

Rennington Annual Parish Meeting

(postponed from May 2020 and 2021)

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00pm on Thursday 28th October 2021 in Rennington Village Hall

Chair: Cllr Robert Dixon

Present: Cllr Karl Neilsen, Cllr Stephen Baggott, Cllr Phil Green, Cllr Fred Bosanquet, : Clerk Deb Still (minutes), NCC Cllr Wendy Pattison and 3 other members of the electorate.

1. The accuracy of the Minutes of the Rennington Parish Council Annual Assembly held on 16th May 2019. Two councillors who were present at the meeting were not present for tonight's meeting so this item has been deferred to the next Rennington Parish Council Meeting.

2. Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting of 16th May 2019 has been deferred to the next Rennington Parish Council Meeting.

3. Report by the Chair of the Council, Cllr Robert Dixon.

The Chair gave the following verbal report:

“Introduction

It is my privilege to present this Parish Council report to the 2021 Annual Parish Meeting (delayed from May 2021 due to COVID-19 related issues. As I was not a Parish Council member until May the report covers the period from May of this year only.

The primary role of the Council is to represent our community in influencing and delivering better services meeting local needs that improve the quality of life and wellbeing of all residents. The Council of course works with higher authorities in seeking to achieve positive outcomes.

The Council, at the May meeting, agreed to address three priorities in shaping its agenda – good governance, community engagement and neighbourhood planning. I will refer to these later in this report.

Parish Council meetings

The Council held a total of five full council meetings during the report period, one of which was via the ZOOM digital platform. An additional informal discussion meeting involving three councillors was held with four members of the electorate in July. Agenda and minutes of all meetings are available to view on the Parish Council website.

Parish Council membership and staff

The Council currently has seven councillors. Five councillors were elected unopposed at the May local elections to serve for four years. One of the elected councillors resigned citing personal reasons in June. Three further councillors have

been co-opted to council following due democratic process. Three vacant councillor places remain.

Council members collectively have a broad range of public, private and charity sectors work, volunteering and organisational governance experience. Improving diversity and inclusion of membership remains a priority in seeking additional councillor co-options. Anyone wishing to consider becoming a councillor should contact the Parish Clerk for further information.

The Council has one employee. The Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer is employed on a part time contract under standard terms set nationally. Deb Still has a legal background and has worked in the private, statutory and voluntary sectors.

The role of 'volunteering' to support Parish Council work has become established during the last twelve months and will be further considered going forward. I will discuss the current volunteer support in relevant sectors further in this report.

I would like to thank councillors and clerk for their support during a time of change for the council. I would also like to acknowledge the support given by two councillors who stood down at the May election for their advice and for their service to the Parish over many years.

Parish Council assets

The Council maintains a register of assets. Beyond its bank accounts (current and reserve), the most significant asset relates to the lease of Rennington Village Hall.

The Council has very few other actual assets. They amount to several bench seats, litter/dog waste bins, noticeboards, signposts, and IT equipment (laptop, printer and back-up hard drive).

Further references to specific assets are made later in this report.

Rennington Village Hall

RVH is subject to a lease dated 21st March 1984 between the Parish Council and Northumberland Estates that was extended on 29th September 2013 for a further 26 years.

The lease requires that administration of the hall is delegated to a 'committee of management' organised within the meaning of Section 45 of the Charities Act 1960. The Parish Council acts as Custodian Trustee of the charity but is not involved in the day to day management or operations of the hall. The Council has a single representative (councillor) position on the 'committee of management'.

Lawrence Dent, Chair of the RVH Committee will report further on village hall matters.

Rennington village defibrillator (cPAD – community public access defibrillator)

The Council is in the process of assuming full responsibility for the Rennington village defibrillator. This includes an undertaking to provide funding for device

maintenance, defibrillator and CPR (cardiopulmonary) training, and to manage funding arrangements for eventual device replacement. The defibrillator will be added to the Parish Council asset register for insurance purposes and governance will be formally adopted at the next council meeting in December.

Originally installed as an outcome from fund raising by Peter Purdom (a Rennington resident), the defibrillator has been managed by him with the support of The Stephen Carey Fund and one other village resident. The Council has previously met the cost of consumable items relating to the device. After many years of dedicated volunteer service to the community, Peter has decided it is time to pass the role on to others.

Going forward, a team of three Rennington volunteers, known as 'guardians', will provide day to day support and maintenance of the defibrillator which is installed on the front outside wall of The Horseshoes Inn. Two of the volunteers have considerable defibrillator experience, and the third will undertake relevant training. Transfer of the 'guardian' role from Peter Purdom to the new team is due for completion by the end of October 2021.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the community, to thank Peter Purdom for the valuable service he has given to Rennington.

I would also note a thank you to the Stephen Carey Fund (a Northumberland based charity) for its support, and to the owners of the 'Horseshoes' for hosting the defibrillator and providing power to the device.

Governance and accountability

Rennington Parish Council is defined as a smaller authority and must annually publish various documents on our website as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015 and the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities.

The AGAR Return 2020/21 documents can be viewed on the Council's website.

The Council has commenced a detailed review of its governance arrangements.

Two new policy/procedure documents have been adopted during this report period:

- Terms of reference for the Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group
- Co-option of Councillors Policy

The following revised policy/procedure documents are due for adoption in December:

- Standing Orders – revision in line with recognised national standards
- Financial Regulations – revision to incorporate changes to on-line banking arrangements and to be in line with recognised national standards.
- Community Public Access Defibrillator (cPAD)

The review of other policy/procedure documents will continue through 2022.

Finance

The Council reports on financial matters as a standing agenda item at all Council Meetings and can be viewed on the Council's website.

The Parish Clerk is also the Council Responsible Financial Officer. The Council's Internal Auditor is a fully qualified accountant living within the parish.

During this report period, the Council has completed the move to on-line banking with Lloyds Bank. The Council holds a current account and a saver (reserve) account.

The Council has commenced preparation of a forward planning and budgeting process. Business plans and related financial implications for both the year end 2021/22 and for the full year 22/23 will be considered at the December council meeting. The work on these plans will inform the Council's consideration for the 22/23 Parish Precept Request.

Planning

The Council has been involved in a small number of planning issues during this report period most of which were already in due process before May.

North Farm (Phase 1), Rennington

This has been and continues to be challenging for council and residents. The outcome of this development is of course different from the original plans for the site. The management of the site during the building process has caused considerable distress to many village residents and has been at times a hazard for pedestrians and motorists using the C73 and adjacent footpaths.

The considerable number of objectors (council, county councillor, residents) to the developer's main final variance planning applications were not agreed to by the planning authority and in July resulted in the NNAC (politicians) Planning Committee voting to approve plans. There is little more that can be done in planning regulations terms, and we need now to begin to live with the development and respect and welcome new residents as they arrive in the village.

The Council will continue to argue for a 'dark skies' outcome for the development and to seek enforcement actions on the developer in respect of conditions relating to the remaining build and site management.

North Farm (Phase 2), Rennington

Northumberland Estates (NE) sought pre-planning application opinion from the Planning Authority on its proposed development for this second phase earlier this year. The response was highly negative and cited wrong place, too many properties and loss of traditional rural vistas as key concerns. In other words, the Planning Authority has set a significant and major obstacle to NE achieving planning permission.

NE has invited the Parish Council to review this outcome with them before taking any further action on the proposed development. Discussion with NE commences in

October and the PC will consider its position at the next council meeting in December.

Other 'live' planning applications:

- Land north of Grange Park, Rennington – issues of drainage from the site are a concern
- Four new residential houses in Rock – the Parish Council has objected to the application on several points of national and local planning policy issues
- Land west of I Rennington Village – issues of car parking space, bin and fuel storage arrangement, and access/care of adjacent roadway are of concern

Neighbourhood Development Planning (NDP)

The NDP project has become a live project under the direction of a Working Group of three councillors, three active volunteers and a number of others making comment on aspects of project work.

The first phase of consultation has been undertaken using a 'drop-in event' and a questionnaire that was distributed to every address in the parish. Responses to both actions have produced considerable information and comment from residents across the parish. The NDP Working Group is now analysing the feedback and will report to the Parish Council to determine the key issues that might form the basis of future plan development.

The Working Group will report findings to the Council in December and to the wider electorate in the new year. I would like to thank the Working Group members for their work on this important project.

The project has featured the successful introduction of a new parish Council identity developed under the creative and technical skill of Tony Lomas, a parish resident. This identity will be further developed across Council information and communication materials over coming months. I would like to note a particular thank you to Tony Lomas for his volunteer contribution.

Forward plans years 21/22 and 22/23

I expect that the key themes established during the last six months will continue to form the overall direction of the Council's work through the period to end of April 2023.

Business planning and budgeting will be added features of the Council's good governance practice. New ways in which the Council engages with the community across the parish will be explored. We will consider opportunities to share ideas and resources with other groups in achieving better communication with electors and other residents. The Neighbourhood Development Plan should be near to completion by the end of this period and would be expected to be the major influence on the Council's agenda on its approval.

I look forward to being involved in this important programme of parish representation aimed at improving community well-being and in influencing the provision of better services in collaboration with higher authorities and neighbouring parishes. “

4 Speakers

a) **Laurence Dent** – Chair of the Rennington Village Hall (RVH) Management Committee

The current Management Committee was first elected by the AGM held in 2019 and has a good mix of people including two members, John Watson and Wendy Swinney, who have given their time, knowledge and skills to the committee over many years. Due to COVID restrictions it had not been possible for an AGM to be convened until October 2021 when the Committee had been re-elected and a new member, Karon Lomas, appointed. Since 2019, two Parish Council nominated members, Jim McQueen and Karl Neilsen had served on the Committee but both had resigned for personal reasons. Cllr Fred Bosanquet will be the new representative on the Committee from Rennington Parish Council.

Annual Accounts had been produced and independently verified during the period of lockdown although formal approval had not been possible until the AGM in October.

The Parish Council is the Custodian Trustee of the Lease for the Hall from Northumberland Estates with the RVH Committee acting as Managing Trustee and fully indemnifying the Parish Council in respect of rent payment and all other Lease obligations.

Since 2019 the Committee has been focussed on governance and funding issues and has introduced new policies in relation to Health & Safety, Safeguarding, Risk, Conditions of Hire and most significantly a Reserves Policy. Under the Reserves Policy, a Restricted Lease Fund of £12,000 has been established to meet identified Lease and Trust Deed obligations which currently include sums designated for timber treatment to the roof and the replacement loft insulation.

Typically, to meet running costs, RVH needs to generate income of around £8,000 per annum of which half is usually generated by the Scarecrow Festival together with a smaller, but important contribution from the Annual Christmas Bingo evening. Neither of these events were able to be held in 2020 or 2021 and no income was generated from User Groups or Hall Hire due to Government Restrictions. Although rent and other outgoings still had to be paid during this period, Government Covid Support Grants had been awarded which would provide a financial buffer for the Hall during a continuing period of uncertainty.

Since September, use of the Hall for activities and meetings is gradually returning to some normality, although understandably it is not yet back to pre-COVID levels. On a more positive note during October, the Rock Cricket Club held a very successful Annual Awards Dinner in the Hall and a separate Junior Awards Presentation. The Committee is keen to explore other opportunities to support the outstanding work of the Cricket Club particularly for its junior members during the winter months. Three Film Nights have been held since the Hall reopened but attendances on Thursday evenings had been low so further consideration would be given to the organisation and promotion of these events.

Going forward the challenge will be to return use of the Hall and income generation to sustainable levels and to seek to attract an active group of enthusiastic volunteers to help with the organisation of future activities.

THE COMMITTEE WOULD URGE ANYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN HELPING OUT, RUNNING ACTIVITIES, HIRING THE HALL OR COMING UP WITH NEW IDEAS FOR USING THE HALL TO CONTACT THEM AT:

renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com or to telephone Laurence Dent on: 07866 695850.

b) County Councillor Wendy Pattison

Cllr Pattison represents the Longhoughton Division which includes 9 parishes: Rennington, Craster, Edlingham, Eglingham, Ellingham, Embleton, Hedgeley, Longhoughton and Newton-by-the-Sea.

Wendy is also the NCC Cabinet Member for Adult Well-Being which includes Food and Fuel poverty, Safeguarding, Equality & Diversity, Mental Health, the Voluntary Sector, Domestic Violence, Adult Social Care, Public Health, Extra Care & Supported Housing and Communities Together.

Cllr Pattison would like to see different options for people in Northumberland living with dementia, for instance:

- A 'Dementia Village' based on the Dutch model which is a village made up entirely of residents with severe dementia and their carers, which presents an innovative and different way of providing dementia care.
- A 'Care/Dementia Farm' where people could visit for two hours or stay for a couple of days and help to feed the animals and participate in a range of outdoor activities – this could be a diversification model for local farmers.

Cllr Pattison is also keen to do more for those suffering domestic violence which can be a hidden problem in rural areas.

In relation to Rennington Parish issues with roads, work will start on 9th November to put in an extra safety surface on the sharp bend at Rock Midstead.

Cllr Pattison is also campaigning for the following highway improvements:

- Upgrading of the road coming into Rennington from the B1340
- Upgrading of the road from the Hocket to the hump back bridge near to the Stamford turn and
- Improving the 4-way junction at Stamford with some form of roundabout

Cabinet Members including Cllr Pattison will be endeavouring to visit as many parishes in Northumberland at the request of Cllr Sanderson, the Leader of the Council, who would like each cabinet member including himself to visit as many Parish Councils who issue an invitation.

5. Any other matters raised by electors of the Parish

Discussion ensued by those present about:

- Encouraging new volunteers and activities in the Village Hall
- Training for the Defibrillator
- Focussing on issues in the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) that are important to local residents
- Having a shared website for the PC and other community organisations including RVH
- Looking at methods for engaging local residents and keeping them informed (the NDP consultation day was well attended and flyers had been dropped into each resident's letterbox by volunteers).