

ALSTON MOOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 18th April 2016 at 7.30pm in Alston Town Hall.

Present: Cllrs: A. Martin (Chair), D. Athey, J. Glendinning, E. Grew, T. Haldon, S. Hall, M. Herdman, R. Miller, A. Robertson, County Cllr M. Robinson, District Cllrs P. Godwin & D. Hymers & members of the public.

Apologies: Cllrs B. Aves, Phillips & Thomson, J. Hodgson, S. Hodgson & Rev M. Nash Williams, R. Watson

Hustings for the Police & Crime Commissioner candidates

Prospective candidates Loraine Birchall, Peter McCall, Michael Pye and Mary Robinson spoke about why they wanted to become the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cumbria and answered questions from the floor.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 18th April 2015 were approved as a correct record. Proposed by Ray Miller and seconded by David Athey.

1. Matters Arising out of the Minutes of the last AGM

Nentsberry speed limit request. – it is on the multi-agency Crash Group's list for review and is monitored to check if speeds are excessive. M. Robinson, who is now a member of the Crash Group, reported that decommissioned equipment is being converted to hand held speed-guns, which can be used by community groups to monitor speed levels.

2. Report from Alston Moor Parish Council

The annual report for 2015/16 was circulated. Alix Martin, parish council chair, said that she wanted to explain the increase to the parish precept for 2016/17, and had produced graphs showing the proportion of the council tax for the parish, district and county. The increase of 54% for the parish translates into around 50p per week for a band D property, and will be put towards additional costs for the Town Hall, and increases to donations for public halls, buildings and play areas to help with rising costs. Contributions are made to Nenthead Community Works and the Townscape Heritage Project. The parish also pay for a community warden to carry out litter clearance and other tasks in the areas not managed by Eden District Council. Other funds have been put aside for use should there be a need to take on services formerly managed by the district council, although district councillors confirmed that there will be no requirement to do this if it is not wanted by the parish.

The parish council plan to hold a meeting in October to encourage residents to let them know if there are specific items for which they want funding, ahead of the budget meeting, which is usually held in January.

Questions from the floor were invited.

The parish were asked to set out a more consistent policy for budgeting, to avoid swings between under and over budgeting.

It was noted that adult social care has now been itemised on council tax bills, which may be helpful in arguing against local cuts to the service.

3. Reports from County, District & Parish Councillors

3a County Council report

Cllr Mary Robinson reported on the following:

Traffic Management Group - the meetings are unique to Alston and a good means of getting officers and others around the table to discuss traffic management issues, prioritise and initiate actions. The setts on Front Street are due to be replaced during the TH project. The signs for the extension of the speed limit to the Leadgate road end should have been up by now, but have been delayed due to capacity issues.

Community Transport Group – this group discusses public transport and the community minibus. Just enough voluntary drivers have come forward to keep the bus going, and it can stay on Alston Moor provided it is used.

Grant funding – funds have gone to the community gym under the healthy weight scheme. Funds are also available from the 0-19 scheme and can be used for out of school activities for young people, after-school clubs, trips away, toddler groups etc.

Highways - work on underpinning the road is due to start on Hartside, a major project that will involve the use of traffic lights to control traffic.

3b Eden District Council report

Cllr David Hymers reported on the following:

Nentsberry proposed planning applications – proposals for the Haggs Mineshop campsite should be with the planners shortly. The proposals to treat contamination by mine water of the river Nent and beyond have not been submitted yet, and a number of residents are opposed to them, but assuming the project gets approval it could encourage other agencies to take an interest in the area.

High Mill – Eden District Council, Alston Moor Partnership and Heritage England have carried out a groundwork survey of the area around the mill, and are looking to carry out a usage survey to gather ideas on how the building might be used in the future. It is too early to say what this might be at present, but one major idea is to provide car parking in one section of the building.

In response to a query DH confirmed that the owner was willing to sell.

Nenthead Chapel – an enthusiastic presentation by the organisers left DH impressed by the community spirit.

Eden area – has become a farming and food enterprise zone, which could be of benefit to anyone involved in any part of the food chain. One advantage is that it removes some planning constraints, and makes it easier for businesses to apply for bank loans.

Junction 41 – there are plans for a major industrial expansion zone around junction 41 north of Penrith, with plans to market to businesses from outside the area. Alston Moor residents could benefit when new jobs are created.

Appleby Community Enterprise is a similar organisation to Alston Moor Partnership and is also supported by Eden District Council, as is the organisation in Kirkby Stephen. It may be useful to set up some cross -own meetings to exchange ideas.

Councillor Godwin reported on the following:

Eden Local Plan – it has now been submitted to the government for approval. Residents were given the opportunity to look at it and comment on the draft. If approved there will be a separate policy for Alston Moor. Described as the ‘pile of stones’ policy it will mean that provided it could be proved that there was once a dwelling, the site will be allowed to be developed.

Neighbourhood Plans – there is potential to put together a neighbourhood plan on the local area, which can specify which sites the local community want development on, and where they would prefer it not to happen. This is something a community group can take on, so if anyone is interested let the parish council know as currently they do not have the capacity to take it forward.

Review of non-statutory services – the Community Action Group visited Kirkby Stephen to look at what is happening there. A number of non-statutory services including public toilets, footway lights and litter bins could be taken on by parish councils if they are interested, as a means of safeguarding the services for the future. Discussions were held with parish councils and a report produced.

Questions were invited.

Complaints were made about the condition of the footway lights, but the district has no legal requirement to install them, as they are a non-statutory service.

3. Report from local organisations and charities

3a Alston Cottage Hospital League of Friends – Malcolm Forster reported that the hospital has undergone a major refurbishment to bring it up to the standard of other community hospitals. Funding has been put towards hanging baskets, a framed photo of Eleanor Walton, and supplementary furniture for the community areas of the hospital. The summer coffee morning raised £900 and the winter fair another £800, which was an excellent achievement despite the bad weather. Thanks were given to everyone who put money in the jars at local venues, and to donations given in memory of their loved ones.

3b Alston Ambulance – 8 volunteers from the first cohort have been trained to grade 1 Standard and were congratulated on the commitment needed to get this qualification. The project has been plagued by discussions over budgets and who pays for what. Funds have been raised to build a hard standing and canopy at the hospital, which should be in place within 3 months. The intention then is to go live with the 8 volunteers on a partial rota. Negotiations are ongoing over the budget for training the second cohort of a further 10 volunteers to enable a 24/7 service to go ahead. The Care Quality Commission and Rory Stewart MP have been very helpful so it looks hopeful. Funds have been offered to pay for part of the training costs, and it is hoped to be able to go live in August. Cllr Robertson suggested applying to the Eden Community Fund, with 9th May the next deadline.

3c Alston Cottage Hospital – the Success Regime team from London were appointed to look at the overall economy of the health service in north Cumbria. The ‘emerging’ thought in the ‘progress report’ is to close 63 beds in the 5 smaller community hospitals, just leaving the day clinics. The joint League of Friends of the cottage hospitals does not agree with this proposal and has held several meetings and written to the Success Regime. The HealthWatch consultation event recorded 350 people through the doors of the van parked in the Spar car park, so it was surprising that when the list of public meetings was published, Alston was not on it. The Success Regime were persuaded there should be a public meeting in Alston to present the overall plans, which will be held on Tuesday 10th May in Samuel Kings School. It is critical that people attend as there needs to be a show of force. A banner on the market cross will advertise the meeting, there will be a letter drop, a piece in the Herald and Cllr Martin has organised a crowd photo on 30th April using a drone in front of the hospital, with the aim of getting 4-500 people on the field.

The renovation work carried out recently on the hospital has brought Alston Cottage Hospital up to the same standard as other hospitals, and they have built up a good relationship with the NHS Partnership Trust. The problem is that the Success Regime has to go back to London with a plan and closing beds is an easy option; the sad thing is that it will do little to solve the underlying financial issues facing the health authority in Cumbria.

3d Fairhill Recreation Grounds – Pat Godwin gave the report on behalf of Norman English. In an attempt to create some financial security he has set up the Fairhill Lottery. 70 people so far have committed to pay £10 and there will be a monthly draw from April to December, with an additional £100 in December. The first one took place at the Fairhill Coffee morning. Funds have also been received from the parish council annual donation and car park rent, but insurance costs alone are over £1k and income is needed for repairs and maintenance, and there are plans to erect a shed to store equipment. A grant application has been made to the 0-19 fund.

3e Alston Moor Schools Working Group – Ian Johnson reported that the schools have joined together in a federation with a new governing body and one head teacher for all three schools. Brian Cooper is chair of the governors. The pupils are working hard, as is the staff team, supported by parents. They are keen to provide opportunities for youngsters to see other places; the younger ones have visited Durham and Beamish, and older pupils have gone skiing in Austria.

Finances are the biggest challenge, but for the first time all three schools are in the black. Another challenge is that pupil numbers are dropping slightly, which puts pressure on the budget, so the schools need more partnership working to safeguard education for all. It has been a steep learning curve, and anyone who would like to visit the school is welcome to get in contact.

In answer to queries IJ confirmed that they are committed to keeping Nenthead school open, but it has to be self-sufficient. The school governors have not discussed academy status yet.

