

Minutes of the Meeting of Hexhamshire Parish Council held on Thursday 14th March 2024
in the Malcolm Caisley Meeting Rooms, Whitley Chapel Parish Hall

- 2.1 Present –Marge Rastall (Chair), Greg Finch, John Austin, Roger Rutherford, Gill Whatmough, Hilary Kristensen, Davy Short Ed Parker, Lauren Porteus; Jonny White (Clerk) Colin Horncastle (County Councillor).

Apologies for Absence – Nicola Matthews;

- 2.2 Minutes of the previous meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 8th February 2024

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

- 2.3 Declarations of Interest – None.

- 2.4 Matters Arising

- The first item discussed concerned the resignation of the Clerk. Jonny has had the pleasure of being the parish council's clerk for nearly two years, but must now step down from the role due to personal circumstances. Adverts will be put in the parish magazine, the Hexhamshire notes, the facebook page and anywhere else where the public could see it.
- Enforcement issues were also discussed on the two caravan parks, Guards Lane and Broadwell (Lilswood). The parish council had complained to Colin about these and the lack of enforcement from Alex Campbell, as there is an illegal building, which had no planning permission. Colin apologised as it slipped his mind from the last time he attended. We had tried to contact Alex but were told she wasn't replying to emails directly. Our other complaint on Lilswood was that there were several outstanding issues that still needed finishing, including painting. Colin will make a point of chasing Alex up.

- 2.5 Resilience Hub

Marge has another donation of a sleeping bag. Tom has completed most of the work. The generator requires keys to get to the fuel, so it is secure. No cage will be necessary. Lauren will chase Tom to complete the work.

- 2.6 Public Participation

Christopher Porter attended, telling the council that the CEG would like to purchase a thermal imaging camera that could be handed to residents of the area. The camera would help people identify where heat leaks from their houses. Remedying such energy leakage could help people save money on their energy bills and be better for the planet. He requested money from the council's resilience hub fund. However, the council informed Christopher that, due to the terms of the agreement with Northern Powergrid, the money could only be used for the Parish Hall's resilience hub. Sadly, the council is not in a position to make financial donations of any kind at this time, and so cannot spare any funds from the other accounts either. Any capital that remains in the resilience fund after all work has been completed and supplies bought, will be used for maintenance going forwards. Colin also said that there was no money left in his fund for the year. He did suggest that the CEG should contact the Communities First group from

the county council, which will be able to provide support. Marge also suggested the Slaley Village shop.

2.7 Matters for discussion with the Unitary Councillor

Colin Horncastle attended the meeting. He began by noting that the county council set out their next budget last month. This included £35 million for the highways budget, with £4.4 million dedicated to C-roads.

He acknowledged the dire state of roads but noted this is a national problem, not local, and mainly due to the severely wet weather we have had. Fixing potholes permanently is an issue largely because of disagreements with the Environment Agency. Before large-scale work can be completed on roads, material is removed to be tested for tar, which is toxic and carcinogenic. However, due to the 48-hour limit to fix potholes, testing can't take place. Colin apologised for how slow large-scale fixes are but told us that by Autumn, C-roads such as ours would see a big difference. Greg asked whether a record is kept of where tar is found. Colin will find out. Lauren would also like to know who specifically takes the sample and suggested that Greg's idea should be integrated with what3words. Colin will also find out. Part of the issue is that the people fixing the roads aren't trained, as they're contractors.

Elsewhere, it has been decided to convert the site of the former Hexham Middle School into homes. The green spaces and trees will all be left. The only issue is access, as there is only one, and there needs to be two.

94% schools in the area have been rated Good or Outstanding, with three new high schools to be built soon. The library service hasn't been touched by cuts, but new library vans will be rolled out in the near future.

A £4 million scheme is begin planned at Lynemouth, where rubbish was tipped into a landfill which now risks being uncovered by coastal erosion. This work will find a new home for the unrecyclable waste. Parking charges in most towns in Northumberland won't be increased/introduced. They also have more control over planning fees, and seek to increase them which will bring in more money (300K).

Davy Short raised the point Colin made in January regarding the county council's four gulley suckers, which were not being used over winter because the drivers were on grit lorries, asking why are there not more drivers. Colin said there wasn't enough money over the past year. With the increases in council funding (noted earlier), the council hope for this to be somewhat remedied by Autumn. Colin also clarified that there are eight gulley suckers in service, it was just that the four newer vehicles were not able to be manned.

Hilary raised safety issues with Colin, specifically the cattle grid near Westburnhope, which has been only temporarily fixed by them; she is concerned it could injure someone. He noted the what3words of the cattle grid and agreed to see to it. Gill also noted the 20mph speed sign is still not working.

Hilary also asked Colin to make a note that the road markings at the Whitehall Chapel and Stotsfold junction need replacing, as the lines have almost entirely faded away, making the crossing dangerous for drivers.

2.8 Correspondence

The clerk received posters detailing information on voting guidelines for the upcoming elections. They have been placed in the notice board opposite St. Helen's Gate.

The council also received notice regarding a planned changed to the Definitive Rights of Way map, where a footpath is due to be converted into a restricted byway. Although this track is within the bounds of Blanchland's parish, it joins onto a footpath in our area. The council

strongly object to this change, as it risks becoming a stepping stone for further unnecessary changes to footpaths and byways in our area. Following the recent issues within Staley Forest, the council are keen to see fewer BOATS and restricted byways, not more.

2.9.1 Finance

2.9.2 Balances as of 10th March 2024:

Treasurer's Account	£13,080.07
Sportsfield Account	£2,095.40
Dukesfield Account	£5,284.72
Wetlands Account	£1,188.74
Resilience Account	£7,005.08

2.10 Planning

- 24/00751/FUL Channel Well Hexham Northumberland NE46 1YE – Support.

2.11 Highways, footpaths and BOATS

Footpaths/BOATS:

Roads:

As you will have seen, work has begun on the road to the Dipton Mill. This is to install a new water main, to rectify flooding and to stop silt being deposited on the road. The entire Dipton Mill road is due to be closed from the 8th of April to the 2nd of May, with additional work carried out with further traffic light controls from the 2nd until the 13th of May. The parish council have been in close discussions with the county council and Northumbrian Water to try and limit the length of this closure and have successfully decreased its length from an initially forecast 14-week period. The parish council have been very happy with the response of Northumbrian Water, who have proven to be extremely cooperative. A meeting will be held between NWL, the council and whoever would like to attend to discuss the closure and works, which will be held in the Parish Hall on the 21st March at 2:30pm.

Colin asked the council to name which road is its next priority for urgent works. The council agreed unanimously that the Windy Hill road is of the greatest concern, and deserves immediate attention.

2.12 **Reports**

Wetlands: Roger to complete fencing when it has dried.

Dukesfield Arches: No reports

Hall: AGM next week. Northumbrian Water are carrying out a survey of any building which children may use to see if they have lead pipes, and if they do they will change them free of charge.

Sportsfield: No reports.

School: No reports.

2.13 Any Other Business:

Verges: The council will organise a meeting with people from the CEG or other interested parties. The clerk will enquire with the highways department what their stance going forward is on verges, as they may want to reduce how much is cut. This meeting will need to take place before the next council meeting. Lauren will propose it to the CEG, and ask them to decide where their priorities are. If last year's survey information on species growth is used to provisionally decide for this year, they will have more info.

The council's viewpoint is that all grass verges should be cut in the shire for safety reasons. However, the council will consider the consultation of experts on plants etc. Any proposed sites must be agreed by both parties.

Council Stage 2 enforcement issue needs to be readdressed. The next clerk will need to chase this, and make them aware we are not letting it go and note it was from June 2023. Every enforcement case we have had has had nothing happen

Garden trail for the church is on the 16th June

The police had a day in February in Slaley forest to combat the bikes etc. However, the forest was empty at the time.

Meeting closed at 9:40pm.