

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT MERTON HALL ON 13 DECEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor K Overbury (in the Chair)

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

86. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caisley, Greenwell and Sehgal.

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted by Councillor Ahmed in relation to Minute 91(ii) below.

Councillors Darwin and Dodd took no part in the discussions relating to item 90 – Planning minutes.

88. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 8th NOVEMBER 2023

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 8th November 2023 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

89. MATTERS ARISING

Minute 78(ii) – Appointment of Internal Auditor

The Clerk reported that this item would be deferred to the next meeting if progress had been made.

90. PLANNING

(i) Planning Committee

Minutes of meetings held on 7 and 21 November 2023 were circulated for information.

(ii) Report on recent planning decisions

There were no reports.

91. GRANT APPLICATIONS

(i) Application from Escape Charity

An application had been received from the above-mentioned charity requesting a donation of £1000 towards the cost of the work they carried out in Ponteland. The organisation currently provided assistance to 10 families within Ponteland which represented 1.1% of their budget.

91. GRANT APPLICATIONS (Continued)

After a discussion on this issue, it was finally agreed to provide a grant of £500 to the organisation. The Clerk was also requested to ask if they could provide more publicity for their services locally.

RESOLVED – A grant of £500 be approved and the Clerk ask about additional publicity in Ponteland.

(ii) Rialto restaurant

A request for a grant towards the cost of the annual fireworks display held on New Year's Eve had been received from the proprietor of Rialto.

Members were reminded that a grant of £500 had been approved last year when concerns were raised about anti-social behaviour and impact on wildlife.

After a discussion on this issue, it was agreed to give a grant of £500 this year. It was noted that the Clerk would not be writing out to licensees this year re use of plastic glasses etc and had not done so in 2022.

RESOLVED – A grant of £500 be approved.

Note - Councillor Ahmed took no part in the discussions or voting re Minute 91(ii) above.

(iii) Ponteland 41 Club

A request had been received from the above organisation requesting a grant towards the replacement of wheelbarrow wheels for the Wheelbarrow Race to be held on 1 January 2024. A grant of £204 had been requested.

RESOLVED – A donation of £204 be approved.

92 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

A report relating to the acquisition of a financial management system package had been circulated.

Currently the Council's finances were managed by Excel spreadsheets which was becoming increasingly time consuming and difficult to manage.

After looking at various packages, it seemed that Scribe had received the best reviews from the parish and town council sector.

An initial Zoom call was held with a representative from the company on 30 October which demonstrated the various reports that could be produced within the package. They included streamlining year-end processes, lists of payments for approval, bank reconciliation documents, invoices, VAT returns etc.

92 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM(continued)

Details of the costs involved were set out within the report. A one-off fee to join Scribe of £797 was needed as well as an annual subscription fee of £1068 giving a total of £1865 to be paid.

RESOLVED – The subscription to Scribe as outlined above be approved at a cost of £1865.

93. APPOINTMENTS TO CURRENT VACANCIES

A report relating to the vacancies that had been created following the sudden death of Councillor Alan Varley had been circulated.

Details of these vacancies for Committees and Working Parties as well as outside bodies were included within the report.

Most of the appointments could be delayed until the current vacancy in the East ward was filled by either by-election or co-option.

There was a pressing need for an addition to the Planning Committee if possible as there were currently only four members. There was no-one able to fill the vacancy at the meeting and it was noted that the Mayor may need to attend on occasion as an ex-officio member.

Councillor Dodd agreed to join the group set up to review the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations as that had to be carried out before 31 March 2024. Councillor Darwin was interested in being the Town Council's representative on the Newcastle Airport Consultative Committee and asked for more information.

Councillor Woodrow agreed to fill the vacancy on the Pont News and Views editorial group.

The remainder of the vacancies would be filled at a later date.

RESOLVED – That the appointments set out above be agreed (subject to additional information being given to Councillor Darwin) and it was noted that the remainder of the vacancies would be filled at a later date.

94. CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR OFFICE CLOSURE

A report relating to the annual closure of the Town Council office for Christmas and New Year had been circulated.

It was proposed that the office be closed on Thursday 14 December to reopen on 2 January however, there may be a need for a Planning Committee on the 19 December and the Assistant Clerk has said she would come in for that meeting.

When the office closed, a notice would be displayed giving the NCC number and stating that emails could be sent to the enquiries@ponteland-tc.gov.uk address throughout the holiday period.

Emails would be monitored at certain times and replied to if necessary.

94. CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR OFFICE CLOSURE(Continued)

RESOLVED – That the proposal to close the office from the 14 December until Tuesday 2 January be approved, and it was noted that arrangements would be put in place to ensure urgent issues would be dealt with.

95. ENVIRONMENT WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the above Working Party held on 27 November had been circulated.

A recommendation relating to the refurbishment of the outside of the Pele tower was included within the minutes for approval by the Council.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The minutes be approved.
- (ii) The proposal to proceed with the necessary work to the outside of the Pele Tower in 2024-25 be agreed and that the shortfall of £10,500 be included in the budget for 2024-25.

96. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd reported that he had been in touch with the Police regarding the possibility of introducing a system for local shops similar to Pub watch. This was an ongoing project, and he hoped that all of the shops would participate. A further meeting with the local shops may be necessary.

He mentioned some possible improvements to Merton Way which he hoped other County Councillors would contribute towards as well as the Town Council. Some expert advice on what could replace the existing layout would be required.

He was concerned that the heavy rainfall would result in more potholes, and he was making checks on the state of the roads and reporting back to NCC.

Councillor Darwin reported that members allowances had to be spent before the end of the financial year.

He also reported that he was trying to organise a site visit to the replacement for Athol House.

Councillor Darwin also mentioned that he had spoken to the Leader of the County Council relating to the land at the site of the former High School. There was a lot of interest in this land. He had asked if it would be possible to consider installing a MUGA type development there.

He also reported that there was a new bus route going through Ponteland which was going through Twizell to Newcastle.

96. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT(Continued)

Councillor Darwin also reported that the MP was holding a meeting at the Memorial Hall in January to discuss the work carried out on Rotary Way and the bridleway. This was to be a positive meeting to see how the area could be improved with planting etc.

Councillor Hall reported that Ponteland Rotary had already planted 60 trees at the location and a further 90 were planned for future planting.

97. MAYOR'S REPORT

A report by the Mayor, Councillor Overbury had been circulated for information.

98. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

(i) Report on attendance at the Tynedale and Ponteland Flood Forum

A report by Councillor Hall who had attended the above event on 30 November had been circulated. Councillor Hall felt this was a useful and well attended meeting. Offers of assistance to parish and town councils had been made by NCC and other agencies in attendance. He suggested that he and the Clerk would find out more and report back to a future Council meeting.

(ii) Ageing Well event

A report by Councillor Sehgal relating to the above event held on 3 November had been circulated for information.

99. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORT

The Accounts Committee approved payments totalling £25,108.65 for November 2023.

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

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the disclosure of the following item on the agenda as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of schedule 12A in the 1972 Act.

100. STAFFING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the above Committee held on 29 November had been circulated at the meeting.

The Chair provided additional information relating to item 4 which related to the employment of the current gardening contractor as an operations officer who would continue to work outside but who would also provide additional assistance relating

100. STAFFING COMMITTEE(Continued)

to projects and other outside issues. It has been agreed that he would be seconded for a 6-month period.

RESOLVED – The Minutes be noted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – THE NEXT MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL WOULD BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 JANUARY 2024 AT 6.15 P.M. THE TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES AT 1 MEADOWFIELD COURT, MEADOWFIELD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE.