

Bearpark Parish Council

At a meeting of **Bearpark Parish Council** held on **Wednesday 18 January 2023** at **7.00 p.m.** held at **Beaurepaire Community Hub.**

Present: **Councillor M Wilson in the Chair**

Councillors I Cummings, J Peart and J Thompson.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Edwards, R Kemp, P Wilson and County Councillor D Nicholls.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items of business on the agenda

3. Heritage 100 Project

The Parish Council welcomed Keiron Young from the Heritage 100 project. A project to create 100 circular circuitous walks in County Durham. In time it was hoped to include a short story to accompany the walk containing information about the people, history, culture, natural history and so on. Keiron explained that there were lots of walks within County Durham but there was no specific collection. The project would give something to give back to County Durham. Keiron explained that community engagement was essential for the project to work. A website had been designed and it was hoped to include way markers on both the website for each walk. It was hoped to create a walking group in the community and connect to the local schools. Initiatives in Consett, Ushaw Moor and Beamish were all up and running. The walks were recorded on an app called Komoot and were based around publicly accessible public rights of way where possible. All of the routes were legal and areas where individuals are able to walk, however, routes could be adjusted if need be. Heritage 100 would make people aware of the lost history. The route for Bearpark would hopefully contain a marker post, start and end post, next to the community garden. The project would incorporate some educational resources into schools to assist. The project were seeking support from the Parish Council to support the initiative and gather support locally. It was hoped to take a group of local people around to walk it and obtain their feedback to what they think.

Resolved

The Parish Council were full of praise for the project and would look forward to its development. They made a commitment to support the project by way of postings on social media and the Parish Council website.

4. Minutes

Resolved

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

5. Police Report

Councillor M Wilson informed the Council that there had been no police report.

6. Representations from the Public

There were no representations from the public.

7. County Council Report

Councillor M Wilson provided a brief report to the Council as follows:

- Celebrations would soon be taking place across Durham City to welcome the Year of the Rabbit. A host of traditional events and activities would be on offer including a lion dance procession winding its way from Millennium Place through the city centre at 12.30pm and a full day of activities including traditional music, costume and dance at Durham Town Hall. Clayport Library would be offering an opportunity to learn Mandarin with students from Durham University, and students from New College Durham would be cooking a number of oriental dishes for visitors to try;
- Communication were being circulated to all residents in preparation for changes to the way people vote. From May 2023 voter ID would be required at polling stations as a result of new legislation; and
- Friday (27 January) is Holocaust Memorial Day. To mark the event, two free events were taking place, to share wartime experiences. On Thursday (26 January), military researcher Steve Shannon would be delivering an online talk hosted by The Story, which tells the incredible account of the County Durham men involved in the liberation of Belsen Concentration Camp. Meanwhile, Durham University professor, Marek Szablewski, would be sharing his story at the Gala Theatre in Durham at 10am on Friday 27 January of his family's life in occupied Poland during the Second World War.

8. Budget and Precept 2023/24

The Clerk provided a copy of the latest accounting records which included all payments for approval, payments made since the last meeting and a bank reconciliation.

The Clerk informed the Council that the budget and precept deliberations 2022-23, centered around the transition out of COVID-19 pandemic and it was agreed not to increase the precept for 2022/23. However, since that time there had been huge inflationary increases in the economy, interest rates were going up, fuel costs were at levels never seen before and the country was in a cost of living crisis.

The Parish Council placed on record last year that they would continue to lobby on behalf of residents in the community and would also look at cost effective ways to

better the local environment, wherever possible, and refresh any assets moving forward.

Many of these aspirations had been met. For example, there had been increased activity within the Parish throughout 2022/23 and the Parish Council had offered a number of donations towards setting up of new groups and expanding local organisations. Contributions had also been made to community events at Beaurepaire which was becoming a valuable asset for the Community. The Parish Council contributed £5,000 towards new play equipment at the Colliery Road Play Area which was in line with its strategy set out in previous years. Areas of the village had been enhanced with planters and flowers and regular litter picks had resumed with a dedicated group of volunteers.

In considering the budget and precept for 2023-24, the Clerk summarised the current balances as per the bank statements and the estimated expenditure to the end of the financial year. Increased costs were becoming a significant issues in terms of inflation and many suppliers and contractors were passing these rises onto customers to meet their own costs. Although, economists were forecasting that inflation would reduce much later in 2023.

The Council considered two options, one option to leave the precept at 0% or levy a potential increase to cover any increases in costs. The Council were unanimous in agreement that the cost pressures faced by residents were significant and there was no desire to increase the precept. The Clerk advised that this would be acceptable, explaining that reducing the precept was an option the Council could take, however, it was not recommended, given that costs and inflation were significantly high.

The Clerk also advised that if the Parish Council wished to increase their precept, then they would need to consider projects and associated expenditure to justify any potential increase and nothing of significance had been forthcoming from the Council.

If the council decided against any increase this year – the cash amount factoring in council tax support grant would be £25,572.03 which would be a small increase of around £190.57 in cash terms from the previous year.

Resolved

That the Council agree a 0% Council Tax given the continuing levels of inflation, increased interest rates, fuel and the cost of living crisis.

9. Report of the Clerk

The Clerk provided the Council with an update, which included:

- Final update in relation to the Electoral Boundary Review for Parliamentary Boundaries;
- Reminder of the closing date for the review of Durham County Council Boundaries which would end on 30 January 2023;
- Update to the final tree works to take place on the parish land which had taken place early in the New Year;
- Installation of new play equipment at Colliery Road Play Area;

- Consultations from Durham County Council relating to the Customer Relationship Management system and the Council's Digital Offer.

Resolved

That the Clerks report be noted and actions agreed, where appropriate.

10. Requests for Financial Assistance

There were no requests for financial assistance.

11. Planning Applications

There were no planning applications for consideration.

Resolved

That the application be noted.

12. Community Emergency plan update

The Clerk informed the Council that due to workloads and the Christmas period, it had been difficult to pin down a date to present proposals to the wider community. It was hoped to schedule an event in February.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

13. Village Matters

(i) County Council Neighbourhood Budget

Councillor M Wilson informed the Council that she had some additional money to spend from her Neighbourhood Budget and was looking to incorporate some accessible equipment (swing and roundabout) at the play area.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

(ii) Events

Councillor M Wilson informed the Council that the small Christmas Event at Beaurepaire had been a success as had the Christmas concert by Bearpark and Esh Colliery Band held at St. Edmunds to coincide with the Christmas Tree light switch on. The remembrance event held at the pit wheel had also been a success. To assist with planning events for 2023, the Clerk suggested that dates and bookings be penciled in. The Clerk explained that the installation date of the Christmas Tree would depend on the supplier and availability of resources at the time. The Clerk would also query if a bugler would be available for a Remembrance Event at the pit wheel on 9 November 2023, with a possible PA System.

Resolved

That Bearpark and Esh Colliery Band be approached to perform on Sunday 26 November at St. Edmunds Church, with the village Christmas Tree to be booked for installation in time for the event, if possible.

(iii) Community Centre

Councillor M Wilson informed the Council that the Warm Hub at Beaurepaire was providing a valuable resource. Little Jems had also restarted following the Christmas break and was going very well.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

(iv) Parish Planters

The Council considered options for the renewal of the parish planters for 2023 and agreed to continue their contract with the current supplier. The contract would need to be renewed in 2024.

Resolved

That the contractor be notified.

(v) Overgrown areas / flytipping

Councillor I Cummings reported further information to Cllr M Wilson regarding some problematic areas in the village which had been raised previously through correspondence. Councillor M Wilson informed the Council that she had been working with colleagues in Clean and Green and Planning Enforcement to ascertain land ownership and identify any course of action that could be taken.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

14. Any other items of interest

There were no additional items of interest.

15. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 15 February 2023.