

Minutes of the Annual Elector's Meeting 14th June 2023

6.45pm at Heddon Library

Chair's Report for 2022 – 2023:

Cllr. Keller welcomed everyone to the AEM and introduced herself and Cllr. Dryden as the incoming chair and deputy chair and thanked the outgoing chair and deputy for their service. She explained that the Parish Council now has full membership of councillors, all with different skills, to bring diversity to future projects. Cllr. Keller summarised some of the highlights and key achievements of the Parish Council over the past year. These include the Sponsor a Tree project to replace the trees lost during Storm Arwen; various events in the village including Remembrance Sunday, the Queen's Jubilee, the King's Coronation, the Hadrian 1900 events and the forthcoming Heddon Culture Festival; the new grounds maintenance contract and the focus on Environment and Sustainability; and increased community and stakeholder engagement.

Financial Statement 2022 – 2023:

Cllr. Edwards was unable to attend the Annual Elector Meeting and the annual accounts are currently being finalised, but the Parish Council have been prudent in keeping reserves throughout the pandemic. They intend to invest more in the village over the next 3 – 5 years in line with the strategic plan. The precept has been maintained at same level as last year. The financial statement will be shared via the website when it is ready.

Open Forum for residents:

1) Memorial Park:

One resident asked if there could be some weeding and removal of self-sown ash trees in the Memorial Park. Cllr. Keller confirmed that the agreement with Batson's Groundcare includes refreshing and tidying the Memorial Park.

A Memorial Park project will follow. Another resident asked if the PC would involve Halls of Heddon in this project. Cllr. Keller confirmed we would.

Another resident pointed out that 2 trees are dead due to underwatering. Cllr. Keller confirmed that the new trees are being watered and that a tree report has been carried out. The trees were planted at different times; therefore, growth varies.

2) Speeding:

Several residents raised concerns about speeding in the village and mentioned the Towne Gate entrance being particularly dangerous. Different ways of combatting this were discussed including using bollards or a movable barrier as a trial to slow drivers down. One resident commented that the red stripes are not entirely effective at this. Cllr. Keller explained that the red stripes are the first phase of the process. Other proposals include a potential consultation on reducing speed throughout the village to 20mph and the possibility of installing metal barriers near The 3 Tuns. A resident suggested children could

design safety posters to bring awareness of the dangers of speeding to parents. The PC will liaise with the school on this.

3) Parking in the village:

Residents also commented on the difficulties parking on Hexham Rd especially during school pick up and drop off times. Residents appreciated the bus stop being clearly marked out on the road but feel that this also impacts parking. It is particularly dangerous on the crest of the hill where white lines have been extended, but are not enforced. Cllr. Keller explained to residents about the Local Transport Plan, where the PC put forward priorities including those raised by residents. The PC has raised the issue of speeding with Northumberland County Council as one of their priorities for the village.

The PC also intends to liaise with Northumbria Police about parking issues near the school when the zigzag markings have been installed. Another possibility is a consultation on the introduction of permit parking on Trajan Walk near the school.

4) Station Road:

One resident mentioned the turning circle on Station Rd, where cars are parked seemingly all the time. People from out of the village meet up here, sometimes in groups, and it can feel threatening to people nearby. Northumbria Police have asked residents to take a note of registration plates and inform them of these occurrences.

Other possibilities were discussed such as engaging with the landowner to see if their fences could be extended to block this area. Another resident suggested a community watch scheme; however, this would require volunteers.

Litter is also a problem in this area and the PC has resolved to place a bin next to the bench on Station Rd and add this area to future village litter picks to tackle this problem.

5) Allotments:

One resident enquired about the proposed increase in allotment rent for next year. Cllr. Keller explained the reason behind increase is to cover costs such as water. The resident asked whether more services could be offered to allotment holders if the price is increased, for example, grass cutting. Councillors proposed the option of an allotment tenant group to meet with the PC and discuss their needs.

6) Pitch on the Wall:

Many residents had come to the meeting to talk about this. They are concerned about a planning application submitted to Northumberland County Council for the change of use of agricultural land into a campsite. The site is currently used as a wild camping site (temporary permission for this was granted during Covid, but has now expired). Residents do not object to the current small campsite, but to the permanent change of use of the land and the fact that large events may take place there on a regular basis if the permission is granted. They cited specific events which have taken place or are proposed and the resultant concerns: In November 2022 a Bonfire Night event was held here with fireworks, funfair and food. This caused severe traffic problems on the single-track road where residents live, specifically including large goods vehicles using the road and residents being blocked in. The noise of

fireworks and funfair was extremely loud and distressing to livestock in nearby fields. Another similar event is planned for November 2023.

In July Legends on the Wall, a family friendly Music tribute event is taking place at this venue with capacity for up to 500 people and onsite camping. Risk assessments for this event have been submitted to the local Parish Councils and relevant permissions have been sought from Northumberland County Council and Northumbria Police. However, residents are concerned about the associated noise and traffic.

In August a different and much larger event may be taking place here. This has not yet been confirmed, but if it goes ahead, will involve large numbers of vehicles, 27DJs, a fairground, car stunts and camping. This event could accommodate up to 1000 people and residents are particularly concerned about the lack of suitable facilities for such a large number, the resulting noise and litter and the traffic problems that will ensue. They are also concerned about how the event will be safely managed and that if it goes ahead, it will set a precedent for future events of a similar nature.

Residents are objecting to the proposals on the grounds mentioned above. Cllr. Keller thanked everyone for attending and sharing their concerns and said the PC would reconvene separately to put together a response. Cllrs. Keller, Dryden and Adams will also visit the site to get a better understanding of residents' concerns.

7) Heddon Village Show:

A resident who is part of the committee for the village show attended the meeting to feedback to the PC about arrangements for the village show on Saturday 2nd September. This is a separate event from the Heddon Culture Festival, but it is running at the same time. Plans are going well and a schedule will shortly be printed. Cllr. Keller offered support from the PC and a point of contact if needed. It was resolved that the PC would advertise the village show on the PC Facebook page.

AEM closed at 8.45pm

Parish Council Meeting reconvened to Monday 19th June at 7pm