

**Blanchland Annual Parish Meeting
Held in the
Village Hall on 21st May 2024**

Present: Councillors: R O'Connor, M Kennedy, M Forster, C Horncastle (NCC), Clerk: C Asquith, Michael Forster (BCDO), Michael Evans – Savills and 6 members of the public
Apologies: Councillor's T Bowers & David Kelly.

The minutes of the previous meeting on 23rd May 2023 were approved

Matters Arising:

Chairman's report 2023

The Parish Council are continuing to work with Duncan Lovatt from NCC and Savills to improve the riverside footpath which is often in a very poor condition due to rain fall and poor drainage. As stated last year this is not a quick fix but we are hopeful that we may see some improvements in 2024 – 25. The Council are also working with NCC to solve the drainage issue on Clapshaw which is still causing significant problems on the Show Field and needs to be sorted this year so that the B&H Show is not impacted. The council urge residents to use "Fix MY Street" to report any pot holes etc. as this will speed up response times, the Clerk also emails NCC directly to try to ensure that issues are reported promptly and addressed accordingly.

The Parish Council has increased the precept to £1600 in order to be able to fulfill certain tasks this year; this is the first increase in over 2 years. The PC purchased 3 grit bins which have been installed in 3 locations; there is a 4th bin which was donated which is located at the Village Car Park. The bins are still full and as such will remain in-situ. The PC is responsible for keeping these filled and the precept goes towards covering these costs.

The new picnic benches are now installed on the show field and it's great to see families using them on dry days. The PC will also be contributing £100 to Blanchland Village Hall to enable them to purchase a bin for public use which will be situated near to the dog waste bin in the VH Car Park. The Council also donated to the annual bonfire display and other causes such as the Great North Air Ambulance each year. It also makes a goodwill contribution to Cliff for his upkeep of the Show Field, he does a sterling job and we are all very pleased to see him out and about again this year.

As you may recall last year the PC were granted funds from The Northern Grid Foundation to purchase a generator to be installed at the Village Hall, the purpose of which was to be able to create a Crisis Hub in the event of sustained power outage. The generator is now installed and fully operational, it was tested in December when planned power cuts affected the village and the Hall opened its doors for the local community to use for the day. The Parish Council agreed in their February 2024 meeting that the Generator should be gifted to Blanchland Village Hall as they would be able to monitor, maintain and man the generator should the need arise.

At last years AGM the future of Blanchland Village Hall looked uncertain, however the members of the committee who were retiring have been replaced and a full Blanchland Village Hall Committee is now up and running.

Felons Bar is no longer trading but the Village Hall Committee are working very hard to ensure that there are regular events such as Food Vans, Quiz Nights, Markets and other events where the bar can be utilised for the local community to use. If you have any enquiries please contact Lesley Ogle the BVH Secretary.

Questions Raised:

1. Could the area around the telephone box please be tidied up?
2. One member of the public thanked the PC for their work getting the bus running back to the village after the route was disrupted due to the bridge work at Edmundbyers. .

Response:

1. This was referred to Michael Evans from Savills, as it had been part of the Place Making Scheme, so far no updates regarding the scheme.

Report from Michael Evans, Savills for Lord Crewe's Charity 2024 Trustee's strategy over the past 5 years has been to refurbish properties as they become vacant which has resulted in only one or two properties being refurbished per year. The plan is to accelerate the strategy and upgrade more houses per year which may include properties that are already occupied. This programme will be completely voluntary and the plan would be to move tenants out of their home into another vacant property in the village, while the work is going on. They plan to work with the tenants and the idea would be to make the houses more energy efficient as part of the refurbishments which is a current hurdle due to them being listed and the conservation officer resisting previous attempts to insulate properties. The hope is to engage with the conservation officer to agree a suitable compromise to upgrade insulation without impacting on the listing

Response: 1. If the pigsty is listed then there is a legal obligation to ensure its upkeep. The charity has to spend funds to best fulfil their objectives and any works would have to be considered within the wider budget for Blanchland. 2. They will be looking at all options and Colin Horncastle suggested Michael Evans emails him with regard to planning issues etc. 3. It was suggested that no. 8 might remain un-occupied as this may be the alternative property Savills will use to home tenants who agree to have refurbishments completed in their home. 4. No updates on Place Making scheme they are still waiting to hear back from Highways

Questions Raised:

1. The pigsty at the bottom of Blanchland bridge, can this be preserved? It is not associated with Bridgend House and needs to be looked after to ensure it is maintained for the future.
2. With regard to insulation, The BCDO secured a grant to provide secondary double glazing, which made a major difference in houses on the square, is this a possible solution?
3. No. 8 the Square has now been done up but the flood barrier has been left in-situ at the front of the house, it stands out and is not very pleasing to look at, can it be removed?
4. What is happening with the Placemaking scheme?
5. What is the plan for renovating the village properties?
6. With regard to the area which has been felled, is a replanting programme in place and will the path be in the same place? Will the path become a bridal path?

Response:

1. If the pigsty is listed then there is a legal obligation to ensure its upkeep. The charity has to spend funds to fulfil the maximum obligation and the aesthetics of buildings is key to that.
2. They will be looking at all options and Colin Horncastle suggested Michael Evans emails him with regard to planning issues etc.
3. It was suggested that no. 8 might remain un-occupied as this may be the alternative property Savills will use to home tenants who agree to have refurbishments completed in their home.
4. No updates on the Place Making scheme they are still waiting to hear back from Highways.
5. There is no plan as yet as there are various hurdles to go through before they get to that point.
6. As part of the licence to harvest replanting is mandatory, and there will be a 50/50 mix of broadleaves and conifers. Yes, the plan is to retain the original route. Michael Evans had not been aware of any discussions regarding change to the paths usage.

Blanchland Community Development Organisation 2023-4

Michael Forster 23 May 2024

Michael Forster is acting Chairman until a new vicar is appointed. The Abbey Project is ongoing, Yvonne Conchie is the Project Lead and Susan Mackel is the Community Events Organiser. The project is currently in phase 2, there is work being completed which includes the conservation of panels of glass which are of national importance, the work involved will cost £25,000 and the Trust have donated £15,000 to support that. The glaziers report has recommended they be conserved and kept in York, they are very fragile and rare. The plan is for the project to apply for funding in the autumn for Stage 3 works in the Abbey. This work includes a kitchen, disabled toilets, underfloor heating, new seating and disabled access. Archaeological excavation feasibility study will be starting next week at the front and back of the Abbey to understand the impact this might have in support the application. There are a number of events planned in the Abbey including Katie Doherty and the Navigators, who is a local singer; this will help showcase the Abbey as a venue for music etc. Embroidery has been found in the Abbey which it is believed might date back to 1500's, there is evidence to say that it came from Bruges in 1894, this is a piece of interest and is being looked into. The glass will be kept in York until phase 3 has been completed.

Questions Raised:

1. Do the pews have to be removed?
2. The Donation Box in the village car park is in a very poor state and may not last the summer, it needs replacing.

Response:

1. The Abbey costs so much to run, if it doesn't cover its costs it will have to close. By removing the pews the space will be opened up so that more people can be seated making it a venue which can be used for music, concerts and other such events. It is the right thing to do. The annual insurance for the Abbey is £3500. An information leaflet about upcoming events has been posted through everyone's doors.
2. Would the Trust be able to help?

Report from Colin Horncastle NCC – South Tynedale 2024

Councillor Horncastle began by reminding the meeting of the vast number of roles and jobs the County Council has, mentioning that it isn't just potholes and that NCC has a budget of £8 million and provides a variety of services. There have been changes to the Executive

board and the new mayor system, North East Mayor, should see £4 to £5 million invested into the region. The new Mayor is very focused on Public Transport in rural areas. Fix My Street is being used widely with over 30,000 county wide reports. It covers a range of services, not just potholes and means that the report goes directly to the appropriate department and this should speed up the process and resulting work.

The past year started off looking bleak with inflation at its highest. NCC only has 2 sources of income, Council Tax and the Settlement from the Government. Council tax went up by 2.9%, as the majority (2/3) of Northumberland's population live in Blyth and Ashington in tax category A and B. Last year savings of 11 million had to be made without any cuts to services or redundancies. As a result the council is working more economically now and doing things differently. Planning fees have not gone up in 7 years, these have now risen. By Christmas the Government Settlement was £1 million better off £10 million rather than £11m. Various issues with land in Blyth that was sold to British Volt which failed, this land has been sold again and will result in a huge construction 11 x the size of Wembley. It will provide 700 construction jobs for 7 – 8 years. Blyth is seeing major investment with old houses being knocked down and new home as being provided. Investments into the Port Of Blyth. It is the largest town with 60,000 residents Various antisocial issues and investments being made into education housing etc. across this region (Blyth and Ashington) This is seeing an increase in living standards of up to 8.2%.

Ash Dieback is a major problem across the region and massive surveys are taking place. NCC has to carry out the government's wishes, one of which is to start recycling food. NCC is going to push home composting and there is also work being done regarding electrical recycling after a major issue with fires from unsafe lithium batteries. They are still deliberating over glass recycling as the government has recommended glass be put in the general waste and then is sorted at the depot, but as NCC is not set up for that glass will be disposed of as it is now.

Leisure centres across the County are no longer run by Active Northumberland, but all staff have been transferred without any job losses.

The County continues its work supporting and homing refugees in different parts of the region.

The road improvements scheme in Hexham is now completed and the one way system is now finished. There are proposals for a £9 million cycling Corbridge to Hexham Scheme, supported by Sport England but this is currently under a 2 year delay. With regard to potholes, they can't be fixed when full of water, however with funding over £39 million in place and extra contractors on board, bit by bit things will get done.

Questions Raised:

1. The drainage from the road at Clapshaw is still an issue, despite being told a camera would investigate, the PC have heard nothing back, Northumbrian Water have done a dye test and have assured the council it is a highways issue. The leak is causing issues on the show field which could prevent part of it being used and may have a significant impact on the Blanchland and Hunstanworth Show, what can be done?

Response:

1. Councillor Horncastle will be speaking to the Glen Harrison about other issues soon and he will mention this, adding that we are lucky to live in a beautiful place and compared to other parts of the region we have relatively few issues, however acknowledging that this is an issue for the community and does need to be resolved.

Meeting Closed: 8.30pm