

ON-SCREEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING A GREAT SUCCESS

By Alan Hyde

About 60 parishioners, and some from outside the parish, tuned in to this year's virtual Annual Parish Meeting (APM), held by Zoom on 15 April.

It was a great opportunity for the community to stay connected after the tough time we've all had over the last year or so. No APM was held last year due to Covid, so it was particularly pleasing to see so many interested faces on screen, some clutching their favourite tippie as we heard about some of the issues of the day from invited speakers.

Masterminded by Jane Hole, brilliantly chaired by John Parsons and expertly hosted by Jacq Wanstall, our new Parish Clerk, the two-hour session flew by and, despite a couple of faltering handovers, it went without a technical hitch!

First up was John Bell, Chairman of Neroche Parish Council, who gave an update on local issues including the proposed local government changes for Somerset's county and district councils, a bridleway issue, an unauthorised development, and the Parish Council's purchase of the debrillator outside The Greyhound Inn. John concluded by saying that he was stepping down from his role as Chairman but would continue as a councillor. A new Parish Council Chair will be chosen in due course.

Ross Henley, our District Councillor, then gave a brief summary of his activities and, looking back over the past year, recognised the impact of Covid and its restrictions on people's mental health and highlighted the support available.

County Councillor John Thorne spoke about the **proposed A358 upgrade** and the Taylor Wimpey development at Orchard Portman. Details of the plan to dual the A358 between Southfields roundabout near Ilminster and junction 25 of the M5 near Taunton are available on the Highways England website, including a recently published environmental assessment report which provides some information on the impacts on local roads and the surrounding area. Further community consultation is planned as part of the planning process before the scheme gets considered by a Planning Inspector and a recommendation goes to the Secretary of State. In the meantime, the Parish Council held an extraordinary general meeting on 22 April to seek feedback from parishioners.

On the **Orchard Portman development**, John said the proposal was likely to be included, with other development options at other sites, in a forthcoming consultation on the Draft Local Plan. Watch this space.

This was followed by an encouraging talk on the rollout of **superfast broadband** by Lynda Sudlow from Airband, which had recently secured a contract following a frustrating chapter for this project. Lynda gave some costs (£38/month for 40 Mbps download speed and £47/month for 100 Mbps) and indicative timescales, including

building the 'fibre to the premises' solution later this year before project completion in 2022. The installation cost is £99 including fibre router and twist port.

Anyone interested is invited to visit <http://www.airband.co.uk> or telephone 01905 676 121.

The meeting culminated with a fascinating talk on the **climate crisis** by Jane Durney, a former Wildlife Trust Chief Executive from One Planet Bruton (www.oneplanetbruton.org). She shared a number of environmental insights and lessons, particularly on what individuals and local communities can do to play their part in tackling the climate emergency. The hope is that residents in Neroche, supported by the Parish Council, can come together and develop a plan of action for our corner of this green and pleasant land.

All in all, the meeting was, thankfully, a successful experiment for Neroche - with no sign of Jackie Weaver and no heated exchanges about standing orders! If you missed the meeting, an edited recording plus the broadband and climate crisis presentations are available on the Community tab of the Neroche Villages website - <http://www.nerochevillages.org.uk/annual-parish-meeting>