

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF CRASTER PARISH COUNCIL**  
**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024 – 6:30pm in the Craster village Hall**

**Councillors present:**

**Chair:** Margaret Brooks

**Parish Council members:** Ann Fettis, Rosie Robson and Allan Gregory

**Also present:** Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk), County Councillor Wendy Pattison and 12 members of the public and Mr Stephen Pinchen (Managing Director of Alncom).

**1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors M Green, M Craster and M Smith.

**2. Declarations of interest**

None received.

**3. Confirmation of the minutes for the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings, subject to the following being added to the public participation minute: *"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."*

**4. Matters arising**

None received.

**5. Public participation**

Fyona Robson asked when the new scheme to the entrance of Craster village would be installed as this was promised in February 2024. The Clerk reported that he had been engaging with NCC Highways on this and they are now advising that the project would not be delivered until October 2024, in order to avoid the busy tourist season. Members expressed their real disappointment that this had not been done earlier and asked the Clerk to insist that this be delivered by absolutely no later than October 2024.

Fyona Robson also asked when the double yellow lines would be extended up to the top of Tower Bank as vehicles were already beginning to park there and cause an obstruction in the road. The Clerk advised that he would chase this up and report back to a future meeting.

**6. Discussion relating to the BT digital switch over with iNorthumberland**

The Clerk advised that he had received a last-minute apology from the iNorthumberland team for this meeting this evening. However, the Clerk highlighted that Stephen Pinchen, Managing Director of Alncom, was in attendance this evening. The Chair welcomed Stephen to the meeting and asked if he might speak to the Parish Council on Alncom's work in the digital area.

Stephen began by thanking the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak with the Council and residents this evening. Stephen highlighted that, earlier this month, Alncom announced that the Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme approved a new project, which will allow Alncom to extend their gigabit-capable Fibre-to-the-Premises network further into the north of Alnwick area.

Stephen advised that Alncom is currently aiming to build their full fibre network to cover 50,000 premises in the North East of England and have already delivered on over half of this, mostly across rural parts of Northumberland, County Durham and the Scottish Borders – and that Alncom also have an existing Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) network.

Stephen advised that the latest network build to be added to Alncom's plans will hopefully cover a further 1,454 properties North of Alnwick. Stephen highlighted that, whilst this might seem like a small number, the rural nature of the area means that the network itself is still geographically significant in size. Stephen advised that the route will include Denwick, Rennington, Rock, Christon Bank, Embleton, Craster, Dunstan and Howick, plus all areas in between.

Stephen advised that this is a 'demand lead' project, so if anyone in Craster and Dunstan would like full fibre broadband into their property, with free installation and 200mbps for £25 per month, it is vital that they register their interest immediately. Stephen advised that the timing is dictated by levels of interest and if there is enough, Alncom can begin the build before the end of March 2024.

A number of residents asked what the benefits of signing up with Alncom were from a user perspective. Stephen advised that Alncom would be able to provide Ultrafast & Superfast broadband to locations where other Telecom providers fail and therefore residents can enjoy browsing with quicker internet speeds. Stephen advised that Alncom will install fibre from a full fibre source direct to premises and that this is currently the fastest and most reliable broadband technology on the market.

The Clerk asked what would happen in the event of a power outage. Stephen advised that the technology also runs on batteries which could be provided as an added safeguard.

Stephen advised that the Government is providing up to £210m worth of voucher funding as immediate help for people experiencing slow broadband speeds in rural areas. Vouchers worth up to £1,500 for homes and £3,500 for businesses will help to cover the costs of installing gigabit broadband to people's doorsteps and Craster and Dunstan would qualify under the scheme.

Stephen advised that the associated package for this includes free installation, a free WiFi 6 router and a 24-month contract with no mid contract price changes.

Councillor A Fettis asked how a resident would find out about signing up to the scheme. Stephen advised that he would be happy to leave leaflets in the Hall for further information. Councillor R Robson suggested that the Parish Council, in collaboration with resident Jacqui Mellor, produces an information leaflet, to be distributed around homes and businesses, encouraging sign-up. Jacqui Mellor advised that she would be happy to support such an initiative.

The Chair thanked Stephen for his time this evening. At this point, Stephen thanked the Council and left the meeting.

## **7. Update on the proposal on the future of the Craster Tourist Information Centre**

In Councillor Green's absence, the Clerk provided the following report on this issue, as provided by Councillor M Green for this meeting:

### **Background**

*It is understood that NCC wish to close Craster TIC, along with several other TICs in Northumberland, and will listen to proposals from community groups to acquire and redevelop the property. Craster TIC has already been listed as an Asset of Community Value by the Parish Council and there is a general will in the community that it be redeveloped for the good of the community rather than simply sold to a commercial entity.*

*A working group consisting of 3 members of the PC (Mark Green, Margaret Brooks and Rosie Robson) and 2 members of the parish community (Michael Drage and Nick Ringrose) has been formed to explore this potential opportunity.*

### **Update**

*On 1st February an online meeting took place with representatives of NCC – Sarah Kidd and Ivan Hewitt. At the meeting it was confirmed that capital grant funding did exist that could enable the PC to redevelop the TIC but that the first step would be to commission a feasibility study. The cost of a feasibility study (up to £20,000) could be provided through grant funding*

*by applying to the Regeneration Reserve Development Fund (RRDF) Business Case and Project Development Funding which is controlled by NCC. The application form is attached.*

*A further online meeting took place on 13th March with Ivan Hewitt of NCC. An in-person meeting has been arranged for 26th March to go through and complete the application form. The proposal of the working group is to pursue the application for funding for a feasibility study. This would be on the basis that the study considers a wide range of potential uses for the TIC including but not limited to cafe, shop, WiFi provision, heritage and tourism information, craft sales etc. It is expected that applying for grant funding, receiving funding, procuring a provider and beginning the feasibility study would take 3-6 months.*

*In the event that we did proceed with a feasibility study we would at the same time engage in consultation with the parish community including both residents and businesses.*

### **Next steps**

- *We require a decision by the PC to allow us complete and submit an application for funding for a feasibility study. This would be on the basis that the study is 100% grant funded.*
- *We make an open call for interested members of the parish community to join the working group. All enquiries should be directed to Mark Green.*

Members thanked the Clerk and Councillor M Green for this update and report. Nick Ringrose asked what consideration had been given to the proposal in relation to its impact on Piper's Pitch's operation at the site. Councillor R Robson advised that she felt that this was a separate agreement which Andy Grant has with the Council and not something for the Parish Council to enter into a discussion on, as this was a separate matter with NCC.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support Councillor M Green's report and to follow-up with the proposal of a feasibility study. Members felt that the process and eventual use of the TIC should be entirely guided by the results of the feasibility study at this stage prior to going out to wider public consultation.

### **8. Report by County Councillor Wendy Pattison**

Councillor W Pattison advised that she was aware that there were ongoing concerns around potholes in and around the village and that she is continuing to report these. Councillor W Pattison advised that she felt that it would be worthwhile inviting Robin McCartney from NCC Highways to a future meeting of the Parish Council.

### **9. Report from Embleton Joint Burial Committee representative**

Councillor M Brooks advised that the EJBC had not met since the last Parish Council meeting and there were no new issues to report to the Council at this time.

### **10. Report from Craster Community Trust representative**

In Councillor Craster's absence, Mrs Jackie Reeves provided a report to the Council on the recent work of the CCT. Jackie advised that the CCT is primarily focused on the renovation works to the Hall at present, namely the repainting of the Hall as well as renewing the lights in the Hall too.

The Chair thanked Jackie for her report.

### **11. Report on coastal erosion in Craster**

The Clerk highlighted that he had arranged a meeting with the coastal protection team at NCC, Northumbrian Water and residents on 20th February in order to look at the issue of coastal erosion opposite 25 Dunstanburgh Road. The Clerk advised that NCC's coastal protection team

had now advised that they had discussed this issue with the Environment Agency and it is unlikely that NCC would be able to attract any national Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA) funding as there are no properties at imminent risk of erosion.

With regards to the Council's interest in getting involved, NCC does not own any land at risk and the adopted highway appears to stop prior to the area at risk of erosion. Considering this, NCC has concluded that this is a matter for Northumbrian Water to resolve as it is their asset at risk. Regarding potential options, NCC believes that this will likely require rock armour protection, a concrete retaining wall or a combination of both.

The Clerk advised that he was pursuing this matter with Northumbrian Water directly now.

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

The Clerk advised that he and Councillor W Pattison had recently met with the consultants, commissioned by the AONB, to look at a Conservation Area designation for the parish area. The Clerk advised that he was very impressed indeed with the meeting and that a preliminary Conservation Area Character Appraisal would be produced by mid-April hopefully for Members to consider.

The Clerk highlighted that this is an AONB-funded initiative and that they can themselves seek a designation. The Clerk advised that he hoped that the Character Appraisal might be able to provide a range of boundary options around the parish but highlighted that members of the public would need sufficient heritage grounds in the event that they did not wish to see the area designated.

The Clerk advised that he would circulate a copy of this report as soon as he receives this.

## **13. Update on the mobile phone mast for the parish**

The Clerk advised that he had met with NCC highways, iNorthumberland and Atlas Group representatives on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

The works on the mast are being split into 2 separate stages – namely the works to the base of the mast as stage 1 and the mast itself as stage 2. The works are set to begin on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

The Clerk advised that building the base and wiring for the mast are going to be the most time consuming and difficult aspect of the works. This will be split into 3 phases in total.

**Phase 1** – will involve the works to the base and wiring up to the edge of that row of parking spaces. The car park will remain more or less fully open during these works which are expected to take approximately 3 days.

**Phase 2** – will most certainly be the most difficult and disruptive element of this stage of the development, digging out the road to a depth of 650mm installing the wiring to the entrance of the quarry section of the car park. It is likely that the centre of the road will be the section which is dug up for access and also the closer to the quarry walls they get, the nearer they are likely to meet Whinstone foundations – exceptionally difficult to drill. This stage of the development will take 4 days in total and they are looking to keep disruption to a minimum.

On this, the Clerk advised that a number of options were discussed. The works could start at 5pm – a time when NCC confirmed that the car park is relatively quiet and the workmen work during the night up until 10pm – there is a concern about night time disturbance. Alternatively, NCC is happy to take the hit financially for the works to take place between 8am – 8pm but I stressed the need for the overflow car park to be open then.

**Phase 3** – a 1 day piece of work connecting the wiring to the power supply which will likely only impact on the lower part of the car park.

**Stage 2** – the installation of the mast itself will be a 1-day piece of work involving a crane. The crane comes in 5metre sections and to keep disruption to a minimum, the chaps are looking into pre-assembling as much of the mast as possible.

The total works will be contained to the car park and therefore a TTRO is not required.

The Clerk also reported that he will be arranging a public meeting for residents to ask any questions of Atlas and the engineers. Members thanked the Clerk for all of his work on this project and advised that they felt that the village would accept some minimal disruption whilst the works take place for the wider public benefits of mobile phone signal to be realised.

#### **14. Planning matters:**

**24/00594/FUL** | Alteration of store room above garage into an en-suite bathroom and associated works. Insertion of windows to south west elevation. | West House Dunstan Village Dunstan Northumberland NE66 3TB. It was **agreed** to note this application.

**24/00121/FUL** | Construction of two holiday lets (Sui Generis) with associated landscaping | Land North And East Of Dunstan House Dunstan Northumberland. It was **agreed** to object to this application in its entirety. In agreeing to object to this application, the Parish Council were also made aware that there is a significant effort by residents to campaign for the application's refusal at Committee.

#### **15. Items for next Agenda**

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

#### **16. Date and time of next meeting**

18<sup>th</sup> April 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. A. Brooks'.

**Chair of Craster Parish Council  
(Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024)**