

Minutes of Annual Parish Council Meeting of Norham Parish Council held on 20th May 2024

Those present were George Straughen (GS), Jim Greenwood (JG), John Grahamslaw (JJG), Sheelagh Hume (SH), Dougie Watkin (DW) and Alison Murphy (AM). There were several members of the public also present.

5.24.1. To elect a Chair

GS was proposed by JG and seconded by SH for Chair. Before a vote was held GS indicated that all councillors should be aware that he was currently subject to an investigation by the Monitoring Officer of Northumberland County Council arising from complaints lodged against him by AM, in relation to alleged abuse of his position as Chair of the parish council pertaining to the planning application for development of the Victoria Hotel, and failure to properly register an interest/interests. A vote was then held - all councillors except AM voted in favour of GS. GS was accordingly appointed Chair.

5.24.2. Chair to sign Declaration of Acceptance of Office

GS duly signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

5.24.3. To elect a Vice Chair

JG was proposed by SH and seconded by DW, to become Vice Chair. Before a vote was held JG indicated that all councillors should be aware that he was also currently subject to an investigation by the Monitoring Officer of Northumberland County Council arising from complaints lodged against him by AM, in relation to his conduct as a member of parish council pertaining to the planning application for development of the Victoria Hotel, and failure to properly register an interest/interests, and that he strongly refuted those allegations. A vote was then held - all councillors except AM voted in favour of JG. JG was accordingly appointed Vice-Chair.

5.24.4. To accept apologies for Absence

None – Apologies had been received from Cllr Hardy who had another parish council annual meeting to attend.

5.24.5. To make any Declaration of Interest

No declaration of interest was made.

5.24.6. To agree Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2024 and 2 May were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

5.24.7 To Receive Chairman's Report

The Chairman's Annual Report was accepted. Copy attached. SH confirmed that GS was to be thanked for going above and beyond what was expected, especially in relation to the ongoing issues with the public toilets.

5.24.8 Matters arising from Minutes

i Election in Respect of Casual Vacancy

It was confirmed an election to fill the vacancy left by Jim Blythe's resignation would take place on 4th July. It was good to have so many candidates although unfortunate in that the costs of the election would be borne by the parish council. DW noted that if there were to be a national election on the same date the costs would be lower in that e.g. costs of the polling station would be shared with the parish council – the same would apply to the elections next May if contested.

ii Proposed Joint Neighbourhood Plan – Options Paper

It was explained that this process had been going on for c 10 years with not much progress for the last few years. Member councils had decided to try to get some momentum going with a view to making progress. Hence NCC had drawn up the Options Papers with a view to focussing minds on the issues. DW confirmed that affordable housing was a real issue in rural areas, and the provision of such housing in the Glebefield some years ago had effectively saved Norham School – what was required was affordable housing for families. Part of The Glebefield has been allocated for housing in NCC Local Plan (not affordable housing). There was discussion about whether a full development of affordable housing was a realistic option or an aspiration. All councillors were asked to consider the Options papers and pass any views/comments/ideas to the clerk by 31st May. The draft terms of reference were also agreed.

iii Public Conveniences

GS reported that he had had to clean the WCs of excrement on walls, floor, etc four times withing the past week. The drains had also been blocked by baby wipes, and on one occasion a McDonalds cup had been added to the pile. The cleaner understandably refused to carry on cleaning this type of mess, so he was dealing with it himself. Discussion re use of cameras – the police had previously advised against this. Previous incidents had taken place over the last few months but not so often and had been reported on Northumbria Police website and to the community police officer. It does appear that at least the most recent incidents have not been the work of local youths as previously suspected. A car registration number has been taken and reported. The incidents now seemed to be happening during the day, so closing the toilets in the evening would not prevent them happening, and would involve someone having to open and close the WCs.

iv Play Areas

RoSPA inspection due in June -JJG has provided links for changing height of swings in Ubbanford.

- v Community Police Report**
Two off road motorbikes confiscated for scrapping after a number of complaints. VLC will be discussing WCs with community police officer very shortly. He has been on leave over the last week.
- vi Undergrounding of cables**
Nothing to report.
- vii Norham Development Trust**
More information being gradually uploaded on to NDT website. JG confirmed he had just had his monthly discussion with North East and York Net Zero who are the most recent funders. VLC had resigned as a director of NDT.
Re 1 Tower Cottages refurbishment is going ahead. Hoping to be in a state for renting out at an affordable rent this summer.
- viii Jubilee Field**
In pretty good order and well used. Some work to be done on the wall – it is safe and will be sorted once Tower Cottage job has been completed. JJG confirmed access gate is in bad state. GS will contact Northumbrian Water to see if they will repair it.
- ix Parking in Castle Street**
NCC have indicated that they would strongly prefer the plan as originally drawn. After discussion agreed that the parish council would prefer a fresh plan be drawn up as per pervious discussions, limiting the parallel parking to between the two sets of steps. Discussion re the hatching outside Bow Well cottages. Agreed that parish council plan would not require that hatching so if some disabled parking were required there that would not be an issue. VLC will contact NCC.
- x Proposed 20mph Speed limit**
It would appear that some kind of survey has just been done though parish council had understood this would be carried out in July/August. VLC will chase NCC again for confirmation of the situation.
- xi Land at Glebefield**
Nothing further to report. Only two meetings have been held with Diocesan property services to sound them out on their intentions as regards the area allocated for housing. No decisions of any kind have been taken.
- xii Lower Tweed Trail**
Some areas of the trail require work – mainly in the Ord section. Hoping that NCC Footpath officer may be able to provide assistance soon as his involvement in the England Coast Path comes to an end.

xiii Paton & Co Donations

Discussion re possible donation of £250 to Norham in Bloom. GS will discuss with them to see if they need funds at this stage or still have some left from very successful plant sale/open gardens last year.

xiv Trees

The various sycamore trees have now been crowned. D Gibson to be complimented on how efficiently the work was carried out, and how well they tidied up afterwards. This work is to be jointly funded by the parish council and local businesses and residents.

xv Truck Run

There will be a truck run (around 110 trucks) coming through Norham on Saturday 6th July c1.45pm, in aid of charities connected to Borders General hospital, as part of Duns Reivers Week.

FINANCE

5.24.9 To review Payments and Receipts since last meeting

Payments since 25 March 2024: 30 April S Broadbent £278.97; 30 April NALC £145.43; 8 May V Craig £648.

Receipts since 25 March 2024 10 April NCC £2900; 17 April Paton & Co £250

5.24.10 To look at Bank balances in Current and Deposit Accounts

As at 20th May the balance in the Current Account was £14034.45 and Business (Castle) Account £609.15.

5.24.11 To confirm Donations and Grants

Grants agreed as follows:

Norham Churchyard (PCC) £150;

Norham Newsround (NDT) £200;

Norham Village Hall £300

Donations agreed as follows:

GNAA £100;

CAB £100;

HospiceCare North Northumberland £50;

NDT (website) £75

- 5.24.12 Annual Governance and Accountability Return for 2023/2024**
- i To consider and agree any actions arising from the report of the internal auditor**
The internal audit report was received and considered. No actions required.
The internal auditor had pointed out that there were 2 small amounts of VAT that had not been reclaimed, which VLC will deal with in the next claim.
 - ii To consider and approve the draft annual accounts for 2023/2024**
Considered and approved.
 - iii To consider and approve the Annual Governance Statement**
Considered and approved.
 - iv To consider and approve the Accounting Statement and Explanation of Variances**
Considered and approved.
 - v To confirm and approve the Certification of Exemption**
Confirmed and approved.
 - vi To complete agree and sign relevant Annual Return sections**
Completed agreed and signed accordingly.
 - vii To accept Bank Reconciliation**
Considered and accepted.
- 5.24.13 Renewal of insurance**
Confirmed that the insurance should be renewed. Having compared quotes for annual renewal and for a 3-year long term agreement, it was agreed to renew on the 3-year basis.
- 5.24.14 To confirm Standing Orders**
Considered and confirmed.
- 5.24.15 To confirm Register of Assets**
Agreed to add Little Library on Castle Street to the Register. GS also reported that the seat on Boathouse Lane had become dilapidated. JG had offered to replace it at his own expense. Agreed that this offer would be accepted with thanks. The old seat is in GS workshop. JJG will consider if it is fixable.
- 5.24.16 To look at Planning Application decisions**
New Conservatory, West Biggin Farm: Granted

5.24.17 To look at state of Roads and Pavements

Discussion re grass cutting from NCC which is not up to previous standards.
Agreed that they are very stretched financially and by way of manpower.
VLC to contact and ask re strimming round the village green.

5.24.18 General Correspondence

Letter received from Fire Service with advice if D Day anniversary events being held.

Any Other Business (For information only)

Query re closure of the castle VLC (as Chair of Friends of Norham Castle) confirmed that English Heritage were trying everything they could to find a way to open the castle safely. They may provide access by opening a gap in fencing next to the old ticket office. The bridges in the castle have been condemned and that combined with issue of falling masonry by the Sheep and Wicker gates has become a real issue.

They have very limited funds to carry out work and have to have permission from Historic England for any changes.

The Tommy on war memorial is damaged. Agreed after discussion that GS will repair it.

Date of next meeting: 22 July 2024