

Minutes of the Meeting of Hexhamshire Parish Council held on Thursday 14th December 2023
in the Malcolm Caisley Meeting Rooms, Whitley Chapel Parish Hall

12.1 Present –Marge Rastall (Chair), John Austin, Nicola Matthews, Greg Finch, Davy Short, Roger Rutherford, Gill Whatmough, and Hilary Kristensen.

Apologies for Absence –Jonny White (Clerk), Ed Parker, Lauren Porteus and Colin Horncastle (County Councillor).

12.2 Minutes of the previous meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 9th November 2023

Approved.

12.3 Declarations of Interest

None.

12.4 Matters Arising

12.4.1 Willow

Monica Haigh has commented to DS that the basketry group would not have a use for the overgrown willow, but they will have a meeting about other possible solutions and revert to us. The PC will be responsible for its felling, but it could easily be done with chainsaws. The gathering of it will be time-consuming. It would be suitable for biomass but there may be insufficient for anyone to be interested in coming to collect it. We could cut it and invite anyone interested to come and collect it, when the ground is firmer. The PC will await a response from the basketry group before taking further steps.

12.4.2 Environment grant

The PC were unsuccessful in the application for the Environment grant.

12.5 Resilience Hub

Northern PowerGrid has said they wouldn't cover maintenance costs. There will be further £20,000 grants available, but only for assets/further resilience-related developments - not maintenance of existing structures. GF thought that was unfair and it was agreed to ask the clerk to challenge them about it. HK will ask Tom if he knows whether it has a tracker on it, and what he estimates the annual maintenance costs to be. We could potentially purchase a tracker and cage (if required by the insurance company) out of the remaining approx. £7,000 of unspent grant. We also need to purchase the sundry items such as sleeping bags as previously identified. These can be stored under the stage but will need to be in protective boxes. NM recently attended a webinar about resilience hubs and will circulate a draft action plan template, provided by NCC.

12.6 Public Participation

None

12.7 Matters for discussion with the Unitary Councillor

None as CH was not present

12.8 Correspondence

None

12.9.2 Finance

RPA Payment of £514.70 has been received.

The insurance renewal premium of £777.66 was approved, but the clerk is still waiting to find out the increase in premium if the generator is insured by the PC.

Mathew Hope's invoice has been received. GW was unable to download it but thought it was £2,400, which was approved. [When downloaded it is actually £2,600].

Precept: GF circulated financial calculations, based on some assumptions, which suggest we may have a surplus of income compared to expenditure this year, and therefore we may not need to increase the precept above last year's figure of £9,000. Hopefully, more definite figures will be received by the next meeting and GF will make a further recommendation then.

Church path lighting – a £83 payment to HK was approved (see A.O.B.)

12.9.1 Balances as of 10th December 2023

Treasurer's Account	£19,305.46
Sportsfield Account	£2,088.55
Dukesfield Account	£5,070.41
Wetlands Account	£670.74
Resilience Account	£6,982.17

12.10 Planning

No applications to consider.

The clerk chased Alex Campbell about outstanding planning conditions at Lilswood Caravan site and Guard's Lane but received an automatic response of, "I am currently experiencing high volumes of correspondence in relation to enforcement cases which is causing delays." It then said she wouldn't respond to each email individually and we would have to wait for the enforcement outcome.

12.11 Highways, footpaths and BOATS

Roads:

- Windy Hill

The Environment Agency have asked if we know the type of spoilage. The PC does not, and surely it is the EA's job to make that determination. The clerk is to reply accordingly and also ask if they have a licence or not. The clerk is also to enquire with

NCC whether they are in contact with the landowners about remedial works to the road, as a result of damage caused by the lorries.

- Dipton Mill Road

The road is currently closed as Northumbria Water are doing investigations. There are rumours that they could close the road for approx. 6 weeks to do the necessary repairs. There has not been any consultation with the PC to date. JA said he feared for the continued existence of the Dipton Mill pub, if the road is closed for much longer. The clerk is to email Andy Olive and cc Colin Horncastle to say: -

1. *The PC is angry we have not been consulted to date as it is the main road into our parish;*
2. *It is essential to minimise the disruption to traffic and the economy (particularly the pub);*
3. *What traffic management is being proposed while works are carried out?;*
4. *We request that any works are carried out by external contractors (who work much quicker than NCC staff) and that works continue during the night to shorten the length of time. Ideally, traffic is controlled by traffic lights rather than the road being closed.*
5. *We require a response to the above before Christmas.*

If no response is received by Christmas the clerk is to forward the email to John Riddle and say that it is unacceptable that we have not received a reply.

- 20 Mph sign

Although workmen were seen at the site on 12th December, it is still not working. The clerk is to make sure NCC are aware of this.

- Grit

The clerk is to ask for grit heaps to be replenished and to request a grit bin to be installed by the main door of the Parish Hall.

- Flood at the Steel

This has been reported on "Fix my Street" and is said to be under investigation. The clerk is to email Andy Olive and ask for a progress report. It is unacceptable that the road has been flooded for so long, especially as the Dipton Mill Road is closed, meaning long detours for some.

12.12 Reports

Wetlands: RR will do the fencing work when the area is less wet, hopefully in March

Dukesfield Arches: RR has fixed the fence around the millrace. He reported that some trees had fallen on another fence. GF thinks that fence is not our responsibility, but will take a look and report back.

Hall: The Christmas Fair was very successful. A fundraising Ceilidh is planned for 24th February.

Sportsfield:

School: Unfortunately, the head teacher is currently off work with sickness. The Diocese are looking for temporary cover. Mrs Hilton (Class 2 teacher) is retiring, and a replacement has been appointed. The cook is also retiring, and a replacement has been appointed. A higher-level TA has left and the post is yet to be filled.

12.13 Any Other Business:

HK reported that the church path has been tarmacked over, so Tom can't put an electricity cable down it as we thought. HK has purchased some removable, rechargeable lights that can be placed along the path in order to provide some lighting. As the PC promised to pay for this lighting many years ago, we agreed to reimburse HK.

Meeting closed at 9pm.