

THE PARISH COUNCIL OF WHITTON AND TOSSON

Minutes of the PARISH COUNCIL MEETING Thursday 1st October 2026 Parish Rooms, Rothbury

Present: Hilary Dunn (HD -Chair), Peter Henry (PH), Alan Tait (AT), Fran Tait (FT).
In attendance: County Cllr Mark Mather (MM), Tony Bell (TB) NCC Highways, four members of the public, Clerk.

The meeting opened at 7.00 p.m.

1. **Apologies for absence.** None.
2. **Carterside Road Passing Places.** The Chair welcomed Councillor Mather (MM), Tony Bell, NCC Interim Highways Northern Area Manager, and members of the public to the meeting and invited Councillor Mather to address the Council. Councillor Mather explained that the internal Northumberland County Council process for the approval, planning and installation of the passing-place signage on Carterside Road had failed. As Cabinet Member for Highways, he had received a number of complaints regarding the installation of the signs. He confirmed that, although the WTPC Local Transport Plan (LTP) priority for passing-place signage had been approved for inclusion within the LTP 2026-2029 programme, a number of required procedures should have been completed before any installation took place. These procedures included consultation with the Parish Council and the local community, together with the necessary assessment and design work. Councillor Mather acknowledged that these processes had not been followed and, on behalf of Northumberland County Council, offered an apology to the Parish Council for the error. He confirmed that the Parish Council had done nothing wrong in this matter. He noted that, whilst the situation was regrettable, it had highlighted areas where procedures needed strengthening, particularly in relation to communication and coordination between the Local Transport Plan process and local operational teams. Members advised Councillor Mather that, during the short period the signs had been in place, they had received several positive comments from members of the public regarding their benefits. Councillor Mather further advised that appropriately designated passing places provide an enforceable mechanism to prevent parking within those locations. He also confirmed that a ward councillor does not have the authority to prevent council officers from carrying out their operational duties. Parish Council members reiterated their support for passing-place signage on Carterside Road. They highlighted the increasing level of traffic using the route, including cyclists, pedestrians and tourists, and expressed the view that traffic volumes could increase further following the proposed sale of the Rothbury Estate to the Wildlife Trust. Members noted that many road users are visitors who are unfamiliar with the road and that clearly identified passing places would contribute to improved safety and traffic management. The Parish Council welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Highways Design Team and expressed its willingness to participate in future consultation on the most appropriate passing-place signage solution for Carterside Road. Councillor Mather agreed to ask the relevant officers in Highways to keep the Parish Council informed of developments.

The Chair thanked Councillor Mather, Tony Bell, and members of the public for their attendance

Councillor Mather, Tony Bell, and members of the public left the meeting.

Members then agreed the following:

Resolved: that the Clerk write to Glen Sanderson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, to thank Mark Mather and Tony Bell for their constructive engagement with the Parish Council regarding the Carterside Road passing places scheme. Members welcomed the open discussion, the clarification provided, and the commitment to working positively to move the matter forward.

The Council further agreed that the letter should express its concern regarding the conduct of Steven Bridgett, particularly in relation to actions and communications which members considered had the potential to undermine a Parish Council priority and the proper decision-making process.

Action: Clerk

3. **Review and completion of Declarations of Pecuniary Interests.** Members were asked to complete a new Declaration of Pecuniary Interests to be submitted to the Clerk on or before the next Council Meeting. **Action: All**
4. **Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday 16th July 2026** were reviewed, unanimously approved as a true record and signed as such (proposed (FT), seconded (PH), all in favour).
5. **Matters arising from the minutes not included in the agenda**
 - a) Update on the Wildlife Trust purchase of the Rothbury Estate. The latest publicly reported position, as at 14 September 2026, was that the appeal had raised more than £26 million, including pledges, towards the £30 million needed to acquire the remainder of the Rothbury Estate. This followed £5.5 million in new pledges announced on 26 August. The charities had already secured the Simonside Hills and the western section of the estate, and the current appeal concerned the remaining land. A report published on 30 August stated that financing arrangements had been agreed to cover any shortfall and that completion was expected by the end of October 2026.
 - b) Retention-based rationalisation of the Council's email and online documentation. The Clerk reported on initial discussions with Mark Ahearne of IdentityFirst Ltd regarding the rationalisation of the three Parish Councils' email and online

documentation systems. A draft proposal had been received outlining options for migrating to Microsoft 365 for Business, improving security, record management, and future Clerk handovers, while retaining separate Council email addresses and mailboxes. Resolved: That the Clerk be authorised to continue discussions with IdentityFirst Ltd, further investigate the available options, costs, licensing requirements and governance arrangements, and prepare a detailed proposal for consideration at a future meeting. No commitment to proceed with any implementation or expenditure is made at this stage.

Action: Clerk

6. **Police Report 27th July - 25th September 2026:**

'There have been THREE reports to Police, TWO crimes and ONE Public Safety welfare incidents, however no incidents reported would have had an impact on the wider community. In relation to one of the crimes, can residents be vigilant about reporting any suspicious activity or vehicles in the area. A vehicle has been recently reported to have caused damage to a crop field and reports of hare coursing have also been reported. We have also nationally and locally seen an increase in rural quad bike thefts and thefts from farms, although none in the specific area of Whitton and Tossion. Any report or information provided will assist in future enquiries.'

Thank you – PC 1144 Jonathan Kay.

