07-103 CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chairman then closed the meeting at 9.16 pm

Roy Fairclough
Clerk to Wembury Parish Council