



DRAFT Minutes of the meeting of Combe Martin Parish Council held on Monday 13th December 2021 at 7pm at Combe Martin Community Centre.

Present: Cllrs T Seldon (Chair), S Coomber (Vice Chair), S Boyce, S Daukes, C Galloway, M Richards, P Walker, D Woodbury, and M Worth.

In attendance: Andrew Wyer (Clerk), District Cllr Y Gubb, and four members of the public

PART A

270/21 Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs. Mallinder and Hatherley. County Cllr. Davies also sent apologies.

271/21 Declarations of interest

None

272/21 To consider any requests for dispensations

None

273/21 Public Participation Period

Query about Mill Weir Lane (to be addressed in agenda item)

274/21 Minutes

RESOLVED: To approve and sign the minutes from the Parish Council meeting held on Monday 8th November 2021.

275/21 County and District Councillors' Reports

Combe Martin Parish Council

County Councillors report

December 2021

Coronavirus updates from Devon County Council

The link below may be of interest to residents with the situation changing and many interested in what is happening locally this link is a useful starting point for questions and the current situation in Devon.

The link takes you to the Covid-19 pages on the Devon County Council Website, it has daily updated information as to positive cases within the area, information about testing and track and trace.

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/coronavirus-data/>

Devon County Council budget

A brief 'hi-level' update on the finance part of DCC operations.

We are rapidly approaching the 'business end' of the financial year where month 6 and 7 figures show no slowdown in demand as we move in to winter, not least where Higher needs in Education requirements are increasing pressures. Winter is the traditional time for a peak surge of demand on services across DCC, but frankly currently every day is 'winter' before we get to Christmas.

One of the key factors in setting our budget for the following year, as well as informing future years setting is the settlement we receive from central Government. This is largely based on a formula which enables the DCC finance team to predict the amount we are likely to receive and set the budget, together with any additional support as 'one offs' e.g. Covid support money is temporary, and not something we can (or frankly would want to given the reason for it) depend on in future years.

The settlement figure or at least a strong idea of the amount for DCC should be known at the back end of December, early January. A bit more levelling up here recognising deprivation in large parts of our largely rural county would be appreciated.

Devon is not the land of milk and honey for many of our residents that many outside of the South West would think, not least in the amount per pupil our school pupils receive compared to other local Authorities.

The various service areas are now putting into the finance team what they think they will need for 2022/23 with plenty of opportunity for County Councillors to have a view on budget proposals culminate in in the rounds of scrutiny meetings at the end of January and final budget setting at Full Council on the 17th of February 2022 where we set the legally required balanced budget within the resources available to us. Ongoing pressures, largely as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic are likely to have a significant impact on DCC in the same way they are everywhere else in our society.

Waste and Recycling

The 2020/21 performance statistics have recently been published and Devon's recycling rate reduced to 55.3% from the previous year's 56.6%. The reduction can be linked to the provision of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) which closed for seven weeks during the first lockdown commencing end March 2020. Subsequent social distancing measures reduced site capacities, closure of resale shops and the introduction of booking systems also impacted on the amount of waste processed leading to a reduction in recycling performance.

East Devon once again achieved the highest recycling rate amongst Devon's Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) with 60% marginally down from previous years 60.5%.

The other seven WCA figures as follows:

- Teignbridge (55.9%);
- Torridge & West Devon (55.2%);
- South Hams (54.7%);
- Mid Devon (53.7%);
- North Devon (49.5%)
- Exeter (27.8%).

While our recycling centres recycling performance remains high at 72%, 2020/21 saw a small reduction from previous year (75%). Reductions across all streams were noted for Devon's HWRCs, notably organic material down 22%. The closure and restrictions to HWRC re-use shops last year resulted in a 64% reduction in sales, equating to 666 tonnes less material resold to members of the public – all HWRC re-use shops have now re-opened.

Families on Free School Meals- Christmas arrangements

Over the past year Devon County Council have provided supermarket vouchers worth £15 per child per week of the school holidays to families who qualify for free school meals, so their children don't go hungry.

For Christmas, this is being doubled, with an extra one-off £30 supermarket voucher, so families will receive a £60 voucher per child for the two-weeks to help with the additional financial pressure the festive period can bring.

[You can find out more about the free school meals holiday voucher scheme on our website.](#)

Children currently receiving benefits-related free school meals and their families can also take part in our Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) scheme for free over the Christmas break.

[You can find out more about the Holiday Activity and Food scheme on our website.](#)

Part of a £5 million pound programme the Council has organised with money from the government's new Household Support Fund to help people who are struggling this winter.

