

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 17 March 2025 at 6.30 p.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor J Nicholson** in the Chair

Councillors T Bird, I Bourne and R Coleman.

**Also in attendance:**

Clerk Ian Croft  
Kate Ward

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Clark and J Moore.

**2. Public Participation**

The meeting welcomed Cheryl Hudson to the meeting who provided details of the South Church Community Partnership.

Cheryl informed the meeting that the Northern Heartlands had attended their last meeting and discussions had been held about what Northern Heartlands could provide.

Councillor Bourne considered the main issue was the lack of venues in the Area to do anything for the community. Councillor Bird replied that the One Stop shop was a community facility but focussed a lot of work on suicide prevention. It was open 5 days a week between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. and served an area wider than that of Dene Valley, although it could not handle large numbers of people.

Councillor Nicholson considered that the One Stop Shop was not a community centre as we know one to be, it was more focussed. Councillor Bird replied that although the One Stop Shop did not have a games room, it did organise outings for children using another organisation.

Councillor Bird agreed to hold discussions with Cheryl outside of the meeting about mutual support. Cheryl added that the next meeting of the Partnership was this Wednesday at St Andrew's Church.

### **3. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Councillor Bourne referred to the County Durham Housing Strategy: Targeted Delivery Plan - Coundon Grange which was on the Agenda for later in the meeting and informed the meeting that this was not in Coundon Grange.

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Chair circulate her update report for March 2025 which included details about the creation of a community woodland, the Bishops Park Development, Anti-Social Behaviour reports and Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Bourne referred to hunts which were taking place in the forest where live ammunition was being used to shoot wildlife and birds of prey. Councillor Nicholson suggested that this should be reported to the police via 999 as if it was reported it would trigger an instant response.

Councillor Bird referred to racing which was taking place around Mill View/Millbank Terrace. County Councillor Townsend replied that this had been picked up via residents and that a multi-agency group was needed for the area. When enquiring as to who the Neighbourhood Warden was for the area, Councillor Nicholson replied that a new Neighbourhood Warden had been appointed and was currently in training. It was hoped that regular meetings could be set up with the Warden when they were in place.

County Councillor Townsend referred to the demise of AAP's and the establishment of Local Networks, at which only one representative from Town and Parish Councils in the area could be appointed. She was happy to propose that for the area, Shildon Town Council did not nominate, Eldon Parish had been asked many times but had not nominated. She would talk to Bishop Auckland Town Council to ask them not to nominate and also with West Auckland Parish Council likewise. Councillor Jayne Nicholson had been an excellent representative on the AAP and County Councillor Townsend would be pleased if she was the area nomination onto the Local Network.

## **5. Elections 2025**

The Clerk circulated Nomination Packs to Members of the Council who wished to stand for election. The forms should be completed and returned to the Clerk as the completed forms needed to be returned to Electoral Services by 2 April 2025.

## **6. County Durham Housing Strategy: Targeted Delivery Plan – Coundon Grange**

The Council discussed the County Durham Housing Strategy: Targeted Delivery Plan – Coundon Grange.

Councillor Townsend informed the meeting that this had been pulled together and started prior to the last County Council election in 2021 but after that election priorities had changed with a change of political leadership of the Council. Councillor Townsend suggested that Peter Garrod be the best contact to get an update on it and ask what the way forward on it was.

Councillor Nicholson agreed that Peter Garrod should be asked to provide an update. Councillors Quinn and Townsend had recently met with Kim McGuinness and this plan could be used as a springboard. However, Councillor Nicholson was of the opinion that the tasks to look at health and wellbeing were outdated as well as those relating to landlords. Regarding looking for areas for new development of new houses, Councillor Nicholson stated that there were two social housing providers on the bishops Park development but that not one person from the area had benefitted. There was a dire need for the infrastructure to support any new development including GP practices, shops, schools and safe streets, as well as traffic calming measures.

Councillor Townsend informed the meeting that Phase 1 of the housing allocation consultation had just closed and agreed there was not enough social housing. Councillor Townsend considered that absentee landlords continued to be a problem.

Councillor Nicholson considered that the Selective Licensing scheme had backfired in that there were now more empty properties. Councillor Townsend responded that she would like to see Durham County Council prosecute more under the Selective Licensing Scheme and take over management of properties where necessary. Councillor Nicholson asked what pressure could be put on for this to happen, adding that the local MP was pushing for the County Council to use CPO powers.

Councillor Townsend informed the meeting she could ask what the outcomes of the Selective Licensing Scheme had been and whether there had been any success stories, She added that she would be happy to ask Kim McGuinness to visit the area.

Councillor Bourne agreed that more facilities were needed, including social infrastructure including shops. Councillor Coleman agreed with Councillor Bourne, adding that many new houses were being built but there was nothing being provided to support this housing and therefore there was nothing to keep people in the area for any length of time

## **7. Discussions with County Councillor S Townsend**

Councillor Nicholson advised he meeting that she had not responded to County Councillor Quinn's email about a Facebook posting because this was nothing to do with the Parish Council and would not be discussed in the meeting. The Parish Council was not aware that the s106 money had been allocated to another project and had only found out by default.

Councillor Bird added that his initial thought when discovering the s106 money was no longer available was that people in the area had been let down as they had been promised a new play area. Councillor Coleman commented that she found the situation to be unbelievable.

Councillor Nicholson reported that the Parish Council had not been able to apply for the s106 funding because the asset transfer of the Play Area had not been completed and considered that this process had been considerably delayed by inaction on the part of Durham County Council in progressing it. The Council had spent to date over £1,000 on its own legal fees and could not refurbish the Play Area without the s106 funding. As a result the Council would need to consider whether it wished to proceed any further with the Asset Transfer, which without the available funding, could become a liability for the Parish Council.

Councillor Bourne informed the meeting that he had emails dating back to 2019 when this was first considered, but regrettably if the Council could no longer afford the refurbishment, then he considered the Asset Transfer should be put on hold to prevent any further fees being incurred. He was very disappointed with the outcome regarding the s106 money.

Councillor Townsend fully understood the disappointment of the Parish Council and informed the Council she had been unaware of the allocation of the s106 money. However, she undertook to discuss the Play Area with officers at Durham County Council to investigate possible solutions to the situation and enquire about other available sources of funding.

Councillor Nicholson considered that the Parish Council needed to be reluctant to progress further with the Asset Transfer.

**Resolved:**

That the Parish Council's solicitors be instructed to proceed no further with the Asset Transfer for the time being.

**8. Police Update**

A police update which had been forwarded by Kate Ward was circulated to the meeting (for copy see file of Minutes).

**9. 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.

**10. Any Other Business**

A request was made to replace the seat at the end of Brook Street which had been damaged previously by fire.

Councillor Nicholson reported that this had previously been considered by the Parish Council and it had been decided not to progress with this until the new CCTV camera had been installed. Councillor Coleman added that there were two seats at Auckland Park within close proximity of each other and one of these could be relocated to the location.

Councillor Nicholson referred to an email received from Kate Ward regarding lighting in Randolph Park, a copy of which was circulated.

Although Kate had identified sources of funding to replace some columns in the Park, there would be a need for the Parish Council to meet the revenue costs of the lighting which would be in the region of £500 a year.

Councillors were pleased that funding had been identified to upgrade the lighting columns in the Park and considered that the Council should agree to meeting the revenue costs, at a level of approximately £500 a year.

**Resolved:**

That the Chair write to Kae Ward to inform her of the Council's decision so that the mater could be progressed.

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would take place on Monday 14 April 2025.

The meeting finished at 8.35 p.m.