



Birtley Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting, Wednesday 12 August 2025, 8pm at Birtley Village Hall

Present: Sarah Crone, David Burn, Bill White, Marilyn Bell, Paul Andrew, Anne Lowes,
Apologies:

Minute taker: Mel Bramley (Parish Clerk)

In attendance: Bob Neilson (member of the public and local resident)

1.Apologies for Absence

Cllr Azocar-Nevin

2. Opportunities for matters raised by members of the public before the meeting to be discussed

None

3. Declaration of interest

There were no declarations of interest to be noted.

4. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of 20 May 2025 and 23 June 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record by all present.

(a) Matters arising from the previous meeting

Resurface of pathway to village hall.

The Ray Windfarm CIC are likely to offer funding to cover the cost of this work. Awaiting written confirmation.

Register of interest forms

Mel has forwarded the relevant Councillor forms to Northumberland County Council as required.

AGAR forms (accounts) were sent to Mazars by the Parish Clerk in accordance with the timescales.

Update of policies and procedures

Mel stated that she had checked the present policies and procedures displayed on the website. She reported that all of them need updating/reviewing and a few key policies have not been implemented.

ACTION: Mel will review these as an ongoing action and will circulate 2 policies per month to Parish Councillors to read and comment before ratifying at December's PC meeting.

(b) External e mails forwarded by the Clerk

There are no e mails to comment on that will not be discussed on this agenda.

5. Financial update

(a) Bank reconciliation

The Parish Clerk had circulated a financial record of the PC account prior to the meeting.

(b) List of payment made since last meeting

A. Lowes (bedding plants reimbursement) £200.00

Zurich Insurance £400.13

(c) Income

A VAT rebate for 2024/25 has been paid into the Commercial Instant Access Account. For £327.80

The Parish Clerk has recently submitted a further backdated rebate for 23/24 for £190.00. She reported that claims can be backdated up to 4 years .

ACTION: The Parish Clerk will continue to work on this and submit further claims. She will move the VAT rebate into the Community (current) account.

(d) Payments to be approved

Birtley Village Hall	Room hire	£40.00
M Bramley	Stationery reimbursement	£22.88
Northumberland Ass NALC membership balance o/s		£49.73
Mr and Mrs R Bell	Lawn mower reimbursement	£125.48
TWDA creative	Website hosting	£456.00
Rospa inspection (playground)		£100.80
Total payments due		£794.89

It was also agreed to employ TyneRede, Bellingham for calculating Payroll/PAYE at a cost of £30/quarter for the Parish Clerk's salary. Parish Councillors agreed to discuss the Parish Clerk's wages at the end of the meeting without her presence.

(e) Bank signatories

There are continued problems with Lloyds Bank arranging access for Cllr Crone for online banking. It also seems that Cllr Burn has been removed from the account as a signatory. The matter has taken

up an extraordinary amount of time and several complaints have been submitted to the bank. Cllr Crone will continue to communicate with the bank in the hope of resolution.

6. Future expenditure

(a) Grass cutting

Dickinson's have sent a quotation for grass cutting. The field cost is £65 per cut and the church yard is £75 per cut. The Parish Clerk pointed out that The Local Government Act (LGA) of 1894 Sec 6 (1) & Sec 8, transferred powers from the Church to the newly formed Parish Councils. Those powers are to:

- Hold & manage parish property and do any works including to maintain and improve it, and contribute to expenses (but NOT property relating to affairs of the church or held for an ecclesiastical charity).

There was mixed debate from various Parish Council's on this matter. Cllr Burn pointed out that the church makes a £50.00 contribution towards the costs of the grass cutting and that the Church does not have its own budget to cover these costs, relying on the generosity of local residents. After some discussion it was agreed that residents of Birtley would support the Parish Council bearing the costs of maintaining the church yard and the PC would continue to pay for the costs incurred. All present valued the work that Roger Bell did in volunteering to the grass cutting and maintaining of the lawn mowers. Residents also appreciated the high standard of work conducted.

ACTION: All agreed to continue with the grass cutting as it stands. The Parish Clerk will inform James Dickinson of the decision. Some future thought needs to be given to asking the church for a greater contribution towards petrol and general upkeep.

(b) Rospa playground report

The Parish Clerk circulated a precis of the recommendations made by PlaySafety Ltd. There were no urgent repairs etc, however there were a number of "amber" recommendations. The Parish Clerk pointed out that a regular, recorded health and safety check need to be carried out to fulfil insurance requirements.

ACTION: Cllr Bell agreed to speak to Roger Bell with regards to removing algae from the play equipment/surface and for him to carry out a monthly check. The Parish Clerk will set up a check list to cover H&S aspects of the playground.

(c) Bin replacement near Gold Island

Cllr Andrew had received a map of the Wark/Birtley area showing the boundary lines. This confirmed that the bin near Gold Island was the responsibility of Birtley Parish Council to maintain. The bin by the bridge however was the responsibility of Wark PC. The Parish Clerk said that NCC had produced a quotation of £470 + VAT to replace with a 250-litre wheelie bin. This cost was excessively high, and the Parish Clerk had calculated that a bin could be purchased for approximately £60 and a fixing post for approximately £80. By finding a contractor to do this work would be considerable cheaper.

ACTION: It was agreed that this matter would be put on hold for the time being until the PC finances were in a healthier position.

(d) Monument cleaning

The Parish Clerk had made enquiries with a local specialist cleaning company and NCC who had both advised that permission needs to be sought for work to the monument as this is a Grade 2 listed monument. This would incur further costs to the Parish Council.

ACTION: The parish Clerk would seek costs for the work.

(e) Zurich Insurance (motor insurance for lawnmower)

All invoices have been paid for both the lawnmower insurance and public liability insurance at a total cost of £727.19 and £400.14 respectively.

(f) Clerk's wages

Parish Councils agreed to discuss this payments at the end of the meeting when the Parish Clerk had left.

(g) Payroll

The Parish Clerk pointed out that employee salary payments would be best calculated by a outside body. TyneRede Accountants in Bellingham would carry out this work, incuinf tax payments etc at a cost of £30/quarter.

ACTION: It was agreed to employ this service. The Parish Clerk would inform TyneRede.

(h) Laptop for Parish Council

The Parish clerk stated that a replacement laptop (and MS packages etc) would cost in the region of £600. It was noted that this is a necessary item to purchase but it would be necessary to raise more funds before this expenditure be considered. Cllr Andrew pointed out that reserves need to be built up in case of emergencies e.g. breakdown of the existing laptop.

(i) Anticipated expenditure for 2025/26 (over £400)

It was agreed to carry out budget setting and Cllr Crone and the Parish Clerk would produce this for the next PC meeting.

7. Potential income streams/grant applications/VAT rebates

The Parish Clerk will continue to investigate VAT rebates which had not previously been applied for (backdated for 4 years) Where possible grants will be looked into to help pay towards expenditure.

ACTION: The Parish Clerk will look into funds with the War Memorial trust to pay for upkeep of the memorial in the village.

8. County Councillors report

Cllr Azocar-Nevin had sent a report which the Parish Clerk had circulated to all prior to the meeting. The report was noted.

9. Other items for discussion

Pending digital telephone network

By January 2027, all traditional landlines in the UK will be phased out and replaced with digital phone services delivered over broadband. Certain devices people use at home, such as care alarms,

security alarms and fax machines may also be connected to a landline. For someone who uses an analogue personal alarm, the landline provider must be contacted. The provider is responsible for making sure the alarm keeps working through the switchover and that adequate support is provided.

ACTION: Bob Neilson kindly agreed to produce a poster which would be placed on the noticeboard and in Village Hall to raise awareness of these changes.

Digital and date compliance (.gov.uk)

Cllr Andrew explained the requirement for the PC to have a .gov or .org domain e mail address. He had spoken to the existing website provider who would be able to do this. The Parish Council would be provided with 2 e mail addresses on .org.uk for both the Parish Clerk and the Chair. The cost would be in the region of £150 to set up plus ongoing costs for maintenance.

ACTION: This does not have to be in place until next year so will be considered at a later date.

Local transport plan

The Parish Clerk pointed out that the Council will be writing to the PC soon to ask for priorities from each Parish Council for repairs to roads, pathways etc. It was agreed that potholes in the main route through the village needed repair.

ACTION: The Parish clerk will let Councillors know the deadline for consideration so priorities can be drawn up and sent to the County Council.

New anti-terrorism legislation

The Parish Clerk pointed out the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, also known as Martyn's Law, received Royal Assent on Thursday 3 April 2025. This Act delivers the Government's manifesto commitment to strengthen the security of public premises and events. This will be the responsibility for the Village Hall committee to abide by. Guidance will be provided in due course to assist in understanding the requirements set out in the legislation. The guidance is being designed to be easy to follow, needing neither expertise nor the use of third-party products or services.

ACTION: Implementation is not expected for at least 12 months, however Committee's need to be aware of requirements. The Parish Clerk will keep the PC up to date and refer information to the Village Hall committee

Policies and procedures for the PC

Five of the existing policies and procedures on the website require review. There are also a number of key policies missing including a reserve policy, health and safety etc.

ACTION: The Parish Clerk will review these and circulate updated draft policies on a gradual basis for Councillors to review and ratify. New policies will be drawn up by the Parish Clerk.

10. Planning applications

Comments for Planning Application 25/02739/FUL relating to the proposed development at Threpwood Hill are requested. After some discussion it was collectively agreed that the PC should submit an objection as it was felt that the plans for the new build were not in keeping with the surrounding area.

ACTION: The Parish Clerk will write up an objection and send to the Chair for approval prior to submitting to the Council.

11. Correspondence

There were no items received.

12. Information Items

It was agreed that as minutes of the PC meeting were quite long and difficult to display on a small noticeboard, in future a file would be set up displaying minutes and agendas for the public to view. Agendas would also continue to be displayed on the village noticeboard. The website would also continue to display all documentation.

ACTION: The Parish Clerk will set up a file for the Village Hall.

13. AOB

It was agreed to call a public meeting for the village in order to invite community ideas for fundraising and priority expenditure for Birtley Parish.

ACTION: Cllr Crone will set up a meeting for 12/9/2025 and invite Church members and local villagers to a meeting in the Village Hall. Cllr Crone will contact Helen Watson who oversees the Parish Broadsheet in order to publicise the meeting.

14. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 2 December 2025 in the Village Hall.

Parish Councillors were asked to stay behind in order to discuss the Parish Clerk salary payments.

The meeting ended at 10pm.