

Draft Minutes of Meeting of Norham Parish Council held on 26th September 2016

Those present were: George Straughen (GS), Jim Blyth (JB), Sheelagh Hume (SH) Billy MacLauchlan (BMcL) and John Grahamslaw (JIG). Victoria Craig (VLC) was present as clerk. Several members of the public were present.

9.16.1. To accept apologies for Absence

Apologies were accepted from John Urwin and Jim Greenwood.

9.16.2. To make any Declaration of Interest

No declaration of interest was made.

9.16.3. To agree Minutes of previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25th July 2016 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

9.16.4 Matters Arising from Minutes

i. Proposed Joint Neighbourhood Planning in Norham and Islandshire

GS had attended another meeting of the steering group. The type of question to be included in the proposed questionnaires had been discussed. It was, in GS's view, important to note that the matters to be covered by the neighbourhood plan only related to planning considerations. Any other questions would raise or change expectations as to what the process involved.

ii. Leaflets for Walks around Norham

About 2500 had already been distributed, and the rest were available from GS. It was reported that there had been visitors to the church who had come because of the leaflet. It was also reported that the church were in the very early stages of consideration of how to make the building more attractive to visitors, and their thoughts generally seemed to be in line with those of the parish council in relation to the village.

iii. Electronic speed sign

After a recent glitch the sign was working again, and the perception is that it seemed to be having an effect. There had been fewer complaints re speeding vehicles this summer. It was reported that it was likely that within the next two years the road by the school would be designated as a 20mph area, in line with NCC plans. The sign would then be recalibrated. There was discussion re further speed signs in the village and it was again agreed that once sufficient funds were available, a speed sign for the road by Birchill would be pursued. D Watkin confirmed that he would endeavour again to obtain NCC support.

iv. Play areas (village green posts and chains)

GS confirmed the inspection of the posts and chains, and their up grading was under active consideration. JB confirmed he had been carrying out the weekly inspections of play areas in JU's absence.

v. Public Conveniences

Soap dispensers would be put up shortly. A suggestion of a donations box will be considered.

vi. Maintenance of Footpaths

It was reported that it was agreed that Fisher's Walk would not be sprayed again and that JU, JB and Rob Kelsey would be responsible for strimming the path. JIG reported that grass was encroaching on to pavements along Castle Street and West Street. In addition the pavement on the left past Birchill has a similar problem. It was agreed NCC local services would be asked to edge the grass. The path by Norham Bridge was also apparently almost impassable due to overgrown hedges. SH confirmed she will arrange for this to be dealt with. JB reported that the path along past the Dene was in need of attention due to subsidence on the riverbank.

This will be reported to the footpaths officer.

vii. Mobile Mast

The terms of the recent letter from Ann-Marie Trevelyan's office were considered. Whilst it was reassuring that emergency coverage was available, the real thrust of the petition had been the availability of everyday mobile coverage. VLC will respond to the letter requesting that Ms Trevelyan continue her efforts.

viii. Northumberland LED Street Lighting

It was agreed that delay so far as this process was concerned was no bad thing, as it was intended to have the desire to bury overhead cables enshrined in the new draft Joint Neighborhood Plan. It was reported that workmen had been seen inspecting the overhead cables recently. GS will contact the appropriate party.

ix. Seat Location Plan

VLC has prepared a formal list and is in the process of making photographic record of all benches. In addition it was agreed that she would try to make up a similar record of all bins, and the bus shelters. These can be added to the Register of Fixed Assets once finalized and used as a basis for deciding on a repair/maintenance programme. The amended Register would be placed on the website in due course. It was confirmed that the speed sign had been added to the Register, and to the insurance policy.

x. Pantomime Funds

A bank account has now been opened by the panto group so the agreed funds will be delivered to them shortly. It was agreed that this was a donation.

xi. Parish Council Website

VLC and JU had met with Alexander Dalgety and matters were progressing.

9.16.5 War Memorial

Consideration was given to correspondence from Historic England, in relation to process of listing the Norham war memorial, as part of their First World War Commemoration project. It was agreed to investigate further the likely ramifications of such listing.

9.16.6 Freedom of Information Policy

After discussion it was agreed to increase the cost per sheet to 20p, and to add further detail regarding charging of any actual costs incurred, and the clerk's time at an appropriate rate for time spent. That might be sought should a FoI request be made. The amended policy would then be posted to the website.

Finance

9.16.7 To review system of internal control including Internal Auditor and Insurance cover/risk assessment.

Internal Control was reviewed as follows:

Internal Control is based on Appendix 9 of Governance and Accountability 2014 and covers the following:

Proper Book-Keeping:

Cashbook is correctly maintained and arithmetic is correct^[SEP]

Cashbook regularly balanced and bank reconciliation completed for each bank statement^[SEP]

Payments in cashbook are supported by invoices, authorised and minuted. The relevant page in the Minute book is recorded in the cash book^[SEP]

Income is usually paid in electronically^[SEP]

Standing Orders and Financial regulations adopted and payment controls applied:

Council has adopted Financial Regulations and Standing Orders

RFO has been appointed with specific duties

Payments in cashbook are supported by invoices, authorised and minuted. [SEP]

VAT on payments is identified, recorded and reclaimed [SEP]

S.137 expenditure is separately recorded and within statutory limits [SEP]

Risk Management arrangements:

Review of Minutes shows no irregular financial activity [SEP]

Minutes show that Council carries out regular risk assessment [SEP]

Insurance cover is reviewed and is appropriate and adequate

Internal financial controls are documented and reviewed at every Parish Council meeting. [SEP]

Budgetary Controls:

The Council has prepares an annual budget in support of its Precept

Actual expenditure against the budget is regularly reported to the Council

There are no unexplained variances from the budget.

Income Controls:

Income is regularly recorded and promptly banked

The Precept agrees to the Council Tax authority's notification

Security controls over cash are adequate and effective

Petty Cash Procedures:

The Council has no petty cash [SEP]

Bank Reconciliation:

A bank reconciliation is carried out on receipt of each bank statement

There are no unexplained balancing entries in any reconciliation

Year-end Procedures:

Year-end procedures are carried out on the accounting basis of Receipts and Payments

Accounts agree with the cashbook

There is an audit trail from financial records to accounts.

In addition based on the Risk in Parish Councils document from NALC/CAN, the following risks were assessed:

Insurance: The Council's Insurer is Came and Co. who specialise in Local Council Insurance. There is a three-year agreement in place, which expires on 31st May 2018. Public liability and Fidelity guarantee are currently £10,000,000 for Public Liability and £10,000,000 for Fidelity Guarantee, designated as appropriate by our Insurers, and these are regularly reviewed.

Internal Auditor: An independent Internal Auditor with accountancy experience, is appointed each year to ensure that the Internal audit is carried out rigorously. She is shown a copy of the External Audit Report to ensure that the issues raised have been addressed.

Staffing: If the Clerk were away the Chair or Vice Chair would take Minutes and respond to correspondence. The Clerk is in regular e-mail contact with other Council members. In the event of a long absence, the Chair would have access to post delivered to the Clerk's address. The Chair also has a note of the password for the Clerk's designated email address.

Signing of cheques: Two out of three designated signatures are required when cheques are signed

Sharing the responsibility: Grass cutting work is contracted out to a third party. Trees are inspected regularly by a third party, and appropriate action taken. Public convenience cleaning is contacted out.

Records: Key records are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the village hall. Key documents are stored on the Clerk's computer and are sent electronically to Council members, or hand delivered. There are two back-up memory sticks, and paper copies of key documents are on file for easy access by other council members. Most of those documents are also on the website.

Legalities: The council has access to professional help from NALC and CAN and consults with them regularly. HMRC can be consulted about Salaries and PAYE. The accountants BDO are useful in supplying financial advice concerning Audits.

Property: Street furniture and Play area equipment are regularly inspected. They are insured with Came & Co. Safety inspections on Play area equipment and grounds are carried out weekly by identified Council members and an additional annual monthly inspection is carried out by RoSpa. Repairs are carried out to bus shelters and seats when needed.

Mass resignation of Parish Council

The risk is considered low. The Clerk would take over temporarily until Local Council Elections could take place.

9.16.8 To review procedure for setting Budget and Precept for 2016-17 including any additional costs for maintenance of Play areas and seats

After discussion it was agreed that the same procedure for setting next years budget would be used, and the figures would be discussed and the budget and precept fixed at the November meeting.

9.16.9. To review Payments and Receipts since last meeting

Payments to Sheila Penman of £172.16, and £100 (WC Cleaning and soap dispensers and soap); to J Gibson £500 (design and printing of leaflets), and a cheque for £100 just written to Norham Village Pantomime. Receipts of £3669 (reimbursement from NCC re net cost of speed sign) and £1675 (2nd Precept)

9.16.10. To look at Bank balances in Current and Deposit Accounts

As at 26th September the balance in the Current Account was £7709.34, and Deposit Account £1309.33

9.16.11 To look at Planning Application decisions

Notification of application for Bow Well Farm in relation to an extension had just been received. A query was made re the status of planning for the plot at the end of South Lane, as nothing seemed to have been done for at least 6 years.

9.16.12 To look at state of Roads and Pavements

JJG again reported the loose paving slabs by the village shop. JB again reported potholes on Castle Bank and Birchill. These had been reported to NCC on numerous occasions. D Watkin indicated he would try to get some progress.

9.16.13 General Correspondence

VLC had received information re a new mobile app MyStreetNorthumberland, which can be used to report potholes and many other problems to NCC. This will be publicised in Newsround. Information has also been received re this winters opening times for local recycling centres which will also be circulated.

Any Other Business (For Information Only)

Two members of the public reported detritus lying behind the newly cut hedge at Ubbanford. GS confirmed he would investigate.

JJG reported fly tipping at Mount Carmel. D Watkin confirmed he would investigate.

JJG also reported that the sycamores at Bow Well were interfering with overhead phone lines, and interrupting broadband. GS will consider.

There was a query re when and if closure of Norham Bridge was to proceed. VLC will seek an update.

JB sought views on the possibility a new sign containing cyclist maps somewhere near the village hall. He also confirmed he purchased more bulbs and intended to plant them from the village hall along the wall towards south lane, and round the village hall. It was also agreed after discussion that he would accept an offer from a paramedic to give more instruction on defibrillator use, and other first aid skills.

Date of Next Meeting

Monday 28th November 2016 at 7.30pm in Norham Village Hall.