

Minutes of the Meeting of Hexhamshire Parish Council held on Thursday 13th July 2023
in the Malcolm Caisley Meeting Rooms, Whitley Chapel Parish Hall

7.1 Present –Marge Rastall (Chair), Hilary Kristensen, Lauren Porteus, John Austin, Nicola Matthews, Greg Finch.

Clerk - Jonny White.

Apologies for Absence –. Davy Short, Ed Parker, Roger Rutherford, Gill Whatmough; Colin Horncastle (Councillor).

7.2 Minutes of the previous meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 8th June 2023

It was agreed the minutes were a true record of the meeting.

7.3 Declarations of Interest – No Declarations of Interest.

7.4 Matters Arising

- The wording was finalised for a commemorative sign in memory of Alison Tweddle.
- The parish council received further clarification on its Stage 2 complaint against the county council's enforcement office. However, this did not provide a resolution.

7.5 Northern PowerGrid Grant

The parish hall saw its first use as a resilience hub this month, due to a localised power outage from Renney's barn to Rowley Head. Claire Nixon used the meeting room to deliver some online training for work while the power was down. It later transpired that a metallic helium balloon had landed on the line and blown the fuse. The power was off for 4 hours.

7.6 Public Participation

Christopher Porter was present, inquiring into the parish council's discussion from last month over the verge protection signs. The parish council explained that initially there had been confusion on how the signs worked (as one sign is on one side of the road, and the sign that marks the end of the protected section is on the other side of the road), but now the council fully understands. Regarding road safety, the council reasoned that it was a good idea to cut a 1m safety strip for walkers and horses etc, as is standard practice by the county council.

Christopher agreed that road safety is of paramount importance (and was so during the wildflower surveys that the CEG hosted) but he disagreed with the 1m rule, as it would damage certain species of wildflowers. He stated the signs were not on bends or near junctions, as this would cause a danger to traffic of all kinds. The council maintained that sections of road in the Shire which are narrow or are sided by a ditch, are always dangerous for walkers or riders to travel on with incoming traffic.

Christopher explained that a road safety inspector travelled around the Shire and determined that there were no safety issues with the signs. Nicki raised the point that there was no disagreement about the signs themselves not being a danger, but the issue was that the verges between the signs were a danger from being overgrown and a visual hazard. This raised a point of a matter of interpretation, and Christopher said he would enquire with the safety inspector as to his meaning.

The parish council contends that while the verge issues this year should have been discussed earlier, preparation for, and discussion of, next year's verge protection should begin immediately, to give plenty of time to reach a sensible and safe agreement.

Christopher asked whether in years to come, someone on the council would be willing to join with the CEG in a discussion.

The PC suggested that surveys of the verges be taken this year to determine which sections have protected species in, though Christopher pointed out that surveys have been done and advertised in the magazine already. The PC argues that only the most endangered species should be protected.

Greg asks that Christopher reports back to the next meeting of the CEG that the PC and CC believe that the 1m strip is necessary and that the signs being in place (while the county council haven't cut anything) is having a negative impact on the view of the project.

Christopher said he will ask what the county council's policy is for only cutting one side of a road, to reduce the amount of protection required.

Christopher also raised the point that many of the signs were missing and another sign near Close House was vandalised. The parish council denies any knowledge of their whereabouts and is saddened by their disappearance. The PC, subject to safety, is supportive of the protection of wildflowers and does not condone the vandalism or theft of the signs.

Despite contacting the CC on the subject, the verges around the area are yet to be cut anywhere. We have reminded them of the necessity of this.

7.7 Matters for discussion with the Unitary Councillor

Colin was not in attendance this month.

7.8 Correspondence

The parish council received notice from the county council of footpaths being upgraded to bridleways, as well as one bridleway being turned into a BOAT. The PC strongly argues against the introduction of another BOAT, due to the local issues we've had with the misuse of BOATS in the parish. The PC will give a considered response to the county council before the deadline.

7.9.1 Finance

7.9.2 Balances as of 8th July 2023

Treasurer's Account	£15,552.59
Sportsfield Account	£2,079.43
Dukesfield Account	£4,994.40
Wetlands Account	£667.82
Resilience Account	£6,951.69

7.10 Planning

- 23/00564/FUL: Rowley Head Equestrian Arena, this was granted last month, and the enforcement case against it has since been dropped.

- 23/00710/ENDEVT: a new enforcement case has been opened against the proposed caravan park at Guards Lane.
- 23/00677/BRCOND: An enforcement case was also opened against Lilswood caravan park for failing to remove exterior lighting before the deadline. They are now also in breach of the deadline for changing the colour of the caravans from cream to brown.
- 23/00676/ENDEVT: Another enforcement case has been opened against Eads Bush, for the equestrian arena that is seemingly being built.
- 23/01259/FUL: Construction of an open-fronted agricultural shed, Land North Of Dukesfield Hall Slaley Northumberland. Council Supports.
- 23/02343/FUL Rowley Head Farm, Single Storey garage replacement. Council has no objections.

7.11 Highways, footpaths and BOATS

Footpaths: - Several footpaths are to be upgraded to bridleways - See correspondence.

BOATS:

Roads: A member of the Shire contacted the Clerk after their car was damaged by a large pothole, stating that they had tried to claim against the county council for the damage. However, the CC refused to respond to the claim as they said they had not received any notification of the pothole in the last six months. The Clerk provided the complainant with evidence of several emails he had sent to the CC, specifically mentioning the stretch of road where the pothole is located. Sadly, this proved insufficient, as the CC argued that they only respond to reports of specific, individual potholes, rather than entire stretches of pothole-strewn roads. Hence, it is extremely important, that if you are plagued by a troublesome pothole (or many), to report the exact positioning via: fix.northumberland.gov.uk. You can also contact the clerk, ideally with a what3words geolocation of the pothole, and he will report it (though that is not a guarantee that the problem will be solved). Elsewhere, the cattle grid near Westburnhope has still not been repaired.

7.12 Reports

Wetlands: Beetle, insect, bird, and botany surveys have been undertaken on the Wetlands. The steps to the bird hide have been cleared, and John Dent has agreed to repair them. Christopher Porter also brought up the issue of the dilapidated fence in the wetlands (mentioned in last months minutes). He suggested the PC applies for a grant for hedging via the Great Northumberland Forest fund, a government initiative to plant 1 million trees in Northumberland. This grant would also cover the costs of fencing. He passed on the contact details of Kirsten Johnson, a representative of the project. PC would be required to care for the hedge and fencing for 15 years. Members of the PC will arrange to meet with Kirsten to discuss this further, as well as contact those who live beside the wetlands for their opinions. Christopher Porter also informed the PC that Matthew Baker from the county council would like to come and see the wetland. The PC would be interested in inviting him to a meeting to discuss what concrete plans the council has regarding the environment.

Dukesfield Arches: No reports.

School: The school had a visit from Glen Sanderson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, who was apparently thrilled to hear all about their involvement with the environment, including the wetlands and the verge up Leazes Lane.

Hall: A new carpet will be going down in the meeting room. Due to shut during the October/November half term for the fitting of the new septic tank.

Sportsfield: Matthew Hope will redo the tennis court lines when time allows. The new tennis court net has been installed.

7.13 Any Other Business:

None.

Meeting closed at 9:30pm.