



ALSTON MOOR PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Alston Moor Parish Council held on Monday 9th January 2023 in the Masonic Hall at 7pm.

Present: Cllrs: R. Miller (Chair), B. Cooper, B. Davies, N. English, A. Green, E. Grew, M. Hanley, S. Hattersley, C. Harrison, H. Ho, G. Ransom, A. Robertson, R. Robinson.

Apologies: Cllr: P. Best

Absent: none

Declarations of interest: none

1. Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the parish council meeting held on Monday 5th December 2022 be approved as a correct record with the following amendments: correction to date of 5th December and 5b/DEC/22 Cllr Robertson reported that he met with an officer from Eden District Council to discuss the location of the project. Proposed by Cllr Miller and seconded by Cllr Grew. (nem con)

2. Update from Alston Moor Foodbank

Hazel Hanley reported that she had taken over as chair to Alston Moor Foodbank at the AGM in October. Since then, there has been a big increase in demand due to the cost of food and fuel. Requests are accepted from members of the public in financial crisis with not enough money to buy the food they need. The Foodbank was relaunched this year with publicity material re-done, which may account for some of the increase in demand. Thanks were given to the past chair who had secured a large donation from AMBA. Cumbria County Council recently granted £950, and donations have come in from the Masons, local businesses and individuals. To make the most of private donations, the intent is to set up as a Charitable Limited Company (CLC) so gift aid can be collected.

Most foodbanks get their food from short life donations from supermarkets. Fairshare offer 2 deliveries a week from Rhexghed, but as Alston has no premises to store donated food, they shop at the Co-op, keeping the donated funds within the local food economy. It is important to keep up the volume of sales going through local shops.

Alston Foodbank joined the Independent Food aid network for news and information, attended the inaugural meeting of a new Eden food organisation and are in touch with the CVS. Ideally, there would be no need for foodbanks, but there is a need, mainly from clients in receipt of benefits. 25% of clients are between jobs and are waiting for their benefits to come through, so the foodbank is a stop gap measure. Some are unable to make their money last the month, especially with the increase in fuel bills.

If anyone knows of anyone struggling, the foodbank is there for them; it is from the community for the community.

In response to questions, HH replied that AMERG allows the use of their telephone so that people can self-refer. They can provide 3 days' worth of food for clients. The foodbank has no remit to give advice but can signpost.

The chair thanked Hazel for the great job she and fellow committee members are doing.

3. Chair, County & District reports

Chair's report

The chair wished everyone a happy new year with the hope that the council could continue working together well in 2023. Thanks to all involved in the town's Christmas lights and Santa Claus team.

Cllr Claire Driver has taken on a new job, so on behalf of the council the chair gave thanks for all she has achieved over the past 5 years, and he would like to wish her well in her new journey.

He offered condolences to the three councillors who lost family members over the Christmas period.

County Council

Apologies from Cllr Driver who will leave office at the end of January 2023.

District Council

Cllr Sharp reported on the following:

Grant funding – funding applications are welcomed for Arts and Culture projects up to £10k, and for up to £32.5k for the Eden Area Improvement grants with a deadline of 20th January. There are also COP26 grants of between £30k and £5k for biodiversity projects.

Firs Estate woodland and play area – Eden Housing Association has agreed to fix the gate to the play area. Someone will come out from Eden to look at the wood and assess what work needs to be done on the overgrown trees. They will also look at the trees that came down in the cemetery. There are thoughts on setting up a residents' committee.

Local projects - an art project is planned for Nenthead, and the gym project is still ongoing.

Cllr Hanley reported on the following:

Planning – Local planning matters included a decision to accept the application to reduce the height of trees at Bridge End workshop.

WFC shadow meeting – held on 19th December, the meeting dealt with appointing committees and head officers, a remuneration panel and the appointment of a legal and monitoring officer.

The WFC council plan received a letter of objection that it was not realistic, and the new coal mine in West Cumbria remains controversial. 88% of council staff have been re-appointed.

Cllr Hanley was questioned about the threatened closure of a care home at Staveley, which is under the care of the County Council until April 2023.

Reports are posted on the website.

4. Public participation

A resident reported that he and a partner acquired land outside Nenthead and wanted to engage with the community to let them know what is planned. The site is above Nenthead adjoining the Carrshield road and is about 50 acres with woodland, grazing land, watercourses, spoil from mining activity and was once used as a tip by the former rural district council. It also has a public footpath running through the site. The intention is for the land to thrive naturally, improve the water systems and manage recovery. There are several species flourishing because of the contamination, but it is hoped to encourage natural mixed woodland and the re-introduction of native species. They would also like to include permissive footpaths and will be happy for people to come and see what is being done. They are working with organisations such as the Tyne Valley Rivers Trust and the AONB who are assisting with surveys to test for heavy metals.

Members suggested attending the Nenthead Ward meeting to inform residents, and planting should be well stocked [not sure what is meant about planting being 'well-stocked'] with stockproof boundary fences.

The former chair from AMBA reported on progress. The market equipment has been taken over by the Fairhill Recreation Ground Trustees with two conditions: that the equipment can be hired by local organisations and that the trailer included with the kit, which is not needed, will be sold, and £500 each given to the gala and SKS.

Christmas trees have been allocated to Garrigill and Nenthead leaving a minimum of 42 Christmas trees with lights that are available for the council. £780 income was generated this year with scope to expand. It took 5 hours with 3 people helping to take the trees down.

The flower tubs have been allocated to the premises they are situated besides, and AMP has taken over the Facebook page and will re-direct traffic from the website.

AMBA has donated £13k to local organisations in allocations of between £50 and £500. If anything is left over, it can be used to buy more lights or donate to AMP.

The chair thanked AMBA for all that they have done for the community. The closure will be a big miss for businesses and people in the town.

5. Progress reports

5a/JAN/23 Re-distribution of Alston Moor Business Association Christmas trees

Re: 8/DEC/22 A misunderstanding arose between AMBA and Wright Bros who confirmed that they would be unable to store the Christmas trees due to the need for the space. Cllr Miller contacted the owner of the Crown annex who is willing to allow them to be stored in the short term, but long-term storage will need to be found.

The clerk reported that the council will need to consider whether they will be required to register for VAT, depending on how much income is raised from participating businesses.

5b/JAN/23 Flagpole planning application

Re: 5b/DEC/22 An application has been submitted to Eden District Council for the flagpole. The planners are processing the application and confirmed that there will be a partial refund from the planning portal as the council were overcharged.

5c/JAN/23 Meeting with Coal Authority

Re: 6b/DEC/22 A round table meeting has been arranged for Monday 23rd January with the Coal Authority, who would like to know if there are any specific questions or materials the council would like to see.

Cllr Ransom reported that he asked the Ward for a briefing and to draw up questions to ask and will circulate this when it is written up. It was agreed to ask the Ward chair to attend.

5d/JAN/23 Woodland tree planting

Re: 9/DEC/22 Following contact with Cumbria County Council the project was passed over to the North Pennines AONB Heart of the Pennines scheme. An officer will meet with the tenant and carry out a site visit. He explained that the only potential stumbling block would be the presence of wading birds which, if present, would require the involvement of the RSPB and Natural England, although this is part of the process. They will keep the council updated on progress.

5e/JAN/23 Alston Conservation Area consultation update

Re:11b/DEC/22 A response was received from Eden District Council's Conservation Officer on the comments made on the consultation document. She will get back to the council later.

6. Reports from representatives

6a/JAN/23 Warm Hubs

Cllr Miller reported that the Christmas meeting was very well attended by 55 people, who were entertained with carol singing and games. After a two week break the warm hub was back and attended by the sustainable warmth officer from Eden District Council to talk about grant funding, and a film about Alston people was shown. They are looking at the possibility of Saturday mornings if there are volunteers to cover; funds should last until April. This could be an opportunity to hold councillor surgeries.

The Oaklea Trust attended to explain that they have some funding through SKS and have pupils willing to make soup and scones for the next 5 weeks. It is hoped the pupils will be willing to call in to introduce themselves to the attendees.

6b/JAN/23 Nenthead Ward

Cllr Robertson said there had been no meetings since Christmas. It has been challenging trying to track down the ownership of the fountain. Cumbria County Council confirmed that the fountain is sited on public land, but they do not own it. The clerk explained that it is included on the council's list of assets as the council had received a grant from EDC to renovate the fountain before she took office, but there are no papers to confirm ownership. Nenthead Community Projects are continuing to research ownership.

Cllr Robertson added that a town centre scheme carried out in partnership with the district and county council around 20 years ago had renovated drinking fountains and stand pipes, so presumably it was thought at the time someone owned them.

6c/JAN/23 High Mill

Cllr Robertson reported that Alston Moor Partnership are investigating insurance costs, but the project cannot move forward until the sale to the prospective new owner goes ahead.

6d/JAN/23 AMERG Group

Cllr Ransom reported that a funding bid to create safe spaces is progressing, with the closing date this week. The AGM discussed the appointment of officers, and the emergency plan. The response to last year's storm highlighted some issues including communication difficulties with the loss of many phone signals, radio communication may be an alternative. A WhatsApp group is being set up to enable volunteers to act more quickly as one of the issues was a shortage of people able to knock on doors. Residents were advised to stay in their homes where possible. Cllr Driver talked about finding the right person to ask permission to use the hospital building when the power is out, as previously they had been told it was not possible.

This year Alston has the warm hub and chat room, and the library can be used as a warm space. Leaflets about the warm hub have been circulated.

The foodbank reported on hopes to hold a free Christmas dinner next year.

6e/JAN/23 Alston Moor Area Planning

A meeting is to be held tomorrow with the main topic about volunteering.

6f/JAN/23 AMRD Group

The next meeting is to be held later in the month.

7. Planning applications

The clerk apologised that she had omitted to include a planning application from the County Council received on 24th December, but that it can be considered at the council precept meeting next week.

8. Consideration of proposed footpath diversion 302151, Haggs Bank, Nentsberry

An e-mail was received from Cumbria County Council asking for any comments on the proposed diversion of public footpath 302151 at Haggs Bank, Nentsberry. The application has been made for the reasons of security and safety and to make better use of the land. In considering the matter the council was asked to take note of the following legal tests:

1. Will the new path be substantially less convenient to the public?
2. The effect which the diversion would have on public enjoyment of the path.
3. The effect the order would have as respects over land served by the existing right of way.
4. The effect of the new right of way on land over which the path is created.
5. The termination of the alternative footpath is on the same or a connected highway and is substantially as convenient to the public.

Resolved to accept the diversion of footpath 302151 as the new route fulfils the criteria listed above. Proposed by Cllr Davies and seconded by Cllr Ransom. (nem con)

9. Commissioned tree works in Firs Wood – crack in branch overhanging footpath

The clerk reported that she had been informed about a beech tree with a crack in the branch overhanging a footpath in Firs Wood. She discussed with the chair whether the work should go ahead immediately and as a result asked contractor Michael Collins to attend to it and to check whether there is any additional urgent work. He put together a list of trees that require attention in Firs Wood and on Tyne Willows Playing Fields.

It was agreed to hold a site visit with the contractor, Cllrs Davies and Harrison and the clerk. **Action CI**

10. Proposal to commission an external report on council finances and procedures in response to overwhelming e-mail correspondence from Cllr Ho.

Cllr English read out a statement to explain that since he joined the council, he has been happy to assist in developing new policies, and congratulated members for working well, especially as work on the town hall has been extensive. However, there is a lack of clarity over the issues raised by Cllr Ho, and it seems the only way to reach a resolution is to ask Eden District Council to carry out an independent review. An officer spoke with the clerk and himself today to say that they can pay for the review but need to discuss what is required by the council.

Resolved that AMPC should allow EDC to review our financial procedures and the interaction between the parish council, town hall and Fairhill charities, based on the outcome of the MO investigation report of 2022. Proposed by Cllr English and seconded by Cllr Miller (12+ 1 abs)

11. Consultations & Correspondence

11a/JAN/23 Correspondence – Appendix 1

No comments received.

11b/JAN/23 NALC legal note on elections

The legal note stated that the 2023 local elections will take place on Thursday 4th May, and cllrs would normally take office on Monday 8th May. As this is an additional bank holiday cllrs will now take office on Tuesday 9th May. The clerk reported that the first meeting of the new council will take place on Monday 15th May.

11c/JAN/23 CALC update on footway lighting

EDC have confirmed that the following recommendations were passed:

- No recharges are levied in 2022/2023 as a goodwill gesture.
- Contracts have been extended until 2027 to include maintenance of footway lighting.
- The electricity contract is through YPO administered by Cumbria County Council due to expire in March 2023, so EDC are trying to establish what the position is.
- A program is established to remove sodium lights without replacements as they cease to function.

12. Accounts for payment (Appendix 2)

Summary of accounts for payment:	£2,256.30
Summary of income received since last meeting:	£2,155.87
Summary of accounts paid since last meeting:	£1,206.78

Resolved that sufficient funds are held in balances for the clerk to be authorised to settle all the accounts listed in appendix 2. Proposed by Cllr Green and seconded by Cllr English (11 + 2 abs)

13. Agenda items for next meeting TM and urgent business to report

13a/JAN/23 Report for Alston Newsletter

Cllr Ransom reported that he was approached by Emma Stewart who has taken over as the Alston Moor Newsletter editor and asked if the parish council could provide a quarterly update on the council's activities.

13b/JAN/23 Traffic Management agenda

Requests for inclusion include the loose paving outside the Co-op which has been reported, an update on the school flashing lights crossing at Townfoot and various potholes that have been reported.

The meeting closed at 9pm

Signed:

Dated: