

Bearpark Parish Council

At a meeting of **Bearpark Parish Council** held on **Wednesday 19 January 2022** at **7.00 p.m.**

Present: **Councillor M Wilson in the Chair**

Councillors I Cummings, C Gallacher and J Peart.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor N Anderson, O Edwards and R Kemp.

County Councillor Dan Nicholls had also submitted his apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items of business on the agenda.

3. Minutes

Resolved

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Police Report

Councillor M Wilson informed the Council that no report had been received. Currently have one PCSO. Bearpark had again been relatively quiet since November with the exception of two issues relating to car parking.

5. Representations from the Public

There were no members of the public present and no representations had been received.

6. County Council Report

Councillor M Wilson provided the report to the Council as follows:

- Current coronavirus levels stood at 2,238 per 100,000 – slightly above the national average. The levels were expected to start to decline and were on trend given that the omnicom variant had moved from south to north;
- Protection rates meant that hospital admissions remain low – with only three intensive care unit cases and 109 admissions across County Durham and Darlington;
- The County Council had placed importance on how to support residents through difficult financial times;

- The City of Culture 2025 bid was gathering momentum and memorable moments were being sought to showcase places that had made a lasting impression. Details would be shared on the Durham 2025 social media channels; and
- The Council had started planning early for Pantomime in November – Gala Theatre were offering early bird discount for tickets to see Sleeping Beauty if booked by Monday 31 January with reductions of £5 per ticket.

7. Budget and Precept

The Clerk provided a copy of the latest accounting records which included all payments for approval, payments made since the last meeting and a bank reconciliation.

The Clerk informed the Council that the position the Council found itself in from the previous year remained relatively unchanged. As part of the budget and precept deliberations in 2021-22, the Council were of the opinion that the balances at the time, being mindful of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, were unanimous in their agreement not to increase the precept for 2021/22.

The Parish Council would continue to lobby on behalf of residents in the community and would also look at cost effective ways to better the local environment, wherever possible, and refresh any assets moving forward as and when restrictions permitted. The Clerk explained that the Council had set out what it hoped to achieve within the year, given the constraints due to the pandemic.

In considering the budget and precept for 2022-23, the Clerk summarised the current balances as per the bank statements and the estimated expenditure to the end of the financial year and in view of the information felt that the Council had the option to either leave the precept at 0% or levy a potential increase to cover any increases in costs.

The Clerk explained that reducing the precept was an option for the Council to take, however, it was not recommended, given that costs and inflation were significantly high. The Clerk advised that if the Parish Council wished to increase their precept, then they would need to consider projects and associated expenditure to justify any potential increase.

The current account balance stood at £41,132.74. There were commitments of £5000 towards new equipment at the Colliery Road play area. Outstanding costs relating to payroll and HMRC to the financial year end would be around £3000. Other contractual arrangements had been paid to financial year end.

If the council decided against any increase this year – the cash amount factoring in council tax support grant would be £25,381.46 which would be a small increase of around £257 in cash terms from the previous year.

Resolved

That the Council agree a 0% Council Tax given the continuing tough times and increasing cost of living.

8. Planning Applications

There were no planning applications for consideration.

9. Request for Financial Assistance

The Council considered a request for financial assistance to establish a new community football club in Bearpark. The Clerk informed the Council that he had spoken to one of the representatives of the newly established group. They had a committee and bank account in place and were seeking funding for the club. The club were keen to be involved in village initiatives and were seeking around £1200 funding to establish themselves.

Resolved

The Council were positive about the request and would be inclined to offer funding in principle. However, for assurance the Council wished to meet with the leading representative(s) and hear more about the proposal and what they wished to utilise the startup money towards. It was agreed that the Clerk would invite them to the next meeting.

10. Queens Jubilee

Councillor M Wilson had brought the item onto the agenda and was seeking interest as to whether the parish council wished to organise any events around the Queens Jubilee and events. Various events such as a street or garden party, church event, jubilee beacon were discussed. Councillor M Wilson was also talking to church and chapel.

Resolved

It was agreed to bring the item forward to the meeting in February. The Clerk would try to ascertain costs for a jubilee beacon.

11. Community Help Group

The Parish Council commended the work of the emergency services, power suppliers and Durham County Council following the recent Storm Arwen. However, it was felt that there was a huge gap in terms of immediate local help. The parish council felt that if there was some form of emergency plan in place that could be invoked immediately, then the village would have been able to cope better.

The Clerk informed the Council that it had made tentative moves in establishing a community emergency plan, however, this had been hampered when the coronavirus pandemic. The Clerk understood that the issue may be discussed at a local councils forum meeting in February and would wait to gather any feedback.

Resolved

That further consideration be given to the establishing of a group.

12. Report of the Clerk

The Clerk provided the Council with an update regarding correspondence received which included:

- The Clerk informed the Council that a three-week course relating to allotments was due to take place at £10 per session. The Clerk explained that it would be advisable for a Councillor or the Clerk to attend each session. No expressions of interest were received from Councillor, therefore the Clerk would attend.
- The next meeting of the Smaller Local Councils Forum would be held on 17 February by Zoom should any parish councillor wish to attend remotely.

Resolved

- (i) That the update be noted; and
- (ii) That any required follow-up reports be considered at the next meeting.

13. Village Matters

Various reports of fly tipping which included builders rubble, wires, mattresses and sofas were referred to. There had also been a large amount of plastic tree guards left scattered around Miners wood.

Resolved

Councillor M Wilson would report the flytipping issues.

14. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 16 February 2022.