



Ashington Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 3rd March 2016 at 7.45 p.m. in the School Hall at Ashington First School, Foster Lane, Ashington.

Present: Councillors N. Clark (Chairman), N. Spiers (Vice-Chairman), S. Ball S. Cox, T. Kearney, J. Stillwell, R. Strudwick, K. Wood, M. Woolley.
Parish Clerk: Celia Price

Neighbourhood Wardens: J Jeffrey, A Webster

District Councillors: J. Blackall, P. Circus
6 members of the public

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

L. di Castiglione, G MacPherson (Councillors), K Dare (NP Clerk), D Jenkins (District Councillor)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on the 5th March 2015 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposed by Councillor Stillwell and seconded by Councillor Kearney, and agreed.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL ON THE YEAR 2015/16

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 fifth 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, especially as both Horsham District Council (HDC) and West Sussex County Council (WSCC) strove to reduce their costs and cut services. 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.

Looking to 2016-17, for the sixth year in a row, the PC has again opted for no increase in the precept.

Your Councillors again this year declined to draw any allowances, and claim only modest expenses for costs they incur on PC business.

You will note that the PC has made allowances to pay for the production of the Neighbourhood Plan and employ a Clerk specifically to oversee this work.

Budget

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

Wardens/Youth Worker account for around half of our spend, Maintaining Public Open Spaces, Play Areas and Hanging baskets around a quarter, Cost of Public Works Loan for the Community Centre around 8%, Grants (principally to Ashington organisations) around 1%, Administration (including liaising with external bodies, research and consultants' fees) and other Costs around 20%.

Housing Development

The new mixed development at Penn Retreat for 15 homes is now completed.

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. The PC await key decisions from the Planning office regarding the value of the newly adopted Horsham Development Planning Framework. It should be clearer to assess new planning applications and turn down those that are not in accordance with it.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Government remains keen to give towns and villages a real say in how their communities develop, and as a result the PC is now well on it's way producing a Neighborhood Plan for Ashington.

In the meantime, until we have our Plan in place, 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.

New Business & Planning Applications

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

Equine Hospital: despite considerable delays, work has now started, or at least significant land clearance has taken place in preparation for building a new equine centre in Billingshurst Road for one of the county's best known equine hospitals who are relocating from Ford.

Garage: It was an honor to open the new garage and see it busy from that day forward. Many residents have commented how pleased they are it is here and that PC has kept pushing for this to happen over 15 years.

Flooding: Improvements on the Mill Lane culvert have worked and improved the situation, but the risk remains considerable and PC are actively pressing for more reduction in flood risk.

Prospective developers will now be referred to the NP team for consideration in the plan and it is hoped a greater influence over the future of the village will result in a better place to live.

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

Hoots House: your PC is supporting the development of 6 houses on this site in London Road, which will remove what has become a very derelict building in a very central location

Land north of Martins Farm: your PC has objected to an application for 43 new homes outside the Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB). HDC turned down the application but the developer has now lodged an appeal.

Wardens

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

Jayne Jeffrey has been our core warden now for several years, and with new recruit Andy Webster working shifts they have focused more on the anti-social behavior that we experience from time to time in the village. They continue to deliver the complete spectrum of community safety work plus help with the vulnerable and lonely; supporting their needs directly and signposting to agencies to provide help and support. Two Councillors, Judith Stillwell and Nigel Spiers, together with our Clerk Celia Price, 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, and Paddy Donovan has been our full-time youth worker for a year now.

Paddy is funded one-third by your PC and two-thirds by Chanctonbury Churches (of which Ashington is part).

Paddy splits his time across projects identified by the PC and the Church, and a steering group meets regularly to ensure that our part of Paddy's time is spent on work that reflects the needs of the village.

At the February 2016 PC meeting Paddy presented his vision for young people in Ashington in the longer term. He will present detailed plans on how he will achieve this vision and provides monthly reports on what he has done – available on the PC web site. The youth shelter which is located close to the skate park continues to provide a useful focal point for young people to gather.

Sports Facilities

Your PC continues to invest in cleaning the surface of the multi-sports court and maintenance of equipment. This continues to be available to all residents free of charge for agreed periods each day.

Hanging Baskets

Last Summer, once again hanging baskets of flowers brightened up London Road for a good length of time; this year we hope to do this again

Highways

Following a meeting with WSCC Highways it became clear that our main priority, a quieter running surface for the A24, was not going to happen in the current economic climate, and that the best we could expect was that in the long term as repairs become due the new surface will result in less noise.

Speeding on the Billingshurst Road has been an issue for some time, and following the speed reduction to 30mph the PC are hoping to fund a flashing sign at Spear Hill on the way into the village to try to slow traffic as it enters the village. Section 106 funds have been applied for but all projects are currently under review by WSCC Highways.

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 WSCC 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, and we anticipate receiving the findings and recommendations in the near future.

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 is run on a day to day basis by our Wardens. The scheme does however need to recruit at least 1 Trustee and if no one comes forward the village will lose this great resource.

Grants

Your PC has a policy of restricting grants to activities that will directly benefit residents of Ashington.

During the current year grants were made to Ashington Festival, the Youth Club, Storrington Area Help Scheme, and the Wardens' Christmas Party for the elderly.

PC received funds from the winding up of the Residents Association that have gone into this grants pool.

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 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).

In addition the PC contributes news items to the Newsletter that has recently been restarted and is run as a private venture by a resident.

The PC has also been actively encouraging residents to take up issues that concern them directly with HDC, WSCC or the Police where those bodies are responsible for taking

action, as often a deluge of individual contacts can have more effect than the lone voice of the PC.

The PC hope to launch new communications initiatives in 2016.

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.

Elections

In May, along with national elections, the new PC was elected for the 5 years 2015-2020.

Information on the election process can be secured from Horsham District Council.

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 for most of the year, Karen Dare, has handed over to Celia Price and they have 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 DISTRICT & COUNTY COUNCILLOR PHILIP CIRCUS

Councillor Circus reported

- There will be an increase to Council Tax this year. Council tax has been frozen for a number of years but in hindsight this has resulted in a reduction of some basic services eg no budget to clean road signs.
- There is a new policy about to be issued to the Parish Council – Traffic Regulation Orders (please note, this does not include Emergency Traffic Regulation Orders)
- STARS schools public consultation is now closed. Cllr Circus agrees with Nick Herbert who is not satisfied that there has been enough research into the possibilities of a small secondary school on the Rydon site including costings, funding and population projections. The education select committee will be debating all the issues.
- Overall we are in a 'cold' climate and this will remain for the foreseeable future

Councillor Blackall reported

- The Council's overall budget has now been approved.
- Council Tax will rise by 1.2%
- Officers are addressing savings in a constructive way (eg moving HDC to Parkside where costs and communication has been greatly improved.)
- HDPF (Horsham District Planning Framework) has now been approved.
- He is pleased the Neighbourhood Plan is now well underway.

- He is impressed with Ashington Wardens, who have a positive impact in the community.

PUBLIC ADJOURNEMENT

Mrs Alford asked If Volunteers are asked to clean road signs, who takes responsibility for their health and safety?

Cllr Circus responded that this is not an official County Council suggestion and he agrees it is not acceptable as cleaning of road signs is a core service,

Mrs Alford asked why members of the community aren't being listened to with regard to the proposal for Rydon School, namely it becoming a small secondary.

Cllr Circus responded that the Public are not speaking with one voice, not everyone agrees and he confirmed that all views are being considered and key questions asked to insure the best outcome. He confirmed the Rydon site must be retained for education.

The Chairman thanked Philip Circus, John Blackall and members of the public for their attendance.

Meeting Closed at 8.30p.m.

Signed Dated