

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT MERTON HALL ON 8th NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor K Overbury (in the Chair)

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

The Mayor paid tribute to Councillor Alan Varley who had died suddenly on 31 October.

The Council were shocked and saddened to hear the news about Alan's death. He was a great Councillor, colleague, and friend.

All Councillors had read the tributes to Alan – from the cricket club, the golf club, the rugby club and many more.

All Councillors knew well the jovial, friendly and helpful side to Alan, but they also saw the dedicated, knowledgeable and hardworking man.

Alan was elected to the West ward in April 2014 in a contested by election, moving to the East Ward in May 2021. He was Mayor from 2017-2021, helping to guide the Town Council through the dark days of Covid lockdowns and soaring sickness figures.

Councillor Overbury said that Alan's death would leave a huge hole in all our lives. But our thoughts at this terrible time must go to the family he leaves behind, especially his wife, Linda, who Councillors all know and respect. She asked everyone to stand for a minute's silence as a mark of respect for Alan, fellow Councillor and friend.

72. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sehgal.

73. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

74. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 11th OCTOBER 2023

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 11th October 2023 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

75. MATTERS ARISING

Minute 65 – Review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

The Clerk reported that she had handed out copies of the latest Standing Orders and Financial Regulations to those who were reviewing the documents and that a meeting would be organised soon.

76. PLANNING

(i) Planning Committee

Minutes of meetings held on 26 September and 10 and 24 October 2023 were circulated for information.

(ii) Report on recent planning decisions

There were no reports.

77. GRANT APPLICATION

(i) Application from Jameson Manor Residents Group

It was reported that a request had been received from the newly constituted Jameson Manor Residents Group for funds towards the cost of a defibrillator cabinet on the estate. Bellway had agreed to fund the cost of the defibrillator.

The cost of the cabinet was £495 excluding VAT and the group had secured a grant of £200 from Ponteland Lions towards this purchase. The group were seeking a grant of £295 if the Council purchase the equipment on their behalf or £394 if they purchase it themselves.

There was some discussion on the issue of defibrillators. Councillor Dodd was involved in looking into provision as part of his role as Chair of the NCC Health Scrutiny Committee. It was important for the equipment to be maintained. Currently there wasn't an up-to-date list of provision in the community. Some of the equipment was not for public use.

He did say that there were Government grants available for the purchase of defibrillators.

Councillors were minded to agree the grant in principle but felt that additional information was required from the group in relation to the siting of the defibrillator, details of power supply and future maintenance costs.

RESOLVED – That a grant of £394 be agreed in principle towards the cost of the defibrillator cabinet, subject to additional information being supplied in respect of proposed location, power supply and future maintenance costs.

78 RISK MANAGEMENT/INTERNAL CONTROLS REPORTS

The Town Council was asked to consider the following three reports which had to be prepared and agreed on an annual basis.

(i) Risk Management report

The Clerk had circulated the risk management report to the Council for consideration together with a table which covered financial risks.

In relation to the issue of lone working by staff, the Clerk agreed to produce a policy for this purpose.

(i) Risk Management report(continued)

Regarding the section covering Councillors, the Clerk was asked to contact the Council's insurers and discuss whether the insurance cover was sufficient to cover members in light of recent instances where they had suffered abuse online and in person.

She was also asked to find out at what point the insurance cover would start if there was an issue involving a Councillor.

She agreed to circulate the guidance note relating to social media use to Councillors.

RESOLVED – The report be approved, and the Clerk carry out the actions outlined above.

(ii) Review of Internal Audit 2023-24

A report by the Clerk had been circulated.

The report included details of the work carried out by the internal auditor employed by the Town Council including a checklist of work undertaken.

The Town Council was asked to defer the appointment of the Internal Auditor to the December meeting.

RESOLVED –

(i) The report and checklist be approved.

(ii) The appointment of the Internal Auditor be deferred to the December meeting.

(iii) Review of internal controls 2023-24

Members considered the above report.

RESOLVED – The report be approved.

79. INSPECTION OF BRIDGES – PONTELAND PARK

A report by the Clerk had been circulated.

The three bridges in the park were due to be inspected and the Clerk had contacted the company who had previously carried out this work, Anthony Davies Associates who were consulting civil and structural engineers.

They had provided a quote for the work in the sum of £975.00 plus VAT.

The Clerk explained the difficulties of obtaining quotes. As this was specialist work and due to the need to have the bridges checked, particularly after the recent flooding, it was suggested that the quote should be accepted, and the work carried out as soon as possible. This was in accordance with Financial Regulation 11.1(d), details of which were included within the report.

RESOLVED – The quote from Anthony Davies Associates in the sum of £975.00 plus VAT be approved in accordance with Financial Regulation 11.1(d).

80. REVIEW OF PONTELAND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (PNP)

A report by the Clerk relating to the above had been circulated. The report referred to the intention of the Council to have a review of the plan carried out so that it coincided with the Northumberland Local Plan which was adopted in March 2022.

An approach had been made to the planning consultant used by the Town Council for assistance with complex planning applications. She had worked on the PNP in the latter stages when external consultants had been brought in to complete the work.

The planning consultant had submitted a fee proposal for the work she would carry out, details of which were included in the report. This would take the work up to the preparation of a scoping report. It was expected that further work would be required.

The Planning Committee had discussed the subject at their meetings held on 26 September and 10 October. At the September meeting the members of the Committee agreed that they would be willing to be the appointed group to oversee the work.

The planning consultant was invited to the Planning Committee on 10 October to discuss the way forward in more detail. A former member of the PNP Steering Group had also volunteered to help and he was also in attendance.

A brief outline of the discussions at the meeting was set out in the report. The planning consultant had agreed to direct TC staff towards appropriate funding streams for grants to assist with this review.

RESOLVED –

(i) That the proposal to engage the planning consultant at a cost of £3850 to carry out the work outlined in her proposal dated 19 September be approved. This would be met from funds already earmarked for this purpose with any shortfall being met from contingencies.

(ii) The Council agreed to delegated authority being given to the Planning Committee to oversee the work carried out and to issue update reports to the Council at regular intervals.

81 HIGHWAYS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the above Working Party held on 9 October were submitted for consideration.

In relation to item 3, Councillor Wilson asked if ward councillors could be sent any speed data received from the County Council. This was agreed.

81 HIGHWAYS WORKING PARTY(Continued)

Members asked for an update on item 4 relating to the vans parked on the pavement on North Road. It appeared that the vans had moved but they had been replaced with cars. As there were no parking restrictions currently in force there was little that could be done to enforce this issue. Work was ongoing to examine the introduction of parking restrictions at this location.

RESOLVED – The Minutes be approved.

82. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd stated that he intended to organise another meeting with the police and the supermarkets. He also wanted to meet with the supermarkets to examine possible solutions to the ongoing problem with shoplifting. He mentioned the anti-social behaviour that had occurred at Halloween when the One-Stop shop had to be closed for a time. He referred to the County Councillors small schemes allowance and indicated that he would be interested in allocating some of his funding towards tidying up the area at the Merton Way shops. Other County Councillors may also wish to contribute. The Town Council would be consulted on any proposals.

Councillor Darwin said that he had allocated some of his small schemes allowance to a highways project in Ponteland at Click-em-in. He also mentioned that he was attempting to have a user's group established for the leisure centre. He hoped this would happen in the first quarter of 2024.

He referred to problems with the car park at the leisure centre. Councillors agreed that there was a lack of directional signage in the car park. The planting meant there wasn't an easy way to get from the car park to the centre.

Councillor Darwin reported that he had had contact from residents about the new cycleway scheme on Rotary Way.

83. MAYOR'S REPORT

A report by the Mayor, Councillor Overbury had been circulated. The report included a reminder of arrangements for Remembrance Sunday on the 12 November.

84. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

There were no reports.

85. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORT

The Accounts Committee approved payments totalling £40,126.01 for October 2023.

**85. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET
REPORT(Continued)**

A copy of the budget reports for October were also circulated, as well as the bank reconciliation for that month.

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING – THE NEXT MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL
WOULD BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2023 AT 6.15 P.M. AT
MERTON HALL.**