

Seaton Valley Council

A Community Council

Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 04 October 2017 at 7.15 pm. at Seaton Sluice Community Centre.

The meeting started at 7.18 p.m.

PRESENT:

Councillors: S Stanners (Chair), B. Swinhoe (V. Chair), S Dungworth, L Bowman, E Coulson, K. Collier, D. Nesbitt and S. Hartland. Cllr. A. Stanners joined the meeting at 7.35pm.

IN ATTENDANCE:

S Potts – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Members of the public - 23

CO074/17 1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence as all members were present.

CO075/17 2. Disclosure of interests

Cllr Bowman said that he needed to declare an interest in relation to item 17 on the Agenda as he is Treasurer of the Astley Park Community Partnership. Cllr Nesbitt said that he needed to declare an interest in relation to item 13 on the Agenda as he is Deputy Chair of SENRUG.

CO076/17 3. Chair's Welcome and Civic Announcements

Whilst there were no official announcements the Chair welcomed the recent opening of the Council's new Play Park at Seghill Welfare and informed the meeting that Seghill Community Association has engaged a contractor to repair the slate roof at Seghill Institute.

CO077/17 4. Public Question Time

A member of the public raised concerns about the standard of Street Lighting in her village and in particular the area immediately outside the Community Centre. Other members of the public supported the resident and voiced concerns about reported faults not being addressed in a timely manner. Cllr Dungworth responded and said that she had every sympathy with residents' concerns as both she and the Clerk have reported similar, if not the same issues to Northumberland County Council. Cllr Dungworth went on to ask the Clerk to arrange a meeting with a senior NCC Street Lighting Manager to address outstanding Street Lighting issues in Seaton Sluice and Seaton Valley as a whole.

Another resident raised concerns about the management of Seaton Sluice Library and said that she felt that the management of the library had deteriorated since Active Northumberland had been given responsibility for the service. She went on to mention three specific examples. Firstly she referred to the problems caused to both the librarian and residents by having to route telephone calls, both in and out, via the call centre. Secondly she mentioned that the book delivery and collection service comes to a halt when the driver is on leave or off sick; and thirdly she referred to the library closing at short notice when the librarian is told that she has to attend 'urgent' meetings at County Hall. On the last point in particular she said that such closures further reduce what is

already a reduced service to the community. In response Cllr. Dungworth said that she would raise the matters with the appropriate officer/Councillor at NCC and ask for a written response to be sent directly to the resident.

Additional queries were raised about street lights being partially obscured by trees and problems with parking in former Council Housing residential areas. In response Cllr Stanners said that both of these matters have been reported to Northumberland County Council which is the responsible authority for Highways, Street Lighting and former Council Housing.

Towards the close of Public Question Time Cllr Dungworth said that it was good to see members of the public raising their concerns at Seaton Valley Council Meetings, but went on to say that all of the concerns raised at tonight's meeting referred to services provided by Northumberland County Council. Whilst the Council will certainly take such concerns up with the County Council she said that residents' concerns would be heard much louder by the County Council if residents were to attend NCC's Local Area Council meetings in person and she encouraged residents to make the extra effort to attend these meetings.

There being no further questions; public question time closed at 7.35pm

CO078/17 5. County Council Update

County Cllr Pidcock addressed the meeting and referred to the following matters:

COTY – a multi-agency task group has been formed and has met four times since its inception. The last meeting of the group was quite positive in the sense that Coty appears to be working well with its workforce to agree a reasonable severance package for when the factory does eventually close down. Similarly; the company also appears to be actively working to find another business to take over the Coty site.

HOLYWELL VILLAGE – the County Council and the Community Council met recently to agree to undertake a feasibility study of the options open to address a number of road safety concerns in this area of Holywell, and in particular the area around the Milbourne Arms and the bus stop adjacent to it.

LOCAL AREA COUNCILS – very embryonic and still trying to evolve their role. Cllr Pidcock urged more Seaton Valley residents to attend whilst recognising that meetings are often held in Bedlington. The January 2018 meeting of the Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Council is scheduled to be held in Seaton Delaval, whilst its next meeting will be held in Bedlington on 18 October.

CITIZENS ADVICE – due to funding cuts the service is moving away from face to face contact in favour of telephone consultations. Cllr Pidcock hoped that local Councils and the County Council might be able to offer further support to allow more face to face advice to take place. Cllr Stanners said that he understood the main reason for the monthly surgery being cancelled at Seaton Delaval was that the CAB was unable to provide a suitable volunteer to provide the service – the Council's Offices are available free of charge, should the CAB find a way to re-introduce the Seaton Delaval surgery.