7. **Highways and Footways including:**

- a) Tree hazard to fibre cable along Carterside Road. Alan Winlow had reported that during tree maintenance at the oak plantation on Carterside Road he had removed a young tree to avoid damage to the cable.
Alan Tait reported:
- b) Highways: The passing places along Carterside Road had been fitted with signs as requested in the 3 Year LTP, however they were then removed as the full procedures had not been followed by Highways. This was discussed at length at the meeting where Councillor Mather and Tony Bell (Highways) joined us to discuss events.
- c) Footpaths: An informal sign had been added at the Lady Bridge to direct walkers onto the right of way footpath, but it has now gone. AT to contact Highways again about creating a permanent sign at the Lady Bridge. Alan Winlow had cleared the overgrown footpath
Action: AT
- d) Verges: Verges and junctions remain clear and the vegetation is not obscuring sightlines.
- e) Seats & Road Signs: No issues with benches. AT to create a listing of all benches in the parish for the next meeting.
Action: AT
- f) Drains: All grips and drain gullies had been checked and were clear. The gully just beyond Ryehill had now been moved to the edge of the road and was a very neat job. AT had thanked Dylan Handyside at Highways on this completion.

8. **Finance**

- a) Notification of receipts since the last meeting. Noted.

08/09/2026	NCC 5769277 BGC	Precept First Half	3375.00
08/06/2026	Barclays 70103195	interest	5.49
		Total	3380.49

- b) Approval of Clerk's salary, expenses, PAYE & NI and approval of Other Payments. Noted.

27/07/2026	Rothbury Parish Hall DCC	Room Hire 16/07/2026	15.00
10/08/2026	GoCardless HugoFox 9F9949X	Email account Fee	2.99
09/09/2026	GoCardless HugoFox 9F9949X	Email account Fee	2.99
29/09/2026	GoCardless HugoFox 9F9949X	Annual Bronze Website fee	143.86
		Total	164.84

- c) Requests for donations. None.

- d) Bank Reconciliation. Noted.

Balance per bank statements at 29 th September 2026	£
Community account	5119.22
Business Saver	<u>2102.60</u>
	7221.82
Less unpresented payments	0.00
Uncredited Deposits	<u>0.00</u>
Balance	7221.82
Balance per cash book	7221.82

- e) 2026/2027 Pay Award and Salary Review.
- Annual Pay Award. The National Joint Council for Local Government had agreed new rates of pay for the period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027, and employers were encouraged to implement the award as soon as possible. At the Clerk's current spinal column point, SCP 15, the new hourly rate was £16.08, an increase of £0.52. The Council approved the new rate. **Action: Clerk**
 - Clerk's 2026 annual incremental pay review. At the 2025 review, it had been agreed that the Clerk's employment contract and salary would be reviewed before the next increment was considered in January 2026, the anniversary of appointment. A full review was delayed because of limited time and personal circumstances. Advice had since confirmed that LC2 (SCP 18–32) was part of the salary range available for the Clerk's post, although the current contract was unclear on this point. The Council therefore were able to award increments across the LC1–LC2 range at its discretion, including one or more increments in a year, usually on the appointment anniversary. Any decision should be clearly justified for audit purposes. The Council agreed an incremental pay rise to SCP18; £16.89 p.h., backdated to January 2026, in accordance with the Local Government Services Pay Agreements for 2025/26 (January–March 2026) and 2026/27 (April–December 2026). The Clerk was asked to monitor the hours he was working and if these were proved to be above his contracted hours that he should make the Council aware. **Action: Clerk**
9. **Planning:**
- To consider any planning applications.
 - There were currently no NCC requests for consultation that had not already been commented on.
 - Northumberland National Park Authority: DMC2026-12, planning application 26NP0052: proposed change of use of a car park to mixed use, including the siting of a mobile coffee van for the sale of refreshments. Permission had been granted subject to the development commencing within three years and complying with the approved plans and management plan. Only one mobile refreshment unit may operate on the site, between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm. No external lighting may be installed without prior written approval, and any approved lighting must be maintained as agreed. These conditions were intended to protect the landscape, tranquillity, wildlife and dark-sky character of the National Park.
 - Northumberland Local Plan Update Noted.
10. **Emergency Planning & Community Flood Plan Reports**
- Revised Flood Plan. The revised plan had been circulated to wardens.
 - Flood Wardens Newsletter. Circulated to wardens.
 - Flood Warden Celebration, 13 October 2026, Morpeth Town Hall. The event was to include a visit to Mitford Dam and a Fire and Rescue water-rescue exercise. Clerk to attend. **Action: Clerk**
11. **Rothbury JBC Report** HD
12. **Information Updates including:**
- NCC Joint Town and Parish Council Conference and Northumberland NALC Thursday 8th October 2026 Noted.
 - Consultation on Proposed Countywide Alcohol Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) Noted.
 - Free NHS funding guide for Northumberland residents. CareHomeGuide.uk provided a free independent directory of CQC-rated care homes in England. Its Northumberland page listed local care homes with their CQC ratings and contact details which included a free copy of its NHS Continuing Healthcare guide, which normally costs £37. Noted.
<https://www.carehomeguide.uk/districts/northumberland>
13. **Any Urgent Business**
- Sharpe's Folly The Clerk reported correspondence received from a local resident regarding the deteriorating condition of Sharpe's Folly, a Grade II* listed building on the Heritage at Risk Register. The resident sought Parish Council support for potential restoration proposals and funding opportunities. Members discussed the matter and noted that previous attempts to support restoration had been met with resistance from the current landowners. Whilst sympathetic to the preservation of the building, members considered it unlikely that the Parish Council would be able to provide practical support, given the complexity of the issue, the likely position of the owners, and the limited resources available to the Council
 - Gambling Licensing Consultation Noted.
14. **Date of Next Meeting: 7.00 p.m. Thursday 19th November 2026 in the Rothbury Parish Rooms.**

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