

Minutes of the Meeting of Hexhamshire Parish Council held on Thursday 16th January 2025 in the Malcolm Caisley Meeting Rooms, Whitley Chapel Parish Hall

1. Present – Marge Rastall (Chair), John Austin, Nicola Matthews, Roger Rutherford, Gill Whatmough, Davy Short, Lauren Kristensen, Greg Finch, County Cllr Colin Horncastle.

Apologies for Absence – Ed Parker, Hillary Kristensen, Susanna Nixon (Clerk)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 12th December 2024. – Approved

3. Declarations of Interest – None

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Lilswood Caravan Park complaint

Colin Horncastle reported that the legal notices had been prepared and were going to be served imminently. This was regarding breach of planning conditions regarding lights, colour of units and landscaping. He and the enforcement officer will inform us when the notices are served. The site owner then has 35 days to comply. Although some trees have been planted, the sheep are nibbling the shoots that come over the top of the tree guards, so the trees are unlikely to grow unless the site owner fences off the area.

4.2 Roadside obstruction at Whitehall Junction

The trailer on the side of the road has been removed, as requested.

5. Public Participation

Dan Nixon and Marion Henderson attended to award Gill Whatmough with a gift as a thank you for her long service as the parish hall's booking secretary.

6. Matters for discussion with the Unitary Councillor

6.1 Colin Horncastle reported that in recent years the Financial settlement given by the government to Northumberland County Council has increased by 11.5% and 13.7%. This year the increase is only 6.8% which means that NCC have £192m plus council tax to fund all of their services but the government has also given county councils extra responsibilities for which they must pay including national insurance increases, child protection measures, pay rises and school transport. The government has also scrapped the Rural Services Grant, which was worth £3.2m to NCC. They have replaced this with a Recovery Grant but have said that NCC are not entitled to it. Discussions are ongoing with the government as to why. NCC also previously received a bonus of £20,000 for each new home that was built in the county, but this has also been scrapped. As NCC are highly reliant on private companies in the care sector they feel honour-bound to make a contribution to the increased cost of national insurance contributions for care workers which they are estimating to be a contribution of £2m. In summary there is a shortfall of approximately £17m that NCC have to find. They are committed not to cut the highways budget and do not want to make any redundancies. They are reluctant, but may need to reconsider charging for parking in the counties' market towns. They are likely to cut back on new public toilet facilities. There is concern about how the new High School in Berwick is now going to be funded.

6.2 Colin Horncastle said that he had reported the defective 20 MPH warning light.

6.3 John Austin requested Colin Horncastle to ask the highways department to grit Leazes Lane because they were not doing it when we had recent snow and ice, without it being specifically requested. It is essential that the lane is gritted as school children have to walk along it to access the school gate.

7. Resilience Hub

Lauren Kristensen has prepared some instructions as to how to operate the generator. She is next going to draft some instructions to be given to all parish councillors as to

steps that need to be taken if we need to open the hall as a resilience hub. Information will be disseminated to parishioners about the availability of the resilience hub, including all parish councillors' contact details for people to contact a parish councillor if they need to use the hall in an emergency. This information will be disseminated by flyers being hand-delivered to every property, local noticeboards, Parish magazine, Parish website and Parish Hall Facebook page. It was discussed that it would be handy if someone who lived close to the parish hall would volunteer to go to the Hall to turn on the generator, if and when required, if councillors who live further afield cannot get to the hall. It was suggested that we ask Jonny White.

Lauren Kristensen is to ask Ross Henderson to service the generator. It was stated that we do not plan to hold spare fuel next to the generator for safety reasons.

8. Correspondence

8.1 Parish website - WordPress has been redesigned and Gill Whatmough has been attempting to add council minutes etc to the website without success. She will chase Edward Robson who was meant to be helping to sort this out. Meanwhile, a message will go into the Parish magazine to say that if any parishioners wish to receive copies of the Agenda or Minutes they should email the clerk at hexhamshire.parish@yahoo.com

8.2 Grit piles - Several councillors said that they reported a lack of grit on Fix my Street and they were quickly replenished.

9. Finance

9.1 Precept - Greg Finch had kindly considered our past and likely future expenditure and said that it may be possible not to increase the precept for the next financial year however that may leave the parish council short if we had some large unexpected costs such as urgent repairs needed to the playground equipment. It was agreed that

we should increase the precept from £9,000 to £9300 for the next financial year, which is roughly an increase of £1 per household in the parish.

9.2 Parish council insurance policy renewal quote of £842.87 was formally approved.

9.3 Invoice from TH and M Rutherford for £444 was approved for fencing work on the land between the Wetlands and Mire Meadows.

9.4 Invoice from Zen for £14.39 for the website domain name for the next year was approved.

9.5 When Lloyds bank added Susanna Nixon to the bank account they have inadvertently enabled a single person to perform transactions, when it is necessary for us to have dual authorisation. Susanna will contact Lloyds bank to ensure that dual authorisation is re-established.

10. Planning Applications

10.1 24/04388/COU Stotfold Lodge change of use application (retrospective). Discussed and no objection is to be raised although the clerk is to respond to NCC to ask if a condition could be added to the consent to say that all vehicles must be stored within the site.

10.2 24/04360/FUL St Helens church installation of solar panels – supported.

10.3 24/04241/AGTRES and 25/00040/CUD Newbiggin Home Farm Nicola Matthews reported that she had become aware that an application to determine if prior approval is required for the change of use of an agricultural building to create four dwelling houses had been submitted to NCC. The application is under the Town and Country Planning (Permitted Development) Order. There are 2 x 3 bedroom properties and 2 x 1 bedroom properties under consideration. There is also an application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed change of use from commercial, business

and service use to 6 dwelling houses. It is proposed that there be four single story three bedroom properties and 2 x 2 story 4 bedroom properties. The county council had not given any notification to the parish council. The parish council are concerned that this means an additional 10 properties on the site. Marge Rastall will contact Colin Horncastle (who had left the meeting by this time) to express concern and ask why we were not given notice.

11. Highways, footpaths and BOATS

11.1 Dalton Bridge - Davy Short reported that the section of road heading in the direction of Hexham, before Dalton Bridge, requires attention. He has reported it on Fix my Street but would like the Clerk to send a separate email to the highways department as well.

11.2 Public footpath at Chapel House - There has been a public footpath across the field at Chapel House for many years. As the footpath crosses boggy land the Liddle's (the property owners) created a permissive path via a bridge and put signs on both entrances to say so. Someone has contacted Fix my Street to ask for the permissive path to be adopted. Gill Whatmough reported that the Liddle's have submitted a report to NCC to say that they were given permission to divert the footpath years ago and they wish for this to also be stated in the parish council minutes.

11.3 Damaged fencing on Embley Fell - Nicola Matthews had reported this on Fix my Street, who replied to say it was not the responsibility of NCC. Davy Short believes that Sam Gibson of Embley has looked at the fence. It may be his responsibility.

11.4 BOATS - There was a general discussion about the terrible state of the BOATS as a result of excessive 4 wheel drive use in Slaley Forest. John Austin suggested that we contact NCC to ask them to either repair the BOARS or close them, if too expensive to repair.

12. Reports

12.1 Wetlands – John Austin is meeting Northumbrian Water on 20th January to discuss the Bird Hide project.

12.2 School - The school achieved a “Good” rating in their recent Ofsted inspection.

12.3 Hall - A murder mystery evening is taking place to raise funds for the parish hall on the 1st of February. Tickets are £10 per person which include a pie and pea supper. There will also be a bar and raffle. Tickets are available from Dan Nixon on 07800932956 or by emailing halltickets@outlook.com

12.4 Dukesfield Arches - Greg Finch will have a look to see if any tidying up is required etc.

12.5 Sportsfield & Play Area - Gill Whatmough reported the football club only played six matches on the sports field and stopped doing so because it was difficult to play on because of worm casts. They agree to pay £180 for the matches played to date. It was said that the field would need to be sprayed to stop the worm casts and this is expensive and not very environmentally friendly so it is not something that the parish council wish to do.

13. Any Other Business

None

Meeting closed at 9.15pm