

Rochester with Byrness Parish Council

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Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Rochester with Byrness Parish Council held on
Tuesday

13 May 2025 at 7.00pm. The meeting was held at Rochester Village Hall.

1. Attendance – Cllr S. Chapman, Cllr P. Softley, Cllr M. Kelly & Cllr N. Hall, Mr M. Chilvers (Parish Clerk). Mr D. Pentney

2. Apologies: Cllr P Scott was absent

3 Declaration of Interest: None were declared.

4. Minutes of the Parish Council Annual General Meeting held 28 May 2024 Were signed as a correct record by S. Chapman at the July 2024 Ordinary meeting.

5. Election of

- Election of Chair – S. Chapman was proposed by P. Softley and seconded by M. Kelly
- Vice Chair – In the absence of any nomination it was agreed not to appoint a Vice-Chair at this time.

Parish Council Representatives

- Byrness Village Hall – P Softley & S. Chapman
- Rochester Village Hall – M. Kelly
- Play Park – P. Softley with support from S. Chapman and N. Hall

6. Review and agree Standing Orders, Risk Register, Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Policy

a) There were no amendments to the Standing Orders for the Parish Council and the current orders were re-adopted and signed by the Chair.

b) The Risk register was reviewed and agreed to be appropriate for requirements. It was signed by the Chair and the Clerk

c) The Code of Conduct was reviewed and adopted by all

d) Safeguarding Policy was reviewed and adopted by all.

e) The Financial regulations were reviewed and adopted by all.

f) The Donation Policy was reviewed and adopted by all.

g) The Civility & Respect Pledge was reviewed and adopted by all.

7. Chair's Report

The Parish Councillors are pleased to report on the following work carried out during the past 12 months.

Byrness

The Parish Council has completed the initial work to establish a Woodland Management Plan for the trees on the Parish Council land in Byrness. This will be a long project, but a second meeting with James Lee of the Forestry Commission (FC) has been arranged to progress matters.

Yve Martin of Tyne Rivers Trust (TRT) and her team have made repairs to the burn bank where erosion had damaged sections. Thanks are expressed to the team who did a great job.

Additionally, Yve and her team have undertaken the first stage of willow coppicing on the area between Otterburn Green and the A68. This will be an ongoing project as both residents and the Parish Council did not want too much removed at once as the willow provides a sound barrier for residents from the traffic on the A68.

The Parish Councillors have met representatives from Northumbria Water Ltd (NWL) on several occasions regarding the ongoing flooding on Otterburn Green. After extensive tests and some work also from NCC it appears all options into the cause of the flooding have been examined but

the cause has still not been determined. Following discussions with NWL the Parish Council will examine the possibility of planting further trees on the area impacted which may help to resolve the problem and will seek advice from James Lee (FC) at our next meeting.

Contractors on behalf of NWL have recently undertaken repair work to the pot holes that have appeared on the track to and past the garages to the sewage treatment works. Andrew Webster from Northern Powergrid (NPg) has attended Parish Council meetings during the past year and shares the frustrations that the substation is still not fully operational. He is looking to hold a further drop in event with Byrness residents and seek feedback that he can use in an attempt to get appropriate support from NPg hierarchy to get the project completed.

Andrew Webster has stated he may be able to provide an EV charger for public use in Byrness and the Parish Council are working with him on this project.

After several years of working with NCC the County Council have installed warning signs to improve safety and warn drivers using the A68 of the junction to Byrness as well as St Francis church.

The Parish Council are grateful to Forestry England for providing resources to clear the self-sown trees behind the garages as well as carrying out repairs to the footbridge and along the Ride. Josh and his team have also removed dead trees and several overhanging trees and branches within Byrness village. They have also cleared away the remains of the old Gritter garage.

Thanks go to Cllrs Softley and Scott for undertaking the work at the Play Area recommended following the annual inspection.

The Parish Council has enlisted the help of Mountain Rescue and Northumberland National Park Authority to challenge BT who wish to remove the public telephone box in Byrness. Thanks are expressed to Danny & Craig MacNeil for cutting the field next to the Play Area this has greatly improved the area for the children.

Chris Mowatt has again, this year, cut the grass keeping the village looking tidy.

Rochester

Thanks are expressed to Cllr Hall for continuing to download the data each month from the two Speed Indicator Devices (SID) in Rochester. Over the 42 months that the camera located at the south of the village has been in place the average 85%ile is 37.3mph and almost 50% of vehicles driving through are exceeding the 30mph speed limit. Speeds of up to 70mph are regularly recorded. The first 12 months of records showed an 85%ile figure of 37.0mph whilst the last 12 months is the same. For the camera located at the north end of the village the data since installation is averaging at 36.69mph for the 85%ile, 42.5% of all vehicles are exceeding the speed limit and speeds are often recorded at 65mph. The first 12 months of data recorded 85%ile of 36.4mph and the most recent 12 months 36.7mph.

The data is shared regularly with NCC, Northumbria Police as well as our County Councillor and MP although no successful solution has as yet been identified and implemented to reduce the speed of drivers through Rochester, we have seen an increase in the speed camera van and road safety units being deployed both in the village and at locations on the A68.

In an effort to reduce the speed of the vehicles the Parish Council has purchased a 'pop-up Bob' life-size Police Officers and this is located in differing locations. Early data has shown a very marginal reduction in the 85%ile data for both cameras.

It is hopeful that after many months of continued pressure the drainage problems along Bremenium Way may soon be resolved by NCC.

A recent storm unfortunately destroyed the bus shelter in Rochester. This had been located on private land and at this stage it is not known whether a new one can be built. Meantime NCC should soon be installing a post with a timetable for the bus service at this location.

The Chair continues to assist in resolving the smart meter problems experienced by a number of residents across the Parish with some recent success in Rochester.

The Parish Council continues contact with NCC with the hope that an EV charging point can be installed in the village.

Chris Mowatt made a wonderful job of cutting the grass verges in the village again this year.

Other matters

The X74 bus service introduced last year has proven popular with a good number of passengers regularly using it to Newcastle and Jedburgh.

Following recent changes to the popular weekly ADAPT service to Morpeth which is funded by Ray Windfunds the Chair is working with Ray Windfunds to try to find a solution. It is hoped that the service will be able to continue to pick up from Byrness and Rochester fortnightly until a solution can be found and the weekly resumed.

The Parish Council submitted two items for the Local Transport Programme. These were a) Safety measures to reduce the speeding of much of the traffic that passes through Rochester b) Safety features to improve the use of the junction to Byrness from the A68 in both directions.

The Chair attended the Town, Parish and Community Council conferences.

The Parish Councillors after careful consideration agreed to maintain the precept at £7,500 for 2025-26.

During the last year the Parish Councillors considered 10 planning applications. The Councillors agreed donations to Horsley and Byrness churches towards the maintenance of their churchyards.

A donation was also made to the Great North Air Ambulance.

There are three vacancies within the Parish Council and the Councillors would like to hear from anyone in the Parish who may be able to spare sometime to volunteer and become a Parish Councillor and help make a real difference to our community.

Thanks are expressed to the residents who volunteered their time to continue to manage and organise events at the village halls in Byrness and Rochester. For rural communities such as these it is vital that such facilities exist and both committees are doing a great job.

Finally, my thanks go to all the Councillors for their continued support to the Parish and the time they give freely also to Martin for his advice, support and efficient handling of council business.

The Parish Council will look to work with the community during 2025-26 and beyond in an effort to improve the quality of life for this rural and beautiful part of the world that we know as Redesdale.

8. Finance Report

The Clerk advised that the balance at the beginning of financial year was £23,941.59 and at 31 March, 2025 it was £28,736.59.

Income totalled £12,689 and included precept £7,500 (an increase of £500 to the previous year), Garage rental of £1,930, Allotment rental £114, NCC Community Chest grant of £605 towards defibrillator maintenance, VAT reclaim from HMRC of £1,942.74 as well as £299 Northern Powergrid wayleave and £298 credit interest.

The expenditure during the financial year totalled £7,895 that included £200 for maintenance work on the Byrness garages, £600 donations, £2,250 grass cutting in Rochester and Byrness, £637 Parish Insurance premium, £210 for a 'pop-up Bob' cut out Police Officer and £2,769 Clerk's salary.

The Clerk confirmed that as of 31 March 2024 there was £13,238.82 reserve for the Garages. Reserve balance for the Byrness allotments was £400.54, £2,878 for the Roundhouse reserve and £570.03 for the two defibrillators maintenance.

The Clerk reported that deducting the 'reserved' balances left a working budget as of 31 March, 2025 of £11,648.76.

9. Matters for consideration - None were raised.

The meeting was closed at 7.20pm.