

At a meeting of the Dene Valley Parish Council held at the Dene Valley Community Partnership One Stop Shop, High Street, Eldon Lane on **Monday 11 November 2024 at 6.30 p.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Nicholson in the Chair

Councillors T Bird, I Bourne, J Clark, R Coleman and J Moore.

Also in attendance:

Kate Ward - DCC Safer Places

Clerk Ian Croft

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received from Members. Kate Ward submitted apologies on behalf of Rebecca Bolden.

2. Public Participation

Lynn O'Neill was in attendance and informed the Council that she was intending to stand as an Independent candidate in the County Council elections in 2025.

Lynn outlined a project she was hoping to launch which would involve the provision of football training and playing for young people in Coundon and surrounding areas. Although still in its infancy, the project would provide early intervention with young people and provide links to local communities.

The Council was supportive of the proposed project which could lead to co-operation between villages and would have a positive effect in the community. Kate Ward agreed to hold a further discussion with Lynn outside of the meeting to further discuss the project.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2024 were considered by the meeting.

The Chair formally reported the resignation of Councillor Oliver from the Parish Council due to changed work commitments.

The Clerk referred to the query regarding the Parish Council's responsibility for County Council play areas within the Parish and circulated a copy of a tenancy agreement dated 21 July 2005 between the Parish Council and Wear Valley District Council for the Riverside, Close House and Coronation Play Areas.

The Chair informed the meeting that she had been unable to attend the Remembrance Day wreath laying ceremony but had contacted the Clerk to Eldon Parish Council and had laid the Parish Council wreath this morning.

The Clerk informed the meeting that he had met with Councillor Clark and visited HSBC in Durham to query the Auckland Park Account. The visit had been positive and news was expected from HSBC Business Banking in the near future.

4. Matters Arising

The Chair referred to the removal of hedgerow raised by Councillor Bourne at the previous meeting and to the response received from Durham County Council. The Chair referred to the Environmental Impact report for the development and considered that the developers had broken the law. The damage caused to the seat was a civil matter. The loss of hedging was significant.

Councillor Bourne referred to the development and informed the meeting that the Public Footpath had been built over. Councillor Nicholson replied that she had written to the County Council about Footpaths 41 and 39 and was awaiting a response.

Councillor Bourne considered there had been no consultation with the Parish Council. The development had led to the drainage of a pond and the blocking of a Footpath. Councillor Nicholson informed the meeting she had asked the County Council when the Footpaths would be reinstated. She added that there was insufficient space allocated for the replanting of trees and hedges.

Councillor Nicholson agreed to carry forwards work regarding the hedgerow and Footpath with Councillors Bourne and Moore and would have a discussion on site regarding the damaged seat.

Regarding repairs to be carried out to the Auckland Park Play Area the Clerk reported he had sought a quote from the County Council and was awaiting a reply.

5. Parish Council 5-year Plan

The Chair thanked Councillor Bourne for circulating information regarding Town Council status prior to the meeting.

Councillor Bourne agreed to investigate the responsibilities of a Town Council over those of a Parish Council.

The Clerk advised that Town Councils and Parish Councils were constituted under the same legislation and as such one type of council had no more or less powers than the other. Generally speaking, Town Councils tended to contain at least one major area of population.

Councillor Bird circulated details of a five-year action plan for a community centre/hub. The plan looked to a larger building than the old surestart building and should be a new build in its own grounds. Councillor Nicholson suggested that the only land available would be in The Hollow and that while a new build would be the ultimate goal she questioned whether it would be achievable. Councillor Clark added that people tended to go towards Bishop Auckland and she was unsure whether they would come to a new build in the Parish.

Councillor Bird referred to a DCC Planning Officer who had said that Eldon Lane was not viable. However, Councillor Nicholson reported that she had heard the plan to clear the area for new build had now been shelved. It was important to know what the future plans for the area were – if the area was to significantly change over the next 5 to 10 years, would a community centre/hub be needed? The Parish Council needed to consider whether it should try to achieve quick wins with what was currently available.

6. Police Update

The Chair thanked Kate Ward for arranging the Police Update which had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

Councillor Bird considered that the update should contain greater detail, for example people having their windows broken. Kate Ward replied that the only information in the update could be what was reported by the police and this could not be broken down into further detail for the Parish Council meeting. Councillor Bird replied there was a need to recognise the safety of local people who were having their windows broken.

Kate Ward informed the meeting she had nothing to add to the Police Update. Talks were ongoing with street lighting regarding the erection of signs. The commando box for the camera was awaited.

The Parish Council had some money left over from Towns and Villages funding. A quote had been obtained for target hardening at Blackies Wood which this underspend could be used to fund – Kate would contact Eldon Parish Council regarding both Council's providing 50% of funding for the target hardening as Blackies Wood problems were shared by both Parish Councils.

7. Play Areas

The Chair reported that she had the Clerk had met with the Parish Council's solicitor dealing with the Asset Transfer of Randolph Street Play Area. There had been a delay on the part of DCC but it had been stressed there was now an urgency for the transfer to take place before funding applications could be made.

Councillor Nicholson added that she had contacted the companies who had put original quotes in for Randolph Street Play Area and they were quite understanding of the situation.

8. Planning Issues

Councillor Clark circulated details of planning applications which had been received or determined in the Dene Valley Parish and surrounding areas since the last meeting (for copy see file of Minutes)

9. Footpaths

Councillor Moore reported that he had no issues to raise following his walks around the area.

Councillor Bird reported that hedges had been cut back and Councillor Nicholson reported that she would check the path to Howlish. Councillor Cleman reported that the hedges at Gurney Valley had not been cut back and were still scratching cars.

10. Allotments

Councillor Borne provided details of a change of address for an allotment holder on Close House.

Councillor Nicholson referred to a building structure erected on an allotment at Close House without seeking the permission of the Parish Council. Councillor Bourne replied he would speak to the allotment holder.

11. Finance Update

The Clerk provided the meeting with details of income and expenditure for the since the last meeting. The Chair agreed the balances and signed the accounts and bank statements.

The Clerk reminded Members that the next meeting of the Council in December would need to consider the budget and precept for 2025/26.

12. Any Other Business

Councillor Moore reported that he would be devoting more time to his family going forwards and as a result would be attending fewer meetings, however he still wished to remain on the Council and take a keen interest in the area.

The Chair thanked Councillor Moore for making the Parish Council aware of this and thanked him for his massive contribution to meetings.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Monday 9 December 2024.

The meeting finished at 9.10 p.m.