

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 9 December 2024 at 6.30 p.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Nicholson in the Chair

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

Also in attendance:

Clerk Ian Croft

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Moore and Kate Ward.

2. Public Participation

There were no Members of the Public in attendance at the commencement of the meeting.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. Matters Arising

The Chair reported she had been unable to obtain a contact number for Lynn O'Neill to discuss her football training and playing project she had reported to the November meeting. Councillor Bird agreed to provide Councillor Nicholson with a contact number.

Councillor Nicholson referred to the removal of the hedgerow at Auckland Park. The approval to remove the hedgerow had only recently been approved as a variation of planning permission and the supplementary plans did not come near to mitigate the loss of the hedgerow. The Chair expressed her disappointment at the removal of the hedgerow – while the Parish Council wanted new housing and people into the area, it also wanted to maintain what it already had.

It was still unknown whether Shepherd's Bridge would re-open or what the diversion might be.

The Chair reported that she had not visited the site to discuss the damage caused to the seat but would be doing so.

5. Budget 2025/26 and Precept 2025/26

The Council considered a report of the Clerk which set out a budget for the Parish Council for 2025/26 and recommended a precept level to be charged for 2025/26 (for copy see file of Minutes)

Members of the Council discussed the various draft budget scenarios as presented and noted the amounts that would be available for Parish Projects dependent on the precept increase. The Council also noted that the Parish Council could have some potentially large projects in the forthcoming year which would require funding from the Council.

Resolved:

- (i) That a precept increase of 3% be introduced for 2025/26
- (ii) That all allotment rents be increased by 3% for 2025/26
- (iii) That the Clerk submit the precept request to the County Council.

6. Parish Council 5-year Plan

The Council discussed the merit of the Parish Council becoming a Town Council.

Councillor Bourne reported that the definition of a town was that it was larger than a village but smaller than a city, with a charter to hold a fayre or a market. The Parish Council area did not have a market. The initial step to becoming a Town Council would be to present a petition signed by 7% of the population before applying to the County Council.

The Clerk presented information to the meeting about the levels of precept charged by Town Councils and also by Parish Councils within County Durham

Councillor Bourne reported that there were currently road signs when entering each hamlet designating them as hamlets. However, some funding organisations would not fund hamlets. There were currently seven designated hamlets within the Parish Council area.

Councillor Clark reported that each road sign designated the hamlet as being in the Parish of Dene Valley. She could not see any difference between designation as a Parish Council or a Town Council and

considered the Parish Council should be using its energies on matters within the Parish.

Councillor Nicholson suggested that this matter could be taken forward in separate meetings to the Parish Council meetings and it would be important to clarify what could be applied for funding-wise if the Parish Council was to become a Town Council.

Councillor Bird considered that the Council should wait until the new boundaries were sorted – until then the demographics of the area would be unknown.

Councillor Nicholson reported that she had heard nothing further regarding the former SureStart building. Funding sources including Believe Housing, the Lottery Fund and the Scotto Trust could be approached for funding for the project, however, the building first needed to be marketed.

Regarding the community woodland, Councillor Nicholson reported that she had held a positive meeting with Rob George and had looked at areas in Blackies Wood. The company who planted trees would maintain them for a 10 year period.

Referring to target hardening, it was agreed that the Parish Council would fund this on a 50/50 basis with Eldon Parish Council.

7. Police Update

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

Councillor Bird reported that windows were still being put out in the area but this was not reflected in the Police Update which had been provided.

8. Play Areas

The Chair reported that there was no update on the Randolph Street Play Area Asset transfer but would chase this up with the Council's solicitor in the third week in January if necessary.

9. 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)

10. Footpaths

Councillor Claerk reported that Councillor Moore had not raised any issues with footpaths.

Councillor Nicholson reported that she would chase the County Council to be provided with the new routes of footpaths. She also reported a problem last year of a farmer putting cows and calves in a field which had a footpath through it. The footpath should either be diverted or an electric fence erected.

11. Allotments

Councillor Bourne reported that he had spoken to the allotment holder about the building structure which was a fence over 2 metres high. Councillor Bourne would ask the allotment holder to reduce the height of the fence.

Councillor Nicholson reported that allotment plots at Coronation and Grange Avenue would be becoming available.

12. 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.

13. Any Other Business

Councillor Bird referred to the laying of a wreath by the Parish Council at the Remembrance event. The Parish had some veterans within it and suggested they be asked whether they would like to lay the wreath at next year's ceremony. The Council agreed this would be a good idea.

Councillor Clark informed the meeting that the venue would need plenty of notice to sort any access issues.

14. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Monday 10 February 2025.

The meeting finished at 8.50 p.m.