

Kirkwhelpington Annual Parish Meeting

DRAFT Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 7 May 2024 at 7pm

Chair: Councillor Anne Palmer (Kirkwhelpington PC)

Clerk: Natalie Warren (Parish Clerk)

Kirkwhelpington Parish Residents: 21 residents

County Councillor: Councillor John Riddle

Meeting opened 7pm.

1. Apologies for Absence

Geoffrey Purves, PCC

2. Minutes and Matters arising from previous meetings (held Tuesday 3rd May 2022, Tuesday 2nd May 2023)

Agreed

3. Parish Council Acting Chair Report – Cllr Anne Palmer

I took over as Acting Chair of the Parish Council this time last year, and the Parish Council has continued to meet every other month, on the first Tuesday of May, July, September, November, January & March. And here we are again at the annual Parish Meeting, which will be followed by the Parish Council AGM. All are welcome to attend. There has been a significant change in personnel over the course of this intervening year. First and foremost, we have a new Parish Clerk, Natalie Warren, who joined us in June. We also have three new parish councillors – Phil Lawless, Nicky Brown & Kevin Robson. All joined during the course of the year as a result of a process of co-option, following the departure of Richard Thornton, Ann Purves & Mark Neale. Notices of each vacancy were posted and as usual, people were asked if they required an election – none was requested. Together with the existing councillors, myself, Eileen; Kevin, we are your Parish Council, and you should let any one of us know if you have an issue you think we should know about, or consider.

Local elections are due again in this part of Northumberland next May, 2025, and that will include an election for the Parish Council if there are more candidates than seats. Some of the business we have covered over the course of this year includes :

Gilbert Grange – there has been a great deal of dissatisfaction about the length of time it has taken the developers to finish the building of houses at Gilbert Grange, and the Parish Council has made various attempts to identify who is now in charge, and what their plans are for completion. Some of you may know that the original developers have gone into administration, and a number of different organisations have taken over the reins. The Parish Council has tried to keep up with the changes, and has invited representatives of the various companies to attend meetings and to explain, but these have never been accepted. In June, we received the following reply from the then owners, Hadrian Real estate:

“We acquired the site as a distressed asset from the previous owner with the view of completing the scheme and all obligations under the planning permission. Unfortunately, since acquisition, the finance market has been extremely volatile and even more so for a site that was known to be part of the demise of a previous company. As you can imagine, interest rate increases in recent months and inflation generally, the viability of the scheme is constantly being challenged. That being said,

we continue to meet weekly with the current funder and are actively seeking a solution to the slow progress on site. We remain committed to the scheme and all being well, anticipate the 3 part built plots to be completed during 2023. The 4 plots that are yet to commence to the front of the site (on Eastlands); we are negotiating the sale of Plot 1 to a private buyer who will then undertake a self-build type contract with ourselves and they're hopeful of having this complete and occupied by Christmas. Plots 2-4, we are currently seeking a re-finance package which will allow us to complete the build and ultimately sell. As part of the completion of plots 2-4 we will complete the works to the access road, kerbs and footpaths. The site will then be fully cleared of misc. materials and scrap. Unfortunately we don't have definite timescale for these works but I can assure you we remain committed to finding a solution to allow us to make progress." Progress has continued to be slow, but the site is improving. Please continue to let us know your opinions and ideas about this.

Highways, Footpaths, Road safety and Road repairs: over the course of the year, the PC has reported minor problems with the roads to the county council, and some repairs have been effected – not necessarily to a good standard. The process of reporting problems has been streamlined by the County Council through a system called “Fix My Street” – some of you may have used it, it covers footpaths as well as roads. Another thing to mention in this context is the work that has been done over the course of the year by individual residents – I’m sure you’ve all noticed the work that Michael Yeomans, Bob Nevin, Nick Winslow & others have been doing all year, clearing roadsides of debris, unblocking drains & gullies, repairing steps, bridges and walkways, and generally keeping our village in a good state of repair. Our thanks go to all of them – and after this meeting, the PC will be considering how it might recognise these efforts. The PC is asked every year to suggest more major highways works, and this year (in June) we suggested the following:

- Safety Barriers at both sides of the road at Little Harle corner – many cars have gone off the road here, particularly on the east side, and it is a steep drop into woodland.
- Crossroads at Kirkharle (A696 – B6342) Red box at the junction to prevent traffic travelling quickly along the A696, both northwards and southwards, from overtaking left turners; overtaking in this manner means vehicles stray into the area reserved for right turners, so risking head on collision.
- Further traffic calming measures at Knowesgate, and speed limit along the road from Knowesgate
- to Marycastle. Residents continue to report traffic travelling at unacceptable speeds as they come through Marycastle in both directions. A speed limit of 40 mph, along the road as it heads west towards Scots Gap, from the crossroads at Knowesgate to the last house at Marycastle would be helpful. No word from the council since.

In March Natalie & I attended a conference for Parish Councils at Morpeth County Hall, and many other PCs were reporting that despite being asked for their views on road safety measures, nothing is ever done, and nobody responds to our requests. I know a lot of you feel strongly about this issue, and perhaps you would like to contact your county councillor about it.

Power Cuts – although nothing as catastrophic as Storm Arwen has occurred this year, we have continued to have power cuts, some as recently as this week. You will be hearing later from David Pearson from the Hall Committee about the steps they have taken to make the Hall a resilience hub in times of power loss. Representatives from Northern Powergrid attended the PC meeting in November and reported that they would be putting the cable running through the woodland at Kirkharle to improve the service. That has been completed. I have been notified by Northern Powergrid that they have a grant scheme open currently whereby we can claim for expenses

associated with power loss – the closing date for applications is 13th May. My main concern is that when power is lost, so is all communication – phone signal & Internet. During recent cuts, the landlines have also stopped working. I have been looking into obtaining a satellite phone for the village, for use during power cuts, they are very expensive but something Northern Powergrid could fund. I will be putting in an application this week, any ideas, let me know.

Climate Change – In accordance with the County Council Handbook for Parish Councils, we have this as an agenda item at every meeting. The things we have discussed over the course of the year include maintenance of footpaths and promotion of their use, waste disposal, public transport and maintenance of green areas. I have personally been looking for a solution to the disposal of garden waste in the village, as I am very aware that the PC puts up signs to say where you cannot tip things, but none to say where you can. I have looked into finding a site where cuttings can be composted, but there are very few sites available and the proximity to the river is apparently, problematic. I have tried to get the county council to include us in the brown bin scheme, or to arrange a one off collection during the summer, but these requests have been met with long and detailed replies telling us why it is not cost effective. The best I have come up with is their agreement to supply hot composting bins to households who may want them – if you would like a composting bin, please sign the list and I will arrange for it to be delivered, there are ten available.

I have identified the correct bus timetable for the service from Jedburgh – Newcastle, and have posted details in the two bus stops and at the village hall, similarly the details for how to sue the Adapt request service to Morpeth. If there are other issues you would like the PC to consider on the subject of climate change, please let one of us know.

Playing field – at recent PC meetings, we have identified repairs and improvements needed to the equipment, including some replacement parts. We have made applications to local grant funding agencies, including the two Wind Farms, and these works will start soon. Kevin F can explain further.

Dog Poo – as ever, we have received complaints about the disposal of dog poo on roadsides. We have now arranged for a dedicated dog poo bin to be put up, at the point where Eastlands meets the village road. On the plus side, it is very well used. On the minus side, it is very rarely emptied. We are chasing this up with the council, aware that as summer comes the problem will get worse.

Defibrillator – The PC has assumed responsibility for the defibrillator here at the Hall, and has recently replaced the battery and other parts.

Neighbourhood Planning – Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in recent months we have looked in to the process of neighbourhood planning, which is where a local community such as ours consults its residents about what long term and strategic measures can be taken to improve village life. The process affects only the physical environment, but does allow residents to say what they want in their village, rather than simply respond to planning applications made by others. The result will be a neighbourhood plan, which will be taken into account when any decisions are made about this place at a higher level. At our last meeting on 5th March, we decided to follow this route, and have taken the first step towards it, applying to be designated as a neighbourhood!

We had a meeting here in January with Rob Naples, the county council representative who will help us – some of you attended. We will continue to keep you all informed of the stages to follow, and will be asking for help from the different organisations operating in the village.

are few in number, so have been thinking about how to fund and maintain the church buildings going forward. We want to work together with other community projects, share ideas and build communication. At St Wilfrid's, Kirkharle a successful concert series runs each year funded by the Ray Wind Farm, which brings in new audiences.

Youth Group – John Rowland

Been running the group for 11 years and this is the first year invited to speak. Group benefits from good community support & funding from the Education Trust. The playing field & football goals are a big bonus for club. Wide catchment area for kids– Belsay, Bavington, Rothley, Otterburn– even areas outside the district. Offer variety of activities – sports, arts & craft, space to be with friends. Generally 28 children aged 8-17yrs. Youth Group are looking for volunteers to help run the group which will require safe guarding training and a DBS check. As well as providing the activities, there are a lot of other responsibilities involved such as sorting insurance and writing risk assessments.

Cllr John Riddle - Cabinet Member for Improving our Roads and Highways

Thanks to footpath volunteers for their work.

County Council AGM one week ago. Re-elected as cabinet minister local services which includes pot holes, highways (inc .footpaths) and public toilets. Northumberland County Council are investing £1 million in toilets, as oppose to other area councils which are closing them. They're investing in the County parks.

For highways, to fund the Long Term Plan, Northumberland have received central government funding of £26 million, to which NCC have added £10 million from local funds to tackle the havoc caused by the wet winter. Understand the need to make sure repairs are good, but sometimes need to make very temporary repairs due to national requirements of keeping roads useable.

The County Council budget is in good order with adequate reserves.

Residents question around the choice of contractors for road repairs – advised it is down to managers of highways department, not councillors.

5. Public Participation

None

6. Any Other Business

None

Meeting concluded: 8:15pm

Next meeting: 6 May 2025