

Minutes for the Meeting of Croxdale and Hett Parish Council
Wednesday 13 April 2016, 7.00 pm

Parish Council Members Present:

Councillor J Anderson (Chair), Councillor J Shaw (Vice-Chair), Councillor J Garner*, Councillor A Watt, Councillor I Watt and Councillor W Watt.

*It was noted Councillor Garner would arrive late to the meeting.

Also Present:

County Councillors J Blakey and M Plews.

29/16. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors K Summerson, D Wilson and County Councillor M Williams.

30/16. Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interests.

31/16. Policing:

There was no Police attendance at the meeting. The Clerk reported 3 crimes had taken place as follows:

- 12 March 2016 - criminal damage to vehicle at Croxdale Inn
- 14 March 2016 – attempted burglary at Church Hall
- 28 March 2016 – minor assault at Rogerson Terrace; argument between 2 residents

The Clerk is to contact Bruce Cockburn of the Police to give new contact details and provide schedule of meetings for 2016/17 to encourage Police attendance at future meetings.

32/16. Public Participation

Michael Graveling was in attendance.

33/16. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 09 March 2016 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

34/16. Matters Arising

i. Council Owned Land Adjacent to the Croxdale Inn

A meeting had yet to be arranged with the owner of the Croxdale Inn and Members regarding Council land being used as a car park.

Resolved: GB and a member(s) of the Parish Council to meet with the owner of the Croxdale Inn in an effort to resolve this matter.

ii. Caravan at Hett

Caravan is still present on Hett Lane. Clerk is to contact Conservation Team at Durham County Council for enforcement action.

Resolved: Clerk to contact Durham County Council.

iii. Cemetery Gates

The gate locks at Hett Cemetery has now been replaced.

iv. Transparency Funding

The Clerk reported that funding is available for 2016/17 to enable the Parish Council to meet the Transparency Code requirements. Funding would be used to set up a website for the Parish Council and to cover associated costs such as set up costs and broadband.

Regulations now stipulate that Parish Councils must publish certain information regarding 2015/16 Annual Return. For Parish Councils that do not have a website, arrangements need to be in place to have the information published on another website freely available to electors / residents. The Clerk is currently in contact with ICT Services at Durham County Council regarding costs involved and timings to adhere to the regulations above.

Resolved: Clerk to report progress at the next meeting.

35/16. Parish Clerk Update / Correspondence

i. Durham County Council Grass Cutting Services

Grass cutting services for Croxdale and Hett Village cemeteries for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 was agreed to be carried out by Durham County Council at a cost of £1812.13 + VAT.

Resolved: Clerk to formally sign contract of agreement and return to Durham County Council.

ii. Hett Village Hall Association (HVHA)

The Clerk reported that Mr Brian Ogden, Secretary, of HVHA had made contact with the Parish Council to formally meet and discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. It was also brought to the Council's attention that the Parish Council has a right to appoint one Trustee to HVHA should it wish but over the years it has declined to take up that right. In Councillor Garner's absence, the Clerk confirmed she would like to take up that position should no other Members wished to be put forward for the appointment. It was therefore agreed that Councillor Garner be appointed as Trustee to HVHA.

Resolved: Clerk to contact Mr Ogden to arrange a meeting and confirm Councillor J Garner was elected as Trustee. Clerk to also remind Councillor Garner that her Declaration of Interest Form is also to be updated.

36/16. Financial Matters

i. Appointment of Internal Auditor for the year ending 31 March 2016

Due to Mr G Bestford being appointed as the Council's Acting RFO following the dismissal of the former Parish Clerk, it was not appropriate for him to carry out the Council's audit. It was therefore agreed that Mr S Allen be re-appointed as the Council's Internal Auditor for the year 2015/16 with the following terms of reference:

- To ensure that the Council's annual accounts are prepared in accordance with proper practices as defined in the 'Governance and Accountability for Local Councils – A Practitioners' Guide 2014' and as revised by the 'Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England – A Practitioners Guide 2016'

- To ensure that the Council has a sound system of internal controls which are effectively applied in the exercise of its functions and to so certify the Annual Internal Audit report section of the Council's Annual Return
- To ensure that the Council has carried out a risk assessment and put adequate procedures in place to manage risks including adequate insurance covers.
- To ensure the Council has adequate measures in place to prevent and detect fraud.
- To ensure that the Council is acting lawfully and has provided electors with the opportunity to exercise their rights in accordance with the Accounting and Audit Regulations
- To ensure that the Council has acted upon all matters raised in internal and external audit reports.

Resolved: Mr S Allen be appointed as the Council's Internal Auditor for the year 2015/16.

ii. Approval of the Council's 2015/16 Statement of Accounts, 2016 Annual Return and Audit Requirements

The Clerk reported 2015/16 audit documents had been received from BDO which were forwarded to G Bestford to enable the annual return be completed for 2015/16 and approved at the next meeting in May.

