

THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL

HELD ON MONDAY 1 JUNE 2015

Present: Councillor M Nicholls (Chair)
Councillors B Maddison, J Miller, Mrs M Nicholls,
Mrs L Stewart and Mrs C Stogdale

Apologies: Councillors Mrs E Carr, E Goyns and Mrs M Goyns

1 Thomas Kenny – Victoria Cross Memorial Stone

The Chair welcomed S Pearce, Principal Area Action Partnership Co-ordinator and N Hillier, Heritage Projects Development Manager, Durham County Council to the meeting.

Consideration was given to the report of the Principal AAP Co-ordinator, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

S Pearce reported that special paving stones would be laid in the home towns of every UK soldier awarded the Victoria Cross as part of the World War I centenary events. The stones had been given to the Local Authority in the areas where the VC recipients were born. A total of 7 would be unveiled in County Durham to commemorate medals awarded and would be laid in every year up to 2018.

The stones would initially form part of an exhibition in the DLI museum and from there would be transported to agreed sites. Funding from Durham County Council was available to site the Stones in a suitable location and other funding options were being explored.

Members were advised that the first VC in Durham was awarded to Thomas Kenny on 4 November 1915. Thomas Kenny was buried in Wheatley Hill Cemetery and in 1994 a head stone was erected at his grave.

The Thomas Kenny VC Commemorative Group was formed with representatives from Durham County Council, East Durham AAP, the Rifles Regiment, DLI Museum, East Durham Creates, Wheatley Hill Heritage Group and Wheatley Hill and Wingate Parish Councils. To date the group had met twice.

Key to the location of the VC Stone was the wishes of the family who had confirmed they would like the stone to be placed in Wheatley Hill Cemetery but not on the grave.

It had been agreed that the event would be held on 4 November 2015, exactly 100 years since Thomas Kenny's gallant deed. Although the date of the event was close to Remembrance Sunday, it was felt a separate commemoration day for Thomas Kenny was appropriate.

The group had agreed that key to the success of the event would be the involvement of local schools and community groups. Durham County Council's Archivist Department had been successful in attracting Heritage Lottery Funding and had offered to work with schools and community groups as part of the community engagement project.

On the day of the event a short unveiling ceremony would be held at the Cemetery followed by a reception at a local venue, possibly Wheatley House.

The AAP was submitting a bid for £7,000 to the Heritage Lottery Fund First World War Now and Then Programme. If successful, the bid for £7,000 together with the £300 from Durham County Council would fully fund the cost of the event. A decision on the funding application was expected at the end of July 2015.

If the bid was unsuccessful, Durham County Council Neighbourhood Services had confirmed they would be willing to increase their contribution to meet the cost of the event, although it would be delivered at a reduced cost.

Approval was being sought from the Parish Council to site the VC Stone in Wheatley Hill Cemetery and then for the Parish Council to take on responsibility for the future maintenance of the stone.

Following a number of questions from Members the Chair thanked both officers for their attendance at the meeting whereupon they left.

Members expressed concern that the extent of the Parish Council's involvement had initially been to grant permission for the VC Stone to be sited in the Cemetery and to take on the future maintenance of the Stone. It appeared that the AAP and Durham County Council were passing responsibility for the event onto the Parish Council. This was of particular concern when there was no budget in place to cover the cost of the event and little time to organise it.

Following a lengthy discussion on the issues it was **RESOLVED** that;

- (i) approval be granted, in principle, to allow the VC Stone to be sited in Wheatley Hill Cemetery,
- (ii) the future maintenance of the VC Stone be discussed at the next meeting of the Parish Council to be held on 8 June 2015,
- (iii) the Clerk advise S Pearce of Members concerns and, if necessary, a further meeting be held.