Help with food and utility costs is also available via the government's Household Support Fund, with applications being made through local district councils. The scheme, which runs until Thursday 31 March 2022, can also be used for things like emergency boiler and heating repairs and housing costs. For more information [please visit the Household Support Fund page on our website.](#)

DCC have also partnered with Citizens Advice Devon to help eligible households using pre-paid meters who are struggling to meet their fuel bills. For more information [please visit the Citizens Advice Devon website.](#)

Highway Items

Improvements to the Pothole Repair Process

The Highway Network Response Team have just gone live on the new process for Highway Safety Inspections. This change is the culmination of approximately 18 months work and will provide a platform for improvements in both efficiency and quality of repairs. By investing more time in the data collected by the inspectors the repair gangs will be better informed on the scope and scale of work they will be required to carry out. All repair gangs will be re-briefed on the expected quality standards and an improved auditing process will be implemented to address concerns with workmanship.

The team are moving on to look at improving the automated responses that are sent to the public once they have logged an enquiry through the 'report-a-problem' website. The aim of this work will be to help manage the expectations of the public.

Capital Budget Settlement

The UK Roads Liaison Group have shared a document with highway authorities that was produced on behalf of the DfT to support their discussions with the Treasury in advance of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The paper laid out five annual investment scenarios ranging from Accelerated Improvement (£1.9bn) through to Decline (£1.25bn). Disappointingly, the Treasury have chosen to set the funding levels for the next three years at 'Decline'. The impact of this decision will undoubtedly mean further deterioration of the network and an increase in the number of defects and a more reactive strategy. The Service is preparing a briefing note with more information that will be shared with Devon MPs.

Vegetation Management Trials

In response to the high number of overgrown vegetation defects that have been recorded this year the Service is carrying out two trials to look at alternative ways of managing the issue. By drawing on support from local arboriculturists residents are being encouraged to support residents to ensure their hedges and trees are cut back to remove current problems and provide information about appropriate maintenance of boundary vegetation. These trials will reshape our processes for the future.

Reminder about reporting a highway problem:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

[telephone: 0345 155 1004](tel:03451551004)

One network, shows future roadworks in each place; <https://one.network/>

Drains locators and frequency of inspection (cleaning);

<https://apps1.wdm.co.uk/Live/Devon/PBLC/PIP/map.aspx?cg=kaarb>

Location of and faulty street lights,

<https://www.lightsonindevon.co.uk/Public/ReportFault.aspx>

Merry Christmas

And a Happy and Healthy 2022

Andrea Davis Andrea.davis@devon.gov.uk

District Cllr. Y. Gubb reported that North Devon Council has bought Green Lane Shopping Centre (£8.2m). The Council has donated £15k to the Over and Above charity. There is an increased focus on tackling anti-social behaviour in Barnstaple.

276/21 Police

The monthly Ilfracombe Neighbourhood Police Newsletters for December 2021 was received and circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting.

Number of crimes reported in November 2021:

Combe Martin		Berrynarbor	
Violence without injury	1	Violence without injury	2
All other theft offences	2	Stalking and harassment	2
Criminal damage	1	All other theft offences	1
Possession of weapons	2	Public order offences	1

East Down

No crime recorded

277/21 North Devon Council – Planning Applications

North Devon Council, the determining Authority, has asked for comments from this Parish Council on the following planning applications: **Approve all**

- 1 **74133** Proposal – Demolition of existing outbuilding and erection of a single dwelling and garage at Linden Rise Chapel Lane Combe Martin Ilfracombe Devon EX34 0HJ. Grid Ref: 258720;146614.

RESOLVED: To inform the Planning Authority that Combe Martin Parish Council supports this application.

Applicant – Mr and Mrs Sheppard

- 2 **74293** Proposal – Conversion of garage to create a unit of holiday accommodation at ground and first floor levels at Greenslopes Buzzacott Lane Combe Martin Ilfracombe Devon EX34 OLB. Grid Ref: 259469;145929

RESOLVED: To inform the Planning Authority that Combe Martin Parish Council supports this application.

Applicant – Ms Jane Power

- 3 **74329** Proposal – Alterations to garage/store to form ancillary accommodation to main dwelling at Libra Gardens King Street Combe Martin Ilfracombe Devon EX34 0DB. Grid Ref: 257959;147132

RESOLVED: To inform the Planning Authority that Combe Martin Parish Council supports this application.

Applicant – Mr and Mrs Sanders

- 4 **74429** Proposal – Rear extension to ground floor flat at Richmond King Street Combe Martin Ilfracombe Devon EX34 0AG. Grid Ref: 258113;146940

RESOLVED: To inform the Planning Authority that Combe Martin Parish Council supports this application.

Applicant – Mr and Mrs Richards

- 5 **74435** Proposal – Creation of a roof terrace to existing flat roof, new balustrading and roof access hatch at Flat 1 – The Firs Woodlands Combe Martin Ilfracombe Devon EX34 0AS. Grid Ref: 257549;147077

RESOLVED: To inform the Planning Authority that Combe Martin Parish Council supports this application.

Applicant – Mrs J Rule

278/21 Exmoor National Park – Planning Applications

Exmoor National Park, the determining Authority, has asked for comments from this Parish Council on the following planning application:

None

279/21 North Devon Council Planning Decisions

73113 Proposal – Conversion of garage into a single dwelling (amended Plan) - **Refused**

RESOLVED: To note this decision.

280/21 Exmoor National Park Decisions (if any)

62/19/21/004 – Proposed erection of first floor balcony to front of house, together with enlargement of existing vehicular layby, re-positions of access steps, re-design of front garden and replacement of existing garage roof – **Approved.**

RESOLVED: To note this decision.

281/21 Planning Correspondence (if any)

None

282/21 Finance

(Finance reports shall be circulated to Members prior to the meeting):

1 **RESOLVED:** To approve the November 2021 finance reports on the monthly payments and receipts and December 2021 list of payments to be paid being:

- Payments made between 01/11/21 and 30/11/21 totalling £34896.50
- Receipts received between 01/11/21 and 30/11/21 totalling £5208.55
- Payments for December 2021 totalling £22543.75

2 **RESOLVED:** To note the November 2021 finance reports on the monthly summary balances and bank reconciliation and car park receipts.

3 **RESOLVED:** To accept the quotation received from SSE and C&R for the replacement of the connection boxes which includes live working disconnection and reconnection to the Western Power Network on the 2 lights at Skirhead Lane. **ACTION** – Clerk to investigate the lighting situation re: replacement bulbs/head units and the costs involved.

4 **RESOLVED:** To agree the Budget as presented. The Clerk was delegated authority to set the precept for 2022/2023 to achieve a 0% increase and to adjust the budget as necessary.

283/21 To confirm and set dates for future meetings

1 **RESOLVED:** To hold the next meeting on Monday 10 January 2022 at 7pm at the Community Centre. It was also confirmed that 2022 meetings would continue to be scheduled for the 2nd Monday of the month.

Combe Martin Business Association AGM Report

Review

The association's primary role is to promote the village to attract visitors and business to boost our local economy to ensure a vibrant village community. For us to achieve this, we need financial support from all businesses in the village, otherwise, we are in danger of getting lost in all the competition out there for tourists to visit.

Last year was a disaster for most businesses, especially in the tourism sector. The end of last year and this season, we have seen a major rise in staycations. This brings with it a different type of visitor, ones who would not normally visit this country or our part of the country. This brought its own problems with a lack of respect for our countryside and businesses. It also brought volumes of business that we would never normally expect. This caused major problems with parking, driving around the area and businesses coping with the demand.

Hopefully most businesses will have had a boost from the trebling of visitor numbers. The problem for B&B's was their reduced capacity, and for all businesses the increased overheads caused by COVID.

It is a concern that COVID is showing little sign of lessening despite all the measures being taken. This puts a big question mark over the 2022 season. We must hope that there is no need for any further lockdowns in 2022 affecting tourist numbers and ability to earn enough to catch up on the previous two seasons.

Membership

Our membership numbers keep stubbornly low, related to the number of businesses in the village. It seems too many businesses are happy to let the few altruistic businesses cover marketing our village, benefitting all businesses. This simply is not right. We have kept our membership fee the same for several years and is very cheap for all our businesses. To have a healthy business you need your marketing budget to be aiming at a minimum of 4% of turnover. This covers advertising, your website and domain upkeep, business email, membership fees and printing. But also, on-line booking services which can quickly eat up your marketing budget.

We have the potential of at least 50 business members, probably more. With that membership income we could promote the village much wider.

Our membership fees are still at £80 for accommodation, £60 for attractions, £40 for shops.

Finances

Our membership income over the last 2 years have enabled me to keep the association ticking over well enough to promote us and keep the website updated and paid for, but not a lot else.

In 2020

We spent £1568.10 on advertising and marketing. This included a new video for the website, advertising on the Visit Devon website and in the Visit Devon 2020 magazine. It also included a banner advert on the UK Travel website and adverts in the Exmoor Magazine.

We also printed new flyers about the village which were distributed around a wide catchment area as well as different flyers for the village shops to give out.

We also got £1033.05 in donations from ENPA, CM Composters and our public meeting.

Our website which includes the domain name and email hosting, came to £376.58 inc VAT.

Because of COVID we decided to hold off asking for membership fees, but we still had £170 sent to us.

This left us very low on funds, with just £77.05 in our account at the end of the year.

In 2021

Starting with this low budget, membership fees were again asked for, and during March to May this swelled our account by £1420. This gave us a budget of just under £1500.

I used this budget to keep the village marketed, with advertising in Visit Devon website and magazine and in the Exmoor Magazine costing £570 in total. We still had our leaflets from the previous years which I distributed again through the season. I still have some left for the 2022 season, which will use them all up.

The website, domain name and email hosting cost £231.58 inc VAT. Upkeep of our webcam cost £35.88.

Our audited accounts cost us £492. But that includes 2 years, as the accounts were not audited in 2020.

We had 2 donations totalling £70, one from a member and one from the building company that built the new houses in Spurway Gardens.

That leaves us with a bank balance of £233.91.

Marketing

Why do we need to market our village?

Marketing in the tourism sector is fierce for a destination. It is not niche, it is global. The choices out there for potential tourists is basically anywhere in the world. So why should they choose Combe Martin? Without marketing globally, namely our website, we would be lost and would be reliant on the marketing done by Visit Exmoor and Visit Devon. Even then we would be lost within their websites and

overall marketing strategies. Niche marketing is for individual businesses to use to raise their heads above the competition.

Advertising

Old-fashioned advertising is still a necessity as there are still people who do not have access to the web and prefer printed material in their hands. With our very small budget, I try to spread our budget carefully in magazines that are totally relevant to where we are. I also choose magazines that I know will hang around for a long time, so the adverts could be seen by a wide audience over a long period. These magazines distribution is across the UK and to many countries abroad.

Leaflets

As already mentioned, we got some leaflets designed to help promote the village in a catchment area around North Devon and Exmoor, in TIC's and relevant leaflet racks. These were designed to attract people to visit the village.

We also designed an advertising leaflet promoting the shops and businesses in the village. These were distributed by us around the village businesses to give free to their customers. These proved very popular. The advertisers in there have got their monies worth as they have lasted more than 2 years.

Website

We built a new destination website in 2019. This is a modern website, meeting all the expectations of the search engines, so important for getting good positions in searches. It works perfectly on mobiles and tablets as well. It has 91 pages full of information about Combe Martin, its accommodation who are members of the CMBA, things to do, videos, a calendar, business directory and photo gallery.

We have many top-10 listings for various Combe Martin related search phrases.

Pages

Of the 91 pages, the most popular page is the home page, followed by the things to do pages, shops and cafes pages, kayaking, events, attractions, accommodation and their individual advert pages, gardens, tourist information pages, Exmoor National Park and the ND AONB page and the gallery.

Search channels

Organic: 80%

Direct: 15%

Referrals: 5%

Stickiness: 3 minutes, 3 seconds, which is high

From which top countries in 2021?

COVID will have severely affected these figures.

UK: 98.92%

Australia: 0.15%

USA: 0.14%

France: 0.10%

Germany:	0.09%
Netherlands:	0.08%
Ireland:	0.08%
Spain:	0.06%
Canada:	0.06%

On what devices?

Mobiles:	58.66%
Desktops:	32.73%
Tablets:	8.61%

Daily visits to the website

During the season: 90-330

Off season: 5-90

Inward links

141 external pages link to our site, mostly to the home page but others specifically to the things to do pages. For a small destination website, that is a surprising number of website pages linking back to ours, which makes our site very much part of the web and liked by search engines.

Most importantly we have inward links from Visit Devon and Visit Exmoor, Tripadvisor, UK travel and tourism, Exmoor National Park website. Important, relevant links like this helps our site rankings.

Compare our site with online booking engines, such as booking.com

- Booking.com has 28.5 million entries worldwide, 1725 in Devon
- They charge 15% +VAT per booking commission. A £100 booking costs £15, plus VAT on £115 of £23, so £38, leaving you £62. If you are VAT registered, then not so painful
- We charge no commission, so you keep all your tariff
- Even searching for Combe Martin in booking.com, you get Ilfracombe and neighbouring villages added into the results
- Our site does not accept agencies, so purely shows Combe Martin businesses, so much less booking competition
- If someone searches for 'Combe Martin accommodation' on Google, our site is top of the list, so more likely to get a successful booking. It is even above booking.com!
- Our site gives lots of useful information on the village, things to do and attractions, which the likes of booking.com do not and cannot
- Through our site, customers can talk or email direct to you, giving reassurance in both directions, rather than anonymously through online booking sites.

