

# COTHERSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held via video conference on Wednesday 9 September 2020 at 7.00pm

In attendance:	Cllr John Birkett (Chair), Cllr Vince Bendin, Cllr Richard Hunter, Cllr Richard Green, Cllr Jenny Watson and Cllr Tim Sabey
Public:	Two local electors (one to item 5 only)
Press:	No press were present
Clerk:	Judith Mashiter
<b>1. Approval of apologies for absence</b>	All councillors were present.
<b>2. Declaration of interests</b>	None.
<b>3. Requests for dispensations</b>	No requests had been received.
<b>4. Minutes</b>	Draft minutes (paper 090920-1) had been circulated. <i>It was resolved that the minutes of the Meeting held 8 July 2020 are an accurate record.</i>
<b>5. Public participation</b>	<p>Joy Collyer, speaking for Cotherstone Methodist Chapel, provided an update on the possible future use of the Chapel, which closed on 31 August. A new Superintendent minister Rev Tim Boocock and new minister Rev Graham Cutler are keen in supporting any community project in Cotherstone. The interim Superintendent Minister, Rev John Howard, had met with former Community Shop/Post Office steering group members to explore either marketing the chapel building for sale or renting it out, although it had been identified that charity law might be somewhat inflexible and restrictive. Joy has just yesterday been advised that a slight shift in emphasis of Methodist Church policy in that, instead of selling redundant property, it is now more interested in exploring creative and innovative community uses. Rev Boocock has been involved with a similar community project in Leeds. If a trust was to be established to operate a community shop/café then it would be likely that a Public Works Loan would not be required as it could rent the premises on very favourable terms, following negotiation on the building renovation work, ongoing maintenance. Rev Boocock is keen to visit the village and premises and meet with church property stewards and then possibly met with a project group. Joy (and Peter) Collyer has met with Chris Tarpey and Paul Hunt and reports that the 'old steering group' is confident that there is sufficient interest to take a project forward. Joy stressed that the project would comprise only a community shop and café and so it would not conflict with or duplicate the work of the village hall in any way.</p> <p>Cllr Bendin asked whether any new project group would wish to operate under the auspices of the Parish Council and build on the initial work done with the Plunkett Foundation. Joy explained that the vision is for an independent trust to be formed, hopefully with the blessing of the Parish Council, and seeking advice from Plunkett Foundation and funding from other bodies. Joy suggested that Cllr Bendin might be interested in joining the project group either as a representative of the Parish Council or as a private individual. Chris Tarpey mentioned that a change of use planning permission would be required and hoped that the Parish Council would support this. Cllr Birkett explained that any such application would be dealt with through the usual process.</p> <p>Cllr Birkett thanked Joy Collyer for keeping the Council updated.</p>
<b>6. Update on progress of actions and resolutions</b>	<p>Paper 090920-2, an action log updated 2 September 2020, had been circulated. Following discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• B6277 road surface — agreed that Clerk seek confirmation of the schedule for the works and a response to the Parish Council's request about letter drop, minimising parking disruption etc.</li><li>• Safety equipment — Clerk confirmed that no information forthcoming from Durham County Council or Cllr Richard Bell, despite further chasing.</li><li>• Tree inspection — work outstanding is outside Hagg House, as there is a pigeon nest currently preventing this.</li></ul>
<b>7. Finance</b>	<p>Paper 090920-3 had been circulated.</p> <p><i>a. It was resolved to receive a bank reconciliation at 28 August 2020.</i></p> <p><i>b. It was resolved to note a payment of £102 to Butler &amp; Gee, made on 29 July.</i></p>

- c. *It was resolved to note receipts since the last meeting, and to 'ringfence' the £10,000 Small Business Rates grant from Durham County Council and consider in January 2021 how best to use the funds (rather than just keep it in reserves).*
- d. *It was resolved to note the agreed national pay increase of 2.75% and agree that this be applied to the Clerk's salary, backdated to 1 April 2020.*
- e. *It was resolved to authorise payments due as listed, with the addition of £240 to C A Stamp Grounds and Agriculture for grass cutting at the cemetery and £150 to Robert Thompson for stone wall repairs at the cemetery.*

## 8. Correspondence

Paper 090920-4 had been circulated (interim updates had been circulated on 10, 17, 24 and 31 July and 7, 14, 21 and 28 August) and there were no requests for further information.

- Item 77 — Clerk expressed a benefit in keeping up to date with training, especially as it would only cost this Council £7.50 plus two hours of time and participation could give advance notice of forthcoming issues facing councils. Agreed that Clerk should attend this.
- Item 109 — Agreed to share costs of Clerk attending SLCC Virtual National Conference.
- Item 114 — Agreed that a link to Durham County Council Trading Standards Facebook page be placed on the Parish Council website.

## 9. Planning matters

Paper 090920-5 had been circulated

- a. *It was resolved to note the Parish Council's response to applications DM/20/01785/FPA (Booze Wood), DM/20/01816/FPA (Springbank) and DM/20/01882/FPA (The Coach House).*
- b. *It was resolved to note a summary of planning applications since July 2019.*

## 10. Cemetery matters

Clerk reported that two Exclusive Rights of Burial had been sold since the last meeting. No other cemeteries matters were raised.

## 11. Allotment matters

- a. Clerk reported that responses had been received from 21 of the 22 residents contacted as part of the review. Agreed that Frazer Davies be deleted from the waiting list as he has left the village. A few changes of wishes were indicated.

*It was resolved to offer the following changes to allotment tenancies from 1 January 2021:*

- *Klondike Plot 8a be offered to Mr & Mrs Machin (and if they don't want this, then it be offered to Sarah Last);*
- *Klondike Plot 1 be formally split (but with an invisible boundary) between John Tayler and Mike Sharp;*
- *The Close Plot 1 be formally split (but with an invisible boundary) between Rachel Markham and Gavin Butterfield;*
- *No change possible at The Close Plots 2a and 2b*
- *Sarah Last be advised that she is now at the top of the waiting list, and that it is anticipated that a plot at The Close will become vacant during 2021.*
- *If Sol Skriabin makes an approach to the council and is willing to put in the considerable effort to bring Klondike Plot 0 into cultivation, then this be offered to him.*

- b. No other allotment matters were raised.

## 12. Noticeboard

Paper 090920-6 had been circulated.

Councillors were interested in a quotation from Michael Thompson, being locally based and keen, but they would like to see examples of his work. It was noted that advanced technical skills are needed to make waterproof sealed unit cabinets. Although the quotation from Michael Thompson was an attractive price, councillors expressed concern about ongoing maintenance requirements of a mahogany structure and preferred a low maintenance option. *It was resolved to purchase an aluminium Classic range noticeboard from The Parish Noticeboard Company, at £670, if the dimensions and design were agreeable to the landowner, North Star Housing.*

## 13. Parish Council website

Paper 090920-7 had been circulated, as had a link to a development website.

Clerk thanked councillors for feedback already received on a potential new design and emphasised that any website can be a constantly evolving thing. Councillors were asked whether they wished the website to be purely a Parish Council website, or a wider community-centred website. If heritage-related text, images and maps are to be included, and links to local organisations and businesses provided, and a photo gallery retained, then there is a need for one or more councillors to be given the authority to review, curate and edit that material and provide any new material. Cllr Hunter expressed concern that the website should/must maintain a depository of archive material and hoped that the 'softer' information about the village be retained. Cllr Sabey suggested that the design/content be modified to make

the feel less 'corporate or sterile'. It was agreed to schedule a regular review of content and keep the number of external links to a minimum. Cllr Hunter volunteered to take on the task of reviewing content for inclusion in the new website and he'll ask for help as and when he needs it. Cllr Bendin offered to circulate links to two parish council websites which were held up as good examples in the recent training he attended, as these might stimulate ideas for the Cotherstone site. In the meantime, to create breathing space, Clerk will ensure that the 'old site' is not deleted, as all the content must be archived for possible future use, even if the 'old site' is hidden in some way from the public. *It was resolved to 'park' the old website and keep it for file/content extraction and to move forward with the new site as the one which is updated with council papers etc.* Cllrs Birkett and Hunter expressed frustration that very small councils are being forced to comply with these onerous regulations in the same way as large, well-resourced councils.

#### **14. Cotherstone Community Celebration**

No progress to report or actions to take.

#### **15. Community-run shop/post office**

Councillors agreed that the update (at agenda item 5) was a significant surprise.

*It was resolved that the Parish Council notes that an independent project group/trust will be established, and it will convey its best wishes to that group, asking to be kept apprised of progress as appropriate and offering to the group:*

- *At an appropriate time, to contact all those on the Parish Council's database of interested volunteers, asking them to contact the new project group if they wish to reaffirm their interest;*
- *A summary (reiteration) of the results of the consultation survey carried out by the Parish Council; and*
- *The transfer of all contact details and accumulated guidance and other materials obtained through the Parish Council's work with the Plunkett Foundation.*

*but that the Parish Council should, at this time, decline any invitation to have a representative on any project group/trust (although noting that any councillor could do this as a private individual).*

Cllr Watson reported that the Village Hall has been approached to provide a venue for a post office outreach service provided by the Barnard Castle postmaster and is in contact with Post Office Limited to progress this.

Cllr Bendin suggested that the short-term measures put in place since the shop closure ('bare essentials' from the Fox and Hounds, and newspaper deliveries from G&J Newsagency in Middleton) are definitely helping and that if a post office provision was hosted at the Village Hall, and a community shop and café established at the former chapel, then this could work well.

#### **16. Reports from councillors**

- Cllr Hunter reported that he has received 34 Geographic Information System maps from Durham County Council to check, after which the Neighbourhood Plan will be 99.9% complete, and just awaiting advice on how, in the current pandemic circumstances, the final community consultation can be conducted. Cllr Birkett questioned whether proposed new planning regulations might impact or even make redundant Neighbourhood Plans. Cllr Hunter regretted that he could offer no further information or reassurance on this.
- Cllr Bendin reported on the three online councillor training sessions he'd attended. He will circulate Powerpoint slides/notes to all councillors hoping they might be useful, especially the session he found most useful – about community engagement. Cllr Bendin had reflected that although a small council, compared with many others attending the course, Cotherstone is more compliant than most in following procedures and that having a good Clerk is key to this. Cllr Bendin recommended the method of training (online) as both cost effective and productive.
- Cllr Bendin reported that the damaged gate at the top of the Hagg steps still awaits repair, but that he will follow up on this with Durham County Council.
- Councillors agreed that the efforts of organisations, businesses and many, many individuals should be acknowledged for their help during the past difficult months of coronavirus restrictions.
- Cllr Watson reported that the 'no parking' sign from East Green needs repairing; Cllr Green will attend to this.

Meeting closed: 8.52pm