

## **TOGSTON PARISH COUNCIL**

At the Meeting of the Parish Council held at Acklington Village Hall on 11 January 2022 at 6:00pm.

Present: Cllrs A Cairns, K Farwell, M Farwell, S Jeffrey, F Moore and J Watson (Chairman)

83/21 Apologies for Absence

Cllr Urwin

84/21 Public Participation

A resident raised concerns about the state of the allotments following Storm Arwen. There is no fencing in places and there is a risk to anyone accessing the site. Metal and glass is lying around. The resident appreciates that the Parish Council has limited funds but is concerned that many tenants may end up walking away from the allotments due to a lack of funds, time or skills to repair the damage, especially if there are more strong winds. The resident agrees that allotment prices should be increased generally but suggested that they should not be increased this year. The Parish Council discussed whether tenants could help each other by forming a working party to start the process of clearing and repairing the storm damage.

Cllr Watson has been to the Archives at Woodhorn to read the past Parish Council minutes and has visited the allotments a number of times since Christmas. Cllr Watson would like to see a programme of renewal and proper practices in place for managing the allotments. The Parish Council needs to strike a balance between available funds and what is needed; the Parish Council's spending on the allotments is curtailed by the amount of funds it has, which comes from the rents. Cllr Watson would like to put in place a five year improvement plan, under which rents are gradually increased and used to improve the allotments. At present, there is a deficit which means the Parish Council is subsidising the allotments for example for water and the Service Level Agreement for grass cutting.

The Parish Council discussed hiring a skip at the start of April. The Parish Council will also look at categorising the allotments into Bands to set the rents. Cllr Watson stated that repairs and maintenance at the allotments need to be factored into the rents as the Parish Council cannot afford rents to stay the way they are. The Parish Council discussed whether bonds could be used or whether the outgoing tenant should be billed for the cost of clearing their allotment if left untidy. The Clerk confirmed that paperwork and requests for rents are sent out at the start of April. The Parish Council is not responsible for damage on allotments, however it did discuss what can be done to help. The Clerk will contact tenants to ask about storm damage and to ascertain whether tenants are giving up or keeping their allotments.

85/21 Disclosure of Interests

Cllrs Cairns, K Farwell, M Farwell, S Jeffrey and F Moore declared an interest in Item 11 (Allotments) as allotment tenants. All councillors affected submitted requests for a dispensation to take part in the meeting.

**RESOLVED** to grant dispensations to all affected councillors.

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### 86/21 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 9 November 2021 were approved as a true record.

### 87/21 Report from Northumbria Police

None received.

### 88/21 Report from County Cllr Terry Clark

None.

### 89/21 Chairman's Report

Cllr Watson provided her report:

- a. As a responsible landlord the Parish Council arranged for a skip to be hired following Storm Arwen. This was located behind Togston Social Club. Cllr Jeffrey attached a notice to the sign explaining what it could be used for and the skip was used responsibly by allotment tenants.
- b. Damage to allotment structures (e.g. greenhouses) is the responsibility of tenants. The Parish Council's insurance does not cover claims by third parties as a result of injury by those structures. The Parish Council is responsible for common areas and tenants are responsible for insuring their own allotment.
- c. The East View boundary fence has collapsed. Cllr Watson has asked the joiner for a quote for repairing this, which will include reusing some of the existing pieces. The joiner has also quoted for repairs to the car park fence.
- d. Cllr Watson is applying for a grant to cover the cost of the new bench seat for the main allotment site.
- e. The Parish Council allotments were inspected during the summer months by the Parish Council. The Clerk has created an Allotment Register with details of tenants. If any tenants are intending to vacate their allotment at the end of March please could they let the Parish Council know so that the allotment can be allocated to someone on the waiting list. Anyone who has structures they no longer want on their allotment could advertise these via the Parish Council and/or notice board in case others would like them. Tenants should remove debris when they vacate their allotment in accordance with the tenancy agreement. Tenants are encouraged to give their telephone and email addresses to the Clerk to reduce postage costs.
- f. This year the Christmas light switch on took place for the final time at Christ Church, with thanks to Cllr Cairns for organising this. The location for next year's Christmas Tree needs to be agreed and planned.
- g. The Parish Council can get free trees through the Woodland Trust and Cllr Watson has provisionally ordered two Small Copse packs (30 saplings each) and one Medium Year Round Colour pack (105 saplings), to be planted to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. These will be delivered at the start of March unless the Parish Council decides not to proceed and cancels the order. The Clerk will circulate details of the packs to councillors by email.

