

## **NORTH LODGE PARISH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Virtual Meeting of North Lodge Parish Council held on Tuesday 21 July 2020.

**PRESENT:** Chairman: Councillor Jackie Gregory.  
Councillors: Margaret Caygill, Elsie Forrester, Maureen May, Patrick Driscoll, Dennis Hall, John Waugh.  
County Councillor: Craig Martin.  
Clerk: Dennis Hall (Acting Clerk from Item 6)

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm with the Chairman welcoming everyone to the Meeting

### **Item 1. 20/46 Apologies for Absence**

None

### **Item 2. 20/47 Members' Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Margaret Caygill declared an interest as a Governor of Park View School

### **Item 3. 20/48 Protocol for holding Council Zoom Meetings**

The Council considered a Report from Councillor Hall introducing a new Protocol for the conduct of virtual Council proceedings

**Resolved:** Approved

### **Item 4. 20/49 Report of The County Councillor**

#### **Seven Acre Field**

The Council considered a Report from County Councillor Martin. The Report appraised Members on the issue of unauthorised encampments at Seven Acres Field; the adverse impact on amenity associated with on-going issues relating to rubbish, and measures are being taken by the County Council.

#### **County Council Finances**

Additionally, Councillor Martin commented upon the County Council financial position, noting that there will be a £9 million reduction in the current year albeit Government relaxations will permit borrowing to cover revenue spending.

### **Lyndhurst Rd/ North Rd**

Regarding the cut at Lyndhurst Rd/ North Rd, the necessary works had not yet been programmed but there was a possibility this might be done within the next three weeks.

### **Arizona Chemical Site**

Concerning the planning application for the Arizona chemical site, there was a general discussion, following which Councillor Waugh commented that he considered that the planning officers had done as best as they could in dealing with the detail of the application but he would like the opportunity to make further comments on behalf of the Parish Council

### **Care Homes and the Pandemic**

On the Pandemic and care homes, Councillor Martin said that he had circulated a video of the Adult and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee discussing the care homes issue in County Durham. A separate scrutiny meeting may be arranged. Council Hall mentioned that he would welcome the prospect of a single scrutiny meeting to cover the care homes issue

**Resolved:** To Note the Report

### **Item 5. 20/50 Adoption of the Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 16 June 2020**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 16th June 2020, draft copies of which had previously been circulated, were adopted as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were later signed by the Chairman

### **Item 6. 20/51 Chairman's Report**

The Clerk Mr David Murrell has suffered from a serious illness which has meant he is now on sick leave from the Council. As the Council is David's employer, the Chairman reported that she had liaised with David and Avril to offer support out of a duty of care. This responsibility rests with all the Councillors. The good news is that he continues to improve.

She said her priorities are to David and also to the Council, making sure that it continues to run efficiently.

This situation has resulted in some significant challenges. The Chairman has read and implemented the employment contract David entered into with the Council. She said she has given a copy of that to Councillor Hall. She has also referred to the Employment Act regarding employee's sickness.

Since the Council is now in a transitional period, the Chairman has taken advice from CDALC regarding running a Council without a Clerk. She said she has also read up on running Councils from various publications on the Internet.

The Chairman has undertaken the mammoth task of changing the Council's point of contact details with Durham County Council and other organisations/businesses This is to avoid any

undue stress on David. His priority is to follow medical instructions to aid his recovery.

The Chairman has collated all outstanding Council matters/projects and in due course they will be added to a Council agenda.

She said she has undertaken a short Zoom course so that the Council meetings can go ahead and posted the details of the virtual meetings on the notice boards around the Parish, as the laws requires. If any other Councillor wishes to host a meeting, please let her know.

The Chairman is presently obtaining advice on the role of a Financial Officer/Proper Officer so that the Council can continue to pay a salary, expenses and for items or services it requires. If any other Councillor wishes to hold this post, please let her know.

In between all of this, the Chairman has attended two virtual training courses provided by CDALC, which were very informative. She thoroughly recommends Councillors attend these, as rules and regulation change. These courses demonstrate the difference of what Councillors would often like to do and what the rules and regulations actual allow a Councillor and Council to do.

She thanked Councillor Hall for offering his support to write the Council agendas and Minutes. He is also the Council contact for the Area Action Partnership, Chester-le-Street ( Councillor Hall has all the rights of a Councillor).Councillor Waugh and the Chairman are the point of contact for Planning (Standing Orders, page 15 refer to Planning and the Chairman/Vice Chairman).

Although Councillors were informed of the temporary measures that need to be effected immediately by e-mail, certain formal arrangements must be recorded and voted on.

Motion (1)

a) That Councillor Hall is appointed temporary Clerk with assistance from Councillor Gregory.

Motion (2)

b) That as this post is non-salaried however can incur expenses. Councillors to agree on what amounts to a reasonable level of expenses per month for Councillor Hall.

The Chairman was disappointed to see an increase in fly tipping in the parish however; She thanked Councillors and residents for volunteering to planting up the Parish Council's flower beds and barrels with summer bedding plants.

The Chairman will endeavour to keep Councillors updated and would appreciate that all Councillor's will support the Council at this usual time.

**Resolved:**

**6(a): That Councillor Dennis Hall, Vice Chair be appointed as Acting Clerk, working jointly with the Chairman, during the Clerk's sickness leave;**

**6(b): That the issue of expenses be reviewed on a monthly basis; and**

**6 (c): That the Chairman's update on the Clerk's condition be noted, all best wishes for a speedy recovery having been previously notified.**

Members thanked the Chairman for her Report and the actions taken by her to ensure continuity of Council business.

**Item 7. 20/52 Portfolio Holders Reports**

**a) Play Areas:**

Councillor Caygill updated the Members on the usage and condition of the play areas at Merlin Drive and Low Flatts. All appeared to be in good order. There are some issues concerning opening times as currently only Merlin Drive is open. Councillor Caygill emphasised the need for caution and to ensure that appropriate measures are in place before reopening. Low Flatts will be opening very shortly.

**Resolved:** That the Report be noted.

**b) Planning:**

Councillor Waugh reported on only 2 applications received this month with no comments or observations to be made on behalf of the Council

**Resolved:** That the Report be noted.

**c) Finance:**

Councillor Waugh reported that no bank statements were available at present

**Resolved:** That the Report be noted.

**d) Crime and Community Safety:**

The Chairman reported that the situation was generally quiet and there was nothing formal to report to the Meeting.

**Resolved:** That the Report be noted.

**e) Horticulture:**

Councillor May reported upon issues concerned with recent events of fly tipping of which there were several. She informed the meeting that Durham County Council

had been notified of the incident.

Thanks were expressed to those involved in planting the summer bedding and details were provided of areas that had been planted

Concerning the Christmas tree, it was noted that the installer will be required to have a minimum £5M public liability insurance There was a discussion of this aspect and it was agreed following that discussion the Council set the figure at £5M

**f) Publicity:**

No Report

**g) Highways and Website:**

No Report

**h) Governance:**

No Report

All written Reports submitted are comprised in the Reports Pack previously circulated to Members on 17th July 2020. The Chairman thanked Councillors Caygill, Waugh and May for their Reports.

Members thanked the Chairman for her Report.

**Resolved:** To note the Reports

**Item 8. 20/53 Correspondence**

**1)** Councillor Noble Nesbitt: gift: Update: CDALC had clarified that this cannot be lawfully paid for from Council funds.

**2)** Adrian Richards PSCO re donation

**3)** Invoice: DSJ Property Services: £220

**4)** Land Registry £3 fee

**5)** Zoom Fee: £14.39 p/m

**6)** St Cuthbert's Hospice Donation request:

**7)** Invoice: Durham County Council Summer Bedding plants: £308.15

**8)** Invoice: Durham County Council Host/Support website: £736.51

There was a general discussion of this item; the Chairman said donation requests may be considered throughout the year: her intention is to develop specific policies to guide Council decision-making on this and other areas of Council activity.

**Resolved:** to donate £500 to St Cuthbert's Hospice

**Item 9. 20/54 Items requested by Councillors**

**a) Codes of Conduct (the Chairman)**

The closing date for responses to the consultation on the code of conduct is 17th August stop. Both NALC and CDALC will be responding on behalf of parish members and it was considered not necessary for the council to make a separate submission.

**Resolved:** That no submission be made

**b) Gardener’s hourly rate and expenses (Councillor May)**

Councillor May began the discussion making reference to the draft Job Description for a gardener which she had previously circulated to members on Friday 17th July 2020.

A number of issues were discussed; whether the Job Description was complete and comprehensive, as to whether £20 per hour was a reasonable rate; whether the Job Description made adequate provision for the need for design capabilities as well as general maintenance work

Councillor Driscoll reminded Members of the need to take account of the caretaking responsibilities. Counsellor Waugh suggested that the pricing should be by way of a price band or range with an element to inspire creative working within the role.

It was suggested County Council rates should be explored. Questions were raised about whether this should be a seasonal engagement or longer term .

The Vice Chair agreed to prepare a draft contract and suggested that the suite of documents that are required would include an advertisement, specification, contract terms and a recruitment process. A £5M public liability level was considered appropriate.

**Resolved:** That the matter be taken forward with joint working on the documentation by Councillors May, Waugh and Hall; that a further Report be produced for the September Council meeting

**c) Shrub beds in North Road and Longdean Park (Councillor May)**

Councillor May made a report on the condition of raised beds at North Road and Longdean Park. She said there was an issue at North Road concerning trees causing damage/ wall cracking and that the trees need to be removed. Some landscaping may be required.

**Resolved:** That Councillor May obtain a quotation for the necessary work from Graham Cozens at Durham County Council and to circulate to Members for approval

**Item 10. 20/55 Payments for the accounts for the month**

**Accounts for the month as submitted to the Meeting of North Lodge Parish Council held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020.**

TO	AMOUNT	REASON	VAT
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Salaries	£450.00	Salaries July 2020	
Expenses	£ 90.00	Expenses July 2020	
DSJ Property Services	£ 220.00	Install Seat at Play Area	
J. Gregory (via M B Plant Nursery)	£ 308.15	Bedding Plants and Compost	
Durham County Council	£ 736.51	Hosting of Website	£122.75
D. Murrell (via HM Land Registry)	£ 3.00	Property Search	
D. Murrell (via Zoom inc)	£ 14.39	Monthly Fee	£ 2.40

**Total Payments    £1822.90**

**Balance to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

Balance b/f	£29310.62	Balances at Bank:-	
Deduct Payments – June 2020	<u>£ 4040.76</u>	Current	£ 1742.18
	£25269.86	30 Day	___
			<u>£58541.72</u>
		Total	£60283.90
Add Bank Interest Received	<u>£ 6.58</u>		
	£25276.44	Deduct cheques not yet presented	<u>£ 717.80</u>
Add Precept Received	<u>£32359.24</u>		
	£57635.68		
Add VAT Refund Received	<u>£ 1930.42</u>		
Balance c/f	<b>£59566.10</b>		<b>£59566.10</b>

During this item there was a discussion of payments for expenses to the Clerk during his sickness leave, namely £90 per month. The Vice Chair as Acting Clerk informed Members that unfortunately the Clerk's contract of employment did not indicate these payments continued during sickness leave.

**Resolved:** That the Clerk be paid expenses until end of July and the position be reviewed thereafter.

Further, that the Accounts be approved and that the payments be approved as submitted.

**Item 11. 20/56 Other matters for information**

During discussion of this item, the Chairman lost internet connection and the Vice Chair presided.

County Councillor Martin expressed congratulations to the Vice-Chair for gaining his Lifetime Achievement Award for his service to Local Government Lawyers. The Vice Chair thanked Councillor Martin and other Members who had similarly expressed their appreciation

The Vice-Chair closed the meeting at 8.20 pm