

DaCC update to members July 2020

Dear Members,

The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown regulations continue to impact on Council's work as they do on all of our lives. It has been a particularly busy time for Sara in the office. In addition to the day to day issues, it is the end of our financial year and this requires considerable work and she has been liaising with the Two Bridges Hotel regarding when and how we can hold Council's AGM (Annual Meeting).

The hotel has now confirmed we can hold a meeting in the usual room (Fountain Room) provided that the meeting is for no more than 30 people and that their social distancing guidelines are adhered to at all times. The AGM will be on Wednesday 12th August 2020. Details and an agenda will follow shortly.

Following the elections, we welcomed four new members to Council and said goodbye to four members, including two long standing members, Maurice Retallick and Brian Lavis, both of whom had been on Council since the very earliest days and contributed significantly to Council over those years. Although Neil Cole had not been on Council as long as the others, he also participated significantly in Council's business. Earlier this month Jonathan Aylett announced that he was standing down from Council following his retirement. Jonathan's scrutiny of correspondence and the minutes will be missed and I am sure Council will join me in wishing him a long and happy retirement.

The elections in three quarters required lots of preparation and organisation. The amount of work required additional effort and there are lessons to be learnt for the future. I asked Sara to provide some of her thoughts:

This year, the election meetings had to take a slightly different format, due to the COVID-19 pandemic & the social distancing guidelines set by the Government. All meetings were held in large open spaces (car parks) & arrangements were put in place at each meeting to reduce the risk of infection for Council Members & Commoners. Due to the exceptional circumstances, as a 'one-off', votes were accepted by email/telephone from anyone who was unable to attend an election meeting due to the coronavirus pandemic. Calls to the office were diverted to my mobile phone & during the election period, I received calls most evenings up to 9:00pm as well as Saturdays & Sundays. Each caller had to be identified to ensure I was speaking to the right person & stringent records maintained. I appreciate that the arrangements put in place were not ideal for everyone. However, I feel they were a satisfactory option that enabled the elections to go ahead under unprecedented circumstances. I would like to thank Karla, who kindly offered to attend each Election meeting with me, for all of her help – setting up & packing away, 'anti-baccing' tables & pens in between each vote & totting up the votes. It was a challenge organising this year's election meetings, which resulted in a tremendous amount of work.

Our Act also states that the Commoners' Council gives notice of the Election meetings by a newspaper advertisement & by giving public notice. We go above & beyond this requirement by: placing advertisements in local papers i.e. Mid-Devon Gazette, South Hams Today & Tavistock & Okehampton Times as well as the Western Morning News (all under Public Notices); sending notifications to all of the relevant Parish Clerks requesting that they be displayed on their Parish Notice Board; sending notifications to all Local Commoners Association Secretaries requesting that all of their members are

fully informed of the dates & the conditions for voting in the elections; & putting it on our website. Despite this, I was surprised by the number of commoners I spoke to who did not know anything about the elections until they had received a letter, phone call or visit from a candidate. Some commoners although they were aware of the forthcoming elections, they didn't know the candidates who were standing in their area & some commoners had not heard of the candidates & would have liked to have known what they were offering if they were voted on to the Commoners' Council. When we do eventually hold meetings, it would be really useful if the above points could be given further consideration as part of the de-brief, along with the issue of the eligibility of candidates wishing to stand.

Sara raises some important points that will need to be followed up. She also participated in two Livestock Worrying Awareness Day.

Sara explains the background and success of the initiative: "Karla and I took part in the Livestock Worrying Awareness Days arranged by the Rural Affairs Team of Devon & Cornwall Police. Livestock worrying is a national rural crime priority. It's recognised that it causes financial & emotional harm to farmers & suffering to farmed animals. The problem has been highlighted & raised within the farming community. Some of the problems are that: incidents go unreported for lack of confidence that the matter will be taken seriously; dog walkers perception is that the dog is playing & doesn't cause harm; injured farmed animals suffer injury & at time not found to be treated; & financial & emotional stress for the stock owner.

Along with the Police & DNPA Rangers (about 14 of us in total on each day), we went out & about in areas identified as being livestock worrying hotspots & engaged with the public. We spoke with dog walkers to help them understand the risk, law & preventative actions they could take to reduce livestock worrying. The Police engaged with landowners to reassure, offer crime prevention advice & encourage reporting. Livestock worrying signs & Rural Crime signs were placed in prominent places within hotspot areas. Places visited included Meldon Reservoir, Belstone, Okehampton Camp area, Prewley Moor, Lydford High Down, Roborough Down, Long Ash, Burrator Reservoir, Yennadon, Pork Hill, West Down, Plaster Down & The Pimple."

It is really important that Council is supportive of this initiative and let us hope it results in fewer attacks on livestock.

Unfortunately in the early stages of lockdown, when the number of vehicles on the roads was very much reduced, the number of road traffic accidents involving livestock did not drop significantly. This suggests that the evidence that most accidents are caused by local drivers, including delivery drivers and speed is correct.

I look forward to seeing you all at the Annual Meeting.

Best wishes, John

John Waldon, Chairman. 27 July 2020