

MINUTES OF MEETING OF CRASTER PARISH COUNCIL
Thursday 18th January 2024 – 6:30pm via Zoom

Councillors present:

Chair: Martin Smith

Parish Council members: Mark Green, Ann Fettis, Rosie Robson, Michael Craster and Margaret Brooks.

Also present: Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk), County Councillor Wendy Pattison and 11 members of the public.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors E Pearson and A Gregory.

2. Declarations of interest

None received.

3. Confirmation of the minutes for the meeting held on 30th November 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2023 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings, subject to the following additional sentence being added under Item 5: "*Ms Metcalfe highlighted a specific case on consecrated ground but confirmed that this was not a decision specifically in respect of Spitalford*"

4. Matters arising

None received.

5. Statement by the Chair of the Council on conduct during and outside of Parish Council meetings.

The Chair of the Council made the following statement to the Parish Council meeting:

I wanted to take this opportunity to firstly thank Members of the Parish Council and the many volunteers in our community who work so hard with us to deliver so much for our community – without our collective work, tireless volunteering hours away from family and loved ones and the enormous sense of public duty, our parish would not be the special and unique area it is known the country over as being.

Equally, it has been a delight for me as Chair of the Parish Council to see this collective work deliver projects and events in our community – too many to count – and always the model of cordiality, respect and harmony.

It is therefore with something of a heavy heart that I must express my disappointment at the discussion and subsequent ramifications of that discussion at our October Full Council meeting pertaining to the project involving the collection boxes around Craster.

During the course of this meeting, what I must take as an innocent misunderstanding about the arrangements for this project regrettably lead to a rather heated discussion involving Members and a number of members of the public about this project.

To be clear, there are no governance issues at all with this project and nor is there any insinuation from any Member of this Council that anyone involved in this project has done anything untoward. Far from it, this project has managed to obtain nearly £1,400 from visitor contributions since it began and this has funded a financial contribution to the

harbour, hot water bottles during the recent energy crisis, plants and bulbs – all of which could not be achieved without the fantastic support of those involved in this project.

However, no matter what the topic and content of discussion on our Agenda at any given time – regardless of how controversial it may be to an individual member of the public – I simply cannot allow a situation to arise where a Member feels shouted down by members of the public during our meetings. There is a public participation section on each of our Agendas and this is the only opportunity during our meetings in which a member of the public should raise an issue. Without mentioning any names at all, I was equally disappointed to hear of a situation outside of our meeting, in which a Member of this Council was made to feel upset and intimidated following on from that discussion. Being on a Parish Council is highly rewarding but can also be difficult, Members have a right to a peaceful, private life and I would strongly urge anyone with any concerns about a discussion to please contact either the Councillor concerned and/or the Clerk in writing or seek a meeting with the relevant Councillors, in order that an issue can be resolved amicably and in a private context.

I sincerely hope that this statement clarifies the position on this project, this Council's great appreciation for those involved and also draws a line under this matter and that we can move forward harmoniously.

6. Public participation

Mrs Jackie Reeves raised a concern about digital connection in the community. Jackie advised that she was concerned about the BT switch over from copper wiring to digital in the village in the absence of a mobile phone network. Jackie advised that she felt that local residents should be made aware of this. Councillors agreed to contact iNorthumberland and ask that they come and speak at the next Full Council meeting.

Mr Michael Robson asked the Parish Council if it could arrange for the pedestrian footpath sign to be erected to help draw visitors' attention to the Craster Trail up Tower Bank. Mr Robson highlighted that he had previously asked for this to be done but this had not been done to date. The Clerk promised to arrange this.

7. Update following a recent meeting with NCC regarding the future of Tourist Information Centre

Councillor M Green provided the following report to the Council. Its proposed actions were **agreed** by all Members unanimously and Councillor M Green **agreed** to take the lead on this project:

Proposal for the Purchase and Conversion of Craster Tourist Information Centre (TIC)

I am writing this initial proposal regarding the future of the Craster Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in my role as Parish Councillor on behalf of Craster Parish Council.

Our proposal outlines the acquisition of the TIC from Northumberland County Council by a new community interest company (CIC), the conversion of the TIC into a versatile retail/food unit, and the operation of the facility under a licence as a shop and cafe.

1. Formation of a Community Interest Company (CIC)

We propose the creation of a new Community Interest Company (CIC) for the purpose of acquiring the Craster TIC from Northumberland County Council. The CIC structure ensures that the community has a stake in the management and decision-making process, fostering

local involvement and addressing the unique needs of the community. The CIC will be responsible for overseeing the development, management, and operation of the TIC. The CIC will seek to purchase the TIC building and surrounding access land from NCC for a nominal amount in return for an agreement as to the TIC's future use. This use will include an agreement on who will be responsible for providing and maintaining the existing public toilets.

2. Capital Works for Conversion

The TIC is a building constructed in 1991 split roughly 50/50 between information centre and public toilets. The building's appearance is rather anonymous, dominated by the timber and stone clad East gable end. In its current form it is difficult for passers-by to see inside of the building and the location of the entrance doors, on either side, are not obvious.

Upon acquisition of the TIC, we propose capital works to convert the facility into a versatile retail/food unit. The conversion will include:

- Structural alterations to create a welcoming 'shop front' and entrance in the East gable end.
- Interior renovations to create space for retail activities.
- Installation of kitchen facilities to support a cafe setup.
- Compliance with all local building codes, accessibility standards, and safety regulations.
- Use of external and internal space to share both tourist and local heritage information.
- Remedial works to any defective items identified by the building survey.

At this stage we estimate that the capital works will cost in the region of £50,000. This estimate is of course subject to the findings of a building survey, design advice and tendering. This estimate does not include the upgrade of the toilets planned by NCC.

The conversion aims to transform the TIC into a vibrant and multifunctional space that caters to the diverse needs and interests of both residents and tourists.

3. Operation under License as a Shop and Cafe

We propose that the Craster TIC, once converted, operates under a licence as a shop and cafe. This would mean that rather than running the business itself, the CIC would advertise the business opportunity and then licence the premises to a suitable operator. The operator would pay the CIC a rent and would also be responsible for paying utility bills, business rates and insurance. The rent will need to be sufficient for the CIC to maintain the structure of the building and keep any excess to use for future development of the site.

This will allow the facility to offer a range of services to the community and visitors, contributing to the local economy and creating a welcoming hub for social interaction. The licence will ensure compliance with all relevant regulations and licensing requirements.

We recognise that the proposed changes may impact on local businesses in the vicinity of Craster TIC. These include:

- Piper's Pitch, sandwich van (Craster)
- Jolly Fisherman, public house (Craster)
- Robson & Sons, fish shop and deli (Craster)
- Mick Oxley, art gallery (Craster)
- Stable Yard, cafe (Dunstan)
- Cottage, public house (Dunstan)

However, these impacts are likely to be mitigated by the following factors:

- There is no longer a cafe offering in Craster following the recent closure of the Shoreline Cafe.

- There are an estimated 250K visitors to Craster each year, suggesting that there is a big enough market to support more businesses.

We will conduct a preliminary impact assessment as part of our feasibility study. To mitigate any potential negative impacts, we propose engaging in open communication with local businesses, seeking their input, and exploring collaborative opportunities. This may include joint promotional activities, partnerships, or shared events to enhance the overall economic ecosystem.

We will also provide a detailed financial plan as part of our feasibility study.

4. Action required to progress this proposal

In order to move this proposal forwards we require the following from NCC:

- Funding and a recommended provider for a feasibility plan.
- Access to the interior of the property in order to get a better understanding of the space available.
- Scale drawings of the property.
- Maintenance records and plans.
- Costings for the planned renovation works to the toilets.

We believe that this proposal not only preserves the historical significance of the Craster TIC but also transforms it into a dynamic and sustainable community asset. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss this proposal further and address any questions or concerns you may have. Thank you for your time and consideration.

End of proposal

8. Report by County Councillor Wendy Pattison

Wendy advised that she was working hard to ensure that the large number of potholes around the community are being resolved. Wendy advised that she has asked for potholes in Craster to be a top priority for NCC Highways team,

9. Review of the Parish Council's Standing Orders

Members unanimously agreed a new set of Standing Orders to support the Council in its day-to-day functions. The Council thanked the Clerk for drafting these.

10. Report from Embleton Joint Burial Committee representative

Councillor M Brooks advised that there had been no meeting of the EJBC and therefore there was no update for this evening's meeting since the last update.

11. Report from Craster Community Trust representative

Councillor M Craster advised that the lighting of the Christmas tree had been a great success and thanked all those involved in this great event.

Councillor M Craster also advised that the Trust is meeting on a regular basis and the Trust is looking specifically at the refurbishment of the Hall, including lighting and painting, etc.

12. Update on the Conservation Area Character Appraisal report for the parish

The Clerk advised that the AONB had now agreed to fully fund this appraisal and that they would be looking to contract an appropriate consultant for these works in the very near future and that he hoped to have a draft report to Members in due course.

13. Update on the mobile phone mast for the parish

The Clerk advised that there had been a number of positive discussions with at least two mobile network operators for the new mast and that they were awaiting these MNOs to sign an agreement prior to the commencement of works.

The Clerk advised that he had discussed the works programme with the Atlas Group and they have confirmed that work will only take a matter of days and will not result in any great disruption to local residents.

The Clerk advised that he would keep Members updated on how this progresses.

14. To agree the Parish Council's budget for the financial year 2024/25

Members unanimously **agreed** the following budget for 2024/25, with at least £3,000 agreed to be maintained in the general reserve budget:

| Item of expenditure | Expected expenditure |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Staffing costs (including on costs) | £7,200.00 |
| Insurance | £200.00 |
| Wifi and telephone to the Hall | £400.00 |
| RBL Appeal | £20.00 |
| Christmas tree | £150.00 |
| Cutting of grass verges – incl. Tower Bank and Dunstan | £1,000.00 |
| NALC subscription and website | £170.00 |
| Stationery and printing | £300.00 |
| Hall hire | £288.00 |
| Community events | £500. |
| EJBC request for precept | £215.00 |
| Total | £10,443.00 |

15. To agree the Parish Council's precept request for financial year 2024/25

Members noted that the 2024/25 Craster Parish Council Tax Base was calculated at 151.48. In 2023/24, the Tax Base was 153.59. Therefore, the Tax Base has reduced slightly. Members considered the budget for 2024/25 and noted that the current Band D charge for the Parish Council is £67.13.

Members noted that, should they wish to maintain the current Band D precept charge, this would generate a precept of £10,168.85. Members **agreed** to freeze the precept at its current Band D charge for 2024/25.

16. Planning matters:

23/04606/FUL | Removal of existing oil tank and installation of bunded oil tank in new location | 19 Heugh Road Craster Northumberland NE66 3TJ. It was **agreed** to note this application.

17. Items for next Agenda

The Chair reminded Members to contact the Clerk should they wish to request an item on the next Agenda.

18. Date and time of next meeting

18th January 2024 – 6:30pm in Craster Memorial Hall.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. J. Brooks". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

**Chair of Craster Parish Council
(21st March 2024)**