

Draft Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting of West Rainton Parish

held on 28 May 2015 at Arden House, West Rainton

Present:

Councillors Elaine Bulmer, Iain Clifford, Mark Gilbank, Avril Wallage (Chairman)

Durham County Councillor: Bill Kellett

Parish Clerk: Graeme Keedy

12 x members of the public (MoP)

In attendance to give a presentation: Ron Hogg, Durham Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

Notes:

- a). The meeting was filmed and audio recorded by Cllr Gilbank for his personal use.
- b) Although introduced as Councillor Gilbank and referred to throughout the meeting as such, Cllr Gilbank advised when he asked questions in the public participation part of the meeting that he was doing so as a MoP.

Chairman's Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Wallage (Chair of the Parish Council) welcomed residents to the meeting and introduced members of the Parish Council along with Ron Hogg Durham PCC and County Councillor Kellett. Cllr Wallage explained the purpose of the meeting, emphasising the Parish Council's keenness to engage with the community.

Durham Police and Crime Commissioner - outline of role and questions from residents

Mr Ron Hogg, PCC gave an overview of his role which included holding the Chief Constable to account and advised that 77% of his budget came from a Central Government grant with the remainder from Council Tax. He explained that his office had faced budget cuts of 20% and this had a detrimental impact on front line services. There were ongoing budget challenges and it was possible that an increase in Council Tax may be required to meet these financial difficulties if he was re-elected in 2016.

The PCC then talked through the four overarching objectives contained in the Police and Crime Plan 2015-2017. These were:

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Inspire confidence - he reported that this currently stood at 76%, a figure above the national average.

Support Victims - this aspect was currently delivered by Victim Support, but would be subject to retendering in 2016.

Keep all our Communities Safe - Durham is one of the safest counties and has been visited by the Metropolitan Police for "fact finding".

Deliver an Efficient Policing Service - striving for value for money through working with neighbouring police forces and partnerships.

The PCC took questions from members of the public. Issues raised included: a need for improved lighting and signage on A690; vehicle speed limits in Pit House Lane; and need for action against drivers using mobile 'phones. PCC undertook to follow up.

Cllr Clifford commented that the lower precept for policing applied by Durham County Council was notably less than other Authorities, indicating that Durham Constabulary is more efficient than others.

Cllr Gilbank commended the work of Durham Constabulary.

Chairman's Annual Report of the Parish Council 2014/2015

Cllr Wallage, verbally presented the annual report outlining the work of the Parish Council over the last 12 months. This included:

Changes to the composition of the Parish Council, providing details of resignations and new councillors.

Grant funding success (£3400) which enabled Heritage Garden improvements, which were now visible.

Appointment of new Parish Clerk in September 2014.

Parish Council's decision not to increase the precept.

Development of new grants and donation policy.

Cllr Wallage concluded by encouraging residents to attend future meetings of the Parish Council.

Opencast Planning Appeal Hearing

Cllr Wallage advised that following the decision of Durham County Council Planning Committee to refuse a planning application for an opencast site at Field House (Robin Lane) Hargreaves, the applicant, had appealed the decision and a Planning Inspectorate Appeal hearing was to be held on 29 September 2015.

Residents were reminded that following a public consultation exercise the Parish Council had objected to the proposals at the outset and maintained this position.

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Cllr Wallage added that the Parish Council supported the work of the Stop the Opencast in Pittington and West Rainton Community Action Group.

Residents were informed of the process in the lead up to the hearing and how they could make submissions and become involved in campaigning activity.

Local priorities - resident's views

Cllr Wallage explained that the Parish Council was keen to hear residents' views about issues of importance to the community to inform the Council's priorities.

Resident's views were sought about demand and frequency of sessions delivered by Citizens Advice in light of a request for a significantly higher level of funding from the Parish Council. A MoP suggested these should be reduced to monthly.

Other topics raised included the potential demand for councillor surgeries and environmental issues. The latter topic raised particular concerns about "fly tipping" and dog fouling in the area adjacent to the traveller's site on Adventure Lane. This provoked strong debate among MoP's and councillors about the identity of the perpetrators, the need for preventative action and role of Neighbourhood Wardens.

Cllr Gilbank introduced issues relating to Village Green and Community Association funding, questioning the position of the Parish Council on these topics.

When challenged by a member of the public why he was asking questions about the Parish Council when he was a serving councillor, Cllr Gilbank advised he was in attendance as a MoP.

The Chairman advised Cllr Gilbank, as he was already well aware, the Parish Council had very recently approved a grants and donations policy. Pending the development and approval of this policy applications for funding were not being considered. The new policy was to be publicised shortly and any community group would be welcome to apply for funding.

In relation to village green, the Chair reminded Cllr Gilbank these matters were the subject of ongoing discussions at Parish Council and a definitive position could not be provided at the Annual Parish Meeting.

The Parish Clerk re-iterated this position. Demonstrably unhappy with this viewpoint, Cllr Gilbank made several comments to fellow parish councillors and members of the public which could be deemed unnecessary and inappropriate. His associated behaviour may have been regarded as aggressive, disrespectful and intimidatory.

An intervention by the Parish Clerk advising Cllr Gilbank that his comments were out of order went unheeded. Cllr Clifford proposed that Cllr Gilbank be asked to leave the meeting. This was greatly supported by members of the public, some of whom had already begun to disperse. As no further issues were raised, the Chair thanked everyone for attending and the meeting came to a close at 20.50 hrs.

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