

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN VICTORIA HALL, COCKERMOUTH ON MONDAY 14 MAY 2012 AT 7.15PM

Present: Councillor C Smith, Town Mayor/Chairman
Councillor Mrs I Burns
Councillor A Smith
Councillor A Kennon
Councillor L Davies
Councillor A R Graham
Councillor S Coates
Councillor J M Laidlow
Councillor S Standage

Apologies: Councillors E Nicholson, Mrs C M Jackson & P Graham

There were approximately 20 members of the public present & 1 members of the press.

Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 9 May 2011 were received as a correct record.

Annual Report of the Town Council

The Town Mayor, Christine Smith presented her report as follows:-

2011/2012 has once again been a very busy year with 12 Council meetings, 2 Special Council meetings 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 Town Council continued to work closely with Dr Les Tickner; the Town Centre Flood Recovery Co-Coordinator unfortunately his contract came to an end at the end of March 2012. Dr Tickner was instrumental in supporting our business recovery and completed several flood related projects.

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 is fantastic news. Once built, the scheme in Cockermouth will reduce the risk of flooding to a 1% chance of flooding in any one year. Construction will start in the summer.

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 at the Market Town Awards and Civic Trust Awards.

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 Town Council with assistance from Allerdale Borough Council has been working on the production and adoption of an NDO to remove the requirement for planning permission for changes of use between existing commercial units which have a 'shop frontage' to cafes, restaurants, bars or public houses. The aspiration for the Market Place is to promote it as an area of leisure, arts and culture at the centre of which would be a vibrant and attractive cafe culture. The refurbishment of the Town Hall continues. Works were completed on the roof, guttering, external surfaces and the replacement of several windows and the building has received a much needed lick of paint.

Victoria Hall remains in the ownership of the Town Council, however due to declining usage (we currently only have one regular booking), the Town Council has decided to look for a long term partner to which the hall will be leased.

The Tourist Information Centre received 23,403 visitors in 2011/12, the centre continues to be managed by Mrs Julia Hindle assisted by a number of part time staff. The Tourist Information Centre moved to Unit 4, Old Kings Arms Lane on 1 April 2012. It is hoped that the move to a more central location will increase visitor numbers and sales. The Town Council has been given notice that our £19,043 per year concurrent grant will be reviewed in 2013 and is likely to either be significantly reduced or cease.

The Town Council web site at www.cockermouth.org.uk is provided by Instinct Training, a local South Street based firm, and this is much appreciated. The Town Council pages on the web site are being continually updated, dates of meetings, minutes of meetings, budget etc are now available on line.

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

Our 28th Anniversary visit took place between 23–29 October 2011. 56 Cockermouthians attended the celebrations. We were pleased to welcome several new faces.

Our visits included:-

A visit to a showroom or artistic wrought-iron work

- A guided tour of Castelnau-Pegayrolles Village
- A visit to Le Puy en Velay
- A picnic at Garabit Viaduct
- A tour of Murat Village
- A visit to the timber workshop for the disabled
- A tour of the handisport centre at Montrodar
- Our anniversary dinner in the Salle Polyvalente

Everyone enjoyed the relaxed programme.

Our 29th anniversary celebrations will take place between 28 October – 3 November 2012.

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 any additional allotment land to supplement the allotments it provides at St. Helen's Street and the Gote and at the moment there are 58 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 15 September 2011 for winners of the Garden and Allotment Competition.

The Council once again sponsored The Kirkgate Centre in its annual arts programme in Cockermouth during 2011/12. The re-vamped Cockermouth festival held between 18/6/11 – 26/6/11 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 £2694 was received from the Youth Hostel Association during 2011/12.

The Christmas lights were re-vamped last year and looked amazingly beautiful. The use of one watt led lamps will more than half our electricity bill in future years. The Council organised the usual Best-Dressed Window Competition, Window Spotting Competition and organised a tour of the lights for elderly. The Council continues to be grateful for the donations made by businesses, local organisations and individuals towards the cost of the lights.

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

The Taste Cumbria Food Festival continues to go from strength to strength. This year's event will be held on 29 & 30 September 2012.

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. A £140k restoration scheme funded solely by grants from the NDA, WREN, Heritage Lottery and CWMET was recently completed on the flood ravaged gardens. Works on the new entrance and disabled fishing platform will be completed shortly.

The Council supported Cockermouth Carnival by participating with its float and providing music on it to add to the atmosphere.

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

The Town Council has been asked to take over the inspection and maintenance of four additional play areas in the town situated at Towers Lane, Greyrigg Avenue, Harris Park Extension from Allerdale Borough Council after 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.

I am pleased to announce that our Town Clerk, Sheila Brown is now CILCA qualified.

Hopefully, Cockermouth will become one of the first Councils in Cumbria to adopt the new General Power of Competence which 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 has objected strongly to the Electoral Commissions draft proposals for a single member Cockermouth North and Cockermouth South in their electoral review of

Cumbria. The Town Council feels strongly that the river and Main Road provide a natural divide in the current East/West split and that a North/South divide will confuse residents and split estates and streets.

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 me and Alan to numerous events during the year. I would also like to thank my Deputy Isabel, 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 2011/12.

Annual Report from All Saints CE Primary School

We are delighted that this year All Saints' School has continued to give children the opportunity to learn from a range of 8 instruments, free of charge this includes recorder, guitar, keyboard, violin, drums, flute, clarinet and brass. The choir has continued to go from strength to strength and is regularly invited to attend and perform at community events. A highlight of the year is the annual music concern where the children perform for their parents and we are now rehearsing for our trip to the Sage in Gateshead where the children will take part in the 'Big Sing'. The school achieved the Gold 'Sing Up' award in recognition of its outstanding music provision.

The French provision in school begins in Year 2 and the children enjoy the songs and rhymes that they learn in a fun and collaborative way. By the time the children leave Year 6, their French is proficient and forms a strong basis for their entry to Secondary School.

We are delighted that Harry Bibby won the Young Speaker's competition giving an entertaining speech about the joys of being a younger brother!

Successful grant funding by the school has enabled the fully funded outdoor provision to continue for our Key Stage 2 children, this has included sailing, kayaking, caving, high ropes course, archery, ghyll scrambling and horse riding. The children have thoroughly enjoyed these activities encouraging their peers and developing their own confidence.

The children are busy preparing for the SAT's at the moment and after this Year 2-6 will be enjoying their residential visits to St John's in the Vale, Grasmere, Newcastle and Glasgow.

Observations from County Councillor E Nicholson

Please accept my apologies for not being in attendance this evening; it is difficult to arrange time off around the numerous meetings that I need to attend.

For the past year I have been vice chair of the County Council Local Committee, Chair of the Staffing Committee and a member of the Environment Scrutiny Panel, during which time I chaired an intensive task and finish group to look at how savings could be achieved in the provision of household waste recycling centres. I am pleased to report that the final outcome was the retention of all of the centre's although hours were reduced as well as making savings of 1.5 million.

On the subject of savings, the Conservative led Council has achieved 40 million pounds of savings without having too much impact on services; some of this was achieved by reducing staff numbers by 600 through natural wastage and a moratorium on recruitment. We also froze council tax for the second time running protecting the electorate from additional financial pressures in this difficult time. A further 12 million needs to be cut from the budget next year.

The fire control staff are to be relocated from the headquarters here in Cockermouth which is very disappointing as Alan and I have spent a huge amount of time and effort trying to save this service for Cumbria. We now need to turn our attention to saving the building, and identifying an alternative use as there is scope to house 200 staff which would be an enormous boost for the economy of the town.

The Amey contract finished at the end of March and we have brought most of the Highways staff back in house they have also been split into 6 teams ours operating from Lillyhall should give us better opportunities to become more efficient and responsive to the need of the electorate.

An extensive additional program of road reconstruction and repairs were carried out to put right the frost damage from the previous 2 hard winters and this recent mild one should help us make saving on the winter maintenance programme.

Observations from County Councillor A Kennon

During the last 12 months due to staff reduction and re-organisation of the County Council across the board there has been a considerable reduction in meetings held by the relevant committees, I attend to represent my Council ward.

I am still involved in the following:-

- * Health & Wellbeing Task and Finish Group
- * The Cycle Path Partnership
- * Local Committee for Allerdale
- * Allerdale Joint Liaison Committee

- * Allerdale Highways and Transport Working Group
- * West Cumberland Hospital Working Group

The Cockermouth Flood Recovery meetings have now ceased due to the vast majority of refurbishment work on the businesses being completed.

The main push now is to ensure the new flood defences for the town are delivered as soon as possible and to monitor these works. I now represent the County Council on the Cockermouth Flood Alleviation Scheme Stage Holders Group.

Many projects have been realised over the past year, a few are, The Carlisle Northern by-pass opened, The new waste recycling plant at Hespin wood opened which takes over 6,000 tonnes per month of household waste from Carlisle, Allerdale and Copeland.

The new hospital development at West Cumberland has finally got the go ahead along with our own Cottage Hospital which will be an excellent resource for our area.

Along with Eric Nicholson, County Councillor for Cockermouth East we have allocated some of our local committee funding to re-surface a large part of Rubby Banks road to improve access for the people who use it. This will be delivered after the flood work in that area is completed.

In Dean Parish I have given funding from my allowance to allow a trial period of the local 217 bus service from Frizington to Cockermouth which is working well.

These are only a small part of the decisions and meetings from what has been another challenging 12 month. I will continue to attend as many parish meetings as possible over the next 12 months and would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support.

Mr Hully complained about cars parking on St Helens Street now that double yellow lines had been placed outside the hospital. He requested that the disc parking zone be extended to Pinfold Street. Mr Kennon promised to pass on his comments. The salt bin on Waste Lane had been knocked over and although the bin had been placed upright, there was still salt all over the road, Mr Hully requested that the salt bin be moved to the opposite side of the street. Mr Kennon assured Mr Hully that the potholes on St Helens Street would be addressed shortly. Some bus drivers doing the hospital bus service were still not driving up St Helens Street due to the size of the bus and the threat of bottoming out could the size of the buses be reduced to ensure continuity of service?

Observations from Allerdale councillor Len Davies

This is my first annual report due to me being newly elected in May 2011.

I have attended a number of training sessions since my election. These include:-

- Introduction to Local Government
- Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny
- Community Engagement and Ward Representation
- Licensing
- Code of Conduct
- Emergency Preparedness for Elected Members
- Scrutiny Training
- Chairing Skills
- Equality Training for the Executive and Scrutiny members
- Leadership Academy – Ageing well in the Community
- Housing Awareness

The bulk of my ward work to date has been dealing with housing difficulties including homelessness, nuisance neighbours, maintenance and council tax disputes.

Other issues such as unsafe structures, unlit street lighting, installation of rubbish containers, flooding of gardens and blocked drains on the greenway cycle path were successfully concluded.

I particularly enjoyed participating in talks including lively question and answer sessions with Year 7 pupils at Cockermouth School explaining local government structures and practices.

I serve on a number of panels and committees at Allerdale Borough Council. These include:-

- Licensing Panel
- Scrutiny Panel 1
- Scrutiny Committee
- Development Panel
- Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
- West Cumberland Hospital Working Group
- Closer to Home Health Committee

As I approach the end of my first year as a newly elected councillor I can tell you that it has been a steep learning curve for me which I have found stimulating, exciting and a rewarding experience.

I will continue to give you my very best efforts to help make our community healthy, safe and an enjoyable place to live and be proud of.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to those of you who voted for me and trusted me to work on your behalf.

Observations from Allerdale councillor Margaret Jackson

I have been a representative on Allerdale Borough Council for the Christchurch Ward in Cockermouth for the last 13 years and I am pleased to be given the chance to continue to do so for the next 4 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.

The Panel has looked at 55 planning applications over the last 12 months and it has had 14 site visits.

We also look at changes to planning policies made by the Government and the major one which we were consulted on and sent our comments back was the Draft National Planning Policy Framework. This document is about reforming the Planning System so that it is more proactive in driving and supporting sustainable economic growth and jobs. The National Planning Policy Framework came into effect on the 27 March 2012.

I have also dealt with a number of problems reported to me by the people of Cockermouth and look forward to representing them for the next 3 years.

Observations from the Leader of Allerdale councillor Alan Smith

After the local election last May I became the Council Leader, I do not have a portfolio as such as my role is a strategic one, I still have some committee's which I attend including:-

- Port of Workington Board Member
- Allerdale Community Fund
- Nuclear Issues Working Group

Over the past year I have been heavily involved in the MRWS process and I am one of the co-chairs. The MRWS process has now been out to public consultation and the feedback is currently being evaluated.

The Council has a new Council Plan with reducing poverty, economic development, Town Centre and Sports, Arts and Leisure being the main strands, each have an impact on Cockermouth.

The Council has listened to the concerns of people and businesses, we have introduced pilots for car parking, the free after 3 scheme is currently running in Cockermouth, we are about to pilot a car parking permit for people on low incomes who work in Cockermouth and Keswick, these are pilots and if successful can be rolled out to the rest of Cumbria.

We have just completed a Zero Tolerance campaign on irresponsible dog owners, again the data from this will be analysed, but the Council's resources cannot continue with this project in an intense way, I have other ideas to combat this high level of complaints received to both ward members and council staff.

All in all a busy year, the Government's austerity measures mean that Allerdale Borough Council will have to find £3.5m over the next 4 years, finding the balance between services and savings will be tricky but where we can the frontline services will be protected.

Mr Hully complained that the pot holes in the Sullart Street Car Park were a disgrace. He was informed that the Town Council had already requested that they be filled in. Mr Hully stated that according to the article in the Times and Star the previous Friday, the new Standards Committee that Allerdale Borough Council were forming did not appear to have an independent member on it. Councillor Smith assured Mr Hully that this was not the case and that the new Standards Committee would comprise of 7 councillors, 3 parish councillors and 1 Independent.

Mr Hully thanked Councillor Smith for the introduction of the 'Free after 3pm' scheme in Wakefield Road Car Park, he felt however that more could be done. Councillor Smith informed those present that Allerdale was also hoping to introduce a pilot scheme for low paid workers in Cockermouth and Keswick so that they would only pay £35.00 for 3 month's parking.

Observations from Allerdale councillor Christine Smith

I was elected to Allerdale Borough Council for All Saints Ward after last year's local elections.

Although I do not have any direct committee places, I am very much a ward councillor.

I have been very involved in having the footbridge replaced in the Lorton Street Cemetery and that will happen in June, June is the earliest time the Environment Agency would allow us to do the replacement.

I have also been lobbying to have a residents Association building in the Highfield/Slatefell/Gable Avenue area and that should happen over the coming weeks, with the refurbishment of the Highfield Changing Rooms which will house both the residents groups and a sports team.

Observations from Allerdale councillor Sam Standage

Following the Council election last May, I am pleased to report that I now represent Cockermouth's Christchurch Ward as their Allerdale Borough Councillor.

I currently serve on the Development Panel (which also included 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 the Development Panel by Planning Officers or 'called in' by a Councillor, the reasons for 'call in' vary from major planning developments to concerns regarding the environment, over development, conservation area and listed building concerns etc. The all in 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 members of the Development Panel and its constituents and shows a true commitment to open Government.

For your information I wish to report that the total number of planning applications received from April 2011 to March 2012 was 915, of these 42 related directly to All Saints Ward and 60 to Christchurch Ward.

The total number of applications actually determined by the Panel for this period was 48.

Mr Hully asked Mr Standage if he had been involved in the Lorton Road application. Mr Standage replied that he was a member of the Development Panel and that the application had been refused but that it was now the subject of an appeal. Mr Hully hoped that the speeding statistics gathered recently would be useful in refusing future applications.

Cockemouth and Papcastle Recreational Trust

The Town Clerk circulated a report received from the Cockermouth and Papcastle Recreational Trust. She indicated that the Trust was always happy to receive applications from local organisations who might qualify for funding.

Resolutions of which 48 hours written notice had been given

Mr Allan Holmes asked the following question –

'Can an electric buggy equipped with disinfectant spray and a suction system be introduced to lift dog faeces from the street?

Councillor Smith replied as follows:-

Our new zero tolerance approach has highlighted that dog fouling has fallen significantly.

Staff have been working in teams during unsociable hours to tackle 'hotspots'. Fixed penalty notices have been issued to those who fail to clear up after their dog.

A similar machine was trialled but the associated transport costs and high levels of cleaning and maintenance one would expect from such a machine made it difficult to sustain.

The Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm.