

Minutes of the Meeting of Hexhamshire Parish Council held on Thursday 18th April 2024
in the Malcolm Caisley Meeting Rooms, Whitley Chapel Parish Hall

4.1 Present – Marge Rastall (Chair), Greg Finch, John Austin, Nicola Matthews; Davy Short; Hilary Kristensen, Lauren Porteus; Jonny White (Clerk)

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

4.2 Minutes of the previous meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 14th March 2024

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

4.3 Declarations of Interest – None.

4.4 Matters Arising

- Verges: Members of the Parish council (Marge, Lauren, John and Hilary) attended a meeting with representatives of the Community Environmental Group (Anne Porter and Hilary Porteus), where they discussed which verges were due to be protected last year and those which should be protected this year. It was a productive meeting, with the following being suggested:
 - The Rennys Barn section should be cut this year due to safety concerns as there is a ditch.
 - Leazes Lane is due to continue being protected because of the school's involvement. Gill passed on her concerns about the encroaching blackthorn, which is spreading from the hedge onto the verge side. It was agreed to leave it until it is deemed a problem. The school would like to get involved with survey work on insects and flowers that the CEG are carrying out. A lot of info on the effects the verges have on pollinating insects was given at the meeting.
 - An open, straight section near Lilswood should be protected due to the orchids and pollinators.
 - Motag Road: It was agreed to protect a small 5m stretch where Melancholy Thistle (a rare variety of the plant) grows.
 - Mire House to Aydon Shields: A high degree of botanical diversity was noted here. Part of the stretch (on left side of the road only) will be protected.

All gateways, junctions etc will be cut as normal.

Anne Porter and Monica Haigh were in attendance at the Council meeting, to represent the CEG. They were in agreement with everything suggested at the previous meeting, as were the councillors.

Practical application remained an issue, as there was still some confusion over how the signage system worked for demarcating the protected sections. However, Anne Porter supplied a diagram for how the signs should be placed and what they mean. The point was made to educate the wider community (via the magazine, facebook and other points of contact) on what the signs mean.

Christopher Porter has been in contact with David Hunt (West Area Manager for Neighbourhood Services, such as verge cutting), who has no problem with coming out to talk to people about the verges, so long as it is between 9 and 5.

Lauren has the what3words locations for all the protected areas. These will be supplied on a map for all to see. The information will be passed onto NCC for their agreement.

The plan going forward with the CEG is that the council will continue to discuss the issue in future years to determine whether different areas become more of a priority.

- Clerk vacancy: Interviews will take place next week for the position of Clerk.

4.5 Resilience Hub

Tom has made progress on the hall electrics, including refitting the showers, but had a delay in refitting the fuse box, caused by confusion over the works necessity. A point was raised that some emergency signage/lighting will also need to be acquired. If this can be done under the budget already agreed with Tom, then additional funds will not be necessary, and if not, the hall will cover the costs (as it was deemed to be the hall's responsibility).

The generator has a key to run and the installation of a key box was discussed..

Instructions for how to run the generator can also be put in the lockbox. Plans need to be drawn up for the generator's maintenance. Tom will advise on this.

Nicki previously circulated a template action plan from CAN, as to who will do what in the case of an extreme weather event, and Greg suggested having a subcommittee made from councillors and hall trustees to draw up the action plan and generator maintenance in the future. Marge, Nicki and Lauren agreed to form this sub-committee.

4.6 Public Participation

Aside from the inputs of Anne Porter and Monica Haigh, noted above, none were present.

4.7 Matters for discussion with the Unitary Councillor

Since this month's meeting was postponed, Colin could not be present due to a scheduling conflict. However, he sent a message via email, detailing what he would've contributed.

He said that he had a conversation with Alex Campbell regarding the issue at Guards Lane, but said it was not a concern for her. She visited the site earlier in the year and found the small shed to be legal and allowed under permitted development. The solar panels on the roof were not a matter of concern and again perfectly allowable as are any other solar panels in the parish. She has contacted the owner of the site to alert him to any untidiness but due to work load has not been able to visit yet.

The council disagreed with Alex Campbell's view. There are two structures onsite at the present moment, not one. The caravan is also still there. We would like Colin (or Alex) to explain why the current shed is allowed under permitted development, and also to ask what the situation is with the proposed shed, which formed a recent planning application.

Colin also mentioned the cattle grid that has been causing concern near Westburnhope, stating that if it is not yet repaired, it hopefully will be soon. It has not been fixed yet. The parish council are worried about the danger to the public over the lack of repair to the cattle grid. Lauren recorded it at least 6 weeks ago, including logging

it as an emergency via the telephone. The Clerk has also reported it several times. The Clerk will follow up on these points with Colin, and also point out that he did not mention the missing road markings at Whitehall Chapel junction. He will also raise the Lilswood Caravan park issue, which we raised last time.

Elsewhere, Colin noted that: 'All highways matters have been seriously curtailed due to horrendous weather. The proper long-term repairs programme which should have started early March is now 5 weeks behind schedule but emergency repairs to potholes have obviously been continued. By the end of Autumn there will be a significant improvement to the road and drainage network. The Highways budget has been increased from £17.5m a few years ago to now £35m plus an additional £4.4m from the government specifically for U&C roads. Extra manpower, machines, overtime, contractors etc all in place to carry out road repairs once decent weather arrives. The horrendous one-way system in Hexham should be gone in a week or two meaning life can get back to normal. Work on Hexham Middle School site is due to commence at end of year. That will mean affordable housing and an 80 bed extra care facility.'

4.8 Correspondence

Ruth Marlee emailed on behalf of the Garden Trail committee, requesting a small contingency donation from the Parish Council to pay for up-front costs like hall hire, signs, raffle tickets, ingredients for refreshments. Sadly, the parish council is not in a position to make financial donations of any kind at this time. All proceeds from the Garden Trail will go to St Helen's Church. The last Trail was in 2019 and was very successful despite poor weather

4.9.1 Finance

4.9.2 Balances as of 31st March 2024 (End of Year Statement):

| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| Treasurer's Account | £12,874.79 |
| Sportsfield Account | £2,097.71 |
| Dukesfield Account | £5,290.53 |
| Wetlands Account | £1,190.05 |
| Resilience Account | £7,012.81 |

Zen Domain Renewal approved (£151.06)

Hall costs approved (£67.50 and £22.50 for the road works briefing)

Precept arrived (£4500).

The AGAR forms were received and will be filled in and returned in the coming month.

4.10 Planning

- 24/00773/FUL: Change of use of agricultural building to create two dwellings. Land At West Of Newbiggin Home Farm Hexham Northumberland - OBJECT: Hexhamshire Parish Council strongly objects to this planning application, as they have concerns that this is simply the latest addition in a pattern of development on the property, turning sheds into houses, with the eventual result being nothing short of a hamlet. If anything, the Shire needs affordable property for young families, and these proposed houses to not fit that criteria.

It was also raised at our last meeting that these sheds are not being used as agricultural buildings, nor are they redundant; they were being used for business purposes (storage/private lease).

The dwellings are unnecessary, and should at the least have an agricultural clause put on them so that if they are built, they can only be used for agricultural workers.

Finally, the council queried whether any thought had been given to larger issues such as drainage and access, should this pattern of dwelling construction continue?

In terms of the view/aesthetic of the buildings, the council had no issue, but as stated, the council does not believe they should be built in the first place.

4.11 Highways, footpaths and BOATS

Footpaths/BOATS:

Roads:

Dipton Mill Closure: the water board are continuing to work very quickly, but there have been some difficulties with NCC and the water board working in the same space. A kerb has been installed on the bridge. The verge is slightly wider, meaning the road is narrower. Greg asked to speak to the designer of the works but hasn't heard anything. Greg doesn't think the works will take away too much space from the pub's parking area. All the tree stumps have been removed. More spoil will need to be cleared. More work is to be done to strengthen the hill, to prevent landslides.

Concrete drains have been put in on either side of the bridge. They think lights will be put up on Monday night (22nd). They have realised that artic lorries can't get over Dalton bridge. They will do what they can to help with any big loads coming through the area until the work is complete. The whole road will be resurfaced. The council would like to point out that all of the contractors working on the road have done a fantastic job, working all hours of the day. The parish council thanked Greg and John for staying on top of this issue and pushing NWL and the council to reduce the period of full road closure from 14 weeks to a projected 5.

Hill Road, near Newbiggin, was noted to be in a bad condition, and will be marked on fixmystreet.

As mentioned, the Cattle grid near Westburnhope has still not been fixed.

4.12 **Reports**

Wetlands: The sharp decrease in frogs was noted. Otherwise no reports.

Dukesfield Arches: No reports.

Hall: No reports.

Sportsfield: No reports.

School: The school got a quote for the installation of a replacement septic tank, but they will need to raise significant funds to cover their contribution to the cost.

4.13 Any Other Business:

Last year we got an application for wanting to put a bridleway through Monica Haigh's land. Hilary raised that this was supposed to be reviewed. Clerk will chase this up.

Davy brought up that Ben Fogle wants 20mph limitations on country roads. Even though he noted that it was a non-starter, he did comment that there have been recent incidences of people speeding in the Shire and driving dangerously. The council asked about getting 'slow' signs, or 'horse' type signs. The Clerk enquired a while ago and was told that we couldn't get them, but he will try again.

The wetlands needs to be advertised for grazing.

The Clerk will follow up with Colin and the county council regarding the status of our Stage 2 Complaint against the enforcement department's handling of Rushwood.

Meeting closed at 9:00pm.