



*The Council of the
Parish of Esh*

DRAFT Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of the council

Held on Wednesday 8th November 2023 at the Miners Institute, Langley Park

Meeting commenced at 6 p.m.

Item 1 Record of Attendance:

Cllr Ollie Moat (Vice Chair), Cllr Allison Wardman, Cllr Kathryn Thompson, Cllr John Duddy, Cllr Mike Quinn, Cllr Jillian Crumbie, Cllr George Hawxwell, Cllr Edwin Simpson, Cllr Karenza Passmore Cllr Pat Short, Cllr Carole Greenham-Denny.

Also in attendance County Cllr Bev Coult and 1 member of the public

Item 2 Apologies for absence:

Cllr Joe Thompson, Cllr Louise Dudden, Cllr Linda Bushell, Cllr Ruth Hughes, Cllr Ross Lardner, PCSO Paige Hart

Item 3 Declarations of interest:

Cllr Jillian Crumbie – item 11 and 18

Item 4 Minutes of Previous Meetings:

Minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 13 September 2023

Accepted as a correct record. Proposed by Cllr Edwin Simpson and seconded by Cllr George Hawxwell.

Resolved: to accept Minutes of the meeting on 13th September 2023 as a correct record.

Item 5 County Councillors Report:

County Councillor Coult had circulated the report prior to the meeting, giving councillors opportunity to raise points. Councillor Coult's report highlights local issues such as severe flooding along the lines, which the council are in the process of excavating ditches to alleviate the flooding which is due to storms Babette, Ciaran and heavy rainfall. There has also been gateway fencing installed from the

exits towards Quebec and the west side of Langley Park. County Cllr Coult also launched the Christmas toy and pyjama appeal.

Resolved: to accept Cllr Coult's report

Item 6 Neighbourhood Warden Report:

The Neighbourhood Warden's report was circulated for councillors to view. It included reports of ASB in Langley Park and that patrols had been carried out. Cllr Moat had asked for a greater presence from the Neighbourhood Wardens. County Councillor Coult informed the councillors that they were making their rounds but had limited powers. County Cllr Coult informed the council that all incidents of ASB involving electric bikes and scooters be reported to 101 as they happen, more reports and incidents logged with 101 means that there will be a greater police presence. County Cllr Coult also agreed for the clerk to be copied into emails from the Neighbourhood Warden team.

Resolved: to accept Neighbourhood Wardens report and for the clerk to post on the parish councils Facebook page to encourage residents to report incidents of ASB to 101, including use of electric bikes and scooters. It was noted that there were several lines of reporting that are to be shared through Facebook, including crime stoppers, Durham Live Chat, DCC ASB team.

Item 7 PACT Report:

PCSO Hart gave apologies for the meeting but had forwarded her report to the councillors to view. The report included incidents of ASB that had been dealt with by the police, for instance a male youth being issued with a Traffic 183 warning for use of an off-road bike. There is a PACT meeting at The Miner's Institute on 23rd November.

Resolved: to accept the PACT report from PCSO Hart. Clerk to advertise PACT meeting through Facebook for interested members of the public to attend.

Item 8 Planning Applications:

There is one planning application DM/23/03211/FPA for a single storey rear extension to an existing garage.

Resolved: There were no objections to this planning application.

Item 9 Opportunity for Public to raise matters of interest:

There were no matters arising from the public

Item 10 Playparks:

Plans were shown to the parish council for proposed updating of two of the play areas under the jurisdiction of the Parish Council. Cllrs J and K Thompson met with the representative from Playdale in regard to the refurbishment of The Bobby Robson and Quebec play areas. It was noted that Cllrs J. Thompson and K. Thompson be thanked for their efforts in pursuing this.

In terms of the Bobby Robson play area, this will be completed in two phases, the skate park needs to be removed and possibly re-sited at The Rec. There will have to be a planning request made to the County Council to remove the existing palisade fence and hedge to replace it with a four-foot fence.

Quebec is very dated and is in need of being refurbished. The costs for both play areas were discussed, as yet we have two quotes and have been contacted by Pennine Playgrounds who are in the process of quoting and drawing up plans, like-for-like with those of Playdale.

Resolved To wait until there are three quotes for the parks and raise it at the meeting in December.

Item 11 Allotment Tenancy Agreement:

Mr Keith Smith, Chair of the local Allotment Association attended the meeting. Mr Smith had written to Cllr J. Thompson in connection with the management agreement that the association have with the parish council. The agreement had expired on October 23rd 2022. The Allotment Association was looking to renew the agreement for another ten years, as a minimum and twenty years if possible. It was suggested that the old allotment agreement was outdated and needed to be brought in line with that of DCC. Mr Smith said that the Allotment Association was created using The National Gardens Agreement. Cllr Passmore acknowledged the good practise already in place from the Allotment Association and suggested that the Allotment Association be granted an interim tenancy agreement for four months until a meeting had taken place between the Allotment Association and the Parish Council. A vote was taken and a unanimous vote was returned. County Cllr Coult agreed to share the documentation from the Allotment Association with the clerk.

Resolved Interim four- month agreement to allow for the management plan and tenancy agreement to be brought up to date. Clerk to arrange a meeting at a time suitable to all parties.

Item 12 Surveyors report for the Methodist Church:

A copy of the full report from Lantern, who carried out the survey is available in its entirety in the Miner's Institute. Councillors were given an executive summary report, which highlighted the key features of the survey.

The surveyors had highlighted that the vendors would not produce certificates and documentation for the following: Asbestos Management Survey, Electrical Installation Report, Gas Safety Report or Energy Performance Certificate.

It was also noted from the surveyors' report that the building was in a state of disrepair that would incur substantial costs to bring it to a useable standard. From the consultation process with the public, some views into the purchase of the Methodist Church were quite negative and cited it as a misuse of public money.

Resolved – The Surveyors report was accepted by council who voted not to proceed with the planned purchase due to the lack of certification from the vendors, lack of support from the community and potential costs incurred.

Item 13 Consultation Review:

There were a series of ten consultations that ran from August to the end of September. These on the whole were poorly attended, the highest numbers being fourteen at one event. Several of the consultations were attended by the same people. The consultation also included questionnaire that were open to the public both hard copies available from consultation events and The Miners' Institute and online through the Parish website. There were 71 completed questionnaires, which represents less than 1% of the parish population. Although, on the whole positive, they highlighted many areas that residents would like to see from the Parish Council. Some of which already exists but residents need to be sign posted to them through improved communications from the Parish Council. It was noted that it is good practise to have a follow up questionnaire to gauge public opinion. Cllr Pasmore proposed that due to the lack of mandate from parishioners and public support that purchase of the Methodist Church does not go ahead. Cllr Duddy seconded this, a vote was taken and councillors voted unanimously for this proposal.

Resolved – all councillors voted not to go ahead with the purchase of the Methodist Church. Cllrs Quinn and Passmore are to prepare a statement for public release. Clerk to organise a public diary for events, to be proactive rather than reactive in terms of community needs.

Item 14 Keyholders:

Cllr Duddy proposed that there be a key safe attached to the front of the Miners' Institute and that the code be shared with councillors so that the building can be accessed by councillors at any time. Presently, there are four keyholders, the clerk, chair, vice chair and Cllr Hawxwell. It was suggested that if there was a key safe then all councillors would be able to open the Institute for bookings rather than relying on those with keys. It was noted that this had the potential to be unsafe should there be a breach in security resulting in the code being shared.

Resolved: Having a key safe will not go ahead due to security reasons.

Item 15 New Phone System:

Currently the phone system at the Miners' Institute works via an analogue PSTN system, this is becoming obsolete and is to be replaced with VOIP, which is digital and works using the internet. The clerk was approached by ADNS with a view to updating the current system. The proposal documents were shared with councillors, who took a vote, which was unanimously in favour of the update.

Resolved: Clerk to contact ADNS to inform them of council's decision.

Item 16 Utilities Quote:

The current contract for electric and gas is coming to an end. Total Energies who are the current suppliers have given a quote, however Connect Gas and Electricity had performed a comparison which has highlighted several cheaper options. This was discussed with councillors and agreed that the clerk choses the most suitable option.

Resolved: Clerk to contact Total Energies and Connect for their best solutions.

Item 17 Neighbourhood Plan:

This item was introduced at the last meeting of the Parish Council. Cllr Simpson circulated Neighbourhood plans from two other parish councils. He suggested that there might be funding available from CDALC to support Esh Parish Council in seeking professionals to assist in the compilation and development of a Neighbourhood Plan. The neighbourhood plans are substantial documents that will take time to complete, therefore it was suggested that volunteer groups are created to be tasked with different aspects of preserving and improving community assets. It was suggested that Cllr Simpson draft a paragraph to be included in a parish newsletter explaining the neighbourhood plan and to request volunteers. Cllr Simpson proposed that the plan progress, Cllr Wardman seconded the proposal, a vote was taken which was unanimous in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan moving forward

Resolved: The Neighbourhood Plan becomes a project for the Parish Council. Funding from CDALC is researched and Cllr Simpson is to draft a newsletter article to promote the neighbourhood plan.

Item 18 Smallholdings:

One of the empty smallholdings had been subject to ASB from local youths, they were responsible for lighting fires within a shed located on the small holding. The police and fire brigade had been called to an incident. It was suggested that the shed be demolished as a matter of urgency to prevent further acts of ASB. Cllr Passmore proposed that the work was carried out as soon as possible, this was seconded by Cllr Moat. A vote was taken which was unanimous for the shed and fly tipping to be removed.

It was suggested that because this smallholding has been vacant for some time that the Allotment Association take it over splitting it into several allotments which are manageable and will be used frequently. It was also suggested that the gate on the smallholding be moved to create better access to the site.

The other smallholding had an issue with a drainage chamber that is partly situated on the smallholding. The land on the smallholding side of the chamber is eroding due to heavy rains and the fence which needs replacing runs over the top of the chamber cover which NWL need access to. The fence is to be replaced and we have had quotes for the work. NWL have been in contact with the clerk and work has commenced to re-site the existing chamber moving it to the pathway and to flush and repair the pipe. This work from NWL will be ongoing for a number of weeks.

Cllr Crumbie mentioned that there have been several acts of vandalism to the smallholding. There have been several incidents of rope being tied around the lock preventing entry to the smallholding, also mud has been smeared over the lock on numerous occasions. Cllr Crumbie was concerned about the livestock on the smallholding. The matter has been logged with the police in case there are any further incidents. County Cllr Coult is to draft a response to post with the allotment association stating that this harassment behaviour would be a breach of contract if the perpetrators were in the Allotment Association. At this time there are 3 geese, 14 ducks and 11 chickens being cared for by Cllr Crumbie, they all have homes and need to be caught for rehoming.

Resolved: Clerk to seek contractors for the removal of the shed as a matter of urgency. The incidents of vandalism have been reported to the police, incident number 120. Work from NWL underway.

Item 19 Defibrillators:

Cllr Hawxwell proposed that the parish Council fund the purchase of two defibrillators. He explained that following a conversation with Diane Campbell from the defibrillator fundraising team, current advice is that people should be within four minutes of a defibrillator. Cllr Hawxwell mentioned that if one was installed at the Miners' Institute then this would comply with current recommendations. As there are already defibrillators situated outside of some of the shops in the village, it was thought that there was sufficient coverage within the area.

Resolved: Clerk to contact Diane Campbell and invite her to the next Parish Council meeting for further clarification.

Item 20 Speeding:

Several residents have made complaints to the clerk regarding the amount of traffic speeding along Church Street from the entrance to the village to the junction at the offset crossroad. There are traffic calming measures upon entrance to the village from Quebec and a zebra crossing at the crossroad. Between these two areas there have been numerous incidents where vehicles have been speeding. One incident was an elderly lady being narrowly missed from a speeding van whilst crossing the road. County Cllr Coult mentioned that all incidents be reported Maxine Stubbs from Durham Constabulary who could initiate a speed survey. It was suggested that Parish Councillors, alongside residents, set up a speed watch, subject to training.

Resolved: Clerk to advertise on Facebook and through the parish newsletter for volunteers willing to participate in the speed watch.

Item 21 Clerks report:

The clerks' report was circulated amongst parish councillors which took note of training attended and highlighted historical complaints that have caused issues due to time taking to complete them, diverting time away from other tasks.

Resolved: That the clerks' report be noted

Item 22 Payments to make and Bank reconciliation:

The clerk distributed information on payments made, petty cash income / balance and bank balances. The Parish accounts have been subject to an audit from Gordon Fletcher, which he returned as satisfactory with the recommendation that monies held in petty cash be banked on a weekly basis.

Resolved: Accounts are correct and that payments are authorised by the Council. Clerk to bank monies held in petty cash weekly.

Item 23 Councillor Conduct:

This item was carried over from the previous meeting of the parish council and was in regards to an incident between Cllrs Hughes and Bushell and Cllrs Duddy and Hawxwell that took place in front of

a member of the public. As Cllrs Hughes and Bushell have apologies for this meeting, then this matter will be carried forward until they attend.

Resolved: Councillor conduct to be included in the agenda for December.

Item 24 Date of next ordinary meeting:

Confirmed as Wednesday 13/12/23 6 p.m. at Miners Institute