3f Alston Moor Partnership – Brian Grew reported that there are two projects currently underway. The AMP website is very informative and is worth checking to keep up to date with what is happening.

The Townscape Heritage lottery funded scheme (TH) has a significant amount of money to refurbish properties in the town centre. It is progressing well with the first scheme to start soon. Progress was initially slow, as a rigorous procurement process has had to be gone through, but BG is delighted to confirm that the funders consider it to be an exemplar project. The work involves

remodelling of shop fronts, roofing repairs and rendering. Lime mortar has to be done during spring and summer. Phase 2, work on the street, will be done in co-ordination with Highways and has been put back to 2017-18 at the earliest because of the floods last winter. Other aspects of the funding include training opportunities for heritage skills, but the take-up has been slow so far. The project will continue until 2020.

Sustainability project – this has now come to an end but the hydro project has progressed to a stage where it can be handed over to a Community Benefit Energy Company. AMP successfully secured 7 electric bikes for the use of residents and visitors. There are two in Garrigill and five in Alston, but they have not been used as much as they might. The intention is to try and re-energise and encourage better usage next year, as they are good bikes and the AONB, who worked with AMP are keen to continue the project.

High Mill – the building is amongst the top 5% of listed buildings in the country, but the problem with buildings like this is how to develop a sustainable future for it. Currently discussions are underway with the owner, Eden District Council, English Heritage and AMP.

3g Nenthead Hydro – Tim Haldon circulated a report, and explained that AMP encouraged local people to set up an Alston Moor Community Benefit Energy Society, with the initial aim of trying to buy the Nenthead Hydro. They are hoping to go ahead in May or June with a share offer, but are at a delicate stage in negotiations so cannot say much at present. They need to identify the best value for money, so as to provide a small dividend on shares with the aim of donating profits to local charities.

3h Alston Moor Fitness Club – a written report was received stating that a new group of directors were appointed in January 2016, and advised they had twelve weeks to turn the gym around. Through hard work and many voluntary hours being worked by the staff, the gym is now debt free, but must be able to become sustainable in the longer term. Membership has increased, opening hours extended as well as new classes and equipment provided. If all goes well there are plans to expand, with new classes, equipment and healthy living information.

3i Friends of Alston Town Hall – a written report was received stating that the Friends continue to raise money for the Town Hall mainly by providing refreshments to groups. They contributed towards the cost of plants for the front of the Town Hall, tuning of the piano and buying a new metal Christmas tree. Future plans include showing the England football matches in the European championships.

3j Alston Moor Remembers – the group formed in 2013 and have raised around £3,000 towards the cost of restoring the two war memorials on Alston Moor. Volunteers have tidied up the Nenthall war memorial, and a grant application has been submitted to the War Memorials Trust for Alston war memorial. Donations from the WW1 exhibition in the town hall have made up the bulk of fundraising. The free exhibition features the stories of the men mentioned on the memorials, with research ongoing, and Local Links will be happy to talk to anyone with information on the people from WW1 and WW2.

A Somme Commemoration event is to be held on 11th June with artefacts loaned from the Cumbrian Museum of Military Life.

3k Alston Moor Community Market – is held on the first Saturday of the month between March and December in Alston Town Hall. All proceeds from the raffle and donations from stallholders go to local good causes including the War Memorials appeal, flowers and plants for the Town Hall, Wing and Prayer, Fairhill Recreation Grounds, Alston Pre-school, the Hub museum, Alston Ambulance, the Royal British Legion and Santa at the Market Cross.

3l Nenthead Snowplough – a report was given to the Nenthead Ward meeting, but is available for anyone wishing to see it. An appeal was made for Nenthead residents to help out with driving and maintenance to keep the snowplough going.

3m Police report – a written report was received and questions invited. The police undertook a traffic survey at the beginning of April on the A689 towards Nenthead, confirming that there is an issue with speeding in both directions. The issue of speeding vehicles in Alston was on the agenda for the multi-agency meeting held in April 2016, and several options are being considered. The community are invited to participate in a Community Speed Watch scheme, where volunteers are trained in the use of hand-held speed detection devices. They are then able to monitor the speed of vehicles at key locations and feed back to the police. The scheme has worked very well in other locations and has been found to help influence the behaviour of drivers and assist the police in identifying specific areas and times for enforcement activity.

3n Fairhill Estates Charity – the charity has had no applications for a while, but can help Alston Moor residents with small grants for a variety of needs.

3o Alston United Charities – Matthew Herdman reported that it had been a busy year. All individual applications are confidential and people can contact the vicar for information on how to apply. It is a small charity, mainly providing small grants to individuals for a number of expenses including helping with funeral costs, but was able to grant £600 towards the ambulance fund, The trustees meet 3 times a year.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm