



Ashington Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 6th March 2014 at 7.45 p.m. in the Main Hall, Ashington School, Ashington

Present: Councillors M. Woolley (Chairman), D. Harbour, N. Clark, R. Brennan, K. Wood, J. Gichovi-Elias, B. Norton

Parish Clerk - Karen Dare

District Councillors David Jenkins & Roger Arthur

Neighbourhood Warden Jayne Jeffrey

2 x PCSO's

10 members of the public

0 member of the local press

APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

Cllr R. Lancaster (business), T. Kearney, R. Strudwick & N. Carver (all personal), County Councillor Philip Circus (illness), PCSO Bryony Sparks (personal)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on the 7th March 2013 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposed by Councillor Brennan and seconded by Councillor Norton, and agreed.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL ON THE YEAR 2013/14

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 third 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 we have now recovered 82%, which represents most of the capital that we had on deposit (our loss now being roughly equal to the interest payments we were due but never received).

For 2014-15, for the fourth year in a row, 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

Full details of the PC's Budget and Expenditure are attached to this report, and are always available from the Clerk on request, but a quick snapshot is as follows:

Wardens/Youth Worker 47%, Maintaining Public Open Spaces, Hanging baskets and Play Areas 23%, Cost of Public Works Loan for the Community Centre 8%, Grants (principally to Ashington organisations) 1%, Administration (including liaising with external bodies, research and consultants' fees) 17%, Other Costs 4%

Housing Needs

The Government's housing drive is never long out of the news these days, and in Ashington we must expect to do our bit.

The development at Meiros provided a mix of market priced homes and affordable homes for shared ownership and rent, and is now fully occupied. Looking ahead, a development at Penn Retreat for 15 homes has been approved by Horsham District Council (HDC), and will again be a mix of market and affordable homes.

The PC remains committed to trying to help people, especially those on relatively low incomes, and younger people wanting to leave the parental home, to find homes locally wherever possible.

Neighbourhood Plan

The spirit of the Government's Localism legislation is to give towns and villages a real say in where new development (especially housing) will take place.

Your PC has decided to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan which will give all residents a real chance to suggest and comment on how Ashington should develop.

The development of the Plan requires certain key consultation stages to be undertaken, and as a result it is likely to take about a year to complete.

In the meantime, we are already facing many applications for new housing, as the drive for more housing nationally makes it harder for PC's to object until the Neighbourhood Plan is in place.

Until we have our Plan your PC will try to take the best possible decisions, in the prevailing circumstances at the time, to ensure that Ashington remains a place where all of us continue to want to live

Planning

Along with routine planning applications, every year the PC sees a number of applications which will affect the village.

Vet's Practice: Work on building a vets practice along London Road is now well under way, hopefully the practice will open later this year

Equine Hospital: Planning approval has been secured for one of the county's best known equine hospitals to relocate from Ford to a site along the Billingshurst Road.

Garage: An application for a garage, store and small fuel depot by the northern roundabout was approved by Horsham District Council last year, but we await to hear if and when this facility will materialize

All these ventures will hopefully improve the amenities in the village, and may also bring new jobs to the village

Of course not all applications are welcome; a couple of years ago the PC fought an application for what would have been West Sussex's largest compost site on Broadbridge Farm, and whilst that application was withdrawn the PC continues to monitor the situation carefully in case a new application is submitted

Wardens

Most residents regard our Wardens as a very valuable resource to support village life.

However, in 2013 we suffered first from Jayne Jeffrey being off sick following an accident which required a number of operations on her knee, and then Peter Newell leaving to take up a job in the family business.

Fortunately Jayne is now back with us and doing much work with the elderly and vulnerable as well as all the other warden activities.

Currently we are in the process of recruiting a second warden who will work with Jayne, and who will work mainly evening shifts to focus on the anti-social behavior that we experience from time to time in the village.

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.

The wardens 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, so residents may see what is being achieved.

Youth Worker and Facilities

For a long time the PC has been committed to improving the facilities for the youth in the village.

Since autumn 2013 we have had the services of Kris Page as a youth worker who has been running the Youth Club and doing outreach work.

In addition, we have been exploring the possibility of having a full-time youth worker, and following discussions with the local Church we are now committed to jointly funding a full-time youth worker who we hope will start this summer.

Your PC is very excited at this opportunity and believe it will make a real difference to life for youth in Ashington.

In addition, the half pipe in the much used skate park had been showing signs of its age, and so the PC has just completed a significant capital investment in a new and larger half pipe for the benefit of all.

Community Minibus

Ashington is fortunate to have a community minibus funded by the Community Minibus Association, and whilst the management of this resource is not the responsibility of the PC, the Council has supported this venture, and our Clerk manages the resource.

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. Following work done by WSCC to build up the wall we have managed to come through the amazing national floods earlier this year unscathed. Looking further ahead, WSCC has commissioned a project 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

Earlier this year we were advised by the publishers of our quarterly Bulletin of a significant cost increase, and as a result given the pressure on our Budget we have decided to cease publication.

The Bulletin will continue to be available online, but will photocopy some copies for those residents who prefer a paper copy.

In addition, of course, 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 notice boards around the village; 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 PHILIP CIRCUS

1. Frank Wilkinson was a dedicated County Councillor for the division and he is a great loss to local residents and to his colleagues on both the District and County Councils.

2. I have been a County Councillor for 5 months. The process of induction has not been as easy as it would normally be because the by-election arose suddenly and because it was not at the normal time of the County Council elections, the induction process has not been as straightforward as would normally be the case.
3. It takes time to find one's way around the County Council, not least because the way it operates is rather different from Horsham District Council. This is particularly true of the County Local Committee.
4. The CLC covers 19 Parish Councils and there are 6 Parish Councils alone within the Storrington division. All the parishes have lengthy wish lists and when set against cuts of £141 million the process of decision making needs a high degree of prioritising.
5. I have already put down a marker with officers about the need to address the issue of road humps which are deteriorating and discussed whether there is any realistic possibility of sensitive road surfacing that would reduce noise. The latter seems an unlikely project because of the costs involved. Also, we have to consider addressing the flooding issues that have arisen, particularly in Mill Lane.
6. As soon as I am feeling fighting fit, I will organise a meeting between representatives of the Parish Council and officers in order to move forward key issues. We had such a meeting in respect of Washington Parish Council and it was a huge success leading to real progress on key road traffic issues and a greater understanding and goodwill between officers at County and members of the Parish Council.

REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR ROGER ARTHUR

1. He is concerned that Chanctonbury CLC and HALC operate different agendas and it's not always clear to members of the public who they should make contact with. It would be simpler if there is one central point of contact.
2. HDC has recently taken the decision to freeze its Council Tax but the Government grant to HDC has fallen by 30% making it even more difficult to deliver services. Some of Council Tax revenue has been removed and replaced by business rates so if businesses close then the amount of money available to Councils is reduced. There is a safety net built into the system but risks to Councils has increased.
3. The Government have set targets for new home building based on population growth but Developers will only build homes if there are people wanting to buy them. At present HDC is behind the Govt. targets and this is leading to speculative developments often in inappropriate locations eg greenfield/flood prone sites. HDC has raised this issue with Planning Inspectors and Ministers. HDC is waiting on appeal decisions to help understand Govt. policy and sometimes local knowledge is being overruled by other authorities eg Environment Agency.

PUBLIC ADJOURNEMENT

Nothing.

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

Meeting Closed at 8.05p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....