

PRUDHOE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of Ordinary Meeting held in The Spetchells Centre at 7:00pm, 29th June 2016

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs J McGee (Chair), Cllr E Dobson, Cllr B Futers, Cllr G McCreedy, Cllr Ms J Rose, Cllr A Reid, Cllr G Price, Cllr E Burt

Arrived at 7pm following Planning Training; Cllr A Gill, Cllr Mrs C Cuthbert, Cllr A Piper, Cllr N McGee, Cllr G Simpson, County Cllr Mrs A Dale

1617/021 NCC Planning Training Bart Milburn (Major Development and Delivery Manager)
See Appendix 1 for presentation used in training.

1617/022 Apologies for Absence – none received

1617/023 Declarations of Interest – none received

Cllr Mrs J McGee took the opportunity to express what a great day had been enjoyed at Highfield Fest and thanked the staff and those Cllrs who spent a large part of the day on car parking for their efforts. Cllr Mrs J McGee declared that 'The Fest' gets better each year.

Cllr Mrs J McGee declared that County Cllr Mrs Anne Dale had asked for the opportunity to address the meeting on the issue of grass cutting, an item on the agenda. Cllr Mrs J McGee stated that she would welcome County Cllr Mrs Dales' input prior to the main business of the meeting.

Cllr Mrs Dale described that she was presently working with the landowners of land adjacent to Mickley First School, on the western boundary with reference to grass cutting, this was on-going. In respect to the landscape in front of the new development at Mickley, Leah Gardens, Cllr Mrs Dale explained that part of the area is being encouraged for wildlife, foraging and bees but she had raised concerns regarding the grass further along from this, travelling eastwards. Cllr Mrs Dale assured that she was working with the housing company as to how this area would be managed as presently it looked unsightly.

Cllr Futers responded that he had requested that grass cutting be placed on the agenda and he was pleased to hear that Cllr Mrs Dale was working with the housing developer at Mickley as it did indeed look a disgrace.

1617/024 Standing Order 36

Cllr Mrs J McGee proposed to suspend Standing Orders to allow the adoption of revised Standing Orders to those adopted the previous month. **It was AGREED** to suspend Standing Orders.

1617/025 Standing Orders of Council

It was AGREED to receive the Standing Orders of the Council (adopted May 2016) including amendments 33 and 78 and to ADOPT these as the Council's Standing Orders.

1617/026 Financial Regulations and Responsible Financial Officer

It was AGREED to receive the report and recommendations of the meeting of the Financial Regulations Working Group, held on 16th May 2016

It was AGREED to consider the appointment of Mrs S Eden as Responsible Financial Officer for 2016-17 in camera at the end of the meeting

It was AGREED to agree to adopt the Financial Regulations (as amended) May 2016, subject to the outcome of item 6b) above

1617/027 Financial and Management Risk Assessment

It was AGREED to receive the Financial and Management Risk Assessment (FMRA) and to investigate how this is carried out in other 'like' councils with a view to a less complex document.

The Clerk addressed the meeting advised the following:

- The FMRA should be revisited when new council in place in May 2017
- To convene a group of Councillors to look at an updated business continuity plan
- Set up an audit group to focus on planning at different times of the year
- To revise all terms of reference for groups and committees of the council

Cllr Mrs J McGee thanked the clerk for the work he had carried out.

1617/028 Annual Return

It was AGREED to contact the External Auditor to request an extension to the Council's 2016/17 Annual Return submission. **It was AGREED** to ask if the deadline could be extended until 15th July. **It was also AGREED** that the Planning, Contract and Works Committee would be declared an extra-ordinary meeting to allow the Annual Return to be received and approved for submission at this time. Cllr Mrs J McGee explained that the reason the Annual Return had not been completed was due to the Clerk being absent due to sickness, this was confirmed by the clerk. .

1617/029 Minutes of Annual General Meeting, held on 25th May 2016

It was AGREED to receive the minutes as a true record.

Proposed: Cllr G Simpson

Seconded: Cllr Mrs E Burt

1617/030 Matters Arising

1617/005 Cllr Futers raised that he had resigned from the Planning, Contract and Works Committee following to Annual General Meeting last month but he was given to understand that his resignation and subsequent appointment of a new member would be taken at the next Ordinary Meeting (*see 1617/1001 of Planning, Contract and Works Committee, apologies for absence*). Cllr Futers questioned when his resignation would be made official and a new member appointed, as it was not on the present agenda as expected.

Cllr Mrs J McGee explained that at the Planning, Contract and Works Committee meeting in June it was agreed that there would be a review of the remit of the committee over the coming months. Cllr Futers replied that there was still a vacancy that should be filled and a review of the remit was immaterial. Cllr Mrs J McGee stated that the review would take a couple of months and it was discussed that the number of members would also be reviewed, in which case if membership may be reduced, there seemed little point appointing a tenth Cllr.

Cllr Gill responded that he was not sure he agreed with the course of action, stating that if a review of the remit was going to take a couple of months, followed by the remit being agreed by full council, surely the remit and membership as stands now should be followed and therefore someone appointed. Cllr Mrs E Burt stated that although she is no longer a member of the Planning, Contract and Works Committee, she did attend the meeting and it was clear that the number of Cllrs on the committee was the greatest concern. Cllr Mrs J McGee asked Cllr Simpson to respond as Chair of the Planning, Contract and Works Committee.

Cllr Simpson asked if the appointment of another member should have been on the agenda tonight. Cllr Gill agreed stating again that until a decision is made the number of Cllrs on the

1617/033 Local Government Transparency Code: Consultation

It was AGREED to receive the consultation.

Cllr Mrs Burt stated that the town council already comply with the code as everything is published on the website, adding that the town council has nothing to hide and the information should be in the public domain.

1617/034 Prudhoe Town Council: Social Media

Cllr Mrs J McGee proposed that members consider investigating the possibility of setting up a dedicated Council Facebook page. Cllr Mrs McGee stated that the council already has a website that people use but that many do not understand the work of the council and what is done, especially for events, although acknowledged that there are dedicated Facebook pages for Highfield Fest and the Kite Festival. Cllr Gill asked if Cllrs Mrs J McGee was suggesting the website did not work. Cllr Mrs McGee responded that if the council had its own Facebook Page, everything could be put together, it could be a page for the community and the council could use it to get important messages out, like recent correspondence from Northumbrian Water. Cllr Mrs McGee asked for a seconder to the proposal and a group of Cllrs willing to take this forward.

Cllr Futers warned against the dangers of social media and described a company he was aware of receiving nothing but negative comments on Facebook. Cllr Futers asked who would respond to comments and if this would be timely as Facebook can be accessed at anytime and response rates are published. Cllr Gill stated he was against the idea of Facebook as the council already received criticism on Facebook, even without its own page.

Cllr Mrs Burt said she could argue for both sides but would be happy to second the proposal in order for this to be investigated as well as to look into what the impact would be.

Cllr Dobson stated that he used to be on Facebook but came off as he did not like it, but that he would be happy to be on a group.

Cllr Piper said he agreed that the council needed to get the message out as to what it does, as often it was stated that 'Prudhoe Town Council do nothing'. Cllr Reid agreed that the council were slow to get off the ground with the website and the same could be said of Facebook.

It was AGREED that Cllr Mrs J McGee, Cllr Mrs N McGee and Cllr Dobson would convene a meeting to look into the council having a Facebook page.

1617/035 Northumbrian Water Limited (NWL)

It was AGREED to receive the report of the meeting held on 15th June 2016

Cllr Mrs J McGee commented that it was a very informative meeting that saw the council receiving information as well as having questions answered. Cllr Mrs C Cuthbert asked if NWL had been supplied with the list of schools and other local stakeholders. The clerk responded that this has not been done yet.

1617/036 Northumberland Association of Local Councils

It was AGREED to receive the report of meeting with Stephen Rickitt (Chief Officer, NALC) held on 13th June 2016

Cllr Mrs J McGee explained that members had been notified that the meeting was taking place, to go through issues identified by the town council, with reference to conduct at council meetings. Cllr Mrs McGee continued that Mr Rickitt was keen to hear from local councils and would be

happy to give training if necessary, and that she and the clerk had attended a recent training session in Wylam that was very good. Cllr Mrs Burt commented that it is always good to have a different opinion and in view of the suggestion that the council consider rejoining NERO this should be added to the next agenda.

Cllr Reid expressed that it is very interesting to read the opinions of Stephen Rickett and it was important to establish these things. Cllr Reid went on to say that there was no doubt that the previous meeting was not the council's finest hour and given what was forwarded would draw attention to paragraph 5.28 of *Knowles on Local Authority Meetings*, that officers cannot take part in debate.

Cllr McCreedy acknowledged that an email had been sent out notifying that the meeting was taking place, but suggested that it would have been helpful and he would have felt easier knowing the reason for the meeting and for what advice was being sought. Cllr Mrs Burt accepted this but stated that the council had previously agreed to the 'Human Resources' Committee seeking further guidance on the subjects given. Cllr Mrs Cuthbert responded that she thought the meeting was arranged to seek advice following the Annual General Meeting, this was not a Human Resources Committee meeting. Cllr Mrs J McGee responded that it arranged with regard to both.

1617/037 Grass Cutting and Weeds in Prudhoe

The item was placed on the agenda by Cllr Futers who addressed the meeting. Cllr Futers declared that he did not expect he was the only Cllr to have received complaints about poor grass cutting and rampant weeds. With reference to weed-killing, Cllr Futers reported that along with other Cllrs, he had received an email from the Administrator noting that this would be done again as had not worked, however the issue of grass-cutting remained. Cllr Futers described that the problem was 2-fold; long, unsightly grass and increased dog fouling. Cllr Futers reminded Cllrs of the health and safety issues surrounding dog faeces, explaining that children would be playing in these areas where grass is being left uncut for too long a period of time. Cllr Futers proposed that the council write to NCC to request grass-cutting schedules for both paid-for contracted work and statutory cuts. Cllr Futers exclaimed that it was very unlikely that cuts not achieved due to weather or equipment would be put back in and that the previous year there were fewer cuts than contracted for, for which the council could have demanded a refund. Cllr Futers ended by stating that the town looks terrible and residents in his ward were questioning what he was going to do about it.

The clerk responded that the council has already asked for a schedule and that he would be chasing up details of the cuts carried out under contract. The clerk advised that although he believed it unlikely that the county council would provide a schedule of statutory cuts, they had been informed that this was every 3 weeks. With respect to contracted cuts, this was a priority as NCC does not wish to be in a position of having to reduce contract charges due to cuts not being carried out; however the town council could expect to be informed post-cut with a view to comparing against number of cuts specified.

Cllr McCreedy reported that it was not just frequency of grass-cutting that was an issue; the standard of grass-cutting was very poor on Western Avenue and Kepwell Road. Cllr Mrs Burt responded that she had spoken with the Team Leader for Prudhoe about this particular area and he agreed it was poorly done and that he would speak to staff. Cllr Mrs Burt described that it was also worth noting that sign lines are also prioritised for obvious health and safety reasons and as such staff could be pulled away from other grass-cutting jobs. Cllr Mrs Burt concluded that with

reference to Western Avenue it was a more difficult area to cut due to the layout and there was a lot of green space.

Cllr Reid offered that he had cut his grass last Monday and it was due to be cut again. With respect to local councils, Cllr Reid blamed financial cuts, explaining that a lot of money had been spent on equipment but that there was not the workforce to cut more frequently. Cllr Reid added that West Wylam Bank was presently about 10 inches high, but that it was unlikely to be cut over the next few days due to the weather. Cllr Reid stated that it was understandable that residents feel upset as they look after their own premises and garden and then look out of the window and it is in a terrible state, but what was the answer.

Cllr Mrs N McGee explained that everyone around the table and further afield was aware of the cuts imposed on local government and that spending is prioritised elsewhere. Cllr Mrs N McGee asked if the town council could consider taking this on in the future. Cllr Mrs N McGee ended by stating that when she travels to Morpeth, she never notices long grass; that it is always cut to perfection.

Cllr Mrs Cuthbert accepted the statement by Cllr Reid that residents keep their properties nice but declared that the town council also invests a considerable sum of money on floral bedding and the environment that is completely detracted from by very poorly cut grass.

It was AGREED to write to NCC to express concerns about grass-cutting and to add the matter to the agenda for the next meeting of the Prudhoe Neighbourhood Management Group.

1617/038 Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy: Pre-Submission Draft - Proposed Major Modifications Consultation

Cllr Mrs J McGee accepted that none of the major modifications survey related to Prudhoe, but she asked members to consider writing to NCC Planning with the following:

ADD JENNIFER'S NOTES

Cllr Mrs McGee also urged that the council be very clear that it wishes to be informed of when the Planning Inspector will visit the site and surrounding areas and that the Town Council expect to attend. Cllr Futers agreed entirely but warned that although he was permitted to attend the site visit at Prudhoe Hospital, he was not permitted the opportunity to speak or ask questions.

Cllr McCreedy asked if the council had the necessary expertise to challenge any planning decisions made with regard to the site and suggested that the council may be wiser to invest money in employing an expert, in view of the vociferous objections from the community.

Cllr Reid expressed that he believed the contributions from fellow town Cllrs were first class but would not object if the view of the council was to seek expert advice.

Cllr Mrs Burt agreed that it would be useful to have use of an expert and suggested this should be explored sooner rather than later.

Cllr Simpson claimed he was very frustrated with the result as felt that it was a very well argued objection to the land being removed from Greenbelt, adding that a new person may struggle to make a better case. Cllr Simpson also expressed discomfort at Prudhoe being classified with Haltwhistle, a much smaller town. Cllr Simpson made clear that this was with no disrespect to

Haltwhistle but he did take offence of the continued sniping at Prudhoe as a secondary town with fewer services.

Cllr Mrs J McGee proposed that as well as looking into the services of an expert, the council hold a Civic and Community Forum to ensure the community are informed about the future of Highfield and making it clear the town council would fight its removal from the Greenbelt.

1617/039 Northumberland County Council 'Market Towns Initiative'

It was AGREED to receive the letter from Cllr Grant Davey, Leader NCC

Cllr Mrs Burt stated that Cllrs may questions why Prudhoe is not listed but explained that other than The East Youth Centre, they do not own any other building or land. Cllr Futers argued that there would be other land in the town owned by NCC and there were certainly other buildings.

Cllr Reid stated that although NCC do own buildings in the town: Waterworld, The Fuse, Police and Fire station and Schools, that these are all functioning and not an investment opportunity like those empty buildings around the county due to the demise of District Councils.

1617/040 Reports from outside bodies

Prudhoe Community Partnership – Cllr Mrs Burt reported that all the documents had been signed with regard to the 'Live above a Shop Scheme' and the money had been transferred to ISOS Housing. Cllr Mrs Burt described that hopefully the site would quickly start to look better and they would be able to attract two new shops to the town. Cllr McCreedy asked what the timescale for completed was. Cllr Mrs Burt responded that the project was expected to be complete within 12 months. Hopefully the site will look a lot better and we can attract some shops. GM – timescale is twelve months. Cllr Mrs Burt also reported that the Centre Manager's role had been offered following four candidates being interviewed the previous day. It was expected that this would start work quite quickly allowing a handover with Karen who leaves work at the end of July.

Northumberland County Council – Cllr Reid reported no meetings due to the EU Referendum. With respect to the decision, Cllr Reid reported that statements had already been issued that council tax would increase to accommodate increases in the cost of pension schemes as a direct result of leaving the EU.

Town and Parish Council Liaison Group – Cllr Dobson reported that the rural element of devolution has now been accepted. There was a presentation on the council's three year plan and with reference to the 2% increase in council tax to supplement spending on adult social care, this has been swallowed up by the National Minimum Wage increase, furthermore the Revenue Support Grant from Central Government will also cease. Cllr Dobson explained that this prompted discussion on what services NCC would be able to provide in the future, with the feeling that environmental services and community support would be most vulnerable. In view of this it was agreed there should be combined discussion with other town and parish councils as to how this would be managed.

Ovingham Bridge Liaison Group – Cllr Price stated that concerns have been raised about a further delay to the completion of Ovingham Bridge due to procurement problems identified in the painting contract. Cllr Price declared that the town council has never placed the issue of Ovingham Bridge on its agenda, despite the outcry of public feeling on delays and the impact of its closure on the community. Cllr Price went on to say that when residents are questioning what it is that Prudhoe Town Council does; this is certainly something where there has been a noticeable

lack of something. Cllr Price acknowledged that the Senior Engineer who attends the bridge meetings is not in a position to answer questions about delays and should not be expected to; this is the remit of the Project Manager. Cllr Price stated that Doreen Jordon of Ovingham has suggested that NCC answer questions about the management of this project and he proposed to add Ovingham Bridge to the next agenda and support this proposition. Cllr Price asked why the town council had not raised concerns about progress and the level of management, stating that it had left itself open to criticism. Finally Cllr Price stated that at the very least this should be put onto an agenda and the council should write a letter to ask about the procurement factors, the whole approach has been piecemeal rather than project managed. Cllr Futers agreed, explaining that delays should have been input in order to manage the project.

Cllr Simpson asked why the council could not just send a letter as these concerns have all been raised before and Cllrs have expressed how they feel about the delays. Cllr Simpson added that if Cllrs have further questions then fair enough, but the council should just send the letter.

Cllr Reid accepted that the town council is a free-standing organisation able to write to whomever they choose, however he had seen the emails and felt the authors were 'shooting from the hip'. Cllr Reid defended that the delays with respect to painting were not the fault of NCC but those submitting tenders. Cllr Price responded that the delay factors were considerable and such a late request for tenders for painting has caused this further delay; had procurement begun earlier these issues could have been sorted out.

Cllr Mrs J McGee asked Cllrs to be clear what they wished the clerk to write to NCC about. Cllr Simpson stated delays, procurement and anticipation of needs. Cllr Price added why there has been no critical path factor as to what needed to be done and the project has been carried out piecemeal.

1617/041 Correspondence and Publications

- 1. It was AGREED** to send one officer and one Cllr to the Finance training on 8th September in Peterlee. Cllr Price volunteered.
- 2. It was AGREED** to receive the Caring for Rothbury Action Group email.
- 3. It was AGREED** to receive the Tyne Valley Flooding Review and indicate interest in being involved.
- 4. It was AGREED** to receive the information regarding disable parking in Prudhoe. Cllr McCreedy noted that three bays had been put in at Oakland's car park. Cllr Mrs J McGee thanked Cllr Piper bringing this issue to the forefront.
- 5. It was AGREED** to receive the email from NCC relating to the reduced opening hours of civic amenity sites and to note that Prudhoe was not included. Cllr Mrs Burt advised that there was a deliberate policy not to close sites but to save money by reducing opening hours.
- 6. It was AGREED** to receive the email from Sergeant Gary Simpson on the New Policing Model and to ensure attendance of Northumbrian Police at the next Prudhoe Neighbourhood Management Meeting.
- 7. It was AGREED** to receive the letter from the Land of Oak and Iron. Cllr Reid expressed that it would be wise to wait until the autumn to invite the group to update the council; this was **AGREED**.
- 8. It was AGREED** to receive the email from Wylam Parish Council.

PRUDHOE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of Ordinary Meeting held in The Spetchells Centre at 7:00pm, 29th June 2016

9. It was **AGREED** to receive the email from Prudhoe resident regarding speeding in Prudhoe and to add this to the next meeting agenda. It was also **AGREED** to ensure all further emails were received as correspondence.

To approve a motion, that in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the press and public be excluded for consideration of the following item, in accordance with Section 68 of the Council's Standing Orders:-

Agreed