

Minutes of Meeting of Norham Parish Council held on 2nd May 2024

Those present were George Straughen (GS), Jim Greenwood (JG), Sheelagh Hume (SH), John Grahamslaw (JJG), Alison Murphy (AM) and Dougie Watkin (DW). Also in attendance were Colin Hardy, NCC County Councillor and twelve members of the public.

GS welcomed all, and asked if there were any declarations of interest from councillors in relation to any items on the agenda. There were none.

5.24.1 Resignation of Jim Blythe

GS explained that the principal reason for the calling of this meeting was to note the resignation of Jim Blythe who had been on the parish council for many years, and who had done so much for the village, both as a councillor and as a resident. It was proposed therefore that he should be officially thanked by the council for all that he had done and been involved with including the clean-up group, litter picks, foot paths, the bird hide, the Christmas tree, the living nativity, art exhibitions, the village hall. It was agreed that what is Whitsome's gain will be Norham's loss. JG added that he wished to mention his instigation of the running club and the cycling group. He will be very much missed. It was agreed that a formal letter of thanks would be sent.

5.24.2 Proposed New Procedures for Public at Norham Parish Council Meetings

It was explained that members of the public do not have a right to speak at a parish council meeting unless invited to do so by the Chair. There was proposal that a period before every meeting be set aside for public question time - for a period of 15 minutes in total, with residents having no more than 3 minutes each. This would mean that members of the public could ask questions and raise issues before the official meeting started. Many parish councils follow this practice. After discussion it was agreed that the council would adopt this practice.

5.24.3 Roles and Responsibilities of Parish Councillors

GS indicated that he wished to remind parish councillors that they were bound by the parish council's own Code of Conduct at all times, during meetings, in public and on social media. In addition, councillors were bound by a decision of the council once a decision had been reached. AM asked if GS was referring to any particular social media post. He indicated that he was not on social media but been made aware of posts made on Norham Craic which might have breached the Code. AM indicated that she had posted but

nothing had been said that had not been in the minutes from a parish council meeting in July 2023. She confirmed however that she was bound by any decision of the council once a decision had been taken. AM confirmed that whilst decisions taken by NPC were accepted, they do not always have full support, which was acknowledged by GS.

AM then raised an issue in relation to disclosure of councillors' interests on the Register of Interest. AM stated that councillors should update their entry on the Register of Interest, and these relate to a beneficial interest in property and other pecuniary interest. She referred to the Model Councillor Code of Conduct as published by the Local Government Association. She indicated that she believed that GS and JG had not updated their Register to reflect their directorships of Norham Development Trust Ltd. After discussion on these points, as requested by AM it was agreed that VLC would contact the Monitoring Officer at the County Council for clarification before the next meeting. AM confirmed when asked however that she was not questioning the integrity of GS.

5.24.4 Consideration of Joint Neighbourhood Plan Options Paper

GS asked all councillors to carefully consider the Options Paper which had been produced by NCC in an effort to focus the minds of those councils still involved in the possible preparation of a neighbourhood local plan, and in particular concentrate on planning issues which might affect Norham. This can then be discussed more fully at the next meeting.

5.24.5 War Memorial Maintenance

JJG was thanked for his maintenance of the area around the war memorial over some considerable period. As he was now not in a position to carry on, GS had discussed maintenance with John Short (who also cuts some grass in the churchyard), and he has agreed to cut it as and when required to keep it tidy (probably every 2 or 3 weeks as required) at £10 per cut. Agreed to proceed on this basis.

Any Other Business (For information only)

GS indicated that he assumed that so many members of the public were there for an update on the NDT Renewables Project. He confirmed that the questionnaire had been carried out and the results posted. The main issue which had arisen through these results was a perceived lack of information. NDT were in the process of trying to address this by posting information on the new website www.norhamdt.org. Four open meetings had been held

over the years, and updates given at every parish council meeting, and until the questionnaire had been issued NDT had had the impression that the project had general support. 376 questionnaires were distributed.

In the course of the following discussion GS confirmed inter alia that

- a) NDT became involved in the project because parish councils were not eligible for the grant funding that was on offer (and Norham Parish Council probably would not have wanted to be involved),
- b) that the benefit to the village would be monies coming from the sale of power to the grid once the loans to set it all up had been paid off,
- c) that GreenCat had no financial vested interest in the project,
- d) that the non-technical version of the feasibility study had been available on www.norhamlife.co.uk since February 2022, and that the full feasibility study had also been available by request from GreenCat since then and was also now available by request from www.norhamdt.org ,
- e) that Green Cat had considered and rejected any hydro-power scheme. The Mill Burn was not specifically mentioned in the feasibility study.
- f) that the planning application would not go ahead without being able to demonstrate community support,
- g) that it is likely that another exercise to measure community support would be undertaken. A suggestion was made that this should include the full electoral roll within the parish. AM suggested the possibility of a parish poll could be proposed and requested by 10 members of the parish once further information had been shared. A parish poll would include the full electorate within the parish and be officially overseen by NCC. The financial consequences of such a poll were unknown.
- h) A suggestion was made to have a Q&A forum hosted online to allow questions to be raised and answered
- i) CH explained some of the planning procedure (if a planning application for the project were to be made), and that all environmental and other reports/surveys would have to be obtained in support of the application in the usual way, and that members of the public could object on planning issues. CH also confirmed, when asked by AM, that he would declare his interest and not chair or be part of any discussions with the planning committee as he has demonstrated support for the project in an online poll.

On a separate matter, a resident raised the issue of sewage. She indicated that she lives in North Lane, and they had been informed by Northumbrian Water that the sewage works in Norham were now at full capacity – this meant that from time to time they had raw sewage in their garden. She had noted that the possibility of further development in The Glebefield had been

mentioned – she wished it to be noted that if such a development were ever to proceed, new sewage facilities would have to be included in the plans. GS confirmed that any such new development on The Glebefield (which has been zoned for housing by the County Council in the Local Plan) would have to satisfy the NCC Planning Department as regards many factors including sewage. AM pointed out that the Norham sewage works was one of the most polluting outlets on the River Tweed.

Date of next meeting: 20th May (Annual Meeting)