

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN TOWN HALL, COCKERMOUTH ON MONDAY 15
APRIL 2013**

Present: Councillor I Burns, Town Mayor/Chair
Councillor S Coates
Councillor L Davies
Councillor A Graham
Councillor P Graham
Councillor A Kennon
Councillor E Nicholson
Councillor J Laidlow
Councillor A Smith
Councillor C Smith
Councillor S Standage

Apologies: Councillor C M Jackson

There were approximately 10 members of the public present and 1 members of the press.

Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 14 May 2012 were signed as a correct record.

Annual Report of the Town Council

The Town Mayor, Isabel Burns presented her report as follows:-

2012/2013 has once again been a very busy year with 12 Council meetings, 1 Special Council meeting and 2 Town Twinning Advisory Committee Meetings having been held. The Police have been regular attendees at our meetings providing the Council with updates on crime statistics and other matters and answering queries.

The announcement that a £4.4 million flood risk management scheme aimed at reducing the risk of flooding to more than 400 homes and businesses in the town was fantastic news. Construction of the scheme in Cockermouth to reduce the risk of flooding to a 1% chance of flooding in any one year started last summer and should be completed by June 2013.

The Town Council is consulted by the Borough Council on all planning applications within the town of Cockermouth and in all cases comments have been forwarded to the Borough Council setting out the Town Council's views. The final decision on planning applications does not always agree with the views of the Town Council however the majority of decisions do agree. Members are very pleased that the Cockermouth Heritage Shop Front Scheme has been recognised nationally.

The Neighbourhood Planning 'Front Runners' Pilot Scheme was set up by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in order to trial the process of preparing Neighbourhood Development Order(s) (NDO) before the Bill comes into effect. Given the degree of local involvement in the flood recovery work, it was considered that Cockermouth had the necessary community groups and

networks to be a suitable 'Front Runners' candidate. Our bid was successful and a steering group was set up to develop and manage the project. The Steering Group with assistance from Allerdale Borough Council has been working on the production and adoption of several NDO(s). These include:-

- (i) Use of flats above shops and offices along Main Street & Station Street
- (ii) Replacement shop fronts of traditional design and materials along Station Street and Main Street
- (iii) Replacement windows/doors (article 4 properties) on Wordsworth Terrace and Mountain View
- (iv) Flexible change of use of properties and permission for the placement of tables and chairs on the pavement on Market Place

The refurbishment of the Town Hall continues. The refurbishment after 20 years of the former tourist information centre into our new Council chamber and meeting room is complete and has attracted lots of new users to the Town Hall. We are also pleased to be housing an exhibition showing off artifacts recovered from the Papcastle Dig.

Victoria Hall remains in the ownership of the Town Council, however due to its declining usage the Town Council leased the Hall to Age UK on 1 April 2012 for a 3 year period.

The Tourist Information Centre continues to be managed by Mrs Julia Hindle assisted by a number of part time staff. The Tourist Information Centre relocated to 4, Old Kings Arms Lane on 1 April 2012. The move to a more central location has increased visitor numbers and sales have grown consistently. Allerdale Borough Council has reduced our concurrent grant by 50% in 2013/14. This will decrease even further in 2014/15.

The Town Council have moved and updated their web site. Dates of meeting, minutes of meetings etc are now available at www.cumbriaparishcouncils.co.uk.

Twinning links continue to flourish with official school exchanges and student exchanges being part of the continuing links which take place.

Our 29th Anniversary visit took place between 28 October 2012 – 3 November 2012. Forty Eight Marvejolais attended the celebrations. We were pleased to welcome several new faces.

Their visit included a visit to Aira Force, a civic reception in the Town Hall, a trip to York, lunch at Glaramara and a tour of the facilities, a Halloween themed anniversary dinner, a visit to Gretna and a wine tasting evening.

Our 30th anniversary celebrations will take place between 26th October 2013 – 3 November 2013.

As a result of the town being awarded the Europe Prize in the year 2000 a Europe Prize Scholarship Fund was set up and has now become established and a great help to Cockermouth 6th form youngsters pursuing their studies in Europe. The Committee continues to raise money to keep the fund going for the foreseeable future and the Council continues to actively support the Association of Towns Awarded the Europe Prize of which it is a proud member.

Despite discussions with Egremont Estates the Council has still not managed to find an additional allotment land to supplement the allotments it provides at St. Helen's Street and the Gote and at the moment there are 53 people on the waiting list for an allotment. The Council continues to support the Allotment Association and continues to meet monthly to discuss matters of mutual interest. A successful presentation evening was held in the Council Chamber on 13 September 2012 for winners of the Garden and Allotment Competition.

The Council once again sponsored The Kirkgate Centre in its annual arts programme in Cockermouth during 2012/13. The re-vamped Cockermouth festival held between 16 – 23 June 2012 provided a programme of nationally renowned artists that brought our community together. Preparations are well underway for this year's event.

The fireworks display held in the Memorial Gardens was a resounding success and will be repeated again this year.

The Council continues to be the owner of Cockermouth Youth Hostel and rent income amounting to £2917 was received from the Youth Hostel Association during 2012/13.

The Christmas lights were re-vamped last year and looked amazingly beautiful. The use of one watt led lamps has drastically reduced our electricity bill. The Council organised the usual Best Dressed Window Competition and Window Spotting Competition. We continue to be grateful for the donations made by businesses, local organisations and individuals towards the cost of the lights despite tough economic times.

Civic events organised included the annual Civic Dinner, Civic Service and the Cenotaph Service on Remembrance Sunday.

The Town Council also organised a very successful event to celebrate the Olympic Torch Relay on 21st June 2012, it was fantastic to see at least 7,000 people in town enjoying the event despite the rain.

The Taste Cumbria Food Festival continues to go from strength to strength. This year's event will be held on 28-29 September 2013. The Town Council will be contributing £7,500 Festivals running costs.

The Council's Internal Auditor, Jean Airey, a former Town Clerk of Keswick, regularly audited the Council's accounts and reported back to the Council. This year's annual accounts have been prepared and the Clerk will shortly be sending off the required Annual Return to the External District Auditor. The Council continues to employ ISS Waterers Landscapes as their Maintenance Contractor for works at the Memorial Gardens. Works on the disabled fishing platform & roadway to enable gravel extraction are now complete. We expect works on the new sandstone entrance to be completed shortly.

The Council continues to support Cockermouth Carnival.

Tarn Close Sports Ground continues to be managed by the Town Council and has been used by Cockermouth Titans Rugby League Club over the past season. The Town Council is also investigating the provision of a free ride skate park on the ground on the site.

Play areas at Greyrigg Avenue, Harris Park Extension, Isel Road and Towers Lane have been transferred from Allerdale Borough Council to the Town Council following the threat of closure.

The Localism Bill published on the 13 December 2010 aims to shift power from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and Councils by lifting the burden of bureaucracy, empowering communities and strengthening accountability to local people. A range of new powers and reforms will be introduced as a result of the Bill.

One of those new powers is the General Power of Competence (GPC). I am pleased to announce that on the 17 July 2012, the Town Council confirmed that it meets both criteria for eligibility for use of the General Power of Competence as set out in a statutory instrument known as the Parish Council's (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012 which came into force in April 2012.

The new General Power of Competence will fundamentally change the way Local Government behaves, giving them the same capacity to act as an individual generally which will enable us to do anything apart from that which is specifically prohibited. This will result in greater innovation and a new more confident entrepreneurial approach which should in turn lead to greater efficiencies, improved partnership working and the ability to help our community in ways previously outside our remit.

The Town Council adopted a revised Code of Conduct on 17 July 2012. Copies of the new Code can be found on www.cumbriaparishcouncils.co.uk or from the Town Clerk.

The Town Council wishes to become a Quality Parish Council. We have been reviewing and improving our communication practices and how we engage with our communities.

As a result we now:-

- Produce a quarterly newsletter
- Hold ward surgeries
- Update our website on a regular basis
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Our speed indication device continues to be placed at 'speeding' hotspots around the Town.

The Council continues to be represented on the Cockermouth and Papcastle Recreational Charity.

Finally could I thank all those local organisations and others who have invited Rachel and I to numerous events during the year. I would also like to thank my Deputy Phillip Graham, all my fellow Councillors, Sheila Brown, the Town Clerk and her staff for their invaluable help and support during my term of office.

Sheila Brown, The Responsible Financial Officer gave a brief summary of the accounts for 2012/2013.

Annual Report from All Saint's CE Primary School

This year All Saints' CE Primary School in Cockermouth celebrated after receiving a very good Ofsted report. The Governors were overwhelmed by the positive feedback and support from Parents during the Ofsted inspection.

All areas were judged good with outstanding elements of teaching and curriculum enrichment. Staff were commended for "excellent care and inclusion for all pupils" and it was noted that "behaviour was good and at times exemplary".

The Headteacher, Nicola Smallwood was congratulated on her "visionary leadership" which she said was shared by the dedicated and committed team of staff and governors.

In his report, Lead Inspector David Byrne said: "Pupils thrive on an excellently enriched curriculum" and "good teaching and interesting lessons generate first-rate relationships between staff and pupils." He said that pupils' learning in lessons and overall achievement is good and many children also develop an advanced knowledge for their age of music, French and aspects of outdoor education.

The school has continued to be successful in obtaining external Grant funding which has enabled them to fund, amongst other things:

- Kayaking and canoeing for all our Key Stage 2 children
- Horse-riding for the children in our Strategic Facility
- Food and a specially minted coin for the Jubilee Celebrations
- Sensory room
- A Saturday visit to Chester University to encourage our children to 'Aim Higher'
- Community Rock Choir which is currently running on a Monday night

Music continues to be a strength of the school with free instrumental lessons (in 7 instruments) and a thriving school choir. The choir has been invited to sing at the switching on of the Christmas lights, the Residential Homes for the elderly, the Kirkgate Centre, All Saints' Church and outside Sainsbury's.

All Saints' School enjoys being part of the community in Cockermouth and, as well as inviting Senior Citizens for Carols and Afternoon Tea at Christmas-time, a warm invitation has also been extended to Parents, Grandparents and Governors to come and sample our delicious and nutritious school meals which are home cooked on the premises.

Observations from County Councillor E Nicholson

During the past year I have been Chair of the Local Committee

Chair of the Staffing committee

I have also chaired 2 Task and finish Groups one on Recycling Centers and the other on Fleet Management.

I was also a member of the Unitary Authority Task and finish group

The County Council has delivered £64,000,000 of savings over the last 3 years

Delivered a zero% increase in Council Tax over the last 3 years thanks to the help of central Government funding.

So as not to have duplication I refer to my fellow County Councilor Alan Kennon's report for work carried out in Cockermouth.

Observations from County Councillor A Kennon

I have attend Cockermouth, Dean and Greysouthen parish meetings along with various County Council Committee meetings. These include:-

- Health & Wellbeing Task & Finish Group
- Local Committee for Allerdale
- Allerdale Highways & Transport Group
- West Cumberland Hospital Working Group
- Main Street Steering Group

County Councillor Eric Nicholson and I have jointly used our Local Area Allowance to improve the Town and surrounding area. We have successfully completed the following schemes:-

- Re-surfaced Rubbybanks
- Installed pedestrian crossing phases at Lorton Road
- Supplied over 50 grit bins
- Re-surface the public footpath at the rear of Walkers factory
- Funded the 217 Bus Service from Frizington – Cockermouth for the second time, it is now showing a slight running profit

We are both still working towards finding other uses for the Old Fire Headquarters to enable us to keep it within the County Council and to bring improved and accessible services to Cockermouth and the surrounding areas.

I would to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support over the last 4 years as my ward boundaries have now been changed for the forthcoming elections.

Observations from Allerdale councillor L Davies

I have been involved in helping to resolve a number of housing difficulties including:-

- Homelessness
- Securing accommodation for a soldier made redundant because of defence cuts
- Maintenance & repair problems
- Advising those with planning issues which Officer to seek guidance from.
- Nuisance neighbour

Other matters I have dealt with were:-

- Benefit fraud (a case of genuine misunderstanding).
- Renovation of part of the Greenway
- Highway matters
- Fly tipping
- Estate inspection with Home Housing

The Cockermouth Rural Safety Group of which I am Chairman has been proactive in supporting the campaigns of both Cockermouth School for a school crossing and All Saints Primary School 20 is Plenty.

I am a regular attendee of Cockermouth Centre of the 3rd Age Action Group and recently volunteered to spend time in a wheelchair to help them assess how wheelchair friendly or otherwise Cockermouth Town Centre is.

I accompanied Councillor Alan Smith and Andrew Lawson,(Mayor of Workington), to explain Local Government structure and function to Year 7 Cockermouth School on a number of occasions.

I am a member of the following Panels and Committees:-

- Licensing Panel
- Licensing Committee
- Scrutiny Panel 2
- Development Panel
- County Health Scrutiny Committee
- West Cumberland Hospital Task Group

I have been nominated to attend an Accredited Leadership Academy course at Warwick University.

I am Vice-Chair of West Cumbria Cancer Patient and Carer Advisory Panel.

Treasurer of the Cockermouth Branch of the Royal Air Force Association.

It is a fantastic privilege to represent you and be your voice. I will continue to give you my very best efforts to make our community a healthy, safe and enjoyable place to live and be proud of.

Councillor Davies outlined his attendance percentage rates at Town and Borough level since his election and promised to include his attendance rates in his future reports.

Mr Hully asked why Allerdale Borough Council had increased council tax two years in succession.

Councillor Smith replied that Allerdale Borough Council had refused the offer of Central Government Grant as it was derogatory to council tax payers as it resulted in a 1.9% shortfall in the next year.

Mr Hully asked why Councillor Smith had voted to close four play areas in Cockermouth.

Councillor Smith replied that the previous administration had voted to close the play areas and that those four play areas had been refurbished and were now under the control of the Town Council.

Mr Hully asked why planting had been reduced in Cockermouth.

Councillor Smith replied that savings had to be made across the Borough.

Mr Hully asked why Allerdale Borough Council had cut the Town Council's concurrent grant by 50% this year and 100% next year.

Councillor Smith replied that concurrent grant was introduced in 1974 and had increased substantially over the years. Cockermouth's grant had been reduced by 50% i.e. £14,000 this year. That £14,000 was used by the Town Council to maintain the Memorial Gardens and run the tourist information centre. Councillor Smith argued that concurrent grant was double taxation. He promised that the Executive would look in detail at the letters of objection received from five parishes worse affected.

Mr Ward asked Councillor Smith why Allerdale Borough Council's Planning Policy was still in draft after 12 years as this was detrimental to Cockermouth.

Councillor Standage stated that the plan had been adopted and received its first reading.

Councillor Smith offered to meet Mr Ward and the Head of Planning Services to discuss the matter further.

Mr Hully asked about Councillor Smith's £120 pay rise.

Councillor Smith confirmed that his salary had increased from £15,000 per annum to £21,000 per annum. His salary was set by an independent panel. Twelve years ago the leader's salary had been £35,000 per annum.

Mr Ward expressed his concern that the increase would encourage more 'career politicians' who would treat the role as a job rather than a passion.

Councillor Smith commented that passion could not be banked and that the leader of Allerdale Borough Council was a primary role in Local Government and that the salary should reflect that role.

Observations from Allerdale Councillor Margaret Jackson

I have been a representative on Allerdale Borough Council for the Christ Church Ward in Cockermouth for the last 14 years.

I am a member of Allerdale's full Council and a member of the Development Panel.

The majority of planning application decisions are made by officers but there are occasions that officers feel the panel need to make the decision, e.g. if it is outside planning policy or a major application. We also look at applications that have been called in by Councillors.

We also look at changes to planning policies made by the Government. The National Planning Policy Framework came into effect in March 2012. This document is about reforming the Planning System so that it is more proactive in driving and supporting sustainable Economic Growth and Jobs.

We have been using the National Planning Policy Framework and Allerdale's Local Plan in making decisions.

However the new Draft Allerdale Local Plan has now been approved by Allerdale's Full Council marking a major milestone in the delivery of the Borough's Development Plan which has been progressed over a number of years. The Plan contains policies for the use and development of land up to 2028. The Local Plan forms part of a suite of development plan documents and will be followed by Site Allocations, which will designate specific areas and sites for a range of uses.

I was pleased to see that the Cockermouth Conservation Guide and the Cockermouth Shop Front Guide were included in the Plans documents. These Guides were developed by the Town Council with help from Allerdale officers.

Observations from the Leader of Allerdale Alan Smith

As such as Leader of the Allerdale Borough Council, I do not have a portfolio to report on, along with no committees, but I have some Outside Bodies, to which I attend.

- ❖ Port of Workington Dock Board.
- ❖ Cumbria Community Foundation
- ❖ Chief Officers Panel.
- ❖ Nuclear Issues Working Group
- ❖ West Cumbria Site Stakeholders
- ❖ Chair, Joint District Leaders
- ❖ West Cumbria Strategic Forum

I will outline what actions have been taken over the past twelve months, regarding Cockermouth.

£50k investment in the Sports Centre, upgrading and renewing changing rooms.

The new £28k Lorton Street Cemetery Bridge was commissioned in September.

Two pilot schemes were trialed in the town last year, and I can say the Low Paid Workers Car Parking scheme, has now been rolled out across the Borough.

As a ward councillor I have been involved in various things, mainly regarding housing development in the town.

Dog Fouling is still a persistent problem, last year I instigated a Zero Tolerance on this anti social impact on our communities, I am now looking to take this further, but with the constraints from Central Gov, this is difficult.

I have also been actively involved alongside Officers assisting the North Allerdale Food Bank in Cockermouth, trying and finding ways to help this precious group.

Observations from Allerdale Councillor Christine Smith

It has been a privilege to represent All Saints again for the past twelve months.

I am a member of the new Borough Standards committee, and have attended the first two meetings, a detailed series training events are scheduled over the next few months.

I have also recently joined the Risk & Hazard Reduction and Waste Management Working Group, linked to the Nuclear Industry; I am awaiting to attend the first meeting.

I have a 100% attendance for Full Council.

I along with the two other ward Councillors have been supporting the residents association, Highfield FC and Cockermouth Titans (rugby league) to decant to the changing rooms, which will be fully refurbished over the next couple of months.

Housing is still a problem in the CA13 area, I have taken and acted on calls from people desperate for a home, and will continually do so.

Observations from Councillor S Standage

I am pleased to report that I represent Cockermouth's Christ Church Ward as their Allerdale Borough Councillor.

Development Panel

I currently serve on the Development Panel, (which also includes the Site Inspection Panel)

The Development Panel continues to meet on a Monthly basis. The procedure remains as previous; that is to say the majority of Planning Decisions are taken under delegated powers. Other applications are either brought to the attention of Development Panel by Planning Officers or "Called In " by a Councillor, the reasons for the "call In" vary from Major Planning Developments to concerns regarding the environment, over development conservation area and Listed Building concerns etc. The call procedure thus enables the applicants, objectors and members of the public the opportunity to come before the Panel to express their opinions on individual Applications.

I would again state that in my opinion this particular Process within Allerdale Borough Council is of great benefit to both Allerdale's Development Planning members and its Constituents and shows a true commitment to local open Government.

Mr Hully complained about Allerdale Borough Council's public participation scheme as he was unable to speak at the Development Panel in support of his son's application as no objections had been received to his son's planning application.

Details of Planning Applications Determined by the Development Panel April 2012 to March 2013

The Total number of Planning Applications received was 937.

Applications in respect to Wind Turbines was 43

The total number of Applications Determined by the Development Panel was 95

The number of Applications determined in respect to Christ Church and All Saints Wards was 14

Standards Committee

I also serve on the Standards Committee. The Committee consists of Allerdale Members, Parish Representatives and Non Council Members.

Functions of this Committee are as follows -:

The promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct within the Council

To determine the Arrangements and Guidance for dealing with any Code of Conduct matters.

To determine any allegations of a breach of protocols by Allerdale & Parish members in accordance with procedures adopted by the Council.

All functions relating to standards of Conduct of members under any relevant legislation or regulations

Granting dispensations to Councillors and co – opted members from the requirement relating to interests set out in the Members Code of Conduct.

Cockermouth and Papcastle Recreational Trust

The Town Clerk outlined the activities of the Trust over the last 12 months. She indicated that the Trust was always happy to receive applications from local organizations who might qualify for funding.

