



## Ashington Parish Council

# ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

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**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2015 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, R. Lancaster, T. Kearney, R. Strudwick**

**Parish Clerk Karen Dare**

**Neighbourhood Wardens Jayne Jeffrey & Andy Webster & Community**

**Safety Officer Neil Worth**

**County Councillor Philip Circus**

**7 members of the public**

**0 member of the local press**

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### **APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr N. Carver (illness), District Councillors David Jenkins & Roger Arthur (business)

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2014 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposed by Councillor Gichovi-Elias and seconded by Councillor Norton, and agreed.

### **REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL ON THE YEAR 2014/15**

The Financial Year of the Parish Council runs from April 1<sup>st</sup> each year, through to the following March 31<sup>st</sup>, 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 fourth 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 (WSSC) 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. 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 82.6%, which represents all of the capital that we had on deposit (our loss now being

roughly equal to the interest payments we were due but never received). The Council will continue to receive monies that the Administrator distributes to Creditors from the sale of the banks' assets.

Looking to 2015-16, for the fifth 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.

### **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 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**

Following the successful mixed market and affordable homes development at Blakiston Close, building work on a new mixed development at Penn Retreat for 15 homes is now well under way.

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 Government remains keen to give towns and villages a real say in how their communities develop, and as a result the PC is now actively progressing a Neighborhood Plan for Ashington through all the legally set out stages that is likely to take most of 2015 to complete.

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.

Vet's Practice: in 2014 the vets' practice in London Road was opened and is now a very welcome and thriving business

Equine Hospital: despite some delays, it is expected that work will be starting soon on building a new equine centre in Billingshurst Road for one of the county's best known equine hospitals who are relocating from Ford.

Garage: in 2014 approval was given by HDC for a petrol station, shop and food outlet by the northern roundabout, and we understand that the site owner is in negotiations with potential operators of the service.

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

Of course not all applications are welcome:

Composting: in 2014 we finally heard that the option to build what would have been West Sussex's largest compost site on Broadbridge Farm had expired, and so that cloud that has been with us for several years has been lifted

Land north of Martins Farm: your PC has objected to an application for 43 new homes outside the Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB) that is currently with HDC on various grounds, and believes that more appropriate sites are available within the BUAB.

### **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 had to manage on her own, but fortunately with support from Neil Worth, for most of the year until we were able to recruit Andy Webster towards the end of January.

Andy will work evening shifts and focus more on the anti-social behavior that we experience from time to time in the village, whilst Jayne will continue to focus on more pastoral work with both the old and young.

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, and at the end of 2014 we welcomed Paddy Donovan as a full-time youth worker.

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

Paddy will split his time across projects identified by the PC and the Church, and a steering group has been set up to ensure that our part of Paddy's time is spent on work that reflects the needs of the village.

Following representations by a group of young people, and securing funds from Sussex Police and Saxon Weald, the PC invested in a youth shelter which is located close to the skate park and which provides a focal point for young people to gather.

### **Sports Facilities**

During the year your PC invested in cleaning the surface of the multi-sports court by the community centre and cleaning and reinstalling some equipment which was then available to all residents free of charge over the summer.

As this proved successful, the PC then invested in upgrading the lighting to energy efficient LED lighting so that the facility could continue to be used up until 21.00 during the winter.

## **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.

However, we have been assured that a number of smaller projects around the village will now be progressed.

Speeding on the Billingshurst Road has been an issue for some time, and following the speed reduction to 30mph the PC will now be funding a flashing sign at Spear Hill on the way into the village to try to slow traffic as it enters the village.

## **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 our Clerk provides admin support for the 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, Sussex Air Ambulance, and the Wardens' Christmas Party for the elderly.

## **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 as part of an ARA initiative.

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.

## **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, a new PC will be 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, 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 DISTRICT & COUNTY COUNCILLOR PHILIP CIRCUS**

District Matters:

1. Amendments are currently being made to the Local Plan following the Planning Inspectors comments. The PI had broadly approved the Plan subject to revising the numbers of new houses to be built each year upwards. Some Councillors at HDC are not in favour of the Plan but, without a Plan, Horsham District would be powerless to stop speculative/inappropriate development. Neighbourhood Plans will be worthless unless HDC has an approved Local Plan.
2. Council Tax has been frozen again this year.

County Matters:

1. He is beginning to settle into his role at County Hall but finding the level of bureaucracy worrying. Many Officers are expert at finding reasons not to do things and this is deeply frustrating.
2. Council Tax has been frozen again this year.
3. WSCC has dealt with some big issues recently eg fracking and the proposed second runway at Gatwick Airport and has dealt with these in a way so as to ensure the best outcome for residents.
4. He is very disappointed not to have made any progress on resurfacing of the A24 but all avenues have been explored properly.
5. He had hoped that the January face to face Highways meeting would have yielded better results but he will continue to pester Officers for action.
6. Local Government is an increasingly difficult place to be, with Councillors sometimes being targeted personally by lobby/pressure groups. Fewer and fewer people are volunteering to work at all levels of Local Government (Parish, District and County Councils).

## **PUBLIC ADJOURNEMENT**

Cllr Harbour asked who (at HDC or County) has an overview of the infrastructure needed in the District to cope with the additional numbers of houses. Philip Circus responded that new developments would result in new infrastructure being needed and that Officers/Councillors discuss this with stakeholders as part of new planning applications. A large development north of Horsham was best placed to deliver major infrastructure projects eg railway station. This large development had been key to securing a commitment from John Lewis to open a new store in Horsham, rather than in Crawley.

Cllr Harbour asked if the water supply could cope with so many new houses being built. Do we need a new reservoir? Philip Circus stated that the South East does have an issue with water supply but that all utility companies are consulted as part of the planning application process and none have indicated that there could be an issue.

Cllr Harbour asked what guarantees were in place to make sure that Developers deliver the infrastructure (or money) that they are required to provide. Philip Circus explained that HDC needed to secure legal agreements with Developers to make sure this takes place.

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

Meeting Closed at 8.15p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....