



Ashington Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 1st March 2012 at 7.45 p.m. in the Main Hall, Ashington School, Ashington

Present: Councillors M. Woolley (Chairman), J. Stillwell, N. Carver, N. Clark, R. Brennan, T. Kearney, K. Wood, R. Lancaster, R. Strudwick, B. Norton

Parish Clerk - Karen Dare

County Councillor F. Wilkinson

3 members of the public

0 member of the local press

APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllr D. Harbour (personal), Neighbourhood Wardens Peter Newell & Jayne Jeffrey (attending an incident), District Councillor Roger Arthur (holiday).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on the 3rd March 2011 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposed by Councillor Brennan and seconded by Councillor Stillwell, and agreed.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL ON THE YEAR 2011/12

The Financial Year of the Parish Council runs from April 1st each year, through to the following March 31st, and it is the duty of the Chairman at this time to report to you on the activities and finances of your Parish Council for the year just ended.

Despite the current economic climate, and low interest rates on our deposits, your Council remains financially strong; we will end this year with a small surplus, which will be used to support next year's expenditure; a full statement of income and expenditure will appear at the end of the Annual Report.

In terms of the structure of your Council, following the elections in May, the team remained unchanged, and councillors will serve until the next election in 2015. A full list of councillors will appear at the end of the Annual Report, and their contact details are on the village website.

Communications

To ensure that everyone in the village knows what the Council is up to, we have the village website, where notices of forthcoming meetings are posted, along with the minutes from past meetings; the quarterly Newsletters that go to all homes; the notice boards around the village; the electronic board in the Co-op; the weekly Ashington Events email, which continues to go from strength to strength; and of course everyone is very welcome at the monthly meetings, where numbers have grown over the year.

Community Action Plan

With the completion of the Community Action Plan in 2010, last year the Steering Group which had shaped the Plan, handed back to the Parish Council responsibility for implementation. Villagers can now monitor progress on the delivery of key items through the minutes of the monthly Parish Council meetings, which are available on the village website.

With Localism very much in the news these days, the Plan is a key document that will guide your Parish Council in its activities over the next four or five years

Wardens

Last year Jayne Jeffrey joined Peter Newell as our Ashington Wardens. During the year they have started many new projects to add to the existing list, supporting all groups in our community; the older, the younger and those in between. We contract with HDC for Wardens on a 3-year basis, and so later this year we will be looking at renewing for 2013-16

Two Councillors, Judith Stillwell and Neville Clark, together with our Clerk Karen Dare, now meet on a regular basis with the wardens to ensure that their work always reflects the needs of the village, and would welcome any feedback from villagers.

Diamond Jubilee

In a few months Britain will be celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. At the end of 2011 the Parish Council conducted a survey of everyone in the village to see whether or not there was support for using village funds for a picnic on the recreation ground and a commemorative village sign. The results suggested that most people would prefer to celebrate with their neighbours and in their streets, rather as part of a larger organised event, and so neither idea will be progressed, but the Parish Council will try to help those organising their own events with any guidelines and contacts at the various bodies locally and nationally.

Community Minibus

In January this year the village took delivery of a Community Minibus for the benefit of all villagers. Whilst the management of this resource is not the responsibility of the Parish Council, the Council has supported this venture, and Neville is a Trustee of the scheme and Karen manages bookings.

Planning Applications

Every year seems to bring a number of welcomed, and a number of contentious, planning applications, and the past year was no different.

Meiros Farm Development

Building at Meiros Farm is now well under way, and English Rural Housing Association (ERHA) are busy finalising the applications for the 13 “affordable” homes, and there was an Open Session at the Community Centre on February 28th.

Broadbridge Farm Compost Site

Whilst there has been no further action on the planning application Olus Environmental submitted in 2010, we need to remain vigilant for any activity in this area, and respond quickly and strongly.

Penn Retreat Application

In 2010 a planning application was submitted for a Traveller\Gypsy site at Penn Retreat (junction of Rectory Lane and Penn Gardens). During the past year the Parish Council has been in constant dialogue with the owner of the site, discussing the possibility of a mix of affordable and market homes, which the village needs (like at Meiros Farm), as an alternative use. However, in early 2012, the owner indicated that, following discussions with Horsham District Council, he intends to progress the original application for a Traveller\Gypsy site. The Parish Council continues to look at all options for the site, and is committed to objecting to its use as a Traveller\Gypsy site, as it is felt that this is an inappropriate location for such a site.

Development at Northern Roundabout

For some years now the site at the roundabout at the northern end of the village has had planning permission for a petrol station and restaurant\café, which the Parish Council supported as it would improve amenities and create some employment. However, late in 2011 a revised application was submitted which changed the emphasis to a more industrial use. The Parish Council has objected to this revised application, and we await news of how the application is being assessed by HDC.

Castle Farm

Whilst Castle Farm (A24 south of the village) is in Washington Parish, the proposed development there would impact on traffic on the A24 and potentially in the village area. For this reason the Parish Council has objected to this major application.

Flooding in Mill Lane

Towards the end of 2010 there was considerable flooding at the Honey Bridge stream in Mill Lane, causing damage to two homes and two cars. I am pleased to report that during 2011 various agencies undertook works which, it is hoped, has improved the situation.

Emergency Plan

Just a reminder that that the Council has its Emergency Plan, which provides details of contacts and locations that can be used in the event of an emergency.

30mph Limits

The 30mph speed limit along Billingshurst Road was introduced at the beginning of 2011, and we have just received data which suggests that there has been a

small reduction in speed along this stretch of road, albeit not to 30mph, which we hope will improve safety.

A24 Quieter Running Surface

One of the top priorities that residents expressed in the Community Action Plan was to work towards reducing the noise from the A24. A small stretch of a “quieter running” surface has been laid on the A24, but despite our continued pressing, given the current budget restrictions at County Hall, the remaining stretch will only be completed over a number of years as and when the current surface needs replacing.

Internet Access For All

During 2011 we completed our internet access for all project, whereby villagers may access the internet by arrangement with Karen Dare.

Young People at the Parish Council

Just a reminder that at the Parish Council’s monthly meeting there is now a slot for young people to tell us what’s on their minds.

Bunting & Hanging Baskets

Last Summer, once again hanging baskets of flowers brightened up London Road; this year we intend to do this again, and will use red, white and blue flowers as this seems appropriate for the summer Diamond Jubilee, possibly the Olympics, as well as for the Village Day in August..

Parish Council Budget

In December the Parish Council set its budget for the coming year starting April 1st 2012.

The good news was that we believe that, for the second year running, provided we continue to watch our spending carefully over the coming year, we can continue to deliver the same level of services as currently without having to make any increase in our element of the Council Tax.

Finances

In 2006 you may recall that your Council, along with many others, was a casualty of the collapse of the Icelandic banks. Fortunately, on an ongoing basis we are slowly recovering much of this money, and funds received this year took our recovery to 63% of our deposit, and it is hoped that we will eventually recover a total of 75-84%. Your Councillors have again this year declined to draw any allowances, and claim only modest expenses for costs they incur.

Conclusion

In concluding, I would like to thank all your Councillors for their hard work during the year, and for representing Ashington on numerous clubs, bodies and agencies both within the village and outside.

In addition, many of the issues that the Council has faced this year, have once again required extensive research and liaising with external councils and agencies, as well as keeping abreast of Government legislation, and our Parish

Clerk, Karen Dare, has done an extremely good job in ensuring that we your Councillors are well prepared for the decisions we take behalf of the village.

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR FRANK WILKINSON

Last year when I gave a report the main concern that we had dealt with was the Broadbridge Farm Composting application, that has now disappeared thanks to the united efforts of your PC and the Residents Association and our District Councillor Roger Arthur. I obviously played my part quietly in the background at County Hall. We all hope that the developer will not come back with an amended plan, personally I don't think there will be a follow up.

There are of course two further planning applications that could have an effect on Ashington, the first being the Castle Kitchens site in Washington and the Petrol station Complex on the old cricket field at the northern end of the village. I have at this point in time done all I can to make sure that your concerns have been taken into account by our highways planning officer dealing with the Castle application, having had two or three 'desk' meetings with him to bring his attention to every possible scenario that you and I envisage could emerge from there being such a large wholesale/storage facility on the application site. As it stands at the moment the CC have asked for a safety audit to be carried out by the applicant at both the A24 junction with the Hollow and the Ashington Hole St junction, The CC will then carry out their own internal audit.

With regard the Filling Station application I can't see that there will be much of an objection from the CC as the highways situation is completely different from the Castle one in that the access/egress from the site will be onto an established duelled highway. We shall see.

The Billingshurst Rd. is still a matter of concern, the new speed limit introduced in Feb. 2011 is not working as we would want, mind you I /we were told that there was the likely chance that speeds would only be reduced by 2/3 mph when we insisted on the scheme but there was popular demand for a change that we could not ignore. I have put this problem at the top of my personal CLC priority list and asked for a VAS(Vehicle activated sign) to be installed at the western end of the road as you enter the 30mph limit and for anti-skid surfacing around the Spear Hill bend or any other engineering intervention that would help bring down the speeds.

The flooding at the bottom of Mill Lane may have been helped by the build-up of the holding tank and the open grating on the nearby manhole, unfortunately we will have to wait and see what happens here.

Without embarrassing your Clerk the every day to day matters and maintenance are dealt by her very efficiently and only needs input from me when the system 'Jams Up'. Sad to say the service from our highways team has over the last year not been up to the standard we expect, I am told it is because the last contractor left a huge backlog of work for the new company to inherit and catching up has been a long and tedious job.

My fellow members and myself have made numerous complaints to the highest possible officers and Cabinet members and as a result extra staff have been taken on by both the CC and our contractors to try and sort out the problems.

So there we are another year slips by, I may have missed something very evident but I am sure you will remind me if I have.

REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR ROGER ARTHUR

Not present.

PUBLIC ADJOURNEMENT

The Clerk was asked to talk to Margaret Alford about putting up the bunting during the Olympics.

The Chairman thanked the County Councillor and members of the public for their attendance.

Meeting Closed at 8.05 p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....