

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE

WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL

HELD ON MONDAY 11 MARCH 2013

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

Apologies: Councillors Mrs E Carr, Mrs M Goyns, E Goyns,
J R Lamb and Mrs L Stewart

1 THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 11 February 2013, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were approved and signed by the Chair.

2 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

(i) Wind Turbines

The Chair welcomed Mrs C Jones, Mrs M Fletcher, Mr A Fletcher, Mrs S Morley and Mrs K Craig to the meeting.

Mrs Craig advised that the purpose of attending the meeting was to discuss the Infinis Wind Holdings Limited planning application for a wind farm at Wingate Grange Farm.

Mrs Craig advised that residents were concerned at the growing number of wind turbines in the area, particularly in the vicinity of Weardale Park. It was explained that the cumulative impact of multiple wind farm developments would have a major impact on residents living in Weardale Park and Wheatley Hill as a whole. Residents felt surrounded by them and were concerned that the visual aspect from many residential properties would be ruined by the addition of further wind turbines within the immediate vicinity. County Durham had already reached its quota of wind turbines.

Mrs Craig stated that Infinis had confirmed that properties in Weardale Park fell within the noise bracket and would be affected by the development. Reference was made to dead noise which Mrs Craig explained was noise which could not be heard.

Mrs Craig made reference to the land that the proposed wind farm would stand on and advised that it was prone to swallow holes and therefore unstable. Swallow holes were a type of sink hole that occurred on land which was the site of an old mine and had collapsed. Residents were concerned that the proposed development would disrupt local mines and create swallow holes. It was understood that a geographical survey had been undertaken by Infinis.

If granted planning approval Infinis proposed to undertake detailed ground investigations to confirm the ground conditions of the proposed site. Residents were of the opinion that all investigations related to ground conditions should be undertaken before planning approval was granted or should at least form part of the planning approval.

Residents also felt that the size of the proposed wind turbines would be a visual distraction to motorists and a possible road safety hazard.

Mrs Craig explained that residents felt insufficient research had been undertaken on the effects of wind turbines and they were very concerned.

Members were advised that a survey was undertaken by the former Easington District Council in relation to voles on the proposed site. The survey had identified that voles were present on the land and as they were a protected species, this would have an impact on any development. The report produced by Infinis made no reference to voles on the land in question.

The Chair reported that Infinis had been invited to attend the previous two meetings of the Parish Council, but had submitted their apologies. Due to concerns from local residents, Infinis had produced a letter which had been widely distributed throughout the community and tried to answer questions in relation to the following points: -

- Cumulative impact of multiple wind developments
- Adverse impact upon the landscape
- Shadow flicker
- Amplitude modulation
- Proximity to the aquifer
- Swallow holes
- Nature reserve and woodland area
- Protected species
- Local waterways
- Public right of way
- Radio and mobile phone interference
- House prices

Mrs Craig confirmed she had received a copy of the letter and advised that residents had requested a copy of the geographical report which would be shared with the Parish Council.

Members were also advised that residents had met with Phil Wilson, MP, on 8 March 2013 and he was lending his support to resident's concerns.

Discussion continued in relation to the initial Infinis consultation event held in Wheatley Hill in 2012 and the fact that only 17 residents attended. Mrs Craig was concerned that many residents were still unaware of the proposals for the wind farm or were not aware of the impact it would have on the local environment.

The Chair advised that all the comments and concerns discussed would be taken on board and residents would be advised if Infinis were to attend a future meeting of the Parish Council.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

3 COMMUNITY POLICING

The Chair welcomed PCSO A Robson to the meeting.

The Officer reported that since the last meeting incidences reported included 9 anti-social behaviour, 1 burglary, 3 thefts and 4 vehicle related crimes.

Reference was made to the recent temporary closure of Cemetery Road. Members were advised that the road had been closed to allow the Police Accident Unit to carry out investigations into an alleged incident.

Members were advised that crime overall in Wheatley Hill was down 47% and anti-social behaviour was down 36%.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

4 STREET WARDENS

There were no Street Wardens present at the meeting.

5 CORRESPONDENCE

(1) Requests for Financial Assistance

(i) Durham Miners' Association - Gala Souvenir Brochure 2013

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from the Durham Miners' Association requesting the Parish Council to place an advert in the Durham Miners Gala Souvenir Brochure.

Members were advised that a message of support in the brochure, up to a maximum of 25 words, cost £45.

RESOLVED that the Parish Council support the Durham Miners Gala by placing a message of support in the Souvenir Brochure at a cost of £45 from the Section 137 Budget.

(ii) Wheatley Hill Constitutional Club

The Clerk reported that receipt of a request for financial assistance from Wheatley Hill Constitutional Club towards the Clubs 100 Years' celebrations.

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

(iii) Wheatley Hill History Club

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had previously agreed to a financial donation of £300 towards a Local History Day. The donation

would be made from the 2012/2013 Section 137 Budget if monies were available at the end of the financial year.

The Clerk advised that as money was available, approval was sought to pay the £300 to Wheatley Hill History Club from the 2012/2013 Section 137 Budget.

RESOLVED that a donation of £300 be made to Wheatley Hill History Club from the Section 137 Budget.

Prior to consideration of the following item of business Councillors Mrs Stogdale and B Maddison declared an interest and took no part in the discussion.

(iv) **Wheatley House Moving Forward**

The Clerk reported that in November 2011, the Parish Council gave a commitment to provide £5,000 over the three financial years 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 to Wheatley House.

Member's approval was sought to pay the second instalment of £5,000 to Wheatley House Moving Forward for the financial year 2012/2013.

RESOLVED that a donation of £5,000 be paid to Wheatley House Moving Forward for the financial year 2012/2013.

(v) **Wheatley Hill Community Association**

Consideration was given to the report of the Clerk which outlined details of a request from Wheatley Hill Community Association to provide financial assistance towards services provided to the local community, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Clerk took Members through the report in detail and following a lengthy discussion it was **RESOLVED** that: -

- (i) approval be granted for a financial donation of £5,910 to Wheatley Hill Community Association to assist with the following costs related to the provision of services to the local community: -
- Volunteer drivers - Meals on Wheels mileage - £1,150
 - Paid staff – delivery of Meals on Wheels - £2,484
 - Trade refuse collection – Meals on Wheels, Luncheon Club and general running - £1,226
 - Lift maintenance – essential for all users with limited mobility - £1,050
- (ii) approval be granted to transfer £5,910 from reserves to the Section 137 Budget to fund the donation in 2013/2014.

(iii) the Parish Council continue with grass cutting at the children's play area during the summer months.

(2) Royal Garden Party 2013

The Clerk reported that the County Durham Association of Local Councils had advised that the successful nomination to attend the Royal Garden Party came from Edmondsley Parish Council.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(3) Road Humps – Thornley Road

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from Durham County Council advising of a consultation in relation to the proposed construction of road humps on the B1279 Thornley Road, Wheatley Hill. The consultation would run from 7 to 28 March 2013.

The Chair outlined that Mr Cairns, a resident who lived in the vicinity of the proposal, was concerned there was a discrepancy between what was being advertised in the local press and what was on the County Council's website.

It was suggested that in order to clarify the situation, the Clerk contact Durham County Council and request a plan of the proposed scheme.

RESOLVED that Durham County Council be requested to provide a plan of the proposals.

(4) Wheatley Hill Mothers Club – "Music in the Park"

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from Wheatley Hill Mothers Club, advising that they were hosting a charity 'Music in the Park' event on 17 April 2013.

The purpose of the event was to raise funds to sponsor a local resident who was climbing Mount Kilimanjaro for a charity named Comrades of Children Overseas.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6 PLANNING MATTERS

There were no planning matters to report.

7 DELEGATES REPORTS

There was nothing to report.

8 HEAD GROUNDS PERSONS REPORT

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

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

9 CLERK'S REPORT

(1) Allotments/Stable Blocks

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

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(2) Complaint - Christmas Wreaths

The Clerk reported that a complaint had been received from Mrs Kelsey who had laid 4 Christmas wreaths on a grave over the Christmas period. Mrs Kelsey subsequently had all 4 wreaths redone and replaced on the grave at the end of January.

As Members are aware, all Christmas wreaths are removed from the Cemetery at the beginning of February. A notice advising of this is posted on the Cemetery notice board each year at the beginning of December.

As in previous years, the Parish Council removed all Christmas wreaths from the Cemetery at the beginning of February, including the 4 wreaths laid by Mrs Kelsey.

Mrs Kelsey subsequently contacted the Parish Council to complain at the removal of the wreaths. The situation was explained to Mrs Kelsey and it was pointed out that the removal of the wreaths was common practice in Cemetery management and a notice advising of this had been posted in the Cemetery since December 2012. Mrs Kelsey claimed not to have seen the notice on this occasion.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(3) Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign

The Clerk reported that Durham County Council was running a responsible dog ownership campaign and would be issuing a press release linked to the campaign. All Parish and Town Councils supporting the scheme would be referenced in the press release and the fact that the Parish Council provided free dog bags would also be reported.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(4) Parish Council Minutes

The Clerk advised that Mr Jackson, a local resident, had approached Wheatley Hill Community Association with a request that Minutes of the Parish Council meetings be placed in the Community Centre.

The Clerk had discussed the request with H Jamieson, Operations Manager and advised that a hard copy of the Minutes was available for inspection at the Heritage Centre. H Jamieson had stated that she had never received a request for a hard copy of the Minutes and explained that as they were available electronically the IT Suite could be used to access the Minutes by anyone using the Centre.

It was suggested that a notice be placed on the notice board in the Community Centre advising that the Parish Council minutes were available on the website and could be accessed by computer in the IT Suite at the Community Centre.

RESOLVED that the Clerk liaise with the Community Centre to provide a notice for their notice board.

(5) Letter of Support – Wheatley Hill Community Association

The Clerk reported that Wheatley Hill Community Association had requested the Parish Council to provide a letter of support for an application for funding they were making to provide a programme of summer activities for 0 - 19 year olds during the school summer holidays.

The Clerk advised that following liaison with the Chair of the Parish Council, a letter of support was provided to the Community Association.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(6) Changes to Payroll Services

The Clerk reported that from April 2013, HMRC would be introducing real time information. Information would be sent to HMRC throughout the year, each time a payment was made to an employee, rather than at the end of the financial year.

Members were advised that Durham County Council currently provided payroll services on behalf of the Parish Council. However, with effect from April 2013, the Parish Council would need to be registered as a separate employer. Durham County Council had advised that they could provide the same level of service but the impact of these changes would have an effect on how the procedure was undertaken.

It was explained that all employees' salaries were currently paid direct from Durham County Council's bank account and a monthly invoice was raised to the Parish Council to recover the funds. From April 2013, the Parish Council would need to register as an individual employer and all employees' salaries would be paid directly from the Parish Councils bank account.

Due to the additional processes involved in using real time information the County Council had advised that the cost of their Service Level Agreement would increase by 0.05%. This would increase the Parish Council's costs from 2% of salary costs to 2.05% with effect from April 2013.

The Clerk reported that the cost to the Parish Council would be approximately £148 per month, an annual total of £1,706, plus an additional increase of 0.05% which was approximately £88.80, giving a total of £1,864.80 per annum.

Local accountancy firms offered a similar service to Durham County Council at a much reduced rate. The Clerk had therefore attempted to negotiate a reduced rate with Durham County Council to no avail.

J.A.C.S. Accountancy based in Easington were able to provide the same level of service as Durham County Council at a cost of £2.75 per employee, per month plus a monthly filing fee of £5. This gave a total of £13.25 per month or an annual fee of £159.

The Parish Council currently paid 2 Members allowances and this allowance was paid quarterly. The cost would be £2.75 per Member, 4 times a year totaling £22. In addition to this, J.A.C.S. would charge £6 printing costs for P60's at the end of each financial year. The total cost for J.A.C.S. Accountancy to provide the Parish Councils payroll service would be £187 per year, giving a saving of £1,677.80.

In order to facilitate the new payroll service the Parish Council would need to register for Internet banking to allow payment to be made direct from the parish Councils bank account.

Whilst internet banking was being set up it was suggested that the Parish Council update its mandate for cheque signatories at the same time. The current signatories were the Clerk and Councillors M Nicholls, Mrs E Carr, J R Lamb and Mrs L Stewart.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** that the Clerk be authorised to: -

- (i) terminate the contract with Durham County Council to provide payroll services to the Parish Council effective from the 31 March 2013
- (ii) instruct J.A.C.S. Accountancy to provide the Parish Councils payroll service effective from 1 April 2013
- (iii) set up internet banking to facilitate the payment of salaries following the introduction of real time information.

(7) Contract Renewals

The Clerk reported that Durham County Council had submitted the following contracts for renewal: -

	Last Year	This Year
Summer Bedding		
Supply	3,306.00	3,395.26
Maintenance	1,724.00	1,770.55
Winter Bedding		
Supply	3,306.00	3,395.26
Maintenance	1,724.00	1,770.55
Hanging Baskets		
Supply	1,440.75	1,479.65
Installation and Removal	315.00	324.00
Watering	3,055.75	3,138.25
Trade Waste	510.00	534.00
TOTAL	£15,382.00	£15,807.52

Members were advised that the cost to renew the contracts was £15,807.52 plus £3,161.50 VAT. An increase on the contracts from last year was £425.52.

RESOLVED that the contracts outlined in the report be accepted.

(8) Contract Renewal – Dog Bins

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council currently contracted Durham County Council to service its 3 dog bins on a weekly basis.

Members were advised that the new contract documentation had been received for 2013/2014. The cost to renew the contract was £720.72 per annum, inclusive of VAT. This was based on 3 bins emptied weekly at a cost of £3.85 per bin.

The Parish Council had previously discussed the option of servicing the dog bins itself to provide a financial saving.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the contract with Durham County Council not be renewed and from March 2013 the Parish Council service the bins on a weekly basis.

(9) Policies and Procedures

The Clerk reported that the Parish Councils Policies and Procedures were gradually being reviewed and uploaded onto the Councils website.

Members were advised that the Parish Councils financial regulations had been reviewed.

RESOLVED that the reviewed financial regulations be approved.

10 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.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT

The Clerk advised that there was nothing to report.

..... Signed

..... Dated