The Parish Council's income and expenditure and bank reconciliation was noted for the year end 31 March 2016. This being:

Balance brought forward from 2014/15 = £26,737.09
 Less 2015/16 Expenditure = £2,159.37
 Balance as at 31 March 2016 = **£24,577.72**

Resolved: For Members information.

iii. Requests for Donations:

a) County Durham School Benevolent Fund

The Parish Council received a request for a donation from County of Durham School Benevolent Fund to assist needy families in County Durham. It was agreed on this occasion not to make a donation.

Resolved: Clerk to write to the Fund Administrator informing them of the Council's decision.

b) County Durham Citizens Advice

The Parish Council received a request for financial support in relation to the works carried out by Citizens Advice County Durham. Following discussion, £100.00 donation was agreed.

Resolved: Clerk to write to Chief Executive accordingly.

37/16. Asset Register

The Parish Council's Asset Register as at 31 March 2016 prepared by G Bestford was duly noted and approved. The register contained details of the Parish Council's community land assets being – Croxdale cemetery, Hett cemetery, Croxdale Allotment gardens and garage sites and Hett Village Green. It was noted once the fencing has been erected at Croxdale and Hett cemeteries, the fencing should be added to the Council's Insurance.

Resolved: Asset Register as at 31 March 2016 was approved and noted.

**Councillor J Garner joined the meeting.*

38/16. Planning Issues

No planning matters were discussed.

39/16. Cemetery Update:

a) Mrs Hilaby

The Parish Clerk reported of a complaint received by Mrs Hilaby regarding the upkeep of Croxdale cemetery. Mrs Hilaby was concerned when visiting her husband's grave there are no footpaths as walkways in between graves, the graves are not positioned properly and not in proper rows. Mrs Hilaby enquired if there was any funding available from the County Council to help improve the appearance of the cemetery. Following discussion, Mrs Hilaby's concerns were noted.

Resolved: For Members information.

b) Fees & Charges 2016/17

The cemetery fees and charges are to be reviewed at the next meeting to allow for comparisons with other Parishes in County Durham to be collated for Members consideration.

Resolved: Cemetery Fees and Charges to be reviewed and agreed at the next meeting.

c) Grave Plans & Registers

The Clerk reported she had met with the Records Office at Durham County Council on 8 April 2016 with regard to digitising the Council's two grave plans. Before the plans can be digitised, they require conservation. Following conservation, both plans can be digitised which will enhance the digital images to help capture the information, particular on the textile plan due to its poor condition. Once the plans have been digitised, they will be printed off and used as the new master for updating and deposit original into archives. Quotes for these works are yet to be obtained. The Clerk had also contacted Spennymoor Town Council for advice as they have also recently digitised their grave plans but received no response as of yet.

In terms of updating the registers, once the new plans have been established, the next stage is to update the grave registers for recent burials.

Resolved: Clerk to update Members at the next meeting following quotations being received from the County Council.

d) Fencing Quotes

Quotes have yet to be received from companies with regard to new fencing being erected at Croxdale and Hett cemeteries.

Resolved: Quotes to be obtained and discussed at the next meeting obtained from Councillors J Shaw and W Watts

40/16. County Councillor Reports:

i. Croxdale Roundabout

Two signage frameworks have been left on Croxdale roundabout for quite some time unused.

Resolved: Clerk is to contact Durham County Council and ask for these to be removed if not being used.

- ii.** Councillor Plews reported that Durham County Council were praised from a Government Minister after the Council was one of only two local authorities in the country to be awarded top marks for the efficiency of Highway Maintenance service.

Resolved: For Members information.

iii. Hett Lane Fencing

Fencing between Sunderland Bridge and Hett Road requires replacing on Salvin land which leads to a 100-foot drop. It was noted this has previously been looked at by County Councillors M Williams and J Blakey.

Resolved: Clerk to report to Durham County Council in the first instance.

41/16 – AOB

i. Former Parish Clerk

The Chairman gave an update with regard to the former Parish Clerk. Statements have been taken resulting in the former Clerk being charged of theft. If this proceeds to Court, the Court will determine the outcome.

Resolved: For Members information.

ii. Allotments

There has been sighting of rats at the Allotments at Rogerson Close and are to be reported to the County Council.

It has been brought to the Council's attention that two allotment holders are not complying with the Parish Council's tenancy agreement in terms of keeping the allotment maintained and general up keep.

Resolved: Clerk to report sighting of rats to Pest Control at the County Council and to write to the x2 allotment holders reminding them of the Council's tenancy agreement.

42/16. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 11 May 2016 at 7.00 pm.