



Ashington Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 7th March 2013 at 7.45 p.m. in the Main Hall, Ashington School, Ashington

Present: Councillors M. Woolley (Chairman), D. Harbour, N. Clark, R. Brennan, T. Kearney, K. Wood, N. Carver, R. Strudwick, B. Norton
Parish Clerk - Karen Dare
County Councillor F. Wilkinson
Neighbourhood Warden P. Newell
PCSO Bryony Sparks
5 members of the public
0 member of the local press

APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllrs R. Lancaster (business) & J. Gichovi-Elias (holiday), Neighbourhood Warden Jayne Jeffrey (illness), District Councillor Roger Arthur (holiday).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on the 1st March 2012 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposed by Councillor Brennan and seconded by Councillor Strudwick, and agreed.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL ON THE YEAR 2012/13

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 (PC) for the year just ended.

Finances

For the second year running the PC set a budget which required no increase in the precept (the PC's part of the Council Tax), and which therefore required the PC to find cost savings to offset rising costs. This was achieved, and indeed the PC has ended the year with a small surplus, which will be used to support next year's expenditure.

During the year the PC continued to recover money that was on deposit with the Icelandic banks that collapsed in 2006, and it remains our hope that we will eventually recover a total of 75-84%. Currently we have recovered 76%.

For 2013-14 the PC has again opted for no increase in the precept, which will present real challenges as both our District and County Councils pass on service cuts for the PC to fill, and also increase some of the charges they make on us. Your Councillors have again this year declined to draw any allowances, and claim only modest expenses for costs they incur on PC business.

Budget

From time to time residents ask where the PC spends its money. Full details are attached to this report, and are always available from the Clerk on request, but a quick snapshot is as follows:

Wardens 57%, Maintaining Public Open Spaces, Hanging baskets and Play Areas 15%, Cost of Public Works Loan for the Community Centre 6%, Grants (principally to Ashington organisations) 1%, Administration (including liaising with external bodies, research and consultants' fees) 17%, Other Costs 4%

Housing Needs

As with most villages in the South, the cost of housing in the village is a problem for many people on relatively low incomes, especially younger people wanting to leave the parental home whilst staying in the village. The PC is committed to trying to help people find homes locally, and in 2012 a number of homes were made available within the Meiros Farm Development. In addition, in May a survey was undertaken asking everyone in the village what housing needs they faced, and these results will help shape the PC's response to future planning applications.

Planning

Along with routine planning applications, every year the PC sees a number of applications which will affect the village. In the past year these included:

Penn Retreat: An outline application for houses on this site close to Penn Gardens was submitted, and supported by the PC as means of providing some more homes for local people. HDC approved the outline application in February 2013.

Garage: An application for a garage, store and small fuel depot by the northern roundabout was approved by Horsham District Council, and once completed will hopefully improve the amenities in the village

Vet's Practice: Work on building a vets practice along London Road has been delayed for various reasons, but hopefully the practice will open in 2013-14

Equine Hospital: One of the county's best known equine hospitals is hoping to relocate from Ford to a site along the Billingshurst Road. As a major venture there are many planning formalities still to be completed, but the PC supports it in principle, and hopes amongst other things it may bring new jobs to the village

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

Wardens

Peter Newell and Jayne Jeffrey are our Ashington Wardens. During the year they have progressed a number of projects, supporting all groups in our community; the older, the younger and those in between. They provide a monthly report of

their activities to the PC, which is on the PC website as an appendix to the Minutes of the monthly PC meetings. We contract with Horsham District Council for Wardens on a 3-year basis, and this year we renewed for 2013-16. Two Councillors, Judith Gichovi-Elias and Neville Clark, together with our Clerk Karen Dare, meet on a regular basis with the Wardens to ensure that their work always reflects the needs of the village.

Community Action Plan

Following completion of the Community Action Plan in 2010, the PC works with other groups involved to try to deliver as many of the projects as possible, acknowledging that the difficult economic climate impacts on many of them. Indeed, one of the top priorities that residents expressed in the Community Action Plan was to work towards reducing the noise from the A24, but although a small stretch of a “quieter running” surface has been laid, the remaining stretch will only be completed over a number of years as and when the current surface needs replacing.

The Plan, is available on the village website for everyone to track progress.

Community Minibus

In 2012, initially on a trial basis, 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 PC, the Council has supported this venture, which has passed its trial stage and is now a permanent asset for the village. Neville Clark is a Trustee of the scheme and Karen Dare manages bookings.

Flooding in Mill Lane

Over the past few years there have been a number of occurrences of flooding at the Honeybridge stream in Mill Lane, causing damage to homes and cars. This year further work has been done by the County Council to improve the situation, and in addition, work has been commissioned to look how our location fits into the river courses in the area, with a view to a long-term solution to the problem.

Communications

To ensure that everyone in the village knows what the Council is up to, we have the parish 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; and of course everyone is very welcome at the monthly meetings (7.45pm on the first Thursday of the month in the School Main Hall), where numbers have grown over the year.

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.

Young People at the Parish Council

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

Bunting & Hanging Baskets

Last Summer, once again hanging baskets of flowers brightened up London Road; this year we hope to do this again.

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 on behalf of the village.

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR FRANK WILKINSON

This year has been relatively quiet compared to other years. No applications for landfill or composting, which we all feel has gone away and so most of my work with you has been on flooding and highway matters. On these matters I am not pleased with the support I have had from County Hall, this has been because of the long term sick leave that our dedicated highways officer has endured. The dept. manager has deputised when possible but there is no replacement for a dedicated, keen, proactive individual who will follow up enquiries and force them through the system. I have found that I am having to do this job. I am not moaning as I am prepared to do it but it is not how it should be and I have made my thoughts known to the powers that be and hope an answer can be found in the not too distant future. All of this is coupled with the cost savings that we have had to make over the last two years. To date the savings stand at approximately £55 million pounds with one more year to get through to achieve our target of £79 million. This is a wonderful achievement and had we not suffered as described above you would not have noticed the effect of these savings.

Council tax will be frozen for the third year running and there are more savings in the pipeline for the years beyond 2013/14. So, challenging times ahead for the County Council in this age of austerity.

I am chasing the head of our drainage dept. to find out what is happening about the survey being carried out to come up with the reasons why Mill Lane floods like it is doing. You will remember that £50K was allocated to do this work from the Community Flood Prevention Fund (the survey is expected to start in 4-6 weeks). Once a design is in place then funds from Operation Watershed can be used. The Vehicle Activated Sign and Anti-skid surfacing will be installed in the Billingshurst Road once the new financial year is in and I will do all I can to get the A24 resurfaced in quiet running Tarmac as soon as practically possible. The surface is currently in good condition and to spend @£500k resurfacing when not strictly necessary is hard to justify.

I work closely with your clerk and that is probably why I don't have masses to report at your meetings as work is being done all of the time without your knowledge.

REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR ROGER ARTHUR

HDC has had to accommodate Government funding reductions of £2.5m pa since 2007/08 and is doing that without cutting services, or increasing council tax. That is being achieved by increasing income from assets, whilst improving

productivity and value for money. We are led to expect further cuts in government funding and further exposure to risk. So HDC has taken an objective approach to its 3 year Medium Term Financial Strategy, acknowledging all risk factors. The government introduced New Homes Bonus payments, based on the number of new dwellings built, purportedly to fund community developments in areas affected by new house building. However, the NHB is not new money and it has been more than outweighed by other grant reductions. Notwithstanding that, HDC will do all that it can to keep some NHB money in reserve, to fund community development, in due course. In practice, the number of new dwellings built will depend largely on economic and population growth. HDC is currently evaluating the projected building rate to be catered for over the next 20 years, along with site options, and will shortly be reporting on its findings. A Business Transformation Program is currently underway. This is designed to improve productivity and value for money and the program is due to be completed in 2014.

PUBLIC ADJOURNEMENT

1. What is happening to the WSCC adoption of Viney Close and the promised laybys and streetlights in the spur road of The Sands? WSCC Solicitor Hugh Davis was still pursuing this matter with the Developer and HDC but little progress was being made.
2. The Sands path (a public footpath) was in a poor state of disrepair and accidents are likely. County Councillor Frank Wilkinson would ask the Rights of Way/Highways team to inspect.
3. Rectory Lane from Meiros Way towards Storrington – verges & footpaths are in a poor state of repair, several accidents have happened where vehicles have driven off the side of the road. Passing places are overgrown and not visible, debris is falling from the bankside onto the road, surface water is flowing across the highway rather than into ditches and this is damaging the highway. County Councillor Wilkinson will arrange a site visit with a Highways Officer, Cllr Carver asked to attend.

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

Meeting Closed at 8.10p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....