

# ROTHBURY PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2024 commencing at 7pm in the Dovecote Room Jubilee Institute**

**Those Present:** Cllr Colquitt (Chairman), Cllr Devlin, Cllr Mrs Dawson, Cllr Sutton, Cllr Old, Cllr Mrs Arkle, Cllr Milne,

**In Attendance:** C Miller (Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer), D Nicholson (Support and Development Officer), two members of the public,

Jane Davis (Rothbury W.I.) Jamie Day (Thirston Parish Council/Felton CAN), Julia Chambers (Warkworth W.I, Warkworth Green) (members of CRAG)

**RPC/217/24                      Apologies for absence**

Cllr Gordon

**RPC/218/24                      Declaration of Members Interests**

Cllr Mrs Dawson declared an interest in CRAG. Cllr Mrs Arkle declared an interest in planning application 24/03573/FUL: Antons Leap – two storey extension to front, garage extension, new roof, cladding to walls, new windows and doors.

**RPC/219/24                      Chairman's Opening Remark(s) (for information)**

Chairman welcomed those present to the meeting and reminded all to be constructive, respectful and on topic.

**RPC/220/24                      Meeting with Coquet River Action Group**

Members of Coquet River Action Group carried out a presentation.

The organisation comprised of 60 plus volunteers involved in carrying out water quality testing on the River Coquet in several areas. CRAG advised Environment Agency testing had fallen by two thirds in the past 20 years. Data collected by CRAG is used in a positive way, they are not a pressure group. The group additionally carry out invasive weed surveying, with a removal strategy in conjunction with Northumberland Rivers Trust. Ecoli testing is carried out on five sites to support bathing water applications. The group have support from the Environment Agency, Northumbria Water, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Rivers Trust and Natural England. Parish Councils are to be formally invited to be involved in CRAG. Foxton Burn is currently the only burn in Coquetdale considered poor quality, with investigation planned to understand this. In general terms, the quality of the river Coquet is good. Data had been collected from the Rothbury gasworks site during 2024, with temperature, PH, electro-conductivity, ammonia and phosphate and permanganate (oxygen demand) measured. During high rainfall there is more ammonia, phosphate and higher oxygen demand, which means more organisms in the water. This suggests greater sewage and fertiliser from farmers fields when it rains. Overflows had occurred at Rothbury STP. There were septic tanks in the parish not connected to sewerage mains and therefore not managed by Northumbrian Water. This potential outflow was not being monitored. The group were to carry out ecoli testing in an attempt to clarify if this were a contributor to pollution, and whether warning signs for bathers were required. CRAG were concerned with three invasive species, Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam, considered large plants which grow rapidly, overshadow others, kill off native vegetation and wash away easily. CRAG ask for intervention via the Environment Agency, and aim to work with outside organisations.

CRAG representatives thanked for attending and left the meeting.

**RPC/221/24**

**Approval of Minutes of previous meeting held 9<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

**RESOLVED:**

Members agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held 9<sup>th</sup> October 2024 were a true record.

**RPC/222/24**

**Garden/village maintenance and related issues**

**RPC/222/24/01**

**Monthly gardening report. Members are asked to consider report and issues arising**

County Council had requested additional litter bin at Cow Haugh.

**RESOLVED:**

1. Members agreed to purchase an additional litter bin for Cow Haugh park.
2. Members agreed to thank the village gardeners for the tidying works carried out prior to and after Remembrance Day.

**RPC/222/24/02**

**Waste bin at Ladies Bridge. Members to receive update from County Cllr in relation to possibility of County Council emptying a bin in the area**

Clerk advised that Bob Hodgson County Council would not support a bin in this location due to health and safety issues for operatives.

**RESOLVED:**

1. Members agreed to remove the item from the agenda.
2. Signage to indicate the nearest waste bin to Ladies Bridge to be considered by Traffic Management, Public Signage and information Boards Working Group.
3. Clerk to inform Whitton & Tosson resident who originally requested the bin, of the above.

**RPC/222/24/03**

**Bike Track. Members to receive update on non-urgent repairs.**

Clerk advised non-urgent repairs had been carried out, with the surfacing much improved. Repairs should last a couple of years. The railings were now removable to assist with future maintenance.

**RPC/223/24**

**Planning**

**RPC/223/24/01**

**Members to consider the following Planning Applications received as follows:**

- 24/03510/FELTPO: Moorside – Tree Preservation Order application: Removal of T7 (Silver Birch), T9 (Douglas Fir), T10 (Western Red Cedar) and TG1, (6 No Western Red Cedar and Holly, due to irreparable storm damage and neighbouring tree failures – no objections
- 24/03573/FUL: Antons Leap – two storey extension to front, garage extension, new roof, cladding to walls, new windows and doors – no objections

**RPC/223/24/02**

**Members to note Approval of Planning Application received as follows:**

- 24/02753/LBC: Lloyds Bank House, High Street – Listed Building consent for internal, external repair and maintenance of building with minor internal alterations
- 24/02790/FELTPO: Antons Dell, Hillside – Tree Preservation Order.
- 24/02847/FUL: 7 Model Buildings – rear second-storey extension above existing flat roofed off-shoot to accommodate sun room .
- 24/02005/FUL: Land North of Burnfoot Cottage, Cragside – replacement septic tank with new treatment plant

**RPC/223/24/03**      **Members to consider additional information received relating to the following application:**

- 24/02785/FUL, 4 Walby Hill – Change of use from C2 (care home) to Sui Generis (6 bedroom holiday let).

Clerk advised a Parish Council can object to a planning application and as long as they provide bona fide planning reasons, the application will be referred to the Director of Planning and Chair/Vice Chair of the North Northumberland Local Area Council who will decide whether or not the application should be reported to committee.

CLr Devlin advised planning advice for community groups is available via organisation Planning Aid which runs out of Newcastle University.

**RESOLVED:**

Clerk to pass details of Planning Aid to Walby Hill residents.

**RPC/223/24/04**      **Notice of Planning Application withdrawn**

- 24/02891/FUL: Sandaig, Hillside – Rear extension and raising roof of bungalow to create one and a half storey dwelling. Conversion of garage to create home office.

**RPC/223/24/05**      **Coquetdale Neighbourhood Plan. Members to receive update.**

Various difficulties had been encountered in defining the area. All parishes involved need to share boundaries, however there is a gap between the East and West. There is a possibility of forming two distinct Neighbourhood Plan areas to work closely together, and possibly share a consultant.

**RESOLVED:**

Members agreed two distinct Neighbourhood Plan areas should be formed.

**RPC/224/24**      **Finance**

**RPC/224/24/01**      **Virement of funds, Cost Centre 200. Members are asked to approve the transfer of funds of £1500 from Unforeseen budget (4290) to Church clock budget (4115), to cover cost of new drive motor, repairs to relay on auto restart unit and hