

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL
HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM ON 8 FEBRUARY 2021**

Present: Councillor J Miller (Chair)
Councillors M Goyns, B Miller, L Stewart, L White

Apologies: Councillors E Carr, C Stogdale

Also Present: County Councillor L Hovvels

Prior to the commencement of business, the Clerk advised that this meeting was being held remotely via ZOOM in accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

1 The Minutes of the last meeting held on 11 January 2021 a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were approved and signed by the Chair.

2 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No members of the public joined the meeting.

3 POLICE

There was no Police report.

4 COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT

County Councillor L Hovvels provided an update on various issues which included the following.

- Roll out of the Covid vaccine
- County Hall was a vaccine hub for key workers and County Council front line staff
- New Council housebuilding
- Potholes and fly-tipping in the village

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5 CORRESPONDENCE

(1) Letter of Thanks

The Clerk reported the receipt of a letter of thanks from Wheatley Hill History Club.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(2) Wheatley Hill History Club – Celebrating 25 Years

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from Wheatley Hill History Club together with 2 copies of an anniversary booklet which had been produced to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the History Club in 2020.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6 PLANNING APPLICATION

DM/20/03621/FPA – Refurbishment into 5 individual self-contained flats at Community Health Clinic, School House, Front Street, Wheatley Hill.

At the last meeting Members considered an application to refurbish the former health clinic on the Front Street to provide 5 flats.

Members had expressed concern that the Front Street suffered high levels of anti-social behaviour and low-level petty crime. Many of the properties in the vicinity of the former health clinic were empty or boarded up. It was felt that this demonstrated a lack of demand for residential accommodation at this location.

There was concern regarding the management and future maintenance of the flats. The applicant was Durham County Council and they were asked to clarify if the flats would be let and managed by the County Council, handed over to a social landlord or sold privately.

The County Council had advised that the property would remain in the ownership and management of Durham County Council. Management would be via the County Durham Lettings Agency.

Members were advised that since the last meeting it had been brought to the attention of the Parish Council that once refurbished the flats would be offered to former homeless people and rough sleepers.

It was stressed that the Parish Council had empathy for the homeless and sympathised with the situation people could find themselves in, often through no fault of their own. However, it was felt that the Front Street was not a suitable location for such a facility.

Members discussed the application at length and raised the following concerns;

- The Front Street was a mix of residential and commercial properties and had a history of persistent anti-social behaviour and low-level crime. The Police, Neighbourhood Wardens and Fire Service were repeatedly called to deal with incidents on the Front Street. There were on-going problems associated with youths congregating and causing a disturbance/nuisance on the Front Street. Following concern from residents the Parish Council had requested the Police to introduce Dispersal Orders.
- There was a history of vulnerable people who lived in the vicinity of the Front Street being targeted by local youths and taken advantage of, this could leave them vulnerable to crime and anti-social behaviour.
- People who had been homeless or sleeping rough were more likely to have a range of complex needs. They were more likely to have problems related to substance and alcohol misuse, addictions as well as physical and/or mental health issues. They needed to be near services that could provide them with the assistance and help they required. There were no such facilities in Wheatley Hill and no proper infrastructure to support the occupants of such a facility.
- There was concern that the proposed facility was near 2 primary schools and elderly people's housing. The priority should be to safeguard children and the elderly living in the village.
- There was a lack of public amenities not only on the Front Street but in Wheatley Hill generally. The people to be housed in these flats would require help and assistance to give them the best possible outcome.

- The planning application should have been more transparent and clearly stated that the intention was to refurbish the building for former homeless people and rough sleepers. Nowhere on the application does it mention this, and it was only referenced in the supporting documents.
- Within the supporting documents it stated that no public consultation had taken place. The local community should have been consulted on the proposal as it would have an impact on the whole village. It was noted that a number of individual properties in the vicinity of the site were directly consulted. This was felt to be inadequate as over half the properties contacted were empty or boarded up.

RESOLVED that;

- (i) the Parish Council object to the application on the grounds outlined and the County Council be asked to refuse planning permission based on the concerns raised and the fact that the Front Street was not a suitable location for such a facility.
- (ii) the County Council be asked to refer the application to the Area Planning Committee and a site visit be held to allow Members of the Planning Committee the opportunity to view the site and the surrounding area.

7 HEAD GROUNDPERSONS 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.

8 CLERK'S REPORT

(1) Dodds Close/Pit Wheel

The Clerk reported that at the last meeting Members considered options to address the on-going problem of vehicles accessing the grassed area at Dodds Close/Pit Wheel.

Members were advised that since the last meeting Believe Housing had agreed to a financial contribution of £4,000 towards the project. The County Durham Community Foundation and AAP were approached regarding funding. The AAP had advised that they were unlikely to be able to help and an application to the windfarm fund may be possible.

It had been brought to the attention of the Parish Council that Section 106 money was available for use in Wheatley Hill and the Planning Development Manager had indicated that the proposals for Dodds Close could be considered for funding.

Members had previously considered hooped perimeter fencing which was discounted due to it being too expensive. If Section 106 funding was available, then perimeter fencing may be an option. As the original quotation provided was an estimate Durham County Council were asked to provide a detailed cost for the hooped perimeter fencing.

Durham County Council had advised that the hooped perimeter fencing could be supplied and installed at a cost of £33,932.04 plus VAT. This included the installation of 6 anti-motorcycle barriers and a boom gate for machine access to maintain the land.

It was felt that the hooped perimeter fencing would provide a softer more sympathetic look compared to boulders on such a large area of land.

It was pointed out that the land at Dodds Close was owned and managed by Durham County Council and the Parish Council was unable to undertake any works without permission.

The Clerk had discussed the Section 106 funding with the County Council and it was suggested that to make the application process smoother it may be best for the applicant to be the County Council's Clean and Green section rather than the Parish Council. This way funds would not leave the County Council and there would be no issues related to approval as the County Council would be undertaking work on their own land.

The Parish Council had been advised that planning permission was not required for the fencing but approval would be needed for the anti-motorcycle barriers. If the work were undertaken by the County Council, they would obtain the appropriate approvals internally. As part of the process there would need to be consultation with residents once a firm proposal was agreed upon.

The Clerk suggested that the submission of an application for Section 106 funding be discussed with the Clean and Green section.

RESOLVED that the County Council's Clean and Green section be asked to submit the application for Section 106 funding to provide hooped perimeter fencing at Dodds Close.

(2) New Machinery

Consideration was given to the report of the Clerk which gave details of the need to purchase a new tractor for the Cemetery, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Members were advised that the primary use of the new tractor would be to dig graves, but it would be utilised elsewhere in the Cemetery and around the village.

The Parish Council currently had the use of 2 tractors. One was purchased in March 2017 and the other was over 20 years old. Both machines needed parts which were no longer available. Due to the lack of parts one machine was no longer useable.

Members considered various options which included purchasing a new tractor complete with backhoe and front bucket, purchasing a new backhoe for the existing machine, or purchasing a small Bobcat.

The Head Groundsperson had spoken to retailers to discuss the Parish Council's needs. Discussions were also held with Durham County Council, as they serviced the Parish Council's vehicles and they had advised on the suitability of various makes and models. Following this research the Head Groundsperson had recommended a Solis 26 Tractor.

Quotations were sought for this model and the lowest quotation received was from Agri - Mech Tractors & Machinery in the sum of £13,750 plus £2,750 VAT. The machine was available from stock and the price included delivery, training and a 3-year warranty.

RESOLVED that approval be granted for the purchase of a new Solis 26 Tractor, with backhoe and front bucket from Agri - Mech Tractors & Machinery at a cost of £13,750 plus £2,750 VAT.

(3) Machine Fuel

The Clerk reported that Durham County Council had advised that they were no longer able to supply the Parish Council with machine fuel.

Members were advised that options for a new supply of fuel was being investigated.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(4) Wheatley Hill Community Association – Meals on Wheels

Wheatley Hill Parish Council – 8 February 2021

The Clerk reported that due to the current Covid restrictions the Community Centre remained closed to the public. The Meals on Wheels service was still operating and the Meals on Wheels van was being parked in the Cemetery for security.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(5) ZOOM

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had purchased ZOOM Standard Pro on a month-to-month contract at a cost of £14.39 per month.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

9 PAYMENTS

The following schedule of payments was circulated together with figures for all income and expenditure as of 31 January 2021.

CHQ NO	PAYMENT TO	DETAIL	COST	VAT	TOTAL
Direct Debit	British Gas	Gas - Heritage Centre	462.30	92.46	554.76
Internet Banking	e-on Next	Electric - Heritage Centre	52.49	2.62	55.11
Internet Banking	J Dent	Skip Hire	230.00	46.00	276.00
Internet Banking	J Davies	Reimbursements	98.05	19.62	117.67
Internet Banking	J Thompson	Telephone Allowance	25.00		25.00
Internet Banking	J Thompson	Reimbursements	7.92		7.92
Internet Banking	Payroll	Wages - February 2021	3,381.00		3,381.00
Internet Banking	HMRC/DCC	PAYE/Pension - February 2021	2,184.16		2,184.16
Internet Banking	JAC's Accountancy Limited	Payroll Pension Report	5.00	1.00	6.00
Internet Banking	JAC's Accountancy Limited	Payroll Services - February 2021	12.10	2.42	14.52
Direct Debit	British Telecom	Telephone/Internet	25.34	5.07	30.41
Direct Debit	O2	Chairs Mobile Telephone	26.31	5.26	31.57
Invoice 45	Co-Op Bank	Service and Commission Charges	13.30		13.30
		TOTAL	6,522.97	174.45	6,697.42

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted and the payments be approved.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

There was nothing to report.

..... Signed

.....Dated