

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of
Elsdon Parish Council held
on Thursday 20 May, 2022
at Elsdon Village Hall**

Present: Councillors Simmance, Morgan, Stuchfield and Renton. Clerk Martin Chilvers.

Apologies: There were apologies from Cllr Graham.

Election of Officers for 2021-22

Cllr Simmance was nominated for Chair by Cllr Morgan and seconded by Cllr Renton
Cllr Graham was nominated for Vice Chair by Cllr Simmance and seconded by Cllr Stuchfield

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

The past year will of course be remembered for the global pandemic, the impact of which has hit everywhere including our own rural area. One positive thing to come out of this difficult time is the strengthening of the community spirit for which Elsdon is renowned, with neighbours looking out for each other, and no doubt this will continue after life returns to some normality.

All Parish Council meetings during this year have been held remotely. Whilst it has in some ways been very convenient not to leave the comfort of one's own home, nevertheless I'm sure it will be beneficial to return to face-to-face meetings, especially as the technology for remote meetings has not always been 100% reliable.

ROADS

The state of the roads and issues of road safety in and around Elsdon have again featured heavily on the meeting agendas during the year. I can report progress on a number of concerns.

- Extensive works have been carried out to eliminate the flooding at the Soppit Lane junction on the B6341. There is still some work to be carried out before this project has been completed but already the drainage scheme has resulted in a much improved situation.
- Work to renew and rationalise council road signage in and around the village and to install new brown tourist signs, funded by a grant from the Ray Windfunds, has now been completed. As we emerge from the Covid restrictions it is hoped these will help encourage tourists to visit and stop in the village.
- The Parish Councillors were concerned about the broken fence along the burn past the bridge towards Billsmoor. With the assistance of Cllr Bridgett the County Council has made suitable repairs and installed bollards to help make the area safe again.
- The Parish Council has been communicating with the County Council to clear the blockage in Elsdon Burn under the Knightside bridge which is leading to regular flooding on the road outside Starmyres.
- The Parish Council has requested, in the 2021-22 Local Transport Plan Programme, for further resurfacing work to be carried out on a) the Gibbet Road, b) the road that loops around St Cuthbert's Church and c) the road between Crown Farm and Red Hall. Additionally the Parish Council is still seeking the completion of the white lining where recent resurfacing has been undertaken.
- Pot holes continue to blight local roads and the Parish Council and other local residents are continually reporting these to NCC. We are grateful that NCC does attend to the holes that are reported.
- The Parish Council is seeking assistance from the County Council to investigate and resolve the problem of a potentially dangerous hidden dip on the Billsmoor road out of Elsdon.
- During the recent roadworks on A696 at Monkridge, the Knightside road from the village to Raylees unfortunately, and despite more emphatic signage, became an unofficial diversion route for heavy traffic, due in part to blind obedience by drivers to satnavs. As a consequence this narrow road has

seen significant damage to the verges, the ditches and the road surface. The corner of the green at the Crown Farm crossroads also suffered significant damage and the Parish Council with Cllr Bridgett's assistance is seeking commitment from the County Council to make the necessary repairs as soon as possible. We trust that any future diversion on the A696 will not include Elsdon, as neither route south out of the village is suitable for heavy vehicles or substantial volumes of traffic.

FUNDING

During the past 12 months the Parish Council has been successful in applying for grants.

- As already mentioned, substantial funding was gratefully received from the Ray Windfunds for the purchase and installation of a number of brown tourist signs to advertise Elsdon's attractions and which were provided and installed by the County Council. This project has now been completed.
- Revitalising Redesdale granted a sum of £2,000 towards the purchase of a new noticeboard at the Pinfold.
- The Parish Council is expecting confirmation shortly for funding to install a plaque at the old bull baiting stone on the village green.

The Parish Council was unsuccessful in its application to the Ray Windfunds for village green protection but it is planned to submit a new application in the near future. We are still hopeful of funding assistance for a new project to install in St Cuthbert's a climate controlled cabinet for the Great War commemoration book gifted to the Parish, a frame to display a copy of the 1281 charter for an annual fair in Elsdon and a print of the 1840 map of Elsdon Parish, drawn by the then County Surveyor Thomas Arkle of High Carrick.

VILLAGE GREEN

- Repairs are promised to the damage caused to the village green at Crown Farm corner through the inappropriate diversion due to works on the A696.
- The damage caused by an oil tanker to the track to Whitehall, The Old Smithy and The Croft, has been repaired.
- BT Openreach recently removed branches of the tree at Crawford Crescent to avoid tangling of BT cables.
- The Parish Council has just received a quote for work to remove the ivy on the above mentioned tree that could possibly over time cause damage to the tree.

BUS SHELTER

- This year the Parish Council has been undertaking the redevelopment and upgrading of the bus shelter to make it more presentable and welcoming.
- Thanks are due to Cllr Graham for installing anti-bird nesting netting inside.
- The two front windows have recently been glazed and much of the woodwork has been repainted.
- A new bench has been built and installed inside the back wall.
- The old Pinfold noticeboard is being repaired and will be attached to an external wall.
- Additionally Revitalising Redesdale will be helping to make the shelter a 'village information hub' and will provide details at a forthcoming Parish Council meeting.
- Plans are being made with local stables for a horse tethering rail to be attached to the back wall of the shelter.

VISITORS

Although Parish Council meetings have been conducted remotely over the past 12 months, the Councillors have welcomed three guest speakers and thank them for taking the time to address the Parish Council

- Nick Lightfoot, Revitalising Redesdale, to provide progress report on the various projects and the impact of the pandemic lock-down.
- Duncan Hutt, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, regarding progress and plans for Benshaw Moor.
- Keith Maddison. After many years of excellent service to the Parish Council in various roles Keith decided it was time to retire. The Councillors could not let such service go unrewarded and made arrangements to award Keith the title of Honorary Freeman of Elsdon.

MISCELLANY

- The Parish Council welcomed Mark Stuchfield as a Parish Councillor following Keith Maddison's retirement.
- The Parish Council Facebook page, set up and maintained by Cllr Graham, already has over 60 followers.
- Councillors have considered 11 planning applications during the year. One of these was another attempt by BT to remove the phone box. Although it is appreciated that the phone is rarely used, it is a vital service standing as it does next to the defibrillator and is so important in an area where mobile phone reception is variable.
- Paul Cowie has represented the Parish Council at the Ray Windfunds CIC as a Director and thanks are expressed to him for his time spent on this work.
- Cllr Morgan has continued to represent the Parish Council on the Revitalising Redesdale Steering Group.
- During the recent month long diversion, it was noted that there were benefits of having the bus services re-routed through the village. There was a positive response from residents so enquiries have been made to NCC about the possibility of introducing the bus service on a permanent basis.
- Donations were made by the Parish Council to the Great North Air Ambulance and Community Action Northumberland during 2020.
- The Parish Council contributed to supplements for the food parcels provided by Age UK to help local residents during the pandemic.
- After careful consideration the Parish Councillors decided to keep the precept at the current level of £1,525.
- Sadly, due to Covid restrictions and concerns of residents about an influx of visitors, the Village Fete and November fireworks display did not take place in 2020. It is hoped these two events may be held this year but no decision has so far been made. New volunteers are however urgently required to assist on both events.
- Our thanks to Emma Anderson for producing her weekly online Redesdale and Three Kirks Newsletter.
- Finally on a lighter note, following the challenges over the past 12 months, the vandals who destroyed the Mote Hills information board were caught. At first it was believed to be the work of casual visitors to the village but one resident had noticed the culprits in action. It turns out it was a couple of rams taking out their frustrations on the board; it has now been repaired and fixed to the outside of the gate out of harm's way!

COVID-19

Life in the Parish, as outlined in last year's report, has continued to be restricted by the ongoing pandemic. As I write we are still in a position of semi-lockdown with only a recent gradual relaxation of the rules. Hopefully we will see a further opening up of society, a complete reopening of the village hall, St Cuthbert's, the Bird in Bush and the School House Café. It will also be very refreshing to see the reintroduction of

activities so important to the vibrant community spirit of the parish. Let's keep our fingers crossed we are over the worst and won't be faced with a new surge in Covid cases and a new lockdown.

THANKS

My thanks go to my fellow Councillors, for their dedication and support over the past 12 months and during my four-year tenure as Chair; I wish my replacement as Chair every success in the role.

I would also like to thank Cllrs Steven Bridgett, Sue Bolam and Chris France for their regular attendance, using their invaluable knowledge and experience to support and advise us.

And last, but far from least, our Clerk Martin Chilvers for keeping us all organised and firmly on track. We are very fortunate to have, and this is from someone who should know, one of the most efficient and dedicated clerks in the area.

Financial Report:

The Clerk provided an update on the Parish Council finances. Opening balance on 1 April, 2020 was £3,664 and closing balance on 31 March, 2021 was £12,865.

Income was £13,543 that included £1,525 precept plus funding of £8,881 from Ray Windfund for brown tourist signs, £2,000 from Revitalising Redesdale for a new noticeboard and £998 for a VAT refund. Additionally £138 was received as way-leave from Northern Powergrid.

Expenditure during the year totalled £4,342 including £814 Clerk's salary, £280 Parish Insurance and £150 donations (£50 to Community Action Northumberland and £100 to the Great North Air Ambulance) and £2,416 for a new noticeboard.

The Clerk additionally noted the topic of meeting frequency that had been discussed at a recent meeting. All Councillors agreed that there would be no ordinary meeting scheduled in August or December. It would be trialled for the forthcoming year and assessed at the Annual Parish Meeting in 2022.

Review and agreement of the Parish Council Standing Orders, Risk Assessment and Code of Conduct

The Councillors all agreed to adopt the three papers as they were presented.

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

Any other business:

There were no other matters raised.

Meeting closed at 7.45pm