

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON MONDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2011

Present: Councillor M Nicholls (Chair)
Councillors Mrs M Goyns, J R Lamb,
B Maddison, Mrs M Nicholls, Mrs E Carr,
and Mrs C Stogdale

Apologies: Councillors E Goyns and Mrs L Stewart

1 THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 10 October 2011, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were approved and signed by the Chair.

2 ALLOTMENTS - ANNUAL FEES

The Chair welcomed Mr Coxon, Mr Dilks, Mr Townley and Miss Million to the meeting.

Mr Coxon advised that he was present at the meeting to discuss the rent increase in relation to allotments and stable blocks. Mr Coxon pointed out that many of the tenants were pensioners and the Parish Council had doubled the cost of an allotment to £30 and increased the cost of a stable block by £20 to £60. Mr Coxon expressed concern that the Parish Council had not consulted with tenants prior to implementing the increase and suggested that an increase of £5 across the board would have been more reasonable.

The Chair acknowledged Mr Coxon's concerns and advised that the level of fees had remained static for a number of years. He explained that due to increased costs related to upkeep and maintenance the Parish Council was unable to sustain the allotments without increasing the rents.

The Chair explained that the Parish Council had undertaken a survey of fees charged by neighbouring authorities which had highlighted that the fees being charged by the Parish Council were very low.

Tenants were advised that there had been an excessive use of water at the site which had resulted in the Parish Council receiving a quarterly water bill in excess of £1,200.

The Chair pointed out that the annual fees totalled £545 which in no way reflected the true cost related to the upkeep of the allotments, therefore the Parish Council had made the decision to increase the annual fees.

Reference was made to various problems associated with the site. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council were aware of the problems and steps were being taken to address this. The Police and Street Wardens had also been made aware of the problems associated with the site.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

3 COMMUNITY POLICING

The Chair welcomed PC Brown to the meeting.

The Officer advised that since the last meeting there had been 3 burglaries, 1 theft, 2 criminal damage and 37 incidences of anti-social behaviour.

With reference to the recent 'Rock the Barn' event held at Wingate Grange the Officer advised that the information provided by the Parish Council had been passed to the Environmental Health Department at Durham County Council.

The Chair made reference to the increasing number of wagons that were collecting scrap throughout the village. The Officer advised that many scrap dealers were now legal and had the appropriate licence and insurance, this meant there was very little the Police could do.

Councillor Mrs Goyns asked if when the Fire Brigade responded to an incident did they advise the Police. The Officer advised that the Fire Brigade did not routinely advise the Police of call outs they attended.

Councillor Mrs Carr advised that due to the number of vans and cars parked along the Front Street, just off Vincent's Corner, visibility was very poor when crossing at the zebra crossing and it was only a matter of time before an accident occurred.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

4 WINTER MAINTENANCE

The Chair welcomed Mr Andrew Blankley, Assistant Engineer, Durham County Council, who was in attendance at the meeting to discuss winter maintenance.

Members were advised that in 2003/2004, the Government made an amendment to Section 41 (1) of the Highways Act 1980, which resulted in the Highway Authority having a duty to ensure, so far as was reasonably practicable, that safe passage along the highway was not endangered by snow or ice.

Members were advised that Durham County Council used the Vaisala Ice Prediction System. The County Council had 9 sites throughout the County and worked in partnership with Darlington Borough Council and Tees Valley Partnership. This service currently cost the County Council £45,000 per annum.

In addition, the County Council had a contract with MeteoGroup for weather forecasts, which cost £30,000 per annum.

Members were provided with details of Durham County Council's winter maintenance routes as well as the routes that were salted in Wheatley Hill.

It was explained that the County Council were required to pre-salt 35% of the highway as a minimum, the County Council exceeded this and currently pre-salted 46%. The County Council had stock piled 46,000 tonnes of salt for the 2011/2012 winter which was stored throughout the County.

It was explained that the winter maintenance budget had been frozen for the last 3 years, however, costs continued to rise, particularly in relation to fuel.

The total winter maintenance budget was £2.75M, with fixed costs of £0.9M and the winter period ran from October 15 to April 15 each year.

The County Council's policy was to clear footways during times of severe weather. These included category 1a, main town centres, category 1, busy village shopping streets, public transport interchanges, hospitals, emergency services, doctor's surgeries/health centres and care homes and sheltered accommodation.

The County Council had 2,000 salt bins as well as additional roadside salt heaps. Salt bins were replenished as and when required and the annual servicing of the bins cost between £200,000 and £225,000. The annual cost of salt for the bins was £55,000. The cost to provide 1 salt bin had previously been £210, however, a new contract had been negotiated and a bin could be provided for £140. It cost, on average, £100 per salt bin, per winter season.

Members were advised that the criteria for providing salt bins had recently changed and any previous requests should be resubmitted as they would be considered under the new criteria.

It was explained that the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had undertaken a review of winter maintenance strategy and service in September 2009. The review resulted in a report of 21 recommendations covering resources, strategic and operational management/service provision, publicity and communications, additional resources and working in partnership.

With regard to working in partnership, the aim was to provide: -

- enhanced service - road/footways/salt bins/information
- community engagement - local pride/knowledge
- priority footway treatment
- additional resources/partnerships

One of the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny review was to explore the opportunities to establish pilot schemes of partnership working with Town/Parish Councils in relation to winter maintenance, subject to appropriate Service Level Agreements being in place and staff trained to appropriate standards.

Durham County Council, if working in partnership with the Parish Council, would be able to provide forecast information and early warnings regarding severe weather, they would also provide training, salt, equipment and the appropriate public liability insurance. Members asked a number of questions in relation to what would be expected of the Parish Council and it was suggested that the way forward would be for the Clerk to meet with Mr Blankley to discuss this matter further.

RESOLVED that the Parish Council agree, in principle, to work in partnership with Durham County Council with regard to winter maintenance and the Clerk be authorised to meet with Mr Blankley to discuss this further.

5 STREET WARDENS

There were no Street Wardens present at the meeting.

6 CORRESPONDENCE

(1) Requests for Financial Assistance

(i) Wheatley Hill - Over 20's Club

The Clerk reported the receipt of a request for financial assistance from the Wheatley Hill - Over 20's Club towards their annual Christmas party.

RESOLVED that a donation of £300 be made from the Section 137 Budget.

(ii) Greenhills Centre - Elderly Members Christmas Party

The Clerk reported the receipt of a request for financial assistance from the Greenhills Centre towards the elderly members Christmas party.

RESOLVED that a donation of £300 be made from the Section 137 Budget.

(iii) Wheatley Hill Constitutional Club - Members Christmas Party

The Clerk reported the receipt of a request for financial assistance from Wheatley Hill Constitutional Club towards the members Christmas party.

RESOLVED that a donation of £300 be made from the Section 137 Budget.

(iv) Greenhills Centre - Children's Christmas Party

The Clerk reported the receipt of a request for financial assistance from the Greenhills Centre towards the children's Christmas party.

RESOLVED that a donation of £150 be made from the Section 137 Budget.

(v) Wheatley Hill Community Nursery

The Clerk reported the receipt of a request for financial assistance from Wheatley Hill Community Nursery towards the annual children's Christmas party.

RESOLVED that a donation of £300 be made from the Section 137 Budget.

(vi) Wheatley House Moving Forward

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from Wheatley House Moving Forward advising that they had opened an account with Unity Bank Trust PLC.

Members had previously been made aware of Durham County Councils proposal to close Wheatley house. In response residents had established Wheatley House Moving Forward in an effort to retain it for the community.

The Parish Council had previously discussed the financial situation related to Wheatley House and had suggested that a commitment be given to provide a donation of £5,000 per annum for a three year period. This would provide Wheatley House with financial stability and allow them to plan and move forward.

Wheatley House was an asset to the village and community and its closure would have a detrimental effect on residents who used it regularly.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Parish Council would provide a commitment to Wheatley House Moving Forward to provide a donation of £5,000 per annum for a 3 year period from the Section 137 Budget.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) a donation of £5,000 be made from the Section 137 Budget to Wheatley House Moving Forward for the financial year 2011/2012
- (ii) A donation of £5,000 be made in the financial year 2012/2013 and 2013/2014.

