

## **Minutes of Meeting of Norham Parish Council held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

Those present were George Straughen (GS), Jim Greenwood (JG), Jim Blythe (JB) Sheelagh Hume (SH), and Dougie Watkin (DW). Also in attendance were Colin Hardy, NCC County Councillor and three members of the public. John Cooper (JC) , Strategic Programmes Manager Digital and Information Technology from Northumberland County Council was also in attendance.

- 3.24.1 To accept apologies for absence.  
Apologies accepted from Alison Murphy (AM),**
- 3.24.2 To make any Declaration of Interest  
None.**
- 3.24.3 To confirm Minutes of Previous Meeting  
The minutes of the meetings of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed.**
- 3.24.4 Matters arising from Minutes.**

### **i Mobile Phone Signal**

GS welcomed JC from NCC who had offered to attend this meeting, in the light of the news that phone lines were in the process of being switched from analogue to digital, and in the absence of a decent mobile phone signal.

JC confirmed that all analogue lines were to be decommissioned nationally by the end of 2025. It is very old technology, very expensive to repair and maintain, and did not provide the functionality of mobile phones. It is a simple procedure for those who have broadband, to plug their phone apparatus into their broadband router. Problems may occur for those dependent on their landline, and who do not have broadband. Digital phones are also power dependent. In the past if there were to be a power cut, generally the landline still worked. However, with broadband if there is a power cut the digital phone will not work at all, even to call emergency services. This is an issue for those who live in rural Northumberland and/or those who do not have a mobile phone.

JC confirmed it was his job currently to raise awareness of the situation, of the problems and some of the solutions, and the support such as it is, that is available to those adversely affected. Other services may also be affected by the changeover e.g. personal and domestic alarms. For those who do not currently have broadband there are possible solutions e.g. a type of handset that can run without broadband. The main message is therefore that customers should speak to their suppliers if they have problems or concerns.

NCC is also working on helping to improve resilience support for communities.

GS pointed out that current advice is to keep a mobile phone fully charged, in case of a power cut, but that advice is useless where there is no mobile phone signal. JC conceded that this was indeed a problem with the whole plan for decommissioning, and indeed in particular where currently many existing mobile masts also go offline in a power cut. JC confirmed nationally more infrastructure is being introduced to make mobile masts more resilient. It was pointed out that lack of signal can also adversely affect e.g. the ambulance service.

NCC is also working on building up evidence of how good or bad the mobile signal is in various parts of the county e.g. by having special monitoring equipment installed on bin lorries. It is also considering static monitoring. It would appear that suppliers' data is often at odds with the 'real' situation on the grounds as regards the strength or otherwise of the signal, so it is important to be able to evidence the scale of the problem before trying to put pressure on suppliers and others to improve the situation.

Two local businessmen then described their experiences of how mobile signal or lack thereof in Norham has adversely affected their separate businesses. Clearly the solution for Norham is a new mast. It was recognised that the reason there is not another mast yet is that it has been perceived as not cost effective. NCC is looking into the possibility of persuading suppliers to erect masts via funding from Borderlands and other such projects.

JC also confirmed that 3G is to be phased out to be replaced by 4G. In addition, 2G will eventually also be phased out but it currently still has uses e.g. in car sat navs etc.

JC offered to return once the signal monitoring/mapping exercise has been completed to report and discuss the results. He confirmed that NCC were aware of a number of not insubstantial villages that's had these difficulties and was well aware that Norham was high up on that list. It was important to keep up awareness of the problems.

## **ii Proposed Joint Neighbourhood Plan**

GS confirmed there had been a Zoom meeting that morning which had become heated as a result of frustrations over lack of progress. NPC has asked for a Housing Needs Survey to be carried out over the whole area, but no progress has been made on that either. However, NCC is to produce a simplified version of a document prepared some years ago, which may form the basis of a draft plan, or at least help concentrate minds. This should be available within the next couple of weeks and thereafter it can be considered either at the next meeting or more likely at a specially convened extra meeting of the council.

## **iii Public Conveniences**

As most are aware the WCs have been subjected to some unpleasant vandalism and antisocial behaviour which is unfortunate. It has not happened since and hopefully

will not again. The matter was reported to the police. VLC reported that she had had a meeting with the community police officer who is now aware of the situation, as well as of other complaints regarding electric scooters and mini motorcycles. He reiterated that electric scooters are illegal on public roads and pavements and will be confiscated if their use is repeated. He will visit the village from time to time. He advised against use of CCTV images on Facebook, as this could lead to unnecessary unpleasantness and false accusations, but if anyone could be identified he would be happy to deal with the situation. Any further incidents should be reported via the Northumbria Police website. It was agreed that it was an unfortunate situation when the WCs are generally an asset to the village.

**iv Play Areas**

GS continuing to inspect play equipment in JJG's absence. Recommendations which were raised in the last RoSPA report will be addressed before the next inspection.

**v Community Police Report**

See iii above.

**vi Undergrounding of cables**

Nothing to report, except that it is possible that BT's push to phase out their use of copper land lines may lead to fewer overhead cables.

**vii Norham Development Trust**

GS confirmed NDT had reached an agreement with the PCC regarding 1 Tower Cottages, the proposal being that NDT will lease the cottage from PCC for at least 10 years, and will in turn refurbish, let out and manage the property as an affordable let. Work has started and it is hoped it may be lettable by this summer.

As regards the website, this is in need of redesign/refresh. NDT is looking into finding funding for this exercise.

