

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING FOR TOCKWITH WITH WILSTROP PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on Wednesday 17th April 2013 in Tockwith Church

Present: Councillors; Mr N Waller (Chair),

In attendance: Mrs H Algar (Clerk to the Council),

12 members of the Public

Cllr Waller opened the meeting and thanked all for attending.

1. Minutes of the Last Annual Meeting

He asked the Clerk to explain that the format of this meeting in previous years had been incorrect and that in fact this meeting was for the community and not to perform part of the business that should be part of the Parish Councils Annual General Meeting.

Based on this information it was agreed that the minutes of the last Parish Meeting be reviewed at the Parish Council Annual General Meeting next month as it included reports from committees that Parish Councillors sat upon.

The Clerk also informed all that the Annual Parish meeting is a platform whereby a number of community groups can be invited to talk about the activities they have performed this year as well as an opportunity for any elector to be able to raise any issues. The community can then as a whole decide how they want to deal with those problems moving forward.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the 2012 Annual Parish Meeting be reviewed at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May 2013.

RESOLVED that next year an array of local groups will be invited to attend the Parish meeting to have an opportunity to update the community with what they have achieved this year.

2. Matters Arising

None

3. Report of the chairman covering the activities of the Parish Council followed by any questions.

The chairman of the Parish council gave a report which is attached to the minutes.

4. Public Questions None

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Tockwith with Wilstrop Parish Council Chairman’s Report 2012-2013

The Parish Council is the lowest tier of local government representing and promoting the interests and concerns of the community at a grass roots level. It has fewer duties than District and County Councils, but greater freedom to choose what action to take. It can play a vital role in representing the interests of the community and to improve its quality of life and the local environment. The Council has been granted powers by Parliament to raise money through taxation (the Precept) and a range of powers to spend this public money.

Councillors are elected by the local electorate unless 10 or fewer applicants apply and then they

are automatically Co-opted to the Council. Councillors receive no remuneration for their work although they are entitled to claim expenses for refreshments at meetings, travel, telephone costs etc. incurred in the course of their duties. In the past Tockwith with Wilstrop Parish Councillors have not generally claimed any such expenses but due to the increasing fuel costs and frequency of meetings, and the fact that training and consultative meetings now take place in more distant locations within the area, this position may not remain viable. In addition the Council employs a Clerk to carry out its business and to ensure that the many statutory requirements are met.

Shortly after the formation of the new Parish Council with several new councillors (at the start of a four year term of office), the Chairman Clive Saunders tendered his resignation in July due to him leaving the area and I was elected as Chairman. This came at an interesting time for the council, particularly in respect of the planning enforcement decisions made by the Government Planning Inspector the previous February. Regular meetings have been held with Bilton with Bickerton Parish Council, local residents and members of the Harrogate Borough Council to agree action plans to ensure the airfield operator complies with the Planning Inspector's findings. This has been a slow process and although some of the many thousands of tyres have been removed from the old airfield about 30,000 tyres remain and the Parish Council believes that Harrogate Borough Council should be considering enforcement action. Because of the lack of resources at Harrogate Borough Council the Parish Council has had to enlist the help of local residents to record activities on the old airfield to support any subsequent enforcement of planning breaches. We thank all those that have volunteered to record the information and sincerely hope that the Borough Council uses it to positive effect. The old airfield issues have taken up an inordinate amount of Parish Council business and expense for several years now and we share the frustration of many residents that not much appears to have been done. Sometimes the Borough Council Planning department appears to 'cherry pick' the matters they wish to pro actively act on which adds further to the frustration.

The Clerk is the engine of an effective Parish Council as she is its principal executive and adviser and is the Parish Council's only employee. The Clerk is the officer responsible for the administration of its financial affairs. The Clerk is required to give clear guidance to Councillors, including the Chair, before decisions are reached, even when that guidance may be unpalatable. The Clerk has a key role in advising the Councillors on governance, ethical and procedural matters. We are indebted to the hard work and efforts of Helen Algar in keeping us on the 'straight and narrow', for maintaining her professionalism at all times. Helen picked up the reins as the new Clerk to the Council in March last year after the retirement of the previous Clerk Gill Firth. Helen joined us at a critical time with the challenges that lie ahead - the Coalition Government's commitment to transfer power from Whitehall back to local communities and, as we all know, we are still facing a period of austerity.

Throughout the past year the Parish Council has been working very hard on your behalf. With such a diversity of expertise and depth of knowledge among your councillors, we are well able to deal with most of today's issues.

Sometimes people get frustrated that the cogs of the Parish Council seem to grind slowly and in some cases seemingly put obstacles in the way of progress! I would like to reassure you that Tockwith with Wilstrop Parish Council strives to help as much as we can within the processes that we are required to work within. There are particular regulations that have to be adhered to and unlike a limited company each Parish Councillor is personally liable if anything goes wrong. In order to get anything done efficiently it is best to understand the process and then to work through it accordingly. It not only makes life a little easier but also saves on the valium!

Communication with North Yorkshire County Council and the Highways Department has been frustrating at times. Flooding in the area of New Row in Marston Road Tockwith, Warfield Lane Cowthorpe and Wilstrop Crossing are matters which we have earnestly been trying to resolve. We continue to raise other concerns regarding road maintenance but it seems to be a department that specializes in minimal response and we regularly have to chase up replies. The

Parish Council listens to and puts forward the opinions and comments of local residents on a wide variety of matters. We live in a large parish. Planning Applications are sent for consideration and discussed by the Parish Council. The Council monitors all planning applications and comments where appropriate. It should be noted that the Council does not take any planning decisions. It is a statutory consultee to the Planning Authorities, who must take the Parish Council's view into account (but not necessarily accept it) when making their planning decisions.

The Council continues to maintain a working relationship with Harrogate Borough Council and North Yorkshire County Council. Our County Councillor and District Councillor John Savage attends when he can and usually reports when he cannot. We invite various representatives of those bodies who are also involved in various aspects of the Parish to attend as necessary. This last year for example we had talks by the Environment Agency, the Dog Warden Service, the Borough Council Emergency Planners and the local NHS regarding changes to mental health services to older people.

There are many other aspects of work of the Parish Council which is largely unseen. The Parish Council website is regularly updated and continues to be a useful source of information for residents and others seeking information about what the Parish Council are doing. There is also a monthly update of the Parish Council's activities in the Village and Parish News which is published by Tockwith Church. Presently meetings are held on the third Wednesday of every month excluding August and December starting at 7.30pm in Tockwith Church. Members of the public are most welcome to just come along to listen, to raise a subject or ask questions during "public participation", which is during the early part of every meeting. We endeavour to maintain a Parish Council that is both transparent and welcoming to any parishioner who has a need to raise an issue during Public Participation. Our aim is to represent peoples concerns fairly and without bias. It is difficult to appease everyone especially when there are very strong differences of opinion between members of the public but we do our best!

The Beat Manager for Marston Moor Ward PC Sue Brookes attends whenever she can and reports on crime in the area and gives advice on police initiatives. Thank you to her for the work she and her colleagues do. She has a large area to cover and we are extremely fortunate that we live in a low crime area. It is important however to report any crime to the police as it is the crime figures that decide on the allocation of police officers in the area. We have raised concerns about speeding in Tockwith and Cowthorpe. Monitoring has taken place in Tockwith and the findings indicate that although there was some speeding there were an insufficient average number speeding to warrant targeted enforcement.

Through the year the Parish Council is consulted on every planning application, and is invited to comment. The Parish Council have no power over the decisions reached by the Planning Authority at Harrogate Borough Council, but any comments that are made in the Parish are taken into consideration, along with letters received from members of the public. Occasionally, Councillors from HBC will visit a planning proposal in the village, particularly any that are contentious. However, the Parish Council is only classed as one voice and if a member of the public is concerned about any planning application they need to make their feelings known to the District Council. Matters appertaining to planning applications are often contentious and raise more public interest than most other issues with often vibrant expression from interested parties. The Council endeavours to maintain an objective view on all matters related to planning focussing on the property and its relationship to the immediate environment.

Each year the Parish Council asks for a sum of money, called a 'precept', which is added to the figures requested by the county council, the police, fire authority and is then collected through your council tax. This money is used by the Parish Council to improve facilities and services for local people and run the Council. We did not increase the Parish Precept last year. Once our budget is complete our accounts will be available for scrutiny. The Parish Council is well aware that we are still facing a period of austerity and it is essential that we continue to watch expenditure and ensure that we provide a cost effective service. The Parish Council occasionally receives requests from charities and other organisations for grants or donations. The Council's

resources are wholly derived from public funds and it has an obligation to ensure that any grant or donation made is generally in the interests of the Parish. We have granted a limited amount of money towards activities which the council considers "will bring direct benefit to the area, or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants". The Village Hall is owned by the Parish Council and is administered by the Village Hall Management Committee who are representatives from each of the groups or clubs that regularly use the facilities. I would like to thank each and every one of the volunteers for their support and efforts in maintaining this important focal point within the village community and in particular their Chairman Audrey Unsworth who despite all that is thrown at her remains forever the optimist. Westfield Green is maintained by the Parish Council for the benefit of the whole community and not just the residents of Westfield Green. The area does suffer from people indiscriminately discarding litter in the area which the Parish Council has to pay to clear up. We are very grateful to the village school children, and Marston Moor Scouts for organizing litter picks in the village every so often. If people could be more considerate then litter would not be such a big issue. Children and parents recently helped to resurface the footpath between Prince Rupert Drive and Southfield Lane with bark chippings but it has been disappointing that horse riders using this path have damaged it again. It needs be emphasized that this path is a footpath and not a bridle way. Dog fouling is a problem which causes great irritation to residents and we have had to enlist the help of the dog warden service to carry out enforcement in order to report irresponsible dog owners.

The Parish Council is currently in the middle of preparing a Community Resilience Plan. This is our own plan to deal with local emergencies. In the next few months we expect to hold a consultation meeting when we will talk through the draft plan and seek people to become actively involved in applying the plan should there be a need to implement it.

The Parish Council allotments are fully tenanted and enthusiastically tended by keen gardeners. Some plots have been reduced in size which has enabled the Council to reduce its waiting list. It is possible with further consultation that some more plots may be reduced in size to make more available. Being a Parish Councillor is more than turning up for one meeting a month – it is a commitment to work for the good of the Parish and that involves external meetings, coordination, leading, networking and at the end of the day getting the job done. It is not a soft touch. The past year has created new challenges for the Parish Council.

National budgets have been squeezed and local councils are facing a particularly difficult time. Whilst the Parish Council is not facing quite the same pressure to freeze its budget, the freezes at both district and county level are having an impact at parish level. As budgets are tightened then services currently provided are inevitably changed, and usually this has meant a reduction. The improvements we would wish to make to our highways are rarely acted on the basis of cost but relatively low cost matters like white lining, re-fixing and cleaning of road signs and general repairs to the street furniture also seem to take an age to put right. The passing of Localism Act means more decision making will be devolved to a local level. A new general power of 'competence' has been granted to Parish Councils giving us more freedom in how we spend money. A new Local Development Plan is currently being debated at HBC that will determine housing in the district over the next few years. The Localism Act encourages villages to develop its own Village Plan but this is very costly averaging £17,000 per village. This is not the sort of money this Parish Council has to spend. We are hopeful that a HBC Local Development Plan will, after consultation meet the community's needs and it will not be necessary to consider the expense of drawing up our own plan.

I am grateful for the support and expert guidance of fellow councillors, who give their time willingly and freely, to help with the development of community projects in order to improve elements of the Parish. We have a total of six new Parish Councillors and all have dealt admirably with the new challenges that the role has brought. We still have a vacancy for one parish councillor in Tockwith so if it is something that you could be interested then please do contact the Clerk. And lastly, a big thank you to all the organizations and individuals who make village life more enjoyable and community orientated and ask everyone to remember that the people who make things happen are all volunteers and need your continued support. Please feel

free to attend any of our council meetings.

Norman Waller Chairman Tockwith with Wilstrop Parish Council