

NORTH LODGE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Virtual Meeting of North Lodge Parish Council held on Tuesday 16th March 2021.

PRESENT: Chairman: Councillor Jackie Gregory.
Councillors: Margaret Caygill, Elsie Forrester, Maureen May,
Patrick Driscoll, Dennis Hall, John Waugh.
County Councillor: Craig Martin.
Clerk: David Murrell.

The Chairman commenced the meeting by welcoming everyone.

Item 1. 21/23 Apologies for Absence

There were no Apologies for Absence.

Item 2. 21/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Item 3. 21/25 Report of the County Councillor

The Chairman invited County Councillor Craig Martin to give his report which included the matters contained in his written report below -

Budget 2021/2022

Summary of the key points in this years budget:

- An additional £5 million is being put into the Towns and Villages fund. This has come from the reserves that individual departments hold when they generate a surplus and can hold onto funds to be used in future years.
- Council tax is to be increased by 2.99%. Only 1% of the adult social care precept has been used this year. With the power to raise 3% over two years, it is expected next year's budget will increase Council Tax by 1.99% + 2%.
- Concern was raised about the need to use the adult social care precept when the Towns and Villages fund is being topped up from the Adult and Social Care reserves.

A number of amendments were proposed by opposition groups but rejected:

- Increase spending on highways resurfacing by £8.7 million and provide Councillors an additional £10,000 to spend on their communities. Funded from a dramatic reduction in the communication department's staff, supported by prudential borrowing.
- Free parking in council car parks to support high street retail, funded from government provided COVID recovery funding.
- Reallocating towns and villages funding from AAPs to give Councillors £10,000 each to spend in their area. To ensure a fairer distribution of this funding.
- £10 million for school repairs, to deal with £116 million back log of repairs in council ran schools. Funded from prudential borrowing.
- £1 million over three years to improve rights of way and nature reserves, funded from reserves.

I voted for all these amendments but they were rejected by the Council.

I also spoke on the need to reform Council Tax and Business rates. These continue to be cost pressures that are increasing much faster than the cost of living. While disproportionately effecting those who are poorer and living in the North.

Improving the County Durham Pound

Durham County Council have formulated a new process for procuring goods and services. One that directly promotes organisations based in County Durham, employs those living within the County, and helps to deal with the climate emergency.

The Council's procurement process has always had a 'social values' clause that promotes this. But it is now quantifiable, rather than companies just having to pay lip service to it during the tender process. Improving the 'County Durham Pound' will account for 10% of the score.

I've raised the issue that value for money for the tax payer still needs to be at the heart of procurement. This being 50% of the score, with quality and specification making the remaining 40%. Ensuring that the Council don't fall victim to cronyism with this new process, is something I've also raised.

Smaller and medium sized businesses are also being specifically aided. The value at which a full procurement process occurs has been raised significantly. Something smaller organisations have long complained about. They do not have the resources to compete with larger businesses that have teams of staff who are purely there to jump through the Council's bureaucratic hoops.

In addition, the County Councillor thanked Parish Councillors for exercising a scrutiny function over his work during the past four years. Councillors thanked the County Councillor for his work in the Parish.

The Chairman thanked the County Councillor for his report.

Item 4. 21/26 Adoption of Minutes of Meeting

The Minutes of the Virtual Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 16th February 2021, draft copies of which had been previously circulated, were adopted as a true and accurate record of the Meeting and would be duly signed by the Chairman.

Item 5. 21/27 Chairman's Report

Regarding outstanding matters -

- a) Re Minute 21/19 section 2). Re parked vehicles at Ambleside Court, the County Councillor advised that a plan of action was expected soon.
- b) Re Minute 21/22 section 1). Re completion of the Highways England work at Picktree Lodge, the County Councillor advised that this was expected by the end of April.
- c) Re Minute 21/22 section 2). Re thinning of woodland alongside the A693, Cllr Caygill advised that this appeared to have been completed but the path there had not yet been re-opened. The County Councillor kindly agreed to chase this up.
- d) Re Minute 21/22 section 5). Re seats available for new Councillors, the Chairman advised that notices had been placed in each noticeboard.

The Chairman's report included the matters contained in her written report below -

Chairman's Report 16th March 2021

It is good news regarding the easing of restrictions on Covid-19. However, we must all remain vigilant and be sensible when applying the new rules.

It is uplifting to see the spring flowers blooming and the daffodils are opening slowly. In the Autumn, the council may wish to consider making arrangements for more daffodils bulbs to be planted in areas around the Parish, especially after the major building works have been completed.

The Parish welcomes a new Police Officer to the area, PC Ged Cooke.
Roadworks continue in the area until April. Expect disruption on the main orbital roads in the parish.

Councillors should have received their nomination papers for the forthcoming local elections in May, along with instructions on completing the document.

The Council is committed to helping/assisting residents in the parish and can supply telephone numbers for advice on Covid-19.

Councillors thanked the Chairman for her report.

Item 6. 21/28 Portfolio Holders' Reports

a) Planning

The Chairman invited Cllr Waugh to give his report which included the following matters -
Cllr Waugh advised that he continued to inform Councillors on a weekly basis of any new planning applications in the Parish and also to highlight any concerns. Councillors approved Cllr Waugh's proposal that he should also advise any planning approvals or refusals in the Parish. Cllr Hall considered that Minutes should be available from County Council Section 106 funding application meetings. The County Councillor kindly agreed to ask for this but he was aware that these meetings were not open to the public.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Waugh for his Planning report and invited him to give his Finance report which included the following matters -

b) Finance

Cllr Waugh advised that he had studied the financial information supplied by the Clerk and he confirmed that everything appeared to be in order. There was still a substantial bank balance for what was close to the end of the financial year with no further significant spending anticipated. Councillors discussed the merits and disadvantages of electronic banking.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Waugh for his report and invited Cllrs May and Driscoll to give their report which included the matters contained in the written report below -

c) Horticulture

Report to Council 16 March 2021

Portfolio: HORTICULTURE

Prepared by: Councillor Maureen May

Sent to Clerk on: 15 March 2021

Parish Council Horticulture

Summary

Following correspondence to Durham County Council asking if they would be able to take over the Parish horticultural requirements for this year between April 2021 and March 2022; Durham County Council has replied with the cost of £4309.56.

Parish Councillors will need to discuss and agree.

The Chairman thanked Cllrs May and Driscoll for the report and invited Cllr Caygill to give her report which included the matters contained in her written report below -

d) Play Areas

I have inspected both Play Areas and all equipment appears to be in good order.

We have checked with DCC and it is not necessary for us to do any sanitising of equipment.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Caygill for her report and invited Cllr Hall to give his report.

e) Policy and Governance

Cllr Hall advised that there were no matters to report.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hall and invited Cllr Forrester to give her report which included the following matters -

f) Publicity

Cllr Forrester advised of various matters arising from CDALC. The AAP meeting due to be held on 22nd March has been cancelled. The new Leisure Centre for the town is to be built on the site of the former Civic Centre. The County Councillor advised that a further consultation, to consider such matters as facilities to be included, will be opened in July. Cllr Caygill enquired re possible funding from the AAP for the proposed re-painting of North Road bridge. Cllr Forrester will forward any information received. The County Councillor advised that many of Sustrans' staff were at present on furlough and therefore it was likely that there would be little or no progress re the bridge for now. The Chairman thanked Cllr Forrester for her report.

g) Highways

Cllr Gregory's report included the matters contained in her written report below -

Highway Issues 16th March 2021

Picktree Lane junction with the Blind Lane roundabout, Junction 63, A1M.

Extensive damage to grass verge and trees. Reported to Durham County Council, reference 313173978

Litter bins and dog waste bins Picktree Lodge/Caxton and North Road, required emptying. Reported to County Councillor. (09/03/21).

In addition, Cllr Driscoll gave an update on the proposals from Highways England to re-instate the land at the entrance to Picktree Lodge. Councillors agreed that it would be necessary to scrutinise this work to ensure the re-instatement was carried out to the design and standard anticipated. Cllr May wanted to know of the whereabouts of the stone for the wall there. The County Councillor advised that it was in storage but he would ask Highways England for further details. Cllr Caygill reminded Councillors that there were numerous daffodil bulbs in the centre island bed at the entrance.

h) Crime and Community Safety

Cllr Gregory gave her report which included the matters contained in her written report below -

Crime and Community Safety Report, 16th March 2021

The Parish Council welcomed a new Police Constable to the area, PC Ged Cooke.

No information on crime / community safety issues.

Councillors thanked Cllr Gregory for her report.

i) Website

Cllr Gregory advised that the website was being kept up-to-date.

Councillors thanked Cllr Gregory for her report.

Item 7. 21/29 Correspondence

- 1) From a Resident
Letter re light pollution.
- 2) From a Resident
email re planning application DM/21/00197/FPA.
- 3) From a Resident
email re play facilities.
- 4) From PC Ged Cooke
email re introduction to the Parish Council.
- 5) From Durham County Council
email re Nomination Papers.
- 6) Various planning applications, approvals and refusals from Durham County Council, of which the following were within North Lodge Parish:-
 - a) Application to fell 2 yew trees and 2 holly trees, at 21B North Lodge.
 - b) Application for erection of 1 no. detached dwellinghouse on Plot 5 (reserved matters application pursuant to DM/19/01917/OUT), at site of former Pelaw Grange Cottage.

Item 8. 21/30 Items Requested by Councillors

a) Lights shining from property in North Road

The Chairman advised that the Parish Council has no powers to intervene on this matter. Therefore, it had been forwarded to the County Council whose reply was awaited.

b) Bus shelters - replacement at Picktree Village and new at Vigo Lane

The Chairman advised Councillors of progress to date. Councillors discussed matters including quotes received, the type and design of possible shelters and the potential for matched funding after the forthcoming elections. Agreed that this item should be included in the September meeting Agenda.

c) Siting of noticeboards, Barley Gate, Vigo Lane

The County Council had advised that a noticeboard could be erected at Vigo Lane on either side of the entrance to Wanstead Crescent. The Clerk is to obtain a quotation for an identical noticeboard to those recently installed around the Parish. This item is to be included in the September meeting Agenda.

d) Provision of Horticulture by Durham County Council

In the absence of a Parish Council gardener, quotations had been sought to provide horticultural services. Only the County Council had expressed an interest. Councillors considered this quote, for £4309.56 + vat for the year 2021/2022 together with the quote of £2462.20 + vat for 2021/2022 from the County Council for the existing horticultural services provided.

(Resolved on a unanimous show of hands - to accept the quotes of £4309.56 + vat and £2462.20 + vat from the County Council for provision of horticultural services for 2021/2022).

Item 9. 21/31 The Annual Risk Assessment

Councillors discussed the Annual Risk Assessment, copies of which had been previously distributed by the Clerk, and agreed to approve the Assessment in the form provided except that the first sentence of the section "Condition of Bus Shelters" is to read "Inspected monthly by Portfolio Holder". Cllr Driscoll kindly offered to carry out the monthly inspections.

(Resolved - to approve the Risk Assessment with the amendment to the section "Condition of Bus Shelters").

Item 10. 21/32 Payment of Accounts

TO	AMOUNT	REASON	VAT
Salaries	£ 463.84	Salaries March 2021	
Expenses	£ 90.00	Expenses March 2021	
D. Murrell (via Zoom inc)	£ 14.39	Monthly Subscription	£2.40
UKFast	£ 28.99	Monthly Subscription	£4.83
HM Revenue & Customs	£ 415.40	P.A.Y.E.	
J. Martin	£ 165.00	Chair's Quarterly Allowance	
Information Commissioner	£ 40.00	Data Protection Act Annual Fee	

Total Payments £ 1217.62

(Resolved - the payments be approved as submitted).

Item 11. 21/33 Other Matters for Information

Cllr Waugh considered that the new Parish Council email address system was working well. The Chairman thanked Cllr May for persevering with the proposal for the project.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.10pm.

North Lodge Parish Council

Accounts for the month as submitted to the Meeting of North Lodge Parish Council held on Tuesday 20th April 2021.

TO	AMOUNT	REASON	VAT
Salaries	£	Salaries April 2021	
Expenses	£ 90.00	Expenses April 2021	
D. Murrell (via Zoom inc)	£ 14.39	Monthly Subscription	£2.40
UKFast	£ 28.99	Monthly Subscription	£4.83
Co. DhM Assn of Local Councils	£ 10.00	Training Event	

Total Payments £

Balance to 31st March 2021

Balance b/f	£42341.78	Balances at Bank:-	
Deduct Payments - March 2021	<u>£ 1217.62</u>	Treasurers Account	£ 665.49
	£41124.16	Instant Account	<u>£40548.99</u>
		Total	£41214.48
Add Bank Interest Received	<u>£ .32</u>	Deduct cheques not yet presented	<u>£ 90.00</u>
	£41124.48		£41124.48
Balance c/f	£41124.48		£41124.48

Two cheques not yet presented -

- 1) £50.00 cheque number 1436 dated 16/03/21 for a donation payable to County of Durham School Benevolent Fund. This cheque replaced cheque number 1401 dated 2/09/20 which is now out-of-date and which in turn replaced cheque number 1375 dated 21/01/20 also now out-of-date.
- 2) £40 cheque number 1435 dated 16/03/21 for the Data Protection Act annual fee payable to Information Commissioner.