

## **Minutes of the Annual Assembly of Rothbury Parish held on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014 commencing 7pm in All Saints Church, Rothbury**

**Those Present:** M Gilson (Chairman Rothbury PC), S Bridgett, J Reynolds, H Walklett, C Roberts, C Dawson, H Edes (Rothbury Parish Council), approximately 80 members of the public

**1/14 Apologies for Absence** B Hesler (Rothbury Parish Council)

### **2/14 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held 8<sup>th</sup> May 2013 were read out by Cllr Gilson and agreed as a true record.

### **3/14 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

A suggestion for the future by T Kell was the issue of the Annual Assembly minutes immediately after the meeting, and not waiting until before the next Assembly, which is custom and practice. It was agreed this would happen in future.

### **4/14 Chairman's Report**

Cllr Gilson read out his Chairman's Report 2013/2014. A copy of the report is attached.

### **5/14 Public Participation**

Isabel Wilson asked for additional information on the complaints received. M Gilson explained as recently as four hours prior to this meeting a further email had been received from the MOP solicitor, and it should be understood there are legal issues and at some stage the PC will need to employ a solicitor, thereby diverting funds from the precept. Rosemary Croton asked does the member of the public believe RPC is acting illegally, or have they a hidden agenda. The PC do not know the answer to this question, but there is a belief RPC had acted illegally, although the PC themselves do not believe this. Doug Metcalfe stated the persistent complainant was present tonight and named the person as T Kell and asked why he was pursuing the council. T Kell quoted the 2012 RPC BDO audit report and he is attempting to progress a PC which had not taken account of the changes in law that had come in over the past 20 years or so, and wished to see a PC who applied due diligence, his belief being there is a need for more transparency, with a particular recent item being the precept rise and his perceived notion of the lack of a budget. A Kell was given his first verbal warning for disruption. Mr Branson, a resident of Rothbury for 5 years, a former city cllr and ex leader of Hull Council stated there had clearly been problems over the last two years in terms of corporate governance, there are always budgetary problems and it is not always easy for PC's to disseminate information and keep residents up to date with procedures in the manner some residents may wish, and those residents who are interested do have the right for access to information. He was fairly certain every person in the audience tonight would be delighted if the PC could give categorical assurance in terms of Corporate Governance they are up-to-date where there had been issues. M Gilson responded stating not one single member of RPC wished to act in an underhand manner with public money, they are there to do their best for Rothbury, all governance issues are settled, and there is a great deal of knowledge and an awful lot of effort being put into this, and spiteful innuendo is not helpful. Nicola Crane spoke stating she had always supported the PC, and wished to say they are transparent, and with T Kells supposed expertise and knowledge would it not be more helpful to use that knowledge rather than slaughter the PC, wasting taxpayers money. Mrs Kell replied all her husband was trying to do was help. T Kell then informed the assembly he had a background in governance, the PC is a board of directors that answer to the public, and he had offered a book on local government administration and membership of a web-site with PC expertise. Stephen Bridgett spoke - as a member of RPC since 2011, with the aim to improve the community and lives of residents, but no longer wished to do this, along with other members of RPC, as he had felt under pressure and bombarded over the last 18 months. The PC had continually tried to work within reason, ultimately if there is an issue with the PC, if they have acted untoward it is a judge who will determine that based on reason, and the PC is certain they had acted reasonably. Over the last two year RPC had continually strived to improve its governance procedures, improve practices and ways to operate, and now had governance procedures on the same par as larger town councils, however these are not practicable for smaller PC's with the amount of work, effort and cost to put onto the taxpayer of a small population. RPC had continually acted within reason, attempting to improve and enhance the lives of residents, however due to the ongoing situation the services had been left by the wayside and it was becoming increasingly difficult to operate effectively, and the only way to see an end to this is if it comes before a judge. T Kell then caused a disturbance and was given his second verbal warning. Sarah Bertram asked how many

persons had looked at the minutes on the web-site and on display stating it is up to parishioners to ask for the information they require. A parishioner then asked for other business to be discussed.

Neil Ingham wished to raise the issue of 1560 trees planted to the west of Whitton View, South of allotments and two old police houses, presumably put forward by the developer of Whitton View, yet no households in the area were informed or advised of the planting of these trees. They had potential to grow extremely tall and would affect allotment holders. Residents were not happy and had approached Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Estates. It was understood there was a 5 year maintenance plan by Northumberland Estates then they would become the responsibility of RPC. Stephen Bridgett replied tree planting was part of the initial planning application and members of the public had the right to comment at that time and maintenance will be up to Northumberland Estates, however he would look into the matter and if need be request the trees are removed.

Bob Costello asked about the council tax precept rise. Jeff Reynolds reported the budget had been rewritten on a monthly basis and passed a copy of Draft 4 to Bob Costello. The previous year end figures for 2013/14 were included and planned figures for 2014/15. Every December/January the precept is set, and budget copies had been available to all members of the public in attendance at the January 2014 meeting.

Joan Kirk reported problems with trees on Hillside East on land belonging to Cragside Estates which had taken 16 months, the area now being absolutely lethal, and could foresee an accident. M Gilson said he would contact the relevant bodies.

Robin Murray made a point regarding finance, stating all payments authorised at RPC meetings are reported in the minutes and could be viewed on a monthly basis on the RPC web-site.

Clive Wilkinson asked with the increasing population of Rothbury to what extent would this bring increased revenue to offset increased expenditure. An informal meeting had been held with NCC regarding housing increases, but the honest answer being it is not known. The only proposed development at the current time is 55 homes, Whitton View Phase Two, which had not been unanimously agreed by committee, however an initial proposal for Coquetdale in the draft Local Development Framework was an increase of 380 homes throughout Coquetdale but homes built since 2011 were not taken into account, or the 55 mentioned above. However this is not a final figure and it was hoped it would be revised downwards.

Mrs Kell had a query from somebody who could not be present regarding traceability of budgets and expenditure, and could budget figures be passed to this person. Mark Gilson asked Mrs Kell to confirm if the person were a parishioner, which she did so, and he would ensure they received a copy of the budget.

A Kell wished to speak again and said much had been made of his complaints and as a result of these and comments in the 2012 RPC external audit report the PC had put in a number of procedures but in his opinion there is now a need for movement in realigning procedures, and he would like to see the use of a complaints procedure. The second point he raised was with regards to the individual who decided to name him, Doug Metcalfe, who had responsibility for RPC internal audit and who, in his opinion, must carry out due diligence with an assessment of governance and finance. A Kell's third point regarded issues which had been discussed with NCC Elections Officer regarding Councillors register of interests and expenses, and he suggested the returns be checked to ensure they are in order. His fourth point was he wished to see the 2012/2013 external audit report placed on the noticeboard. His fifth point being who is the keeper of the parish records for those who wish to investigate the history of the parish. He also recommended an account summary at the end of each year without people having to ask for it, committee structures should be advertised on the board, and in his belief committees were not currently open to the public.

Stephen Bridgett believed RPC had broken an election law by allowing a platform for A Kell to talk about his Parish Council manifesto. Mark Gilson to contact Mick Miller, NCC Elections Officer explaining the situation and if action would be taken, however as Chairman of Rothbury Parish Council he would take full responsibility for the matter.

Shelia Gregory commented the Parish Council had always been helpful with the dealings she and her late husband had had with them over the years, and trust is more important than paraphernalia.

Robin Murray would like to see the village behind the pipe band to celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> year of creation with an event to show appreciation for the band. This would be put onto the next agenda of Rothbury Parish Council.

**6/16 Any Other Business**

There was no other business.