Resolutions of which 48 hours written notice had been given

Mr Jim Hully asked the following question:-

What was the commitment by Allerdale Borough Council to the start of the Market Place Scheme?

Who was the portfolio holder for it and signed it off?

What was the financial agreement by Allerdale at the start of it?

What are the financial implications to Allerdale now?

What authority do Allerdale have to Highways when that's the responsibility of Cumbria County Council when Allerdale are having to cut their own budgets

Councillor A Smith replied as follows:-

Allerdale Borough Council agreed to act as the accountable body for the £1.274m Market Place Scheme.

He had been unable to ascertain whether it was the Regeneration Manager or Councillor Margaret Jackson, the portfolio holder at the time who had signed off the scheme.

Allerdale had been left with a £37,700 shortfall upon completion and was likely to be liable for this amount and the maintenance of any element of the scheme which was not adopted.

Snagging issues have been identified but the remedial works had yet to be completed.

Mr Hully stated that the whole area was a disgrace.

Mr Jim Hully asked the following question:-

What was the total cost of drawing up the scheme for the Main Street, were consultants used and at what cost to Cumbria County Council?

Which committee is responsible for the scheme and who is the Chair?

Councillor A Kennon replied as follows:-

The total cost of developing the scheme is £269k. Consultants have been used for various specialist activities at a cost of £109k and Cumbria County Council's costs are £160k.

The Main Street Improvement Scheme is a County Council/Flood repair and Improvement Scheme and as such Cumbria County Council is responsible for the whole scheme. The main chairperson is the leader of the Council,

Mr Jim Samson asked the following question:-

What steps has the Town Council taken to promote the installation of bus shelters in Main Street and the rest of Cockermouth and what does it intend to do in the next year?

The Mayor gave the following answer:-

In the last year, the Town Council has agreed to maintain a new bus shelter adjacent to the Hospital.

It also agreed to maintain the new bus shelters on the Main Street as part of the Main Street Improvement Scheme. However, due to the additional funding streams for the Artwork and Heritage elements being unsuccessful, the provision of bus shelters is no longer part of guaranteed phase 1 works.

Mr Samson suggested that the money scheduled to be spent on the sandstone set islands should be diverted toward the provision of bus shelters.

The Mayor stated that the Town Council had no budget this year for the installation and/or provision of bus shelters.

Mr Darren Ward asked the following question:-

Last November the Town Council rejected the principle of a Town Flag. The Trust subsequently offered to present the design to the following committee so that the rationale could be explained and any questions raised could be answered.

What were the initial reasons for the rejection of the principle of a flag and second why did the Council not take up the offer of a presentation?

The Mayor gave the following answer:-

Last November, the Town Council rejected the proposed design for a Cockermouth flag and expressed an alternative design preference which included the use of 'our emblem'.

Last December, the Town Council were informed by the Civic Trust that our emblem was not appropriate for use as a flag. Given that this was the case, The Town Council did not feel it would be productive to take up the offer of a presentation from the Civic Trust.

Darren Ward asked the following question:-

When assessing planning applications does the Council apply a consistent and recognised methodology such as Building for Life? Is the current methodology used for assessment robust, consistent and free from personal bias?

The Mayor gave the following answer:-

The Town Council does not use the 'Building for Life' methodology when determining planning applications.

The Town Council is not obliged to adopt a recognised methodology.

Each planning application is determined on its merits.

All 12 town councillors have to abide by the Town Council's Code of Conduct and Allerdale Borough Council can impose sanctions should it be proved that this code has been breached.

Decisions made by local authorities and other public bodies which are based on bias or predetermination have always been open to legal challenge by judicial review.

Jeff Thorpe asked the following question:-

Can the lease with Cockermouth Junior Football Club include a clause allowing members of the Tri Lakeland Junior Triathlon club to use the Track at Tarn Close from 1st July 2013?

The Mayor gave the following answer:-

When the Town Council agreed to issue a licence to Cockermouth Junior Football Club it was unaware that any other sporting organisation other than the Titans were using the site. The Town Clerk was instructed to seek advice on the matter.

The Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm