

NORTH LODGE PARISH

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Arizona Chemical, Vigo Lane, Chester-le-Street on Tuesday 19th May 2015.

PRESENT: Parish Council Cllr. Mrs. E. Forrester.
Chairman:
Parish Councillors: Mrs. M. Caygill, Mrs. L. LeDune, Mrs. C. Walton,
Mr. D. Hall, Mr. C. Noble-Nesbitt, Mr. D. Snaith,
Mr. J. Waugh.

Parish Council Mr. D. Murrell.
Clerk:

The meeting commenced at 6.15pm with Cllr. Mrs. E. Forrester in the Chair and welcoming everyone.

1) Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Parish Councillors Dr. D. Hartley and Mrs. M. May, and County Councillor P. May.

2) Adoption of Minutes

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 20th May 2014, copies of which had been previously circulated, were adopted as a true and accurate record of the Meeting and were duly signed by the Chairman.

3) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

4) Council Tax Precept

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had set a Council Tax Precept of £17,376.30 (seventeen thousand three hundred and seventy-six pounds 30p) for the financial year to 31st March 2016.

5) Parish Council Report

The Clerk, on behalf of North Lodge Parish Council, gave a report of the work carried out by the Parish Council during the previous year. Councillors thanked the Clerk for his excellent report.

6) Any Other Business

There were no other matters submitted for consideration.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 6.35pm.

North Lodge Parish Council

Annual Report 2014-2015

It has been a very busy year for the Parish Council and this will be evident from this report.

The first matter to record is the recent resignation from the Council of Councillor Norman Alderson who, throughout his time with us, contributed regularly and helpfully to the work of the Council. We offer our thanks to Norman and send him our best wishes for the future. During the year, John Waugh and Dennis Hall were co-opted to the Council and we look forward to their expertise bringing benefit to the Parish in general.

There is at present a seat available on the Council and we would welcome any expressions of interest for co-option as a Parish Councillor.

Finance

Having been without a Finance Portfolio Holder for some considerable time, in January we welcomed Councillor John Waugh to the Portfolio. Financial matters continue to be carefully planned, budgeted for and controlled by the Council and once again we have received a "clean" report from our auditors. Financial donations were made to the Great North Air Ambulance, the Royal British Legion and Cancer Relief UK (in recognition of the generous gesture of Arizona Chemical which provides the Council's meeting room free of charge). The precept for 2015 - 2016 was maintained at £19.35 per band D equivalent house which produced an income of £17,376.30 supplemented by a grant of £623 from the County Council under the Localising Council Tax Support Scheme which was introduced following the Local Government Finance Act 2012. We also received a substantial grant of £3000 from County Councillor Peter May for a replacement seesaw at Merlin Drive play area. We received a cash donation of £24 from the Lambton Park Property Owners' Association which will be used to buy plants for the entrance to Lambton Park and Cestria Housing provided a third seat for the Drum Pond area. In January, a new laptop was bought for the use of the Clerk. During the year, the bank account signatories were amended, new financial regulations were adopted and five discretion policies were agreed relating to the Local Government Pension Scheme. Finance has been approved for several ongoing projects including the purchase of replacement Christmas lights, towards a new community room at Park View School and for a significant horticulture project being developed in partnership with the Residents Association. Thanks are due to Councillor Waugh for taking on this Portfolio and for his active interest in this important aspect of the Parish Council's activities. Finally, the Parish Council always welcomes suggestions from Councillors and residents for project ideas which might provide lasting benefit to the Parish.

Highways and Transport

The most noticeable developments were the County Council's improvements to Northlands roundabout where traffic lights were installed, and the up-grading of the motorway junction and by-pass interchange, both of these projects being needed to accommodate the rising volume of traffic in the Blind Lane and Northlands area. The Parish Council had significant input to these projects, particularly the Northlands roundabout development and this project resulted in improved movement of traffic and proper crossing facilities for pedestrians. Feedback from residents suggests a generally high level of satisfaction with the completed works. The Parish Council's bus shelter just off the roundabout on North Road was subsequently re-built by the County Council at its new position set back a few feet from the original site. The Gardener re-painted the inside rear walls of the bus shelters on the east side of North Road at Lombard Drive and the Lambton Worm. Following a request from the Parish Council, the County Council has agreed to re-paint the yellow lines at Lombard Drive, near to the School and the Traffic Wardens increased their presence there at School leaving times. The Parish Council took part in a County Council consultation on the proposed removal of street lights in Picktree Lane and we also made a representation to the County Council to ask that several footpaths in the Merlin Drive/Baffle Bank area be made Rights of Way. A series of requests have been made to the County Council for the provision of dog bins and dog fouling signs at Picktree Lodge.

The Highways Portfolio is always a busy one and the Parish Council is grateful to the Portfolio Holder Councillor Colin Noble-Nesbitt for his hard work.

Horticulture

The Parish Council places great importance on horticulture which is important in maintaining the area as a desirable place to live and work. Portfolio Holder Councillor Carole Walton has given many hours to the horticultural challenge. Credit is also due to our Gardener, Frank Leighton through his business, Pot-It-On. Notably, there has been significant partnership working with the Residents Association on many projects during the year and the help of the Association is greatly appreciated. This year's work included the re-siting and planting by the Association of the Council's flower tubs around the Parish although the tubs in Lombard Drive were planted by students from the School, supervised by Councillor Margaret Caygill. Three additional tubs, from a site outside the Parish, are to be provided by the Residents Association. In Low Flatts Road, some residents complained to the Parish Council following the planting of replacement trees by the County Council and after the intervention of Councillor Caygill the trees were re-sited to the satisfaction of all. A major overview, in conjunction with the Residents Association, was carried out to draw up proposals for existing and new flower beds and tubs, following which agreement was reached and the County Council asked to carry out the works. This included the provision of three new beds and six tubs at the entrance to the Parish and County at Barley Mow.

We are grateful to Councillor Carole Walton as Portfolio Holder, supported by Councillor Maureen May and Councillor Linda LeDune, for all their hard work in this important aspect of Parish life.

Planning and Development

During the year, we welcomed the County Council's Neighbourhood Plans team to a meeting and we took part in the consultation on the proposed re-siting of the main Post Office in the town. Thankfully, the Post Office is to stay in its current location. A major event during the year was the publication of the Inspector's Interim Report on the County Durham Plan. The Parish Council had raised several objections regarding certain proposals in the Plan and the Inspector upheld these objections. We now await the next development in the progress of the Plan with the County Council considering a challenge to the Inspector's Report. In March, Portfolio Holder Councillor David Snaith provided an informative overview to the Report and during the year Councillor Snaith attended a County Council Planning Department training session. Our thanks go to Councillor Snaith who, with the Clerk, keeps under review the planning applications submitted within the Parish, reporting as necessary to the Council.

Play Areas

Throughout the year, the two play areas in the Parish have required attention to problems arising of which most have been minor ones. We continue to receive much support from the County Council in keeping the play areas safe and attractive for children. At Merlin Drive play area (County Council owned), graffiti was attended to by the Gardener, a new swing replaced a damaged one and a proliferation of molehills was reported to the County Council. At Low Flatts play area (Parish Council owned), a damaged swing seat was replaced and a dog fouling sign was put up. Due to the all-too-regular nuisance of dog fouling, the County Council's Neighbourhood Wardens visited the June meeting of the Council to discuss measures to tackle this. Play Areas Portfolio Holder Councillor Margaret Caygill, who had assistance from former Councillor Norman Alderson, continues to devote many hours for the benefit of residents and this is widely appreciated.

Publicity

Parish Council Chairman Councillor Elsie Forrester continued to attend many Area Action Partnership meetings and events and this link, together with the many external meetings attended by Councillors, ensures a good flow of information in both directions. The Parish Council's annual Newsletter was again well received. The Newsletter, which was collated by Councillor Colin Noble-Nesbitt and his wife (with our warm thanks), is delivered by Councillors to each household in the Parish and the Parish Council is grateful to all who contribute to its production and distribution. The Newsletter can also be accessed via the Council's website. Portfolio Holder Councillor Maureen May is again liaising in the production of this year's Newsletter and our thanks go to her for her work on this Portfolio.

Website

The website continues to be up-dated at regular intervals by Councillor Colin Noble-Nesbitt and the Clerk. Rare minor problems have been quickly rectified and otherwise the website runs well. The recently introduced Transparency Rules for Parish Councils will ensure that much more information, mainly financial, will appear on the website.

Police Matters

Although, thankfully, North Lodge rarely if ever suffers any of the most serious crimes, the monthly Police report shows that the Parish is not crime-free. During the year, there have been several burglaries and thefts, mostly at Drum Industrial Estate whilst anti-social behaviour from youth nuisance, graffiti, fly-tipping and off-road bikes has also been reported several times. Our Gardener had to clean vomit from a bus shelter on three occasions and, in a very disappointing incident, newly planted shrubs and plants were stolen from the Parish Council's new beds created at the re-sited bus shelter at Northlands roundabout. It is also disappointing that the Police no longer attend our meetings, producing a consequent reduction in the two-way flow of information.

Visitors to Council Meetings

As previously mentioned, we welcomed visits from the Neighbourhood Plans and Neighbourhood Wardens teams. Our County Councillor, Peter May, is a regular visitor to our meetings and he provides a great amount of support, both financial and otherwise, to the Parish Council and to his ward in general. His input brings significant benefits to this Parish. Representatives of North Lodge Residents Association are also welcome regular visitors and it is pleasing that this year has seen increasing partnership working between the Council and the Association, particularly on horticulture, and this has provided added benefits for everyone in the Parish.

Meetings Attended

Throughout the year, Councillors have represented the Council at many external meetings and workshops. These include meetings of the CDALC Chester-le-Street and District Sub-Committee, CDALC Smaller Councils Forum, the Area Action Partnership, Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, North Lodge Residents Association, a meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner and various training events.

In November at the Remembrance Day Service attended by several Councillors, the Chairman laid a wreath on behalf of the Council. The Parish Council thanks all those Councillors who have represented the Council in these many and various matters throughout the year. This is a function that is of great importance in establishing and presenting the views of our residents.

Current Projects

The Parish Council is providing just under £4K in support of the creation of a community room at Park View School. In October, several Councillors and the Clerk visited the school to see the existing room to be converted and to learn of the conversion plans. The Council has for some years been aware of the need for a meeting place for community groups in the Parish and we consider that this is a very desirable project.

At Barley Mow, as well as the previously mentioned horticulture project for flower beds and tubs, we continue to explore the possibility of a welcome sign to denote the gateway to the Parish, and similarly a welcome sign for the Northlands gateway. A major project is for the creation of a safe and enjoyable leisure area at Drum Pond. This has been a wish for many years and much preparatory work had been done by Councillor Margaret Caygill which set in place the basic structure of the project. However, it was only this year, with the land now having tenants, that it has been possible to agree a way forward with all relevant parties. These parties include the tenants, Coveris, who have already provided much positive support to the project, the Environment Agency which, having been brought into the project by Councillor Elsie Forrester, has been most helpful in taking an active part and pointing a way forward, and the pond's anglers who very readily embraced the project and are now preparing a business plan for the project. The Parish Council would like to record its thanks to Cestria Housing, who have provided free-of-charge, three seats for the pond area, and to volunteers from the nearby Co-op warehouse who spent a day repairing a fence and clearing and tidying an access path there. This help has given added impetus to the project.

Acknowledgements

Following another busy year, thanks are due to the Chairman (Councillor Elsie Forrester), Vice-Chairman (Councillor David Snaith) and Councillors who have contributed so much time and effort to the achievements of the Council. Grateful thanks are also due to County Councillor Peter May for his close involvement and interest in the Parish. The Parish Council values its relationships with the Residents Association, the County Council, our MP, the Police and Park View School, all of whom show that they share our aim of improving North Lodge for the benefit of our residents and for the benefit of those who work here. The Parish Council also thanks Arizona Chemical which continues to make available free of charge its training rooms for Council meetings.

Finally, we always welcome the involvement of residents and local businesses in Parish matters and we will continue to strive for the improvement of North Lodge Parish.

David Murrell
Clerk, North Lodge Parish Council

13th May 2015

Having presented this report to the meeting, the Clerk was thanked for all his work in producing this informative document.