As regards Newsround, NDT has also taken ownership of this – Janet Young is currently editing/collating it. This will be funded by NPC/PCC and the Village Hall.

As regards the renewables project JG confirmed that the application to the Community Energy Fund for £100000 had been successful, and the formal offer had been accepted. It has been reported back that the project had been seen to be innovative, that the combination of solar and wind was an attractive proposition, and that the risk assessment and feasibility study were both of a very high standard. This funding can now allow Green Cat to finalise the planning application, and employ sub-contractors to carry out the required surveys etc. The project also needs

community support. A questionnaire has been drafted and is in the process of being delivered to every household in the parish, with a request that responses be returned by 10<sup>th</sup> April. A drop-in session will take place in the Village Hall on 3<sup>rd</sup> April for those who wish to find out more information or discuss their views.

**viii Jubilee Field**

GS has carried out some works to the wall – the rest will be completed when the weather improves and when he has time.

**ix Parking in Castle Street**

The fresh design requested from NCC, after discussions at the January meeting, has not yet materialised. As agreed at that meeting once a design has been agreed by the parish council it will be put out for public scrutiny. There was a complaint that there had not been enough public consultation, but it would be premature to consult on any plan until it has been discussed and agreed by the parish council, and that stage had not yet been reached. There was a complaint from a member of the public that any such scheme might be dangerous – it was pointed out that as it was being designed by NCC Highways Department who could be considered to have more experience in such matters than either the parish council or members of the public. NCC also have to follow their own procedures, statutory and otherwise. The point of the redesign is obviously to provide more parking spaces in Castle Street, for residents and visitors alike.

**x Proposed 20mph Speed limit.**

Traffic survey will be carried out in July/August.

**xi Approach to Diocese re Land at Glebefield**

There have so far still been only a couple of very informal meetings with the Diocesan property manager – it is hoped there may be another meeting in April.

**xii Lower Tweed Trail**

A meeting took place in March attended by representatives of all parishes involved and NCC Footpaths Officer. It is hoped he will be able to spend more time on this matter now the England Coast Path is nearing completion.

**xiii Paton & Co Donations**

No further donations as yet. However, £2000 had been received from NCC via Colin Hardy's Members Local Improvements Scheme. This was specifically for purchase

and installation of new Perspex panels for the bus shelter. After discussion it was agreed that this work had transformed the bus shelter and accordingly it was agreed that no further refurbishment was required. (It was noted that as regards the timetables holder, this was yet to be fixed. VLC will pursue the matter).

**xiv Trees**

GS had at last successfully made contact with the NCC Trees Officer to discuss six sycamore trees, on Cow Holme, on Castle Street and at the Bowell, which had been the subject of many complaints. After discussion he had agreed that in all the circumstances, he would authorise them to be crowned. GS had accordingly obtained three tenders and had then discussed the situation with the affected residents/businesses who had agreed to make a contribution towards the costs involved. After discussion, and a vote, it was agreed that the tender from D Gibson, which was the lowest, would be accepted and that he would be asked to proceed with the work as soon as possible. VLC was also to email NCC Trees Officer to confirm the work was proceeding on the basis of his authorisation.

**3.24.5 Use of Village Green**

VLC reported that the event discussed at the previous meeting would not proceed as the organiser felt that the parish council's requirements were too onerous. It was agreed that the parish council has a duty to protect itself and indeed to ensure the safety of others.

**3.24.6 Drop-In Meeting/Communication**

Agreed after discussion that in light of the Renewables Project Drop in on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, this would be discussed at the next meeting.

**FINANCE**

**3.24.7 To review Payments and Receipts since last meeting**

**Payments from Current Account:**

|          |                |          |                                      |
|----------|----------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| 31 Jan   | V Craig        | £155.96  | reimbursement for cost of litter bin |
| 31 Jan   | V Craig        | £227.98  | reimbursement for cost of gritter    |
| 31 Jan   | S Broadbent    | £173.29  | WCs                                  |
| 6 March  | S Broadbent    | £166.84  | WCs                                  |
| 6 March  | Acers Shelters | £2750.40 | Perspex                              |
| 21 March | S Broadbent    | £150     | WCs                                  |

**Receipts Into Current Account**

|          |      |         |             |
|----------|------|---------|-------------|
| 28 Feb   | NCC  | £2000   | Perspex     |
| 11 March | HMRC | £543.05 | VAT Reclaim |

Payments from Business Account:  
None

Receipts into Business Account

|         |       |          |
|---------|-------|----------|
| 4 March | £2.27 | Interest |
|---------|-------|----------|

**3.24.8 To look at Bank balances in Current and Deposit Account**

Current Account £11811.42

Business Account £609.15

**3.24.9 Increased Use of Online Banking**

JG has set himself up for online banking and GS confirmed he will do this shortly.

**3.24.10 To look at Planning Application decisions**

11 St Cuthbert's Square: Granted

32 West Street: Granted

**3.24.11 To look at state of Roads and Pavements**

Agreed that all potholes and other issues should be reported through FixMyStreet.

**3.24.12 General Correspondence**

VLC confirmed that Cllr Glen Sanderson had indicated he would attend the next meeting.

**Any Other Business (For information only)**

A request was received that the condition of the war memorial be considered bearing in mind it will be the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day in 2025. The matter of the erection of a cross on the roadside towards West Newbiggin, marking a fatal accident, and whether this might be considered inappropriate in all the circumstances, was raised. Agreed that this would be looked into.

**Date of next meeting: 20<sup>th</sup> May - Annual Meeting**