



Ashington Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the remote Annual Parish Meeting held on 4th March 2021 at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Councillors: N. Spiers (Chairman), P. Kerrey, J. Stillwell, M. Woolley, J. Morris, T. Kearney, P. Linehan, S. Ball, T. Watson, G. MacPherson & T. Moss

Also present:

Clerk – Karen Dare
District Councillors – J Blackall & P. Circus
2 Members of the Public

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor – P Marshall

Report from the Chairman of Ashington Parish Council on the Year 2020/21

The Chairman reported:

The past 12 months have been challenging if nothing else, especially with the restrictions due to Covid 19 preventing our normal meetings. The Parish Council rose to the challenge with gusto and very quickly and almost seamlessly continued using Zoom for remote meeting without apparently any real disruption to business. In some ways Zoom has been a good thing, no more turning out in subzero temperatures for a 5-minute planning meeting. Thanks to Councillor McPherson for keeping us all abreast of the ever-changing situation and helping to make sure the PC always did the right thing at the right time.

The main thrust of the year has been the Ashington Neighbourhood Plan (ANP) which 12 months ago we were at Regulation 14 and thought was nearing completion, however we have had a number of curve balls thrown at us. Firstly, the Horsham Local Plan that seemed at complete odds to the ANP. The Horsham Local Plan contradicted the ANP mainly due to the fact it was developed using information about Ashington that was not only dubious but, in many cases, factually totally incorrect that brought into question the validity of the whole plan. This HDC Plan has now stalled although the deadlines have passed. Then Historic England declared that one of the sites in the ANP could not be developed as there were potentially archaeological finds on the site. After reviews with the sites and HDC a solution was found and after amendments the plan moved to Regulation 16 only to have WSCC change its mind during the consultation about the School and wanted land set aside for possible future expansion. Another round of reviews and amendments, that seemed to go on forever, saw us eventually getting to Examination. Apart from a few minor changes mainly to the wording the recommendation is to go to Referendum, with a lot of very complimentary comments in the conclusion on how the PC has conducted itself, the involvement and engagement of the village and the open and transparent way the ANP as evolved. None of this could have been achieved without the tireless work of Karen Dare, our Clerk whom I cannot thank and praise enough.

A major change to the PC was the loss of Ashington Autos as leases to the yard affectionately called the Green Shed. AA had leased the yard for possibly 30+ years raising important revenue for the PC that has helped offset costs being passed on to the village in precept rises.

Having taken back ownership the PC needed to work out a way of using the area to raise funds to cover the revenue loss. Medium term strategy is to have a village café, satisfying the main need raise from the ANP survey, however short term the yard needed to start raising much needed funds.

To do this the yard needed updating and making safe. Hence the building was demolished, power installed, the site cleared, rebranding and some popup businesses were found to create something new for the village in way of increased amenities. A working party was set up, Councillors Kerrey and Watson, Karen Dare and myself. Can I thank all for their enthusiasm and endless energy in making it work, we now have regular coffee shop, butchers, fruit and veg seller along with take away Pizza, Thai takeaway and soon a BBQ pit. A steep learning curve but also fun.

Our memorial bench was installed by the church giving a quiet place for reflection. Come Remembrance Sunday it attracted a lot of poppies, giving the village a focus for those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Well overdue.

The Graham Rumley memorial bench was also replaced this year at the top end of London Road.

The new Speedwatch team started the year with great enthusiasm only to stop due to lockdown but then started up again only to stop again in the second lockdown. Can I thank all of the volunteers who have stood out in weather fair and foul doing the village an invaluable service in trying to get drivers to obey the speed limits, with some success.

The ubiquitous hanging baskets went up again this year after a struggle to find a nursery to make them as due to Covid our normal supplier could not supply.

I am sure these gave some joy in a year that has otherwise been pretty miserable for many residents. Mark Adsett looked after them superbly and they lasted much longer than normal, Mark has also looked after the PC areas of the village to his normal high standards making the village a nicer place to live.

The Wardens have really proved to be invaluable in this difficult year keeping an eye on the elderly and vulnerable and are owed a huge thank you from the PC.

Lastly, I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors, for being so adaptive throughout the year, making sure the PC stayed on track and being tolerant of my sense of humour.

Report from District and County Councillors

District Councillor Philip Circus reported:

1. This has been a very financially challenging year at HDC. He is proud that HDC managed to maintain public services but not without great difficulty involving serious management changes and loss of some very good staff members, but savings needed to be made.
2. HDC has achieved a balanced budget for 21/22 with a modest £5 increase in Council Tax (per Band D property). HDC is only one of many Precepting Authorities (WSCC, Police, HDC, Parish) and he congratulated Cllr Blackall and the HDC Audit Committee for their endeavours in doing this.
3. During the pandemic HDC has distributed £6.78 million to people, organisations & businesses affected by Covid. Paul Clarke (HDC) has recently written to all Parishes to ask for help identifying anyone that had not applied for the benefits/grants available.
4. WSCC are trialling a new booking system for Horsham Amenity Site (not Billingshurst) because there have been problems with traffic congestion leading to the Police

becoming involved. The expectation is that bookings will spread use out throughout the days/week rather than stacking up at certain times. The trial starts at the end of March. Billingshurst tip can be used for people wanting ad hoc trips. Booking trials had been successful in Hampshire. HDC do not consider this to be a long-term solution and they feel that the Amenity Sites need to be expanded in size and reopened 7 days/week.

District Councillor Blackall reported that:

1. He has been impressed with the work of the Ashington Youth Worker during the Covid pandemic. This stands out among local Parishes and is much appreciated by his constituents.
2. He congratulated the HDC Waste teams for ensuring that waste collections occurred as normal throughout the pandemic.

Public Adjournment

Questions were invited from Councillors & members of the public:

1. Margaret Alford asked Philip Circus for more detail about the recent information he circulated about potential closure of Kate’s Cakes. District Councillor Circus apologised and confirmed that the information was very old news and should not have been circulated without being checked.

The Chairman thanked all present and closed the meeting at 7.45pm

Signed Dated