

A Parish Meeting has been called

The meeting will take place in Craster Village Hall at 18:30pm on Thursday 15th May 2025.

Agenda

1. Welcome from the Chair of the Parish Council

2. Confirmation of the minutes of the last parish meeting

Residents are asked to confirm the Minutes of the Parish meeting held on Wednesday 15th May 2024.

3. Chair's update on the work of the Parish Council

The Chair of the Parish Council will provide an update on work carried out by the Parish Council since the last meeting of the parish.

4. Questions from the public

This is not a Parish Council meeting. It is an open meeting at which all electors in the Parish are welcome and are invited to take part.

Signed,



**Councillor Martin Smith
Chair of Craster Parish Council**

Contact the Parish Clerk via e-mail at parishcouncil@crastercommunity.org.uk or alternatively via post at: Craster Parish Council c/o Craster Memorial Hall, 22 Whin Hill, Craster, Alnwick NE66 3TP.

DRAFT Minutes of the Craster Parish meeting held at 18:30pm on Wednesday 15th May 2024 in Craster Village Hall.

In the chair: Parish Council Chair Coun. Martin Smith

Also in attendance: 28 members of the public, Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and Lawrie Stevenson (Alncom).

1. Welcome from the Chair of the Parish Council

The Chair welcomed all those in attendance to the meeting and thanked residents for their time to attend.

2. Confirmation of the minutes of the last parish meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 23rd May 2023 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

3. Chair's update on the work of the Parish Council

The Chair of the Parish Council Coun. Martin Smith provided a report on the work of the Parish Council over the last year as follows:

The Chair reported that the long-standing campaign to secure mobile phone signal in the parish was nearing completion. The Chair advised that the Atlas Group had begun installation works on the mast, with completion expected in early June 2024. The Chair advised that at least two mobile network operators were anticipated to be operational on the site by November 2024. He noted the considerable effort involved in reaching this stage and extended thanks to the Clerk, Sylvia Pringle, and Mark from Atlas, among others. He also mentioned a possible ribbon-cutting event and commemorative photo later in the year.

The Chair also informed the meeting that the proposed new entrance scheme to Craster had received strong support from residents but had been delayed. Northumberland County Council (NCC) had now assured the Parish Council that works would commence in October 2024. He added that the removal of the welcome barrels, which had been maintained by Margaret and Allan Brooks, would coincide with these works.

The Chair reported on the Parish Council's successful efforts in overturning a planning recommendation for an inappropriate development in Dunstan. He acknowledged the contributions of the Clerk and local residents in achieving this outcome. He further reported that a new development proposal had been submitted for Dunstan and confirmed that the Council had submitted strong objections.

The Chair thanked Steve Tennant for his continued work maintaining the parish's grass verges and noted his exemplary efforts on the Cinder Path and Charlie's Path during the past year. He reported that attention had now turned to the Craster Trail and the footpath behind Smithy Court in Dunstan, with a request made to NCC for maintenance.

The Chair expressed his gratitude to second home and holiday let owners for their voluntary contributions, which, along with support from the makers of the *Red King*, had enabled the purchase of a new defibrillator for Dunstan, located at the Cottage Inn. The Chair acknowledged the Stephen Carey Fund for providing the device and training, and thanked his wife Jenny for ongoing maintenance of both the new unit and the defibrillator in Craster.

The Chair updated the meeting on the AONB's exploration of a potential Conservation Area designation for the parish. He confirmed that no immediate decisions would be made by the Parish Council and announced that an information drop-in event, in collaboration with the AONB and NCC's Conservation Team, would be arranged later in the year. The designation process was expected to take approximately three years.

The Chair reported that, through prudent financial management and success in securing external project funding, the Parish Council had frozen the parish precept for the current financial year. The Chair noted this decision had been made in recognition of ongoing cost-of-living pressures on residents.

The Chair commended the work of the fundraising committee and those involved in collecting funds from the community donation boxes. He highlighted that the funds had supported the purchase of flowers and plants as well as the provision of free "hotties" during the energy crisis.

The Chair recognised the vital role played by the RNLI and congratulated the organisation on its 200-year anniversary. He praised the dedication of volunteers who contributed to keeping the community safe at sea.

The Chair reported that Craster Parish Council, in partnership with neighbouring parishes, had made history by owning and renting out a domestic property at an affordable rate. He confirmed that the renovated property was now occupied as a family home and highlighted the Council's continued role in the Embleton Joint Burial Committee.

The Chair expressed his appreciation for the ongoing partnership with the Craster Community Trust, praising its role in maintaining the Hall and organising community events. He highlighted the Council's involvement in securing funding for new solar panels and thanked Jackie Reeves for her work in coordinating the project.

The Chair concluded his report by presenting a portrait of His Majesty King Charles III to Helen Chamberlain, Chair of the Craster Community Trust, for display in the Hall. He explained the portrait had been gifted by the Government to all Parish and Town Councils that requested one.

4. Information from Alcom regarding the Gigabit Broadband scheme

The Chair welcomed Lawrie Stevenson, Director of Operations at Alncom, to the meeting and invited Lawrie to speak to the parish meeting on Alncom's work in the digital area.

Lawrie began by thanking the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak with the residents this evening. Lawrie highlighted that, in March 2024, 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.

Lawrie 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.

Lawrie advised that the latest network build to be added to Alncom's plans will hopefully cover a further 1,454 properties North of Alnwick. Lawrie 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.

Lawrie advised that the route will include Denwick, Rennington, Rock, Christon Bank, Embleton, Craster, Dunstan and Howick, plus all areas in between. Lawrie 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.

A number of residents asked what the benefits of signing up with Alncom were from a user perspective. Lawrie 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. Lawrie 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.

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

A resident advised that they had recently signed up with Alncom and highlighted their positive experience with the service so far. Lawrie thanked the resident for this feedback and advised that he would be happy to leave leaflets in the Hall for further information so that residents could find out more about the scheme and how to sign up for the service.

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

5. Workshop discussion relating to the future use of the Tourist Information Centre in Craster

Councillor Mark Green and Mr Michael Drage led a workshop with residents to explore options for the future of the Tourist Information Centre in Craster. In opening this workshop, Councillor Mark Green reported that the Parish Council had been informed that the County Council intended on closing the Tourist Information Centre and potentially put this on the open market.

Councillor Mark Green highlighted that the TIC is presently listed as an asset of community value which meant that NCC would firstly need to consult on whether a community purchase or take over of the TIC building could be possible. Councillor Mark Green advised that the Parish Council had received assurances that the public toilets within the TIC building would remain open as usual and, in fact, were scheduled for renovation in the coming years.

A resident expressed his concern that, whatever the future of the TIC building, that this must not have a detrimental impact on the Piper's Pitch business which sits alongside the TIC building. Although Andy Grant was not present for the meeting, another resident provided a positive update to the meeting that Andy had received assurances that his current lease for this site with NCC was safe. The resident thanked everyone who had supported Andy Grant's Facebook campaign.

Residents were divided into a number of small groups for the meeting to discuss options for the site. Whilst a number of proposals for the site were put forward by residents – for example: a community shop, a pizzeria, an evening restaurant, a heritage and learning centre, a wedding venue, etc. – the meeting concluded that a community takeover of the building would require significant resources in terms of volunteer time, expertise and expenditure – and, with the added assurance that Piper's Pitch's lease would remain unaffected by the future of the building, the meeting **agreed** that a community takeover should not be pursued.

6. AOB

A resident expressed his concerns that the AONB's proposal to pursue a Conservation Area designation for parts of the parish were a *fait accompli* and also expressed his reservations about such a proposal. These were echoed by a number of other residents, with one resident seeking assurances that the consultation drop-in event would not be taking place via Zoom but in person.

The Chair advised that the Parish Council would liaise with colleagues at the AONB on this issue and would keep residents updated on the proposed timing and format of this consultation event.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Signed,

**Chair of Craster Parish Council
(15th May 2025)**