

# **Ovington Parish Council Meeting**

**Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

**Ovington Village Hall**

**6.30pm**

## **Minutes of Meeting**

**Attendees:** Cllr Peter Levett, Cllr Nigel Parkes (RFO), Cllr Shaun Hanson, Julie parkes (Clerk)

**Additional attendee:** one member of the public

**1.Apologies:** no apologies received.

**2.Declaration of interests:** no declaration of interests.

**3.Minutes of previous meeting:** confirmed as accurate and signed by chair.

**4.Matters arising :** covered by agenda items.

**5. Finance Update:** Current account £1968.87; there is as outstanding invoice to be paid to Mill Gardens. Reserves £3,370. Further to changes to the Hugo Fox web site services from a free service to subscription a direct debit has been set up for £9.99 per month plus VAT (the VAT will be reclaimed). OPC will need to set the revised precept by January therefore need to meet in December.

A copy of the accounts below:

[illegible]

**7.Planning Update:** No further updates: one application is still pending a decision.

designation so as far as designation goes we are just about there. However Brain is still awaiting the same clarification on the Article IV Direction as this is subject to a separate report to be signed off under separate delegated powers. He confirmed as soon as this is received he will have both reports signed off together to ensure the entire legal process is concluded at the same time. He also confirmed he has scheduled a meeting with the Legal team for Thursday this week to understand the turnaround on the final report.

Cllr Hanson requested that OPC be kept in the loop as to outcomes from the Thursday meeting and discussed the importance ensuring that DCC's advertising and notification process can be dovetailed with publicity via our Parish newsletter.

OPC further discussed an approach to the Teesdale Mercury once the CA designation is received: this was agreed.

**9. Broadband Update:** There has been much correspondence between Digital Durham with the clerk and a resident of the village regarding the progress of fibre broadband and the poor/variable performance of EE in the village. Digital Durham have been provided with examples of the poor coverage with a promise to pursue this. Alli Walker, Digital Durham Manager has provided the following update:

The team has raised the issue with Building Digital UK (BDUK) which is the government department that oversees Project Gigabit. BDUK suggested where service has deteriorated, and has been reported to EE and it is unresolved after eight weeks, people can complain to an independent Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme. People can ask their provider for a 'deadlock' letter so an can refer the dispute to the relevant ADR scheme directly before the eight-week mark. There are two ADR schemes, and all providers must belong to one of them – EE is part of the [Communications Ombudsman](#).

Further information about this is available under the compensation and complaints section of the Ofcom (UK Telecoms Regulator) website - <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/problems/mobile-faults-guide>

Here is also EE's Complaints Code of Practice for reference - <https://ee.co.uk/content/dam/ee-help/Help-PDFs/ee-complaints-code-of-practice-january-2022.pdf>

The other thing of note is that Digital Durham recently discovered the Starlink hardware can be rented for £15 per month (the purchase price is £449). Adding that to the £75 per month service charge still makes the service expensive, but worth a mention for consideration for people that work from home in particular.

### **Project Gigabit**

County Durham is expected to benefit from two (Phase One) contracts under [Project Gigabit](#) which is a £5 billion government programme to provide gigabit-capable broadband to harder to reach properties outside of commercial plans. The programme is overseen by BDUK.

The first contract was awarded to GoFibre last September to deliver full fibre to parts of Teesdale. Winston and Hutton Magna are two local communities that are expected to benefit, and the work that you can see along the A67 is linked to that.

Ovington properties are being considered under the second contract. Digital Durham understand from BDUK that the procurement to award this contract is now in the final stages and are just waiting for BDUK to announce the supplier that has been awarded the contract to deliver gigabit broadband.

After the contract is awarded, the appointed supplier will enter a period of mobilisation where they undertake physical surveys and planning in order to develop detailed broadband delivery plans. Only at this stage will BDUK and the supplier be in a position to provide indicative timescales to communities on delivery dates. The original estimate was for this to be late in 2023, but it might slip into 2024. As soon as Digital Durham receive any information, we'll share that with the community.

If Ovington is not be picked up under the contract, BDUK have indicated they will work with the community, and Digital Durham, to obtain coverage using the voucher scheme (which also falls under Project Gigabit). Something to note, is government changed the standard voucher funding amount from £1,500 per home and £3,500 per business, to a flat rate of £4,500 per property. This is likely to be a much more viable amount of funding to get to rural communities with little or no existing infrastructure like Ovington. In addition, Durham County Council have also provided BDUK with £1.5m 'top up' fund. This fund can help fill a funding gap if the standard voucher amount is insufficient to get to a community.

Digital Durham speak to the BDUK delivery lead on a regular basis, and they are very familiar with the situation at Ovington. Digital Durham will provide an update to the clerk that will form a newsletter to residents.

The problem is broadband network infrastructure providers are often not inclined to invest in upgrading broadband infrastructure where the costs are high, leaving behind many communities, particularly in rural areas. Digital Durham are trying to support communities by lobbying government (this resulted in County Durham being included in the first phase of Project Gigabit contracts) and working with BDUK and suppliers where possible to help facilitate investment to provide gigabit capable broadband for our missed communities.

**10.Grass Cutting:** A number of complaints have been received about the standard of grass cutting. Cllr Parkes has spoken to the contractor again who has confirmed he is changing his current 'stand on machine' for a new machine which will hopefully resolve the issue and enable a return to the previously good standard of cutting.

**11.Village Waste Bins:** Cllr Hanson raised the issue that the waste bins particularly on the green are in a very poor condition and require replacing. OPC agreed to look at all the bins in the village, Cllr Hanson provided information as to potential replacement bins that looked very similar to those current but were made from recyclable plastic. OPC agreed to replace the bins but would first explore with Durham County Council if this was their responsibility.

OPC also discussed an additional bin in the area of Cliffords view but would consult with residents as to where it should go.

**12.AOB:**

**12.1 Red Telephone Box:** Previously the Village Hall Committee was happy to fund a red telephone box to replace the current one and house the defibrillator. The clerk will contact the 'Adopt a Kiosk' scheme again to see if there has been any update to the rules as was suggested in previous correspondence.

**12.2.Trees around the green:** Cllr Parkes to remind DCC of inspection schedule

**12.3 Ovington Bridge:** the chair confirmed he had spoken to Mick Donaldson (DCC Bridge Engineer) on 23<sup>rd</sup> March ,who was reviewing the bridge with regard to pointing and the growth of vegetation from the bridge structure. He advised a full inspection was due September/ October. OPC to monitor.

**12.4 OPC vacancy:** the clerk will contact electoral services further to annual leave.

**13. Date and time of next meeting:** Tuesday 5th December; 6,30 pm