Social media

Facebook and Instagram

Our Facebook page is one of our weaknesses with little interaction and 846 followers. To look after social media properly and get the most out of it needs some dedication from someone who has the time and knowledge to make it work. To pay someone to do this would eat up all our budget. If anyone knows of someone who is fluent with social media, knows how to make it work for us and can look after ours, please let us know.

Conclusion

This season was the busiest the village and whole area has seen for many years, down to staycations. There were almost no foreign visitors. It showed up weaknesses in our parking provision, with people parking anywhere and inevitably getting caught by the parking warden. This leaves a nasty taste for the visitor, spoiling all the hard work our businesses have put into welcoming and attracting visitors.

I think it is essential the Parish Council seriously consider and research a 'park and ride' scheme for July and August to ease the lack of parking in the village.

This season introduced a new kind of visitor, one who sometimes showed little respect for the local population and especially our countryside. Hopefully this was the minority, although the most noticeable. We probably will not see those who had a bad experience for their first visit to North Devon and Exmoor. But there will be plenty who loved their first holiday here and the area, and will visit again and recommend to friends.

It is a concern that COVID numbers are not diminishing and what effect this might have on the 2022 season. We certainly could not afford another lock down situation.

As for membership, we need to keep a healthy number of members as the website in particular needs to be maintained. We cannot and should not rely on others to promote our village. If you know of new business owners, please explain to them the importance of promoting the village and linking some of their own website to ours, probably the things to do section is best.

Our committee

Vince Irwin is standing down, so our committee has now dwindled to less than our constitution dictates. If we cannot get some new volunteers onto our committee then the association would have to finish. What funds we already have would have to be passed onto another association who would be unlikely to promote our village as specifically as we do. They would be unlikely to keep and maintain our website which is the mainstay for getting

visitors here. They would be unlikely to specifically advertise and market our village. If our village businesses show that they do not really care, then why should they care and put in a special effort for us?

Being a member of our committee is far from onerous. We have a few meetings off-season to discuss marketing and the website mainly. During the season I tend to look after the necessary running to keep us promoted. But I am hopeless at social media and that has been the way forwards for some time now. Getting this done properly and funding it, is a challenge. Increasing membership numbers would definitely help, while investigating possible funding streams.

The marketing is now in place for the 2022 season. With only £234 left in the bank, there is little I can now add to that. Our membership is due in March and if we can get more businesses to join us and support the marketing and website, then there could be enough to consider social media as well.

Please can some of you join our committee as without a committee we cannot continue anyway. Then we can get our funds up in March and consider our position then, with the funds we have.

285/21 Correspondence

(copied to all Council Members)

- 1 **RESOLVED:** To note the email received from LandMark Estates – Stopping Order application. ACTION: Clerk to investigate loss of parking spaces.
- 2 **RESOLVED:** To note the email received from Graeme Coombs (an ex-Chairman of Combe Martin Parish Council).
- 3 **RESOLVED:** To respond to the Pack of Cards Public House confirming the Right of Way over the car park
- 4 **RESOLVED:** To respond positively to the enquiry about art in the village.

286/21 Parks and Open Spaces

- 1 Footpaths
The Clerk reported that the P3 survey paperwork had been received and was asked to forward this to Cllr. Richards.
- 2 Mill Weir Lane
The Clerk was asked to liaise with a local resident and to bring recommendations to the February meeting.

287/21 Asset Management

- 1 Community Centre/Office Move
Cllr Worth reported that flooring work was being undertaken ahead of the new carpet going in. A quote for a boiler (specifically to heat the office area) was being prepared and that the removal company had been booked.

2 Hollands Park Building

Cllr Worth presented the outline plans for the two options and will now submit a planning application. District Cllr Gubb requested the specifications, so the appropriate committee at NDC could consider varying the terms of the grant, to allow the money to be used on Public toilets within this building.

3 Committee Structure

RESOLVED: To merge the “Asset Management Committee” and the “Parks & Open Spaces Committee”. **ACTION:** The Clerk to bring new Terms of Reference for the new committee to the January meeting.

288/21 Dog Poo bin

Cllr Worth reported that a suitable location had been found. Councillors were keen for this to be installed as quickly as possible.

289/21 Health and Safety (if any)

None

RESOLVED: That under section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items as they involve the likely disclosure of confidential information.

PART B

290/21 Progress on Rental of No1 Ebberleigh House

Cllr Daukes reported that a new tenant had been found.

291/21 Administrative Assistant

RESOLVED: To defer until next year, any decision about recruiting an Administrative Assistant.

292/21 Christmas Bonus

RESOLVED: To pay a Christmas Bonus for eligible employees.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm

Chair of Combe Martin Parish Council