

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD VIA ZOOM ON 10 FEBRUARY 2021

Present: Councillor A Varley (in the Chair)

Councillors S Ahmed, Mrs C Caisley, L Darwin, R Dodd, Mrs C Greenwell, A Hall, Mrs S Johnson, Mrs K Overbury and Mrs K Woodrow.

Public Question

Mr D Butler asked the following question of the Town Council:

“Could I ask the Council about their plans for a total revamp of the two beds either side of the stone bus shelter on Main Street please?

It is many years since these were first planted and they have been almost completely taken over by weeds such as plantains, invasive geraniums and euphorbias, plus the occasional self-sown tree. At the height of summer, one particularly pungent species was encroaching onto the pavement before it was chopped back.

I also believe nothing short of a complete clear out and replanting with more suitable types of plants is the only way to bring what is a prominent area of Main Street back into something that will enhance that space.”

The Mayor thanked Mr Butler for his question. He advised him that the area of land is continuing to be discussed by the Environment Working Party. They are meeting next week, and a report of that meeting will be on the next Town Council agenda. There are currently high demands on the Town Council’s contractors, but the Council will do their best to get Ponteland looking in good order.

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Edwards-Clay and A Shanley.

61. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD 13 JANUARY AND SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2021

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 13 January 2021 and the Special Council Meeting held on 25th January were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

63. MATTERS ARISING

Minute 49 – Request from St Mary’s Church re financial assistance with path works.

Councillor Mrs Overbury asked if Mr Butler who was present at the meeting, could provide any update in relation to the above item. She had been approached by residents asking what works were being planned.

Mr Butler thanked the Town Council for their agreement to support this project. He reported that he had been in touch with the officer at Northumberland County Council asking if she had an update on the current situation but had heard nothing back as yet. It was hoped that this project would progress when the weather improved.

64. PLANNING

Minutes of meetings of the Planning Committee held on 22nd December 2020 and 5th January 2021 had been circulated for information.

65. NCC HOUSING STRATEGY

Councillors were reminded that a copy of the NCC private sector housing strategy for Northumberland 2021-2023 had been circulated to Members on 18th January. Responses to the document were required by 14th February. Comments had been received from Councillors Darwin and Mrs Overbury who had circulated their thoughts to their colleagues by email. Councillor Darwin had kindly produced a suggested draft response to the Strategy which had been circulated to Councillors. The comments from Councillor Mrs Overbury had been added to that document in blue italics.

A query was raised in relation to priority one and the percentage increase on council tax premium for dwellings which were unfurnished. Councillor Darwin reported that the increase of 100% had already been implemented in April 2020. Furthermore, if the property remained empty and unfurnished for more than five years, the premium would be increased to 300% and from April 2021, any property that had been empty for more than ten years would be liable to pay a 400% council tax premium.

Councillor Dodd reported that there were currently 2500 properties in the county which were empty and unfurnished. These properties could become a problem for neighbours where they had fallen into disrepair thereby affecting the ability to sell their homes.

Members expressed their thanks to the two Councillors for their comments which were endorsed by those present.

RESOLVED –The response be agreed and submitted to NCC by the deadline of 14th February 2021.

66. STAFFING COMMITTEE

A report by the Clerk relating to the establishment of a Staffing Committee had been circulated.

The Clerk stated that she was in the process of producing the terms of reference for consideration by the Council and also a revised sickness and absence policy which required some updating and expansion.

Members agreed that this was a necessary and positive move in order to support all staff including the Clerk.

Councillor Mrs Johnson offered to read through the policy document prior to submission if required.

RESOLVED –

(i) It was agreed to establish a Staffing Committee and consider the terms of reference at the March meeting.

(ii) Councillors agreed that a sickness and absence policy be considered and agreed at the March meeting.

67. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd reported that the Council would be considering their budget in two weeks. It was envisaged that there would be more spending in the forthcoming year than the current one. Covid-19 impacted on the budget, for example buildings such as leisure centres were empty and unused at present, but there were still significant cost implications involved.

The county and the north-east in general were handling the vaccination process extremely well. Councillors commented how well the process was being handled by the medical centre in Ponteland. They should be congratulated on how well organised and straight forward the experience was for those attending.

More testing stations were also available in the county area. The dashboard on the NCC website showed figures were currently low in Northumberland but this could change very quickly.

It appeared that the elections would be taking place in May and staff were busy at the moment making preparations to hold them in a Covid-19 secure way. Purdah would begin on 26th March.

Councillor Mrs Caisley asked what was happening on the site of the old Leisure Centre.

Councillor Dodd stated that there were two sites where schools were being demolished, at Broadway and Callerton Lane. He had not seen the masterplan but thought that there would be additional parking at the Darras Hall site and playing fields at Callerton Lane. The area currently occupied by the swimming pool etc would be a new football pitch.

68. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor had circulated details of his limited diary engagements for January, February and March 2021 for the information of Councillors. He had also attended the office to make an emergency payment on 2nd February.

69. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

(i) PCP meeting

A summary of the PCP meeting held on 20th January 2021 had been circulated for information.

70. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORTS

Details of payments approved by the Accounts Committee in January in the sum of £23,905.34 had been circulated. A copy of monthly budget reports for January were also circulated, as well as the Bank reconciliation document for the same month.

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – IT WAS AGREED THAT MONTHLY REMOTE MEETINGS WOULD NOW BE HELD VIA ZOOM. THE NEXT MEETING WOULD BE ON WEDNESDAY 10TH MARCH AT 3.00 P.M. (2.45p.m. for public questions)

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CHAIRMAN

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DATE