

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of  
Elsdon Parish Council held  
on Thursday 14 May, 2020**

***Due to the Coronavirus emergency and social distancing imposed the meeting was conducted via video link between the recorded attendees.***

**Present:** Councillors Simmance, Maddison, Morgan and Graham. Clerk Martin Chilvers. Cllrs Bolam and France. Paul Cowie.

**Apologies:** There were apologies from Cllr Renton.

**Election of Officers for 2020-21**

Cllr Simmance was nominated for Chair by Cllr Graham and seconded by Cllr Morgan

Cllr Graham was nominated for Vice Chair by Cllr Simmance and seconded by Cllr Madison

**Summary of the year's activity and questions (Chair Cllr Simmance):**

For this year's Chair's report I have blocked items under subject headings.

**ROADS**

The state of the roads and issues of road safety in and around Elsdon have as usual occupied much of our attention during this last year.

1. There has been some progress with the repair of the many potholes that seem to spring up overnight but there are still places requiring urgent attention. Key to quick repair is the increasing willingness of local residents to report them to NCC using its online system.
2. A continuing problem is the regular flooding at the bottom of Soppit Lane. Flood signs have now been placed to warn drivers and a plan to repair the collapsed under-road drainage pipe was drawn up in January. To date, nothing has been done and the Parish Council will continue to urge NCC to undertake this work as soon as possible.
3. Councillors are regularly communicating with NCC and Cllr Bridgett regarding the installation of bollards alongside the road between the north and mill bridges. NCC is aware of the dangers of the narrow road at that entrance to the village and it is hoped that increased safety measures will be put in place this year.
4. The Parish Council has requested this as part of the 2020-21 Local Transport Plan Programme, as well as the resurfacing of particular bad areas on the Gibbet Road and the repair of potholes on the road that goes behind St Cuthbert's Church.
5. The Parish Council worked with NCC and Galliford Try to have a new street light fitted near Crown Farm. This has helped illuminate the road from there towards the pub where there are no footpaths and make the route safer for pedestrians.
6. Councillors and residents were all shocked to hear about Mr Cowie's bad accident when attempting to assist a lorry driver who had got his vehicle stuck in the narrow, tight corner at Raylees Farmhouse. Everyone is delighted to see he has made a full recovery. As a direct consequence the Parish Council worked with NCC to ensure improved warning signs were put in place to inform drivers of larger vehicles they should not attempt the road. Unfortunately satnavs do not always differentiate between the shortest route and the most advisable route for HGVs but hopefully this new signage will have reduced the number of inappropriate vehicles using Knightside.

**FUNDING**

Over the past few years there have been a number of successful funding applications for projects in Elsdon; this year has been no exception.

1. A new circular tree seat has been installed around the large tree on the Green It was designed and constructed by Ochiltree in Acomb. We are grateful to both Revitalising Redesdale and Northumberland National Park for the funding to pay for this project.
2. St Cuthbert's Church has received funding from both the Green Rigg and Ray Windfarm funds via the Community Foundation and from Landmarc for grass maintenance equipment to keep the churchyard tidy and to preserve wildflower areas in both the churchyard and the burial ground behind the Tower.

There are also three ongoing projects for which funding will be required:

**1. Protection of the Edges of the Village Green**

- Meetings have been held with a number of contractors to determine the best solution and costs for Village Green protection. A detailed application for funding has recently been made to the Ray Windfarm Fund.
- As it is clearly a major and expensive project, it is not expected for it to be completed within the next year but, in the long term, it will not only protect the edges of the Village Green in key locations but also help to make the Green look neat and tidy for the benefit of residents and visitors.

**2. Brown Tourist Signs**

- The Parish Council has had a series of discussions with representatives from NCC to determine which road signage can be updated and replaced with neater and more appropriate signage in the village.
- The Parish Council is also looking at the installation of a number of brown tourist signs to help 'advertise' Elsdon and what the parish has to offer visitors to the area. To this end, NCC has drawn up plans which Councillors have approved.
- The Parish Council has received a number of quotes for the brown tourist signs and a detailed funding application has recently been submitted to the Ray Windfarm Fund.  
It is hoped that there will be a start made to one or both these projects during the coming year, dependent on funding approval.

**3. Village Notice Board**

- It was disappointing to see one of the doors on the main village notice board by the Pinfold destroyed during recent windy weather.
- Cllr Morgan has undertaken research to determine options for replacing it with a sturdier one able to withstand typical Redesdale weather. It is hoped the Parish Council will be able to get funding to purchase a new one in the near future.

**VISITORS**

Councillors have welcomed a number of guest speakers during the year and thank the following for taking the time to address the Parish Council

- Duncan Hutt from the Northumberland Wildlife Trust regarding the Trust's purchase of Benshaw Moor, aka Benshaw Bog or Middle Hill
- Local residents John Bell and Tony Lawson regarding the Bikers' Convention held last October
- Local residents Nicola Tait and Tony Patrick about the proposed use of the closing bank balance of the Middle Hill Action Group Fund
- Duncan Wise from NNPA regarding Dark Skies and local funding available to residents for replacement external lighting.

**MISCELLANY**

- Councillors have considered five planning applications during the year, at East Todholes (agricultural building), The Croft (extension), BT (removal of phone box), the Village Hall (smart meter antenna) and Ray Estate (Elizabeth monument)
- A new litter bin has been installed near the Starmyers bridge together with a dog poo bag dispenser nearby in an effort to keep the village tidier. A second dispenser has been fitted to the external wall of the bus shelter.
- The plaque marking the site of the cockfighting pit on the Village Green has been cleaned and repainted by Elsdon Memorials and is now looking presentable.

- It is hoped that the Parish Council with the help of the National Park has persuaded BT that the phone box, even though it is rarely used, is essential for emergencies in the village given the often poor mobile signal and its proximity to the defibrillator. Repairs have been made to the phone and it is now operational again.
- Cllr Morgan represented the Parish Council at the opening of the new recycling centre at West Sleekburn where he continued the campaign for Elsdon to have a green waste collection. To date NCC have refused to agree to this, even with the recent closure of waste disposal centres, but the campaign continues!
- Working with NCC the Parish Council helped to ensure the footpath up from Liberty Farm through the new commercial forest plantation was maintained and appropriate gates were in place.
- The two main events on the Village Green were again a great success. The August Bank Holiday Fete saw fine weather and a good crowd. Equally the centre of the village was packed to see the fireworks on 5 November. Thanks to all those dedicated volunteers involved in the organisation and running of these events; without their efforts these two major community events just wouldn't happen.
- Thanks are also expressed to Billy Lewins and Archie Wright for clearing the bonfire area.
- The Parish Council agreed to make donations to Great North Air Ambulance and Community Action Northumberland during the past year.
- Information has been supplied to Ofgem regarding properties within the parish that are not connected to mains electricity. It is anyone's guess if and when that information is acted upon but at least they are aware of the issue.
- The Chair and Clerk attended a meeting in February for all Redesdale parishes with the Police and Crime Commissioner and local inspectors about rural crime. Thanks to the Clerk for arranging and hosting this.
- A new tree, a horse chestnut, has been planted on the village green to replace the diseased one which fell down a while ago. Thanks to Cliff Lamb for supplying and planting it and for reusing the metal tree protector from one of the other trees.
- Thanks are expressed to Cllr Renton for clearing barbed wire on the Mote Hills as well as clearing a drain outlet.
- Thanks are expressed to Cllr Graham for creating the Parish Council Facebook.
- Thanks to all who assisted the long overdue task of tidying and reorganising the parish filing cabinets in the Village Hall
- After careful consideration the decision was made to maintain the precept at £1,525

### **COVID-19**

I can't finish without referring to the current situation. It has sadly meant the closure of St Cuthbert's Church, the Village Hall, the Bird in Bush and the Impromptu Cafe, all vital to the life and welfare of our community. Church services, the Tea Set, Film Club, table tennis, coffee mornings and physical PC, PCC & Village Hall committee meetings have all been put on hold. This pandemic has also unsurprisingly resulted in the cancellation of this year's Fete.

The current lockdown, even with the recently-announced slight relaxation, is bound to affect us for months to come and even well into next year, until there is an effective vaccine to this virus.

In the meantime, I know there are many members of the community looking out for the more vulnerable in the parish and for that I, on behalf of us all, express my sincere gratitude. The vibrant community spirit evident amongst the residents of Elsdon will prevail and we'll come together even stronger when life is able to return to some semblance of normality.

### **THANKS**

Finally, thanks go to my fellow Councillors, Glen, Peter, Keith and David, for their dedication over the past 12 months. I would also like to thank Cllrs Sue Bolam and Chris France for their regular attendance, using their invaluable knowledge and experience to support and advise us.

Thanks are also expressed to Dr Paul Cowie who has represented Elsdon Parish Council on the Ray Windfarm CIC and provided valuable information on developments.

Thanks to Peter for representing Elsdon on the Revitalising Redesdale steering group and providing progress on the ongoing projects as well as highlighting upcoming events and Heritage Community Funding opportunities.

Finally I'm sure I speak for all of us in thanking Martin our Clerk for his continued sterling work on our behalf. Without him and his organisational expertise we would flounder hopelessly.

**Financial Report:**

The Clerk provided an update on the Parish Council finances. Opening balance on 1 April, 2019 was £4,221 and closing balance on 31 March, 2020 was £3,663.

Income was £4,147 that included £1,525 precept as well as £138 way-leave from Northern Powergrid, £2,000 grant from HLF Revitalising Redesdale and £380 grant from Northumberland National Park Authority.

Expenditure during the year totalled £4,705 including £802 Clerk's salary, £120 room hire, £280 Parish Insurance and £150 donations (£50 to Community Action Northumberland and £100 to the Great North Air Ambulance). Additionally there was expenditure of £2,750 for the purchase of the new tree seat, £150 for the repainting of the village green plaque and £250 for the purchase of a new litter bin.

**Reports from County Councillor and questions:** Cllr Bridgett was not in attendance.

**Any other business:**

There were no other matters raised.

Meeting closed at 7.25pm