NEW HARTLEY APPEAL – briefly referred to the recent decision issued by the Planning Inspector to grant planning permission to build 285 houses at New Hartley – Cllr Pidcock referred to the Inspector's judgement which identified the County Council's decision to withdraw its Core Strategy only days after the end of the Public Inquiry, as being a major factor that contributed to his decision to allow Barratt North East's appeal.

CO079/17 6. Minutes of the Council's Meeting held on 26 July 2017

The minutes of Seaton Valley Council's Meeting held on 17 May 2017 were agreed as being a correct record and were duly signed and dated by the Chair.

Prior to agreeing the minutes the Chair referred to the top of page 20 of those minutes and said that the Council had received a reply to the letter it sent to the County Council seeking clarification on whether or not funding was going to be made available to refurbish/replace schools in Seaton Valley. The reply was very non-committal and said that a business planning process is in progress to assess whether or not the Astley High/ Whytrig Middle School might move forward to the next stage of the capital funding allocation process. The letter was silent with regard to additional funding being allocated to Holywell First School. Cllr Coulson said that Holywell First School had written its own letter to the Education Authority to put its case forward for capital funding but had yet to receive a reply.

CO080/17 7. Minutes of Other Committee Meetings

The minutes of the Planning Committee held on 3 and 31 August were presented and received for information.

CO081/17 8. Services and Partnership Update

Councillors referred to a number of matters within the Services Officer's report and in particular to the items below:

It was disappointing to note that the Police had failed to turn up at a recent surgery held at Astley Park Pavilion. Whilst the officer concerned did ring up to apologise for his non-attendance three days after the event, both Councillors and residents had turned up to raise concerns at the surgery. Surely someone could have contacted us on the night to say that the meeting was not going to be supported.

Cllr Dungworth referred to the recent retirement of Mr Terry Garnick who has managed the Seaton Valley Neighbourhood Partnership for the County Council since it began. She offered the very best wishes of the Council and its Community Associations to Mr Garnick and thanked him for his excellent contribution over the last five years. She went on to explain that further changes to the management of the partnership at a slightly lower level are also in the pipeline and that the Council's own officers will look out for any changes in performance that may result from these changes.

Cllr Stanners referred to the recent opening of the new Play Area at Seghill Welfare and said that Seghill should be very proud of the range of play facilities it now has in the village. He also referred to the unveiling of Tom Newstead's sculptured in Astley Park and thanked Tom for his efforts. He also thanked Mr Ronnie Campbell MP for agreeing to unveil the sculpture. Cllr Bowman referred to the recent replacement of a bus shelter outside Astley High School and said that the shelter at the south end of Beresford Road would be replaced very soon. He went onto say that all 48 of the Council's bus shelters are now assessed as being in either good or excellent condition.

And finally Cllr Stanners referred to the recent successful community litter pick in New Hartley and confirmed that the next one would take place in Holywell on Saturday 21 October.

CO082/17 9. Seaton Valley in Bloom

Cllr Collier presented the Services Officer's report and congratulated all involved in the superb success of Seaton Valley entrants to Northumbria in Bloom. She went on to announce all of the Seaton Valley results which are shown on the Council's website and invited all in attendance to come forward to be included in a group photograph. Special mention went to Seaton Sluice which received a Gold Award and to Seaton Delaval which received the accolade of most improved entry. All in attendance celebrated the In Bloom groups' success with a round of applause.

CO083/17 10. Vehicle Activated Signs

The Clerk presented the Engagement and Development Officer's report which highlighted the arrival and installation of four Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) which are now in situ in Holywell, Seaton Delaval, New Hartley and Seaton Sluice.

The signs have been recording vehicle speed and numbers data since their installation although, to the general public, they appear not to have been switched on. This data will be compared to data gathered once they are switched on to see if the signs make a noticeable difference to recorded vehicle speeds. The signs are due to be switched on this week and the Council hopes to share the information it gathers with Police and Highway colleagues to enable them to target enforcement action as and where it is required.

CO084/17 11. Bank Reconciliation as at 31 August 2017

Council agreed to receive the report, and noted that the Council's bank accounts had been successfully reconciled to its financial records

CO085/17 12. Budgetary Control Update

The Clerk presented his report which provided detailed and summary information on the Council's income and expenditure compared to budget as 31 August 2017. In summary, the Clerk said that the Council's income and expenditure is more or less in line with budgets when known variations are taken into account. The report highlighted one or two of these variances and provided explanations where required. The Clerk drew attention to one area in particular, Advertising Income, and said that the full budgeted income was unlikely to be achieved as it was becoming more difficult to sell advertising space in the Council's quarterly newsletter.

CO086/17 13. SENRUG – Corporate Membership

Discussion of this item was delayed until the end of the meeting as it was hoped that a representative from SENRUG would be attending to answer any queries Councillors may have had. In the event the representative hadn't arrived before the end of the meeting so the item was discussed without his input. Prior to discussions commencing Cllr Nesbitt declared his Other Registerable Personal Interest and left the meeting.

SENRUG had written to the Council to ask it to become a Corporate Member of South East Northumberland Rail Users Group (SENRUG) arguing that the more organisations SENRUG speaks for; the louder its voice will be heard.

Whilst supporting the majority of work and lobbying SENRUG is involved with, Councillors pointed out that SENRUG specifically supported the creation of two stations in Seaton Valley, should passenger services be reinstated to the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line; one in Seaton Delaval and one in Seghill; whereas the Council has always lobbied for three stations in Seaton Valley i.e. Seaton Delaval, Seghill and New Hartley.

Consequently, Council **RESOLVED TO: agree to join SENRUG at a cost of £10 per annum subject to it agreeing to support the creation of three stations in Seaton Valley should the scheme to reintroduce passenger services on the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Line go ahead.**

Cllr Nesbitt returned to the meeting

CO087/17 14. Community Governance Review – Boundary Change Blyth/Seaton Valley

The Chair presented the Clerk's report which summarised the details of a proposed change to the boundary between Blyth Town Council's area and Seaton Valley Community Council's area. The area in question was a small area at the top of Laverock Hall Road.

Councillors thought that change requested was very minor, followed the path of designated highways more closely and would lead to any additional resource implications for the Council and, as a consequence **RESOLVED TO: support the changes to the Blyth Town and Seaton Valley Community Council boundaries highlighted in Northumberland County Council's Community Governance Review dated 29 August 2017.**

CO088/17 15. Annual Return 2016/17 – Completion of Audit

The Clerk spoke to his report which informed Council that its external auditors BDO have approved the Council's 2016/17 Annual Return (attached to the Clerk's report as Appendix 11A). Following a summary of his report Council **RESOLVED TO: Approve and accept the Council's audited Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2017**

CO089/17 16. 2018/19 Budget Process

The Clerk presented his report which in essence proposed using a process to develop and agree next year's budget based on previous years' experience which has proved successful. The process is based around re-establishing a Budget Review Working Group made up of members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and holding regular meetings between now and the end of January. The schedule of proposed meetings is reproduced below:

2018/19 Budget Process – Work Schedule/Timetable

Date	Group	Purpose
Wed 1 Nov 2017 – 6.00pm following F&GP Committee Meeting	Budget Working Group	Review Base Budget
Wed 15 Nov 2017 – 6.00pm	Budget Working Group	Review Base Budget
Wed 29 Nov 2017 – 7.00pm	Full Council	Review Latest Information
Wed 14 Dec 2017 – 6.00pm	Finance and GP Committee	Review Latest Information
Wed 11 Jan 2018 – 6.00pm	Budget Working Group	Finalise Proposals
Wed 24 Jan 2018 – 7.00pm	Full Council	Agree 2018/19 Budget

The Working Group's remit will include considering summary information on the build-up of the Council's base budget, the latest projections of the current year's income and expenditure compared to budgets, the Clerk's latest estimate of the Council's projected level of reserves, and growth and savings proposals.

At the conclusion of the Clerk's presentation Council **RESOLVED TO: receive the report and agree the budget process and timetable described above.**

CO090/17 17. Request for Support – Astley Park Community Partnership

Cllr Bowman declared an Other Registerable Personal Interest and left the meeting.

The Clerk presented his report which detailed a request from the Astley Park Community Partnership for a grant towards the refurbishment of the Old Bowlers Pavilion in Astley Park, Seaton Delaval. Once refurbished the building will be used by the Astley Park Bowling Club to host matches freeing up the existing pavilion for greater use by the wider community. The refurbished old pavilion, which will include a ramp for disabled access and a unisex disabled friendly toilet, would also be made available for use by the wider community.

The Community Partnership has already secured approximately £30,000 of the funding required to refurbish the building and has submitted a number of other grant requests to secure the balance (£35,000).

Following a short discussion Council **Resolved To: agree to provide a grant of up to £2,000 towards the refurbishment of the Old Bowlers Pavilion in Astley Park, if both the Astley Park Community Partnership is unable to secure the balance of funding from other sources, and the newly refurbished building is made available to the wider community when not being used for bowling purposes.**

Cllr Bowman returned to the meeting.

CO091/17 18. New Hartley Planning Application – Outcome of Public Inquiry

Cllr Dungworth introduced this item and confirmed that the Planning Inspector had issued his decision in relation to the above planning application on 27 September 2017 which was to allow Barratt North East's appeal and grant planning permission for 285 houses to be built on land to the North East of St Michaels Avenue, New Hartley.

Cllr Dungworth said that the Council was very disappointed with the decision. Councillors, Officers and the Council's planning advisor have worked with NCC and New Hartley residents for a long time to support the reasons for refusal and presented well argued, evidenced based submissions to the Public Inquiry. Cllr Dungworth said she knew how disappointed she felt and could only wonder how the New Hartley residents were feeling.

Cllr Dungworth then turned to the issue of NCC withdrawing its Core Strategy only a matter of days after the end of the Public Inquiry and said that that decision had definitely adversely affected the Inspector's judgement as much of NCC's case had relied on one particular policy within the Emerging Core Strategy – once the Core Strategy had been withdrawn, the Inspector had had no option but to give very little weight to any arguments that relied on policies within it.

Cllr Dungworth closed by saying that very little good had come out the Public Inquiry save for residents' concerns and persistence being recognised by the Inspector by him imposing a number of additional conditions on the planning approval – the Council and residents will need to be vigilant once the development gets under way to help ensure that all of these conditions are complied with.

During the ensuing debate a number of Councillors supported Cllr Dungworth's views.

Council RESOLVED TO: receive the Clerk's report and note the outcome of the New Hartley Public Inquiry.

CO092/17 19. Schedule of Meetings 2018

The schedule of meetings and associated dates of meetings shown in the Clerks report (Appendix 15) was agreed and will be posted on the Council's website within the next few weeks.

CO093/17 20. Dates of Future Meetings

2017	Committee/Council	Time	Venue
Thursday 5 October	Planning	6 pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Thursday 26 October	Planning	6 pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Wednesday 1 November	Finance & General Purposes (inc. Staffing)	6pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Thursday 23 November	Planning	6pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Wednesday 29 November	Full Council	7pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved: That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of items 15 on the Agenda as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act relating to personal staff affairs and/or commercial matters.

CO094/17 21. New Hartley Post Office

The Clerk presented his report which summarised how the Council has worked with the current Postmaster, New Hartley Community Association and the Post Office to try to secure the future of New Hartley Post Office over the last 18 months or so. The current Postmaster has indicated that he wishes to resign his position as soon as possible and no other suitable operator has come forward to take over his business, hence the Council and the Community Association are investigating the possibility of establishing a Community Post Office to run the Post Office in New Hartley.

Indeed agreement has been reached with New Hartley Community Association for it to set up a wholly owned subsidiary company limited by guarantee and for this company to be the potential vehicle to own and operate the Community Post Office. This company is in the process of being registered with Companies House with three initial directors – two representatives from the Community Association, one of whom is Cllr Dungworth, with the Clerk being the third director and company secretary. The company directors liabilities (should it fail) are limited to £1.

Discussions with Post Office Plc have revealed that a higher level of annual fee income will be generated if the new Community Post Office is able to acquire the current Postmasters contract and consequently negotiations are moving along these lines.

The Community Association has submitted grant applications to a number of organisations to secure the funds that would be required to both purchase the business and make alterations to post office premises and Councillor Dungworth has committed some of her NCC Small Schemes Members to the funding package.

The Clerk's report asked the Council to provide a further £2,000 towards the funding package if a viable business plan can be built up to operate the business.

The Clerk stressed that the scheme would not go ahead until all concerned with the setting up of the New Community Post Office Company were satisfied that the new business could operate without making a loss, which means that a suitable second business or additional service needs to be found to run alongside post office services.

In the debate that followed all members expressed their support for the proposal and consequently, Council **RESOLVED TO:**

- 1. Note that the Clerk and Cllr Susan Dungworth have been installed as two of three initial directors of the new company; New Hartley Community Post Office Ltd,**
- 2. Agree, should the acquisition of the business from the current Postmaster go ahead and a viable business plan be drawn up, to allocate £2,000 from its Community Fund towards the funding package required to buy the business and carry out any necessary building**

alterations to the post office premises.

There being no other business on the Agenda, the meeting closed at 8.35pm

Signed by the Chair:

Dated: