

Minutes of the meeting of Chollerton Parish Council, Wednesday 15 January 2025, 7.30pm at Barrasford Village Hall

Present: Cllr Dorothy Pigg (Chair), Cllr Michael Smith, Cllr Edward Heslop, Cllr Andy Bennett, Cllr Maggie Tarbit, Cllr Fiona Charlton, Cllr Bruce Lowdon

Parish Clerk: Mel Bramley

- 1. Apologies:** County Cllr Nick Morphet & Cllr Malcolm Johnson
- 2. Opportunities for matters raised by members of the public before the meeting**

There were no matters raised by members of the public.

3. Declaration of Interest from Members

Cllr Fiona Charlton declared an interest in discussions around Barrasford First School in her capacity as an employee.

Cllr Pigg declared an interest as treasurer of Barrasford

Playpark 4. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on 27 November 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

- (a) Matters arising from the minutes of 27 November not addressed elsewhere on the agenda.**

Warmer Homes Scheme

Cllr Heslop stated that he had spoken with Delia Faran, Locality Co ordinator at Northumberland Council regarding confusion over eligibility for funding for tenanted properties. Landlords cannot apply.

Defibrillator Funding

No funding available due to the number of defibrillators in the area. **EV Chargers at Chollerton First School**

It has been confirmed that chargers are available for Public use and a notice placed on the website.

Payroll

Cllr Smith agreed to accompany Parish Clerk to a meeting with Tyne

Rede Accountancy prior to them taking over the payroll responsibilities from April 1st, 2025.

Grit Bins

Cllr Lowdon will check there is sufficient grit in the bin in

Gunnerton. **Barrasford Quarry**

Parish Clerk has written to Jake Pilmore on two occasions regarding information on decreasing the light pollution at the quarry.

ACTION: Cllr Pigg will contact the quarry by telephone and speak to the Manager

(b) External e mails forwarded by the clerk.

Cllr Lowdon had forwarded an e mail to all from the Environment Agency who are replacing the Flood Warning Service in August 2025. This will involve switching to a new system to create, issue and manage flood warnings. Expressions of Interest are invited for people to help test the next generation of the Flood Warning Service. Anyone interested in participating should refer to the email.

5. Precept for 2025/26

Cllr Pigg presented the financial breakdown and precept calculations drawn up by Cllr Bennett and she thanked him and the Clerk for their input.

The budget has been broken down into 4 areas: Administrative, Grounds Maintenance and rent, Services and Donations.

The presented spreadsheet detailed the 2025/26 budget proposal for consideration by the PC. It also has a section covering the projection for budget/precept and a 'what if' section so that there is clarification as to what happens to the reserves from different scenarios for future precepts.

The budget proposal for 2025/6 is made with the following rationale:

The proposed 2025/6 budget is being presented as year 1 of a 5-year plan to secure the PC's finances.

The plan is an integrated approach of budget reduction alongside an increase in precept, without this the PC will be in the red within 3 years.

A budget reduction from £11,300 to £9,408 is being proposed. This is

detailed line by line on the attached spreadsheet.

Recognising the significant reduction may present challenges, we have earmarked £500 as a contingency. Noting that we do not for example have any building assets which might suddenly require a new roof etc, from our costs the most likely area to be at risk is grass cutting, but not for 2 years as it is fixed.

The rest of the 5-year plan period assumes annual increases of 2% in costs.

Precept Discussions

Even with the budget reduction, ongoing 5% increases leave us with progressively decreasing reserves and leave us at risk.

Ongoing 10% increases build a healthy position quickly but then overshoot the 1 x precept target unnecessarily.

To get us back to a balanced position in a couple of years we would be looking at a 20% and then 15% increase in precept. This is unnecessary as we are working a 5-year plan rather than a short-term recovery.

The proposed 5-year plan used 10%, 10%, 7%, 7%, 5% as our 5-year plan. At this 5 year point we are spending £10,232, have a precept of £11,637 and a reserve of £10,990.

The accounts would be reviewed annually to ensure we were on plan and can adjust up or down.

Cllr Bennett presented the community impact from the changes:

Based on 394 properties, a 12% precept increase equates to an average of c.£2 per property per year for the coming financial year. The 5-year increase amounts to a compound 45% and equates to an average c.£9 per property. We would still be at the low end of the property charge in Northumberland.

The most significant impact will be on the Parish Council's ability to make charitable donations (a significant area of expenditure). Tough decisions will have to be made which will unfortunately impact local groups.

Cllr Heslop noted that clerical costs had increased partly by an hourly increase rate and by the weekly change from 3 hours to 4 hours work. Cllr Pigg noted that the hourly rate is now paid is in line with other local Parish Clerk payments.

It was noted that the donation made to the Barrasford Playpark was a significant expenditure, the alternative to this would be the Parish Council taking back the running of this area. It was agreed that this was a direction that the Parish Council did not want to go in.

Cllr Heslop suggested a written policy on donations would be useful.

Cllr Tarbit commented that donations should be prioritised towards locally affiliated causes in future and not the larger charities.

Discussion took place around recent donations made and the following was noted:

Children's Christmas Party - with advance warning, the Christmas Party Committee could seek funding from other sources. The Parish Council could offer a smaller donation for next year (possibly £100?)

Play area - Cllr Pigg stated that the company where she is employed offer funds for local causes, and she had been able to secure monies towards the upkeep of the play area.

Sport Tynedale - it was suggested that as previous donations were generous, this was an area whereby we can withdraw donations and review in a few years' time.

Church yard grass cutting - last year the PC donated £1300 towards garden upkeep, (just over 16% of the precept). It was agreed to reduce the donation next year to £400.

ACTION: Cllr Pigg and Parish Clerk will draw up letters to relevant committees and individuals explaining the need to reduce donations due to ongoing financial constraints.

Cllr Pigg felt a 12% increase in year was more realistic, Cllrs Smith, Tarbit & Charlton agreed. It was agreed by all that Y1 12%, Y2 10%, Y3 & 4 7% and Y5 5%.

It was agreed that a 12% increase would apply.

Cllr Charlton added that there is a clear justification for the increase (especially as an increase had not taken place for 5 years)

Cllr Bennett added that per capita this increase was at the low end for households in the County. He also stated that good practice dictates that reserves should equal the precept given wherever possible. A 12% increase should allow this.

Cllr Heslop added that there is a need to be more proactive for seeking funding in the future. For example, the Parish Council could apply to the Wind Farm Fund for assistance in upgrade and replacement of defibrillator equipment,

ACTION: Cllr Pigg thanked everyone for their input and a vote to place whereby a 12% precept increase was unanimously agreed. Parish Clerk will ensure that the relevant signed paperwork would be sent off to the Council as a priority.

6. Chollerton Parish Council Website update

Cllr Bennett led the discussion. He explained that the current web hosting is through Lime Design and is budgeted at £190 a year (this includes use of domain name and domain name registration.)

Having obtained access to the operating side of the site, Cllr Bennett has ascertained that it is running on c.10-year-old issue software and cannot simply be updated.

Lime has quoted c £300 to complete the upgrades and cover expected failures in working. A quote to train the Clerk in more detail is for a further £200.

Cllr Bennett explained the options available:

To maintain the existing site with Lime Design will incur costs this year of c.£500 with ongoing costs of £190 p/a plus whatever additional cost is incurred outside of our contract with Lime Design.

We could withdraw from the Lime Design contract and host the site ourselves. However, we would need to sort out the update process first and Cllr Bennett is unsure of what is needed and so whether he could do it. So, we would still be incurring the £300 cost to get the site back up and running correctly. Thereafter private hosting is c£10 a month plus domain registration. An annual cost of c £130. This is a modest saving over the current £190 and would leave the PC beholden to one Councillor to provide in-house technical support for the site.

NALC offers a microsite option, which is used by several Parish Councils (including for example Humshaugh). The cost is currently £75 a year, including technical support. Although not based on WordPress it is unlikely to be an onerous process to learn their content management system. The site offers all we need from a statutory perspective and all of what we do now can be included. The downside is that the

current WordPress site cannot be simply copied over, all content will have to be manually rewritten and loaded. This will be most time consuming for agendas and minutes. Parish Clerk has researched our statutory obligation, and it requires us to publish 3 years of records, but we will in any case need to ensure we have all records saved centrally whether we publish. Cllr Bennett has been communicating with NALC, and they have agreed to set up the site offline in February to give us time to copy across all data, before going live and invoicing from end March.

Recommendation

Compared to the status quo, using the NALC option will save us c.£425 in year 1 and thereafter £115 p/a minimum. It is therefore proposed that we go with the NALC option and advise Lime Design that we do not intend to renew our contract after the current agreement period to end of March 2025 and need the site to remain live until this time.

NALC requires us to have 2 named contacts and it is proposed that Cllr Bennett and our Clerk are those named people, and that Cllr Bennett takes project lead, with Parish Clerk assisting, sourcing word/pdf historical agendas, minutes etc for loading. Everyone present agreed to this recommendation.

ACTION: Clerk will formally write to Lime Design informing them that our contract will cease after 31 March 2025 and asking that the website remain live until this date.

Cllr Bennett will liaise with NALC and copy Cllr Pigg and Clark into correspondence to ensure documents are prepared in time for the migration of information and that payment is made to NALC.

Cllr Pigg will post on Facebook requesting for photographs from local residents of the Parish to use on the new website.

7. County Councillor Report

Cllr Morphet had sent a report in advance of the meeting and had given his apologies for absence due to a Council Committee meeting taking place that evening. The report had been circulated in advance to all by the Clerk.

The following was noted:

The traffic speed survey results showed a speeding problem in Colwell. Cllr Morphet will feedback in due course as to whether Highways will

address this issue or if Parish Councillors will need to raise this via the LTP programme.

The survey at Gunnerton did not show a speeding problem. Cllr Lowdon had spoken to Cllr Morphet who stated that the request for a 20-mph sign from the existing 30-mph speed limit could not be reduced as the road is a main road which has to have a 30-mph limit. Cllr Lowdon will feed this back to Jen Dover and Denny Phillips and Cllr Smith will speak with Paul Plews.

Resurfacing of the footway between Barrasford and Barrasford quarry has been submitted to the 2025/26 LTP programme. Cllr Morphet will feedback after the meeting on 11 February 2025.

Councillors noted the positive response suggesting bus service improvements. It was noted however that the ADAPT bus is sometimes cancelled at short notice.

The grass had not been cut as anticipated on the “Barrasford B’s” species rich grassland site. This will be now done in Spring. Cllr Lowdon added that the machinery had broken down at the time.

8. Items for discussion

Donation request for Tynedale Hospice at Home

It was agreed that the PC will offer a donation of £50.

AGREED: The Clerk will write to the charity informing them of this and set up a payment authorisation.

9. Correspondence

Playing Field Committee had written to say they had an underspend of £146.60 remaining from the PC donation to the Queen’s Coronation celebrations. They had requested if they could keep this money for future spending.

AGREED: It was agreed that the committee could keep this money. The PC usually make a contribution towards the Park insurance, this amount is approx. 50% of the under spent. The remainder can be put to repair costs. All agreed no further funds would be available in the next 12 months.

ACTION: Cllr Pigg and Parish Clerk will draw up a reply to this effect to the Playing field committee.

10. Payments Outstanding

The bank reconciliation report circulated prior to the meeting. All Councillors agreed to the payments to be made to M Bramley for sundry expenditure.(£52.47).

11. Planning Consultation

Forge Cottage, Colwell Northumberland NE46 4TL had been approved. Variation of condition 2 on approved application 24/02355/FUL

The variation of houses in Barrasford required more clarification by the Parish Council Committee for a full response to be given. The updated 'House type booklet 2024', quoted in the application form, has not been included in the online submission. Therefore, the Parish Council does not know what the addition of roof windows to most of the properties, and so an additional living floor means to bedroom numbers or internal layout .Cllr Heslop raised the issue of the number of affordable properties remaining the same as originally stated. It was agreed by all present that the proportion of affordable properties in the development must remain as in the original agreement in order for the PC to support the proposal.

ACTION: Parish Clerk will write to the Planning Department asking that the document be made available and a suitable extension provided to enable full consideration of the information.

12. Information items

Nothing to note.

13. Any other Business

School governor applicants

Cllr Pigg reminded Committee members to submit an expression of interest should anyone wish to become involved in applying for the role as a school governor at Barrasford. No-one at present had volunteered, but it was acknowledged that it is important to have a good relationship with the school.

ACTION: Cllr Pigg will write to the Head Teacher and offer any support or assistance in the work that the school does.

Flooding near Dunkirk Farm

Cllr Lowdon raised this at the request of a member of the Public. Cllr

Pigg has spoken to Cllr Morphet regarding the water running off the fell and the subsequent ice following a temperature drop. The Environmental Agency are aware of the situation and have traced the leak to the farmer's field. Cllr Morphet is pushing for a solution.

ACTION: The situation will be monitored and raised with Cllr Morphet if no progress is made.

Junction opposite Chipchase Castle

Cllr Bennett noted that he had reported the build up of leaves at the Chipchase junction and 100 yds along the approaching roads. Whilst the leaves at the junction have been cleared, it did not appear that the approach had been cleared and as a result the leaves were building up again, resulting in a slippery road surface.

The Layby on Dalla Bank

Cllr Heslop reported fly tipping in the area, and this has been passed to the Council to action.

14. Date and venue of next meeting

Wednesday 26th March 2025, 7.30pm at Barrasford Village Hall

The meeting ended at 9pm.