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- h. Cllr Watson met with NCC on site in Queen Street to discuss a proposal to upgrade the back lane and to improve parking. County Cllr Terry Clark has agreed in principle to help with funding this scheme through his Member's Small Scheme Allowance. Estimates are being prepared and sent to County Cllr Clark for approval.

### 90/21 Finance

- a. The financial report to 4 January 2022 was received.
- b. **RESOLVED** to authorise the following payments. The Parish Council noted that the water bill seemed high. However, looking at the total water bill over the year this seems comparable to previous years.

Payee	Head of Expenditure	Cost	VAT	Total
Wave (Anglian Water)	Allotments – Water	£292.54	£0.00	£292.54
Flannigan & Border Skip Hire	Allotments	£295.00	£0.00	£295.00
Hobberlaw Plants	Christmas Lights	£104.17	£20.83	£125.00

- c. The following receipts were noted:

Date	Source	Reason	Amount
10/11/21	TSB Bank	Interest	£0.04
19/11/21	Individuals	Allotment equipment sale	£140.00
19/11/21	Petty Cash	Petty cash paid into bank account	£16.74
10/12/21	TSB Bank	Interest	£0.04

### 91/21 Precept

**RESOLVED** to set the Precept for the Year ending 31 March 2023 at £5,500, in light of the damage caused by Storm Arwen and the need for repairs and maintenance.

### 92/21 Repairs to Fencing

**RESOLVED** to accept the quote provided by Chris Bowden (Joiner) for repairs to the fencing in the car park area and next to the path at a total cost of £1,100.

### 93/21 Vehicles obstructing Queen Street Footpath

- a. Cllr Watson met with NCC enforcement on site. The car has now been moved. It was noted that the interior wall has been removed between the Parish Council garage and the neighbouring private garage. The occupant of the Parish Council garage needs to be recorded as the tenant and pay the rent, and may not carry out a business from the garage. However, it was agreed with the tenant and the NCC enforcement officer that the tenant could use the Parish Council garage for storage relating to his business which will allow him to continue.

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- b. The Parish Council considered the installation of bollards to prevent parking of illegal vehicles and discussed the issues arising in that area, including cars and vans bending posts into the garage at the other end.

**RESOLVED** to accept the quote provided by Chris Bowden (Joiner) for installing bollards and to also ask Mr Bowden to install two at the other end.

### 94/21 Allotment Rules

The Parish Council considered the allotments generally and the differences between the main site/East View and the Togston Crescent site. The Parish Council agreed it was difficult to compare the sites as they have different advantages: convenience, vehicle access and/or water on site. The Parish Council will review the current rules and the Clerk will draft an updated set for consideration along with allotment rents at the next meeting.

### 95/21 Garage Ground Rent

Cllr Watson has been reviewing the Parish Council papers in the Archives at Woodhorn and noted that garage ground rent has decreased from the original amount, which was £25. The Parish Council noted that there have been no increases since 1993. The Parish Council discussed at length by what amount the rent should be increased.

**RESOLVED** to set the garage ground rent at £32 for the financial year 2022/23 and to increase with inflation in subsequent years. When the Clerk writes to request rents in April she will include the fact that rents have not increased since 1993.

### 96/21 4 Queen Street

There is still a problem with abandoned furniture and white goods in the garden. The Clerk will speak to NCC.

### 97/21 Items for the Next Agenda

- Allotment Rents
- Allotments annexed to properties on Togston Court
- 4 Queen Street – rubbish in garden

### 98/21 Date of Next Meeting

The Parish Council agreed to change its date for the next meeting to coordinate with another hirer of the Hall.

The next meeting will therefore be on **Tuesday 15 March** 2022 at 6:00pm, Acklington Village Hall

The Chairman closed the Meeting at 8:05pm.