(2) Letters of Thanks

The Clerk reported the receipt of the following letters of thanks: -

East Durham Citizens Advice Bureau
Wheatley Hill Workingmen's Club Football Team

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(3) Wheatley Hill Mothers Club - Christmas Carol Concert

The Clerk reported the receipt of an invitation for Members to attend the annual Christmas Carol Concert on 1 December 2011.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(4) East Durham Association of Parish and Town Councils

The Clerk advised that the next meeting of the East Durham Association of Parish and Town Councils would be held on 15 November 2011.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(5) Haswell and District Mencap Society - Carol Service

The Clerk reported the receipt of an invitation for Members to attend the annual Mencap Carol Service on 17 December 2011.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(6) Electoral Review of County Durham

The Clerk advised that the Local Government Boundary Commission had completed its review of County Durham. The changes proposed would now be implemented by Parliament. The Draft Order would provide for new electoral arrangements for County Durham to be implemented in the Local Elections in 2012.

The Boundary Commission's recommendation for a 3 Member Trimdon and Thornley Division had been confirmed and would be their final recommendation for Trimdon and Thornley.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(7) Civil Parking Enforcement in North Durham

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from Durham County Council advising that a parking strategy produced in 2008 set out the intention to seek approval from the Secretary of State for Transport to deliver civil parking enforcement in the north of the County by 2012.

Members were advised that approval had now been received from the Secretary of State to commence the civil parking enforcement in the former districts of Derwentside, Chester-le-Street and Easington from 7 November 2011.

The Clerk advised that in areas where civil parking enforcement was introduced the Council would now be responsible for enforcing parking regulations instead of the Police. The Council would be able to issue a penalty charge notice where a parking contravention occurred. Civil parking enforcement allowed the Council to link parking enforcement in car parks and on-street with other transport priorities thereby reducing congestion and promoting road safety.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(8) Infinis - Proposed Wind Farm, Wingate Grange

The Clerk advised that Infinis had requested to attend a future meeting to provide Members with an update on the exhibitions that were held during September 2011 to discuss plans for a wind farm.

It was suggested that Infinis could attend a meeting in the new year.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(9) **Rock the Barn - Wingate Grange Farm**

The Clerk advised that following the "Rock the Barn" event held at Wingate Grange Farm, numerous complaints were made to Durham County Council in relation to the continuous playing of loud music over the weekend event.

Durham County Council had advised that in relation to the actual farm, 3 Abatement Notices under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Statutory Nuisance Legislation were served on persons responsible for the event.

The requirements of the Notices were that the farm was not to cause a statutory nuisance to anyone outside the farm boundary and a breach of an Abatement Notice was a criminal offence that carried a maximum fine of £20,000 for a business.

Unfortunately Pollution Control could not take any action for any breach of the Licencing Regulations in relation to the temporary event notice. However, the Licencing and Enforcement Section and the Police would be investigating this further.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

7 PLANNING MATTERS

Applications

Consideration was given to the following planning application received from Durham County Council: -

Proposed demolition and rebuild of existing boundary wall at Cemetery grounds, Cemetery Road for Wheatley Hill Parish Council

RESOLVED that no objection or comment be made to Durham County Council.

8 DELEGATES REPORTS

(i) **County Durham Association of Local Councils - Annual General Meeting**

Councillor Mrs Goyns reported that she had attended the County Durham Association of Local Councils Annual General Meeting on 29 October 2011.

Councillor Goyns advised that the meeting was opened by Councillor Linda Marshall who reported on the progress made by Durham County Council since Local Government Reorganisation in 2009. Councillor Marshall also referred to the role of the Area Action Partnerships and how they had greatly assisted in the transition and success of the new County Council.

Reference was made to the issue of double taxation and it was acknowledged that this issue would take a number of years to resolve.

Affiliation fees for 2012/2013 were considered at the meeting and as no pay increases were expected for 2012/2013 and there was a potential surplus from 2011/2012 it was agreed that there would be no increase in CDALC subscription fees for 2012/2013.

The Durham Police Authority Chairman, Mr Peter Thompson, spoke on the Police and Crime Commissioners.

New legislation was passed on 15 September 2011 regarding the future of policing which would see Police Authorities replaced by Police and Crime Commissioners from November 2012.

The document set out the Governments vision for policing and how it would cut crime, be more directly accountable to the public and offer value for money. It was hoped that it would achieve greater collaboration through the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners with less Government intervention and bureaucracy, more professional responsibility and judgement and a new policing and partnership landscape.

The proposed legislation was opposed and in the mean time the Police would continue to operate as usual.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Wheatley Hill Community Centre**

The Chair reported that the PCT proposed to relocate its services from Wheatley Hill Community Centre to the Wheatley Hill Family Centre. This would result in a significant loss of revenue to the Community Centre of £17,000 to £20,000 per annum.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) **Bus Shelter Refurbishment Scheme**

The Chair advised that Durham County Council were planning to carry out a bus shelter refurbishment scheme throughout Wheatley Hill and Thornley which would involve replacing damaged/missing panels and also painting shelters.

Members were advised that the shelter scheme would be carried out in the new year and in the meantime any smashed panels with sharp edges would be made safe by the County Council.

Details of the shelters involved and the proposed works were outlined to members.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

9 HEAD GROUNDSPERSONS REPORT

The Clerk advised that routine work had been undertaken in the Cemetery since the last meeting, details of which were outlined to Members.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

10 CLERK'S REPORT

(1) Allotments/Stable Blocks

(i) Waiting List

Members were provided with details of waiting lists for allotments and stable blocks.

The Clerk advised that allotment number 10 and stable block number 23 were vacant.

Mr Townley, the tenant of stable blocks 11 and 12 had been helping the previous tenant of allotment 10 and had recently made some improvements to the site. He had requested that he be allocated the tenancy based on the amount of work he had already undertaken on the site.

RESOLVED that: -

(i) Allotment number 10 be allocated to Mr S Townley of 25 Granville Terrace, Wheatley Hill, DH6 3JQ

(iii) The allocation of stable block number 23 be deferred.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) Annual Allotment Fees

The Clerk advised that all tenants had now paid their allotment fees for 2011/2012,

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) Sub Letting of Allotments

The Clerk advised that further allegations had been made regarding sub-letting of allotment number 14 and stable block 17.

It was suggested that a further letter be forwarded to Mr Stevenson, the tenant of allotment 14 and Mr Cowie, the tenant of stable block 17, advising that unless the sub-letting ceased, the Parish Council would take steps to terminate their tenancies with immediate effect.

RESOLVED that a further letter be sent to Mr Stevenson and Mr Cowie.

(2) Cemetery Wall

The Clerk advised that work on the Cemetery wall was almost complete.

Members referred to a number of snagging issues which would need to be brought to the attention of Direct Services prior to the signing off of the work.

It was suggested that the Clerk meet with the Chair and Vice Chair on 18 November 2011 at 2pm to discuss the matter further.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(3) Purchase of New Laptop

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council had purchased a laptop at a cost of £429.99 together with Norton Security costing £29.99.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(4) Horses in Cemetery

The Clerk advised on 18 October 2011, 3 horses were left in the Cemetery overnight.

The Clerk had endeavored to have the horses removed and had made numerous requests to various organisations including Durham County Council, the Police, the RSPCA and various animal rescue organisations. Unfortunately nobody had been able to assist the Parish Council and eventually a local resident with a horse box agreed to remove the horses from the Cemetery and keep them in his field.

The Parish Council had a burial scheduled in the Cemetery at 12 noon that day and the horses were removed at 11.45am.

The Clerk had discussed security with Mr Davies and it was concluded that this was hopefully a one off incident.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(5) Website

The Clerk provided an update on progress made regarding the new Parish Council website and provided an update.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(6) Parish Council Christmas Tree

The Clerk advised that a Christmas tree would be ordered for delivery and erection in the Cemetery for 1 December 2011.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(7) Future Meetings

The Clerk advised that a Special Meeting of the Parish Council would be required in December to agree the estimates of expenditure for 2012/2013.

In addition it was suggested that the January 2012 meeting be put back a week from 9 January to 16 January 2012.

RESOLVED that a Special Meeting of the Parish Council be held on 12 December 2011 at 5.30 pm and the January 2012 meeting be held on 16 January 2012.

11 PAYMENTS AND ORDERS

The Clerk presented Members with a written report of all payments and receipts made since the last meeting.

Members were also provided with details of the financial position of the Parish Council in comparison with the Annual Budget.

RESOLVED that the report be received and the payments itemised be approved.

12 RISK ASSESSMENT

The Clerk advised that there was nothing to report.

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Ex-Gratia Christmas Payments

The Chair suggested that an ex-gratia Christmas payment of £150 be made to J Davies, D Lamb and J Thompson.

RESOLVED that approval be granted for an ex-gratia payment of £150 to J Davies, D Lamb and J Thompson from the Chair's account.

..... Signed

..... Dated