

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN THE TOWN HALL, COCKERMOUTH ON
WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH 2023**

Present: Councillor A Semple, Town Mayor/Chair
Councillor G Bennion
Councillor I Burns
Councillor J Laidlow
Councillor D Malloy
Councillor S Nicholson
Councillor A Smith
Councillor C Smith
Councillor R Watson

Also Present: Ms H Tucker, Cumberland Council, a press representative and 9 electors.

Welcome

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 6 April 2022 were signed as a correct record.

Annual Report of the Town Council

There's now less than a few weeks until the two unitary authorities take over the running of local authority services in Cumbria and with the calendar counting down to 1 April 2023, there is a huge amount of activity taking place to ensure that public services will be able to operate 'safe and legally' from that day.

As Members of the Shadow Cumberland Council, Councillor Tucker and I will report later on regarding progress made to date.

Town Council elections will take place on 4 May 2023. New councillors will take office on Tuesday 9 May 2023 due to the additional bank holiday to mark the coronation of HM King Charles III.

Town Council meetings can now be recorded and filmed and as a result the Town Council has adopted a Protocol which is displayed at the entrance to our meeting room.

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.

Special Planning meetings are now held on the first Thursday of every month if required.

I am pleased to inform you that every square inch of available space in the Town Hall is being used. The Citizens Advice Bureau and Allerdale Borough Council continue to hold their outreach sessions each Wednesday in a ground floor office. Allerdale Borough Council enforces usage of our car park on our behalf.

Victoria Hall is currently leased by Mrs Bealt. The Vicky Business Centre opened on 21 February 2018 providing vibrant, flexible and affordable office space for home workers, start-up businesses etc. Flood resilience works were completed and paid for with a flood resilience grant and should help protect the premises from future flooding.

The Tourist Information Centre moved to the library on Main Street on 3 April 2017. We remain committed to work in partnership with Cumbria County Council to deliver a library service. The outdoor area has been decorated with bunting and colourful benches purchase to brighten up the area. We continue to develop and expand this service. The recent introduction of Rhyme Time has proved very popular.

We welcome the return of a weekly outdoor market and wish it every success.

Our website contains lots of useful information including councillor details, dates of town council meetings, minutes of meetings, events etc. Check out www.ckermouth.org. Agendas were published as of May 2019. We have also added a 'green section' to our website.

We launched our cockermouth town council face book page in July 2020, it has been instrumental in sending out information to a wider audience.

Our twinning links continue to flourish despite tough economic times and a global pandemic. A number of events are planned for our 40th Anniversary.

19 Cockermouthians will fly out to Marvejols in April 2023

We are preparing for a coach of Marvejolais to come to Cockermouth in October 2023

In June 2017 we became a 'sister city to Hebron, New Hampshire. Originally Hebron was part of a larger colonial town named after Lord Cockermouth. Cockermouth was founded in 1766. By 1792, it had grown into two geographically distinct villages. As a result, Cockermouth was split. The western portion became Groton and the eastern portion became Hebron. representative from Hebron visited Cockermouth in September 2019.

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. Their next meeting will be held on 7 March 2023.

The Council provides allotments on two sites St. Helen's Street and the Gote. The Gote Road allotments were transferred to the Town Council from Cumbria County Council under a

community asset transfer. There are currently approximately 65 people on the waiting list for an allotment. The Town Clerk continues to meet members of the Allotments Association on a regular basis and provide information for their annual report.

We sponsored and delivered as many events as we could in 2022/23 including Cockermonth Live, Taste Cumbria, Remembrance Service, Fireworks, Switch on Day, Taste Christmas and Carols round the tree. 2022/23 was Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Year, The Town Council and other organisation organised a programme of events that ended with a jubilee picnic in the Memorial Gardens. 1212 trees were planted in Harris Park Extension to commemorate this once in a lifetime event. We will hold a fun day on the Memorial Gardens in June 2023 to assist re-launching Cockermonth Carnival. Plans are also being prepared for an event to commemorate King Charles' Coronation.

Sadly Queen Elizabeth II died on 8 September 2022. The Town Council organised moment of reflection on Sunday 18th September 2022 in the Memorial Gardens and a book of condolences in our Library.

The Council's Internal Auditor, Jean Airey, a former Town Clerk of Keswick, regularly audits the Town Council's accounts and reports back to the Council.

The Council continues to employ Tivoli as their Maintenance Contractor.

Allerdale Borough Council has secured funding from the Government's Welcome Back Fund. They wish to work with us as a delivery partner to use £12,000 of funding to put in place additional measures to create and promote a safe environment for local trade and tourism, particularly in High Streets as local economies grow over covid. All projects were completed by 31 March 2022.

The fund has purchased a Christmas Advert, two Pride banners, new planters and associated planting for the Main Street. I hope you will agree that our Main Street looked stunning last year.

A 30-year lease was signed with Cockermonth Junior Football Club for their future use of Tarn Close Sports Ground. Their vision involves the creation of a football centre at Tarn Close for use by all teams in the town, junior, senior and veteran serving in the region of 500 members initially. Their long-term vision involves the erection of a synthetic indoor pitch to serve Cockermonth and the surrounding villages. A planning application for a new clubhouse has now been approved. Representatives from the Club will attend our March 2023 to tell us all about this exciting prospect.

Play areas and land at Greyrigg Avenue, Harris Park Extension, Isel Road, Towers Lane and Memorial Gardens continue to be maintained by Cockermonth Town Council. The Memorial Gardens play area was fully refurbished in 2019. The path crossing the Greyrigg Avenue site has been restored.

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 15 May 2019, the Town Council re-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 Code can be obtained from our website. The long-awaited report of the Independent Committee on Standards in Public Life (previously the Nolan Committee) on Ethical Standards in Local Government was published on 4 February 2019. It contains a special chapter on town and parish councils and many of the 26 recommendations intend to promote and maintain the standards expected by the public, relate directly to them.

The Town Council continues to maintain three bus shelters two on Main Street and one on Castlegate Drive.

We have purchased a new speed indication device and continue to monitor hotspots around town.

A community defibrillator has been installed in Kings Arms Lane. The Town Council continues to monitor and pay for the maintenance costs of this machine.

The Town Council were instrumental in the installation of cycle stands on the Main Street and are now responsible for their maintenance.

Six pieces of adult fitness equipment were installed in Harris Park Extension on 7 May 2019 following the receipt of a 6k grant from the United Utilities Legacy Fund.

All four public toilets transferred to Cockermouth Town Council on 31 July 2017.

The toilets on Main Street have been fully refurbished. We are investigating funding to update the old toilet block in the Memorial Gardens.

The Council Chamber became an alternative venue for Cumbria County Council's Ceremony Room based in Fairfield. Our first wedding was held on 14 October 2016. Wedding booking

continue to thrive and I am pleased to announce that our licence has been extended for a further five years.

An artist Nem Sarton has completed the wall painting on Cocker Bridge to assist and encourage pedestrians/visitors to continue their journey along Main Street and explore what Market Place has to offer. The artist has used traditional techniques and materials. The Town Council will maintain the sign going forward.

We have become increasingly concerned about the increase in theft and anti-social behaviour. I am pleased to announce that we made a successful application to the Police and Crime Commissioner for £3k towards the cost of the installation and maintenance of a CCTV camera on Main Street. The camera was installed on 25 February 2021.

Cockermouth Town Council declared a climate change emergency on 19 June 2019. A list of simple, achievable actions were drawn up and a task group formed.

This Task Force meets quarterly, its achievements to date include our popular Give and Take Days, the re-distribution of pre-loved school uniform and fancy dress costumes, planting of trees, use of water retaining planters etc.

Our C1, C2 & C3 town bus service which started on 4 February 2020 has been maintained.

Metalcraft Cockermouth Community Fund was launched in March 2020. Metalcraft hope this fund will help to ensure a diverse range of organisations can continue to operate and grow. Organisations must be based in Cockermouth parish and be 'not for profit' organisations operating for the benefit of the local community.

The Town Council assisted and produced a warm spot leaflet in conjunction with a multitude of local organisations to sign post those in need to warm welcoming spaces, advice and assistance during this very difficult winter.

Representatives from Mayfield School attended our September 2022 meeting to outline their exciting new plans for St Joseph's Primary School. An initial cohort of 23 pupils were due to arrive in school before Easter. It was anticipated that 60-70 pupils would join the school over the next few years.

A High Street Task Force visited Cockermouth on 4 November 2022 to undertake an Unlocking Your Place Potential diagnostic visit. The purpose of the visit was to diagnose the main barrier to transformation. As a result of the diagnostic process, the need for a collaborative new vision was identified as the main barrier to transformation in Cockermouth. A number of recommendations were made. These included the formation of a Town Board or Task Force. We are closely monitoring how this develops.

Finally, I would like to thank our fellow councillors and staff for their hard work. I would also like to thank the many volunteers who are helping the most vulnerable within our own communities.

It has been an honour and a privilege to have served as Mayor of Cockermouth. I shall not be standing for election this May. However, I am looking forward to playing my part in the new Cumberland Council, representing Cockermouth South. This also means I shall still be a regular visitor to Town Council meetings and I will be doing all I can to support the fine work that Town Councillors and our valued staff do for Cockermouth.

Mr Coley asked if the new Unitary Authority would affect town and parish councils?

Councillor Semple replied that parishes may have more responsibility. Councillor Tucker replied that no decision had been made.

Observations from County Councillors Catherine Bell & Alan Kennon

Cockermouth South – Alan Kennon

Cockermouth RUFC is a sporting community hub providing facilities for a number of local youth and adult groups as well as rugby union training and competitive games. The nursery school adjacent to the club uses their grounds for daily physical activity and the club offers free to use weekly open night sessions for teenage girls.

To shape the next 10 years, the club consulted and engaged with local schools and potential sports clubs, the outcome of this being that a need was highlighted for a multi-use, modern open space facility to cater for all abilities.

The club were awarded £5,000 in March 2022 and £2,000 in August 2022 towards developing a multi-use games area, with Cllrs Catherine Bell and Alan Kennon both using their divisional allowances to support this project.

The club do a great job giving the young people of Cockermouth something to work towards and a multi-use games area will only further improve their lives and health”.

Cockermouth North – Catherine Bell

Last year The Rotary Club of Cockermouth introduced Incredible Edibles to Cockermouth. This is a national scheme with a vision to create kind, confident and connected communities through the power of food.

The club have planted fruit trees in Harris Park, which in future years when the fruit is ripe anyone may pick and enjoy. The club have built planters in various locations around Cockermouth and this Spring will plant herbs and vegetables in them, and once these have grown the community will be able to pick and use.

The project was awarded £2,000 funding in November 2022 with Cllrs Catherine Bell and Alan Kennon both using their divisional allowances to support this project.

This is an excellent sustainable initiative which allows people to benefit from free, healthy food grown in their community.

Cllrs Bell and Kennon feel that working together supporting projects gives a better outcome for their community.

Other Issues

1. In hand are work on Papcastle Bypass Bridge.
2. More work on Market Place due to raised area stones moving/adrift.
3. Inspection to all trees on Main Street has been carried out with the report of no issues.
4. St Helens Street has been reported for uneven surface/potholes awaiting further repairs.
5. Station Street pavements outside Premier Shop is awaiting repairs for uneven surface.
6. Lorton Road is awaiting repairs for potholes.
7. Kirkgate has had repairs for drainage issues completed.
8. Highfield Road has had drains cleaned due to blockages.
9. Cycle way lighting is still awaiting repairs/reinstatement.
10. Parkside Avenue/ Fern Bank. Repairs/resurfacing is underway.
11. Wakefield Road potholes have been repaired and monitored.
12. Kirkgate/Windmill Lane continues potholes repaired and monitored.
13. South Street potholes repaired.
14. Papcastle several potholes repaired.
15. All Main Street relined and remarked.
16. Anti-social behaviour issues are still a concern.
17. Both the Rivers Derwent/ Cocker is being monitored by environment agency.
18. The Cherry Trees on Oaktree / Cherry Lane have been replaced.

Details of grants awarded locally were also circulated.

Observations from Allerdale Councillor Alan Smith

Once again it has been an honor to represent All Saints ward on Allerdale Borough Council, for this 4 year term, this will be my last report as your Ward Councillor.

Another busy year, with Housing Issues again taking up most of my Ward Work.

There will be two Outstanding projects to complete after Allerdale finishes in April :-

The Bellbrigg Lanning Play Area will be upgraded with new play equipment March/April, this is funded by the Section 106 from the Strawberry Howe Development, and the verges on the Bellbrigg Park New Path will be sorted once they have dried out.

I have helped out with funding opportunities for:-

Linking Lives

Highfield Food Pantry

Cockermouth Food Bank

I have a 100% attendance record at Full Council Meetings and 85% on my Committees:-

Chief Officers Employment Panel

Cumberland Joint Committee

Development Panel

Licensing Panel

Licensing Committee

Licensing Regulatory Panel

Personnel Tribunal

Standards Committee

Substitute – Overview & Scrutiny Committee

My Appointments to Outside Bodies include:-

Allerdale Investment Partnership

Cumbria Police & Crime Panel Joint Committee

Apart from my ward work, I find the Development Panel the most interesting, as this Committee has the power to change peoples lives, both for the applicant and the people in the area.

I would like to take this opportunity in thanking the electors of All Saints Ward for putting their trust in me as their elected representative for the past 28 years, and that I was never defeated by the Ballot Box in that time.

He further stated that works were almost complete at Bellbrigg Play area, that the verges would be sorted in May/June and that a fence would be erected to stop vehicles parking on the grass.

The lights on the safe route to school leading from Strawberry Grange had been transferred to Cumberland Council.

He urged his successor to fight for All Saints ward and thanked everyone who had voted for him.

Observations from Andrew Semple, Shadow Cumberland Unitary Authority

Since election to the new council as the Member for Cockermouth South, I have been a “shadow” member before taking up the post fully on “vesting day”: 1 April 2023.

Most of my time has been spent on work that will have an overall high impact on all residents: the appointment of a Chief Executive and ten Directors – the Cumberland senior leadership team. I was one of seven councillors, including the Leader and deputy Leader of the Council, on the Senior Appointments Committee. We met between July and January. It was a rigorous process and a side benefit is that I now know the senior leaders and vice versa. That can only be a good thing as we form the working relationships we need to deliver services for the people of Cockermouth.

We also invested a lot of time in getting the agreement of all councillors, across parties, to the future community based work Cumberland needs to do. I took an active part in the final “Localism and Communities” workshop in the Autumn of last year.

The plan is to have 8 Community Panels. Cockermouth will be in the configuration that also includes Maryport, Dearham and Broughton, Bothel and Wharells and Keswick. Panels will meet four times a year. They will act as committees of Cumberland Council, providing a local point of contact for all areas; a place where opinions and views can be explored and voiced on a range of issues impacting on our community. We are keen to promote active community decision making, providing a focus for local engagement.

I learned so much from my time as a Cockermouth Town Councillor and you can count on me for ensuring that Town and Parish Councils are supported to enable working together across Community Panel boundaries.

Also under current consideration are more informal neighbourhood and community meetings. All this is part of the Cumberland Vision which aims to take a fresh approach to the delivery of inclusive services that are shaped by our residents and communities.

I am very much looking forward to continuing to work, albeit in a different role, with Cockermouth Town Council.

Mr Coley asked how the new community panels would work?

Councillor Semple replied that this had not yet been determined but felt that they should not be councillor led and that the public should be involved.

Observations from Allerdale Councillor Andrew Semple

This is my last ever report as an Allerdale Borough Councillor. I have only served one term but it is still sad to see an end of an era.

My Mayor's report is included in this meeting and I represent the same named Ward – Christchurch although it of course has different boundaries. As I have said before, my back garden is in Christchurch and my front in Double Mills! Thus many of the duties and meetings I have attended as Mayor have also been as Ward councillor.

This year I have supported many residents with Planning issues and I am particularly pleased to have helped some vulnerable people. It is never easy for individual residents to fight their way through a lot of what can seem incomprehensible detail.

I have supported residents who had problems with their doorstep refuse/recycling service. Issues were resolved following my intervention and I have always found the officers at Allerdale to be extremely supportive and quick acting.

I have attended, as substitute, many meetings of the Development Panel and have played my part in helping to come up with decisions that impact on the people of Cockermouth.

My new Cumberland Council Ward comprises a good deal of the old Christchurch – and I look forward to no longer seeing the Cocker as the divide as I have the other side (well, some of it) now. It has been my privilege to be an Allerdale Councillor and look forward to sending in and discussing my Cumberland report at next year's Annual Parish meeting.

Councillor Semple informed those present that Councillor Smith had recently been honoured as Freeman of the Borough due to his 28 year unbroken service record. He praised Allerdale staff.

Observations from Helen Tucker, Shadow Cumberland Unitary Authority

As a member of the Shadow Cumberland Unitary Authority, I have undertaken the following:

Attended all council meetings

Attended meetings of the Scrutiny Committee

Delivered an assembly to Year 13 students at Cockermouth School

Delivered a talk and answered questions at a meeting of Cockermouth Civic Trust

Met local residents and followed up on concerns of theirs.

Councillor Tucker informed those present that of the eighty Year 13 students she spoke to at assembly regarding the importance of voting, three quarters of those were over 18 and entitled to vote and surprisingly only four of the eighty students were on the electoral register.

Cockermouth and Papcastle Recreational Trust

The Town Clerk explained that the activities of the Trust over the last 12 months. Ten grants totalling £3,825 had been distributed.

Questions of which 48 hours written notice had been given

Mr J Hully asked the following question:-

What have our County Councillors done regarding parking vehicles in the centre of Main Street, vehicles parking fish bone in Market Place and the safety of our public using crossings?

He expressed his disgust that neither County Councillor had turned up again.

The Traffic Regulation Order promised seven years ago had not materialized.

County Councillor Catherine Bell provided the following written response:-

the parking in the centre of Main Street has been reported to Parking Services. Market Place parking is only an issue if an obstruction occurs. Parking Services are monitoring the situation.

The safety of the pedestrian crossing has been reported to officers and a Safety Study will take place under the new authority.

Councillor Smith stated that there would be one parking enforcement team after 1/4/23. He urged the new Cumberland Councillors to pursue a new Traffic Regulation Order as soon as practicable.

Clare Davidson wished to discuss Joe's Walk Footpath.

On behalf of the residents of the Laureates estate, I would like to raise the issue of Joe's Walk public footpath.

It is our understanding that the footpath was established by Lovell Homes as part of the requirements of the planning permission for the estate. However, it is also our understanding that the path is on private land owned by Mr Bob Slack. This has been confirmed by RMG Ltd, the management company Lovell Homes have contracted to act on behalf of the Laureates Estate Management Co Limited which owners become members of on completion of the purchase of their property.

The footpath is not considered part of the estate and the 'Common Parts' for which the management company are responsible for, which is set out on the plans forming part of the TP1 agreement we signed when purchasing the property. This clearly shows that the boundaries of the estate do not extend to the main length of the path.

However, following a number of complaints by residents about vandalised lighting on the path, which we would argue was never fit for purpose due to the height of the posts, RMG sought to raise this with Mr Slack on multiple occasions which were apparently ignored. As a result, we understand that in 2021 Lovell Homes offered a sum of money to RMG for them to take on maintenance of the footpath. This has seemingly led to the maintenance of the path being added to the accounts of The Laureates Estate Management Co Limited on an ongoing basis, as well as the path being added to the estate's public liability insurance policy.

This decision was taken underhandedly, without any consultation with or agreement of the residents of the estate, all of whom completely object to these costs being included in our service charge. We also reject any notion of liability for a public footpath which is outside the boundaries of the managed land which form part of our estate. This is of particular concern now that the lighting has apparently had to be disconnected due to safety concerns following an engineer visit arranged by RMG.

We are seeking the council's support in resolving this issue and supporting us in our request to RMG and Lovell to immediately terminate any agreement for maintenance of the cycle path signed on behalf of The Laureates Estate Management Company Limited and to remove any and all costs in relation to the maintenance from the accounts now and in the future, as we do not believe that these should be our costs to bear.

Councillor Laidlow stated that the whole situation was unfair and that Joe's Walk was in reality a public footpath and that the new Cumberland Council should be persuaded to adopt it and maintain it.

Councillor A Smith suggested that their approach was currently fragmented and that the residents needed to get themselves organised.

Mrs Stephens stated that a damaged gate had led to a near miss with a child and that as a resident she did not want to be responsible.

Mrs Telford stated that Mr Slack had permission for a further 27 homes and that a new access would be created. She questioned if the new homes would share the same responsibilities?

Councillor Nicholson stated that dealing with the parties involved had been difficult over the last 8 years.

Mr Jenkinson the local M.P. had stated that Lovell were examining the legal issues.

Councillor Semple stated that the path had always been part of the overall development.

Ms Tucker agreed that the formation of a residents group was valid and that residents needed to get to the bottom on who owns what and the legalities.

Councillor Watson stated that there appeared to be no checks and balances on Estate Management and Estate Management Companies.

Mr Coley suggested that planning enforcement be contacted to determine if there had been breach of planning.

Mr Hully suggested looking at the planning application, if the footpath was part of the s106 there would be nothing that residents could do. The residents of Strawberry Grange were responsible for the ponds.

Clerk to write to RMG to express concern regarding their poor communication with residents.

Sarah Stephens asked the Town Council to consider creating a skate/bmx park on part of the Towers Lane Play Park.

A rough straw poll she had conducted indicated that 91% of 350 responses she had received were in favour of this suggestion.

Councillor Bennion agreed that there was very little for teenagers to do in the town.

Councillor Laidlow explained that the Town Council had looked for a site in 2010/11 but a suitable site was not found.

Councillor A Smith stated that neighbours and cost needed to be considered. The skate park was estimated to cost 75k ten years ago.

Councillor Tucker suggested that a working group be formed and that the group talk to other successful park developers.

Councillor Semple suggested that a working group should attend a neighbourhood panel meeting and persuade the Panel to fund a feasibility study.

Various other sites were also suggested. These included rear of Scouts Centre, Old Fire Station and Harris Park.

Councillor Watson expressed support for a skate park on Towers Lane subject to consultation with local residents.

Mr Hully stated that a lot of elderly residents lived near the Towers Lane site and that Harris Park was a better more central location.

Mrs Tucker stated that the skate park should be inclusive.

Sarah Stephens also asked if the Town Council would incorporate greater facilities for those with physical or sensory needs when considering future play park investment.

Councillor Burns informed Mrs Stephens that the refurbished play area at Bellbrigg included such equipment.

The Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 8.26 pm