

**Minutes of the meeting of Heddon-on-the-Wall Parish Council held on  
Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in Heddon Community Library**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs. D. Keller [DK]; (in the Chair); K. Dryden [KD]; R. Adams [RA]; R. Oatway [RO]; K. Ince [KI]; M. Wilson [MW]; P. Edwards [PE]

**IN ATTENDANCE:** L. Barton (Clerk); **Members of the public: none in attendance**

- | <b>Minute No.</b> | <b>Agenda item</b>   |
|-------------------|--|
| 1.                | <b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: RESOLVED:</b> That an apology and reason for non-attendance shall be accepted from Cllr. Irving-Munro.   |
| 2.                | <b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:</b> Cllr. Keller declared an interest in matters affecting Karbon Homes and Batson's Groundcare. Cllr. Wilson declared an interest in St Andrew's Church. Cllr. Edwards declared an interest in the Knott Hall.   |
| 3.                | <b>NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL (NCC):</b><br>Nothing to report   |
| 4.                | <b>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: RESOLVED:</b> To approve as a correct record and authorise the signing of the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 <sup>th</sup> November.   |
| 5.                | <b>MATTERS ARISING &amp; REVIEW OF ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING:</b><br>The clerk is still waiting to hear from NCC about buildings insurance for the library and a quote for drain cleaning for the village. It was <b>agreed</b> to chase this action up.<br>The staff pay award for the clerk and asset officer was agreed at the last meeting and Northumberland County Council were notified and have adjusted payments accordingly.<br>The Grants and Donations policy and the Tree policy have been uploaded to the Parish Council website.<br>Cllr. Keller contacted St Andrew's Church to discuss the possibility of changing the Christmas Eve service to a later time. The church responded to explain that this would not be possible due to other commitments. |
| 6.                | <b>KNOTT HALL REPAIRS</b><br>A letter outlining the situation was received from David Blackett. Guttering repairs are needed at the Knott Hall following damage caused by a falling tree during Storm Arwen. The Parish Council had submitted a claim to the insurance company at the time, but after several delays, the insurers refused to pay for the damage. The damaged guttering is now causing damp issues. The quote obtained at the time is now out of date. It was <b>AGREED</b> to source 3 new quotes for repairs up to a cost of £2500. It was further <b>AGREED</b> to discuss at the January meeting whether a complaint should be made to insurers about the delays in dealing with the claim.  |
| 7.                | <b>POTENTIAL BREACHES OF PLANNING</b><br>It was <b>AGREED</b> to move this item to the January meeting.  |
| 8.                | <b>FINANCIAL MATTERS: RESOLVED</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <u>To approve payment of invoices presented at the meeting.</u><br/>The Income and Expenditure spreadsheet (shared with councillors by email prior to the meeting) was approved and signed.<br/>It was <b>RESOLVED</b> to pay the following invoices presented at the meeting:<br/>Newcastle Tree Services (£480); JC Accountants Internal Audit fee for Year end March 2023 (£360); Grass cutting Selman Park (£120); Window cleaning (£33 November); Selman Park rent for Quarter 3 (£392.32); Halls of Heddon Decorating the Cross (£480); Halls of Heddon water charges to allotments for the year ending March 2023 (£522.74); Heddon Gossip</li></ol>                                      |

December /January issue (£95); Timesheet for library cleaning November (£82.50); Hexham Courant vouchers for library (£8.40); Batson's invoices £1,008 for October and November grounds maintenance (£414 each) and £180 for supply of new trees; Stamps £5 (clerk reimbursement).

2. To consider any applications for grants or donations received at least 3 days before the meeting. Tynedale at Home Hospice had requested a donation. The clerk sent the donations request form to them for completion.
3. To consider information relating to External Audit for the year ending March 2023:
  - i. Mazares (external auditor) have shared their preliminary findings by email. **Please see the addendum** for further detail about the qualifications made and the actions agreed by councillors to address these points.
  - ii. Further to this, it is hereby **minuted** that the clerk is now the Responsible Financial Officer for the Parish Council and has been since their appointment in May 2023.
  - iii. Any missing invoices or direct debit statements will be noted in the minutes at each meeting.
  - iv. The clerk and chair will work together to develop an audit timeline in January so that correct processes are followed at the correct times.
4. Budget / Precept setting

The draft budget was discussed by councillors. It will be finalised and approved at the January meeting and the precept will be agreed and requested from Northumberland County Council.

Cllr. Edwards explained that future projects such as the Welfare Field and Memorial Park Enhancement will not be funded from precept – they will be funded from Parish Council reserves.

  - i. NCC have advised that the additional grass cuts for 2024 will be £799.12 + VAT. Councillors **agreed** to proceed with this.
  - ii. NCC have also advised of increased payroll administration fees from April 2024. The charge will increase to £16.67 + VAT per month.
  - iii. Scottish Power have advised of an increase in costs from January 2024 – the annual cost will be £313.
5. Office 1 and 2: A potential tenant has visited the empty offices. The Parish Council are obtaining quotes for repairs, decorating and the building of a stud wall with an interconnecting door. This will be discussed at the January meeting.
6. Potential purchase of a PA System – it was **agreed** to move this item to the January meeting.

## 9. MAINTAINING OUR VILLAGE FOR ALL:

The Asset Officer report was discussed and the following decisions made:

It was **agreed** to cement in place the signpost on Heddon Banks at the quoted cost of £80

It was **agreed** to report the empty grit bin near the library to NCC

It was **agreed** to obtain quotes for clearing the internal down pipes at the library

It was **agreed** to ask the handyman to remove the garden waste near Leigh's nursery

Replacing signs around the village (including the Welfare Field) will be discussed at a future meeting

Repairs to the Welfare Field gate – it was **agreed** that repairs are needed and this item will be

discussed at January's meeting to decide on whether to proceed with repair or incorporate within the scope of works for the Welfare Field Project.

**Allotments** –. The asset Officer submitted a quote from Nicholson Plastics for removing the damaged tank and replacing it with a new one. Cllr. Keller has found another company to come and look at the water tank and give a quote for possible repair rather than replacement. Councillors will consider all options at a future meeting.

10. **IMPROVING OUR VILLAGE FOR ALL:**  
Nothing to report
11. **NORTHUMBERLAND OPEN SPACES ASSESSMENT – PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSES:** Councillors agreed responses to the survey. The clerk will submit the survey.
12. **REPORTS:** Cllr Wilson has spoken to NCC School Street Scheme about traffic and school parking. It was **agreed** to arrange a meeting with the school, NCC Highways department and the Parish Council to discuss and agree the best options to resolve this issue.
13. **PLANNING:**  
**Planning consultations:**  
**23/04494/FUL 1 Station Road** – proposed single storey rear extension – no objections or comments  
**23/04594/FUL 5 Mithras Gardens** – proposed single storey extension to rear and first storey extension to the side – no objections or comments to the planning application.  
**Proposed Telecommunications Upgrade at WEST HEDDON NURSERY, HALLS OF HEDDON, HEDDON-ON-THE-WALL, NORTHUMBERLAND, NE15 0JR (CS11572425)** – (letter received from Sinclair Dalby) **no objections from councillors**. Further information was requested about the potential benefits of the upgrade. We were informed that the upgrade works are required to provide enhanced coverage and capacity and will include 5G service.  
**Planning decisions:**  
**23/01679/FUL Land North West of Rudchester roundabout** – application for change of use from agricultural land to campsite – permission **REFUSED**  
**23/03003/PRUTPO** The Wynding 40 Heddon Banks – permission **GRANTED** for crown reduction of a tree with a TPO in place
14. **CORRESPONDENCE:**  
Several residents have contacted the Parish Council about the expansion works carried out by Virgin in the village. Concerns raised included cracked and damaged paving slabs becoming a trip hazard, the placement of the cabinets, damage to grass verges and sand being deposited on pavements and loss of internet connection. Cllr. Keller pointed out that some of these issues have since been rectified by Virgin. It was **agreed** to write to Virgin on behalf of residents sharing the concerns raised. It was further **agreed** to follow up the issue of damaged paving slabs with Northumberland County Council as part of the Local Transport Plan.  
A resident has requested a memorial tree for Dennis and June Neale. Cllr. Keller will compile a list of all memorial trees and report back to the council on any new orders needed.  
A resident has contacted the Parish Council about overgrown hedging on Heddon Banks. The hedging has since been cut back and the resident has been advised to report any future problems via FixmyStreet.  
A resident contacted the Parish Council with regards the Planning Application process which has now been directed to NCC Planning
15. **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT** – it was **AGREED** to move this item to the January meeting  
To discuss the project checklist and agree an approach to project development and project sub groups for Heddon Parish Council  
Strategic Business Plan – To discuss and review the Strategic Business Plan
16. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS: None raised**
17. **NEXT MEETING: RESOLVED:** That the date of the next meeting shall be Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at 7pm.

**CONCLUSION OF MEETING:** The meeting closed at 7.50 pm.

### Income and Expenditure up to 12<sup>th</sup> December:

To whom payable	Reason	Amount	Date
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>Community Directplus Account [No. 1 Account] - expenses</b>		
NorthStar Audio Visual Ltd	Hire of PA system	£200.00	09-Nov-23
NCC Receipts	Payroll	£1,141.20	15-Nov-23
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,341.20</b>	
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>Community Directplus Account [No. 2 Account] - expenses</b>		
Cleaning Services	October pay plus backdated pay increase from April	£117.00	09-Nov-23
Scottish Power	Electricity Selman Park	£21.00	10-Nov-23
Sky Business Services	Broadband	£45.54	14-Nov-23
ADT	Fire Alarm	£18.43	27-Nov-23
ADT	Burglar Alarm	£56.04	27-Nov-23
Sky Business Services	Broadband	£29.94	28-Nov-23
24/7 Business Support	CCTV	£43.20	30-Nov-23
British Gas	Electricity Library	£346.32	04-Dec-23
Scottish Power	Electricity Selman Park	£21.00	11-Dec-23
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£698.47</b>	
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>Community Directplus Account [No. 2 Account] Income</b>		
i2i Consultants Limited	Rental	£300	16-Nov-23
Trident	Rental	£300	22-Nov-23
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£600</b>	

### Invoices for Approval at the meeting:

Newcastle Tree Services work near Blue Row (£480);

JC Accountants Internal Audit fee for Year end March 2023 (£360);

Grass cutting Selman Park one cut in October (£120);

Window cleaning (£33 November + £33 December);

Selman Park rent for Quarter 3 (£392.32);

Halls of Heddon Decorating the Cross throughout the year (£480);

Halls of Heddon water charges to allotments for the year ending March 2023 (£522.74);

Heddon Gossip December /January issue extra content (£95);

Timesheet for library cleaning November (£82.50);

Clerk reimbursement for Hexham Courant vouchers (£8.40) and Stamps (£5)

Batson's invoices – (£414 for October Grounds Maintenance; £414 for November Grounds Maintenance; £180 supply of trees);

### **Addendum to the December Minutes 20/12/23:**

#### **Item 8.3 Financial Matters: Mazares External Auditor report 2022 – 2023 Qualifications:**

Councillors discussed the following qualifications made by Mazares. These are materially incorrect issues that have been included in the AGS/ accounts:

a) The Council has not published the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and started the period of public rights in accordance with the timetable in the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015. The regulations require these processes to have been completed by the first working day of July. For 2022/23 this was not completed until 10 November 2023, but the Council answered yes to assertion 1 of the Annual Governance Statement indicating appropriate arrangements were in place to comply with the regulations. **For 2023/24, the Council needs to put arrangements in place to ensure that it can discharge its responsibilities in line with the statutory timetable.**

It was noted that the Parish Council had no clerk for a period of 4 months at the start of 2023 and this delayed the accounts being prepared. It was **agreed** that to rectify this in future the clerk will create an audit timeline to ensure all actions are taken at the correct times and in the correct manner. It was further **agreed** that the full Parish Council will continue to oversee all financial matters for the current financial year.

b) The Internal Audit report identified significant weaknesses in internal control during 2022/23, including non-compliance with financial regulations whilst the Council was without a clerk. However, the Council answered yes to assertion 2 of the annual governance statement. **The Council should ensure that the recommendations in the internal audit report are implemented and consider answering no to assertion 2 of the 2023/24 annual governance statement if these weaknesses remained for a significant part of the 2023/24 financial year.**

The internal audit picked up on some invoices being missing at the end of the financial year and some processes not being followed correctly because there was no clerk in post.

To rectify this, the Parish Council has taken the following actions:

A clerk has been appointed (May 2023)

The clerk has implemented the following systems regarding invoices and payments:

- Invoices are printed and presented at the PC meetings each month for approval
- Invoices are paid the day after the meeting and a payment receipt is downloaded
- The invoice and payment receipt are filed in the Finance folder under the relevant month
- The clerk updates the monthly bank tracker (income and expenditure spreadsheet)
- This is emailed to councillors prior to the meeting to update them on direct debit payments made and current bank balances
- The spreadsheet is updated again after invoices have been paid
- This spreadsheet is then printed and retained in the Finance folder (along with direct debit statements and invoices) for the relevant month

It was **AGREED** that in future these actions will be taken:

- The clerk will now include a copy of the income and expenditure spreadsheet in the minutes
- The clerk will now document all invoices received each month (company and amount) in the minutes for clarity and audit purposes
- Where an invoice or direct debit statement is not received or is mislaid, the clerk will contact the supplier as soon as possible to request a duplicate copy so that there is a document to support each transaction. This will be included in the minutes of the meeting.

c) The Council asserted that it ensured an effective internal audit during the year (assertion 6) but the Internal audit report was dated after the Annual Governance Statement and no internal audit testing of 2022/23 transactions or controls had been completed at the time the Annual Governance Statement was approved. **In future, the Council should ensure that sufficient internal audit testing of the relevant year's transactions and controls has been completed before the Annual Governance Statement is approved.**

It was noted that no internal audit took place in 2022 / 2023 because the previous internal auditor retired at the end of the 2022 financial year and the Parish Council was unable to find another internal auditor.

The Parish Council has now appointed an internal auditor (JC Accountants) and are currently undergoing a mid-term internal audit.

d) The minute references for the dates of the meeting approving the AGAR were incorrect. The AGAR was approved in full on 19 June and re-approved following corrections on 12 July and 11 October. However, the final version of the AGAR indicates that Section 1 was approved on 19 June and Section 2 was approved on 12 October. The dates should have been 11 October for both sections to correspond with the actual version of the AGAR published and advertised for the exercise of public rights. In addition, the minutes of that meeting should have been more explicit about the approval and what had changed from earlier versions and the minute references on the AGAR should have referred to specific minute numbers. **In future, the Council should ensure that the AGAR reflects the correct approval dates and minute references and the minutes accurately record the approval process and the reason for any amendments.**

It was noted that the clerk was newly appointed and new to the clerk role and had not realised that both sections of the AGAR needed to be updated. It was **AGREED** that specific minute references will be given on the AGAR form in future. It was further **AGREED** that the clerk will attend training on Year end / audit.

Other matters – other significant recommendations worthy of public reporting:

a) The Chair acted as RFO in a temporary capacity during 2022/23 and also whilst the 2022/23 AGAR was prepared. We regard this to be a significant weakness in governance and the Council should formally confirm that the clerk is now acting as RFO in minutes to the next meeting of full council. **The Council should formally confirm that the clerk is now acting as RFO in minutes to the next meeting of full council.**

It is **minuted** that the clerk is now acting as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and has been since their appointment in May 2023. Councillors also explained that the Parish Council had sought guidance from NALC about the chair acting as RFO in a temporary capacity in the absence of a clerk and NALC had advised that the PC was compliant as the Chair was not remunerated for this role.

b) In undertaking the review of the 2022/23 Annual Governance and Accountability Return it came to our attention that in 2023 the Council has not met the requirements of the 2015 Accounts and Audit Regulations to provide electors with a period of 30 working days including the first 10 working days of July, to inspect the accounts. The Council should ensure that in 2023/24 they comply with the Regulations and respond no to the relevant assertion in its Annual Governance Statement as the assertion is retrospective and refers to compliance during the relevant financial year rather than in respect of it. **The Council should ensure that in 2023/24 they comply with the Regulations and respond no to the relevant assertion in its Annual Governance Statement as the assertion is retrospective and refers to compliance during the relevant financial year rather than in respect of it.**

It was **AGREED** that the Parish Council will respond No to this assertion on the 2023 / 2024 AGAR with regard to provision of public rights.

## APPENDIX

### MAINTAINING OUR VILLAGE FOR ALL:

#### ACTIONS:

PE to liaise with D Blackett re Knott Hall repairs  
Knott Hall / Clerk to source 3 quotes for gutter repairs to Knott Hall  
JP to cement post in place on Heddon Banks  
RO to look into allotment legislation re provision of water  
LB to ask LT if water tank at the allotments has been drained and to organise this if not  
LB / LT Source quotes for the library roof repair  
LT to ask handyman to remove garden waste near Leigh's nursery  
Monitoring of Memorial Park / Batson's are fulfilling their contract – will fall under Assets  
LT to report grit bin to NCC

### IMPROVING OUR VILLAGE FOR ALL:

#### ACTIONS:

LB to chase NCC re drain cleaning quote  
LB to chase NCC re library buildings insurance  
DK to compile list of all memorial trees and share with councillors

### FINANCE AND ASSETS:

#### ACTIONS:

PE to invite D Blackett to January meeting with finances

### OTHER:

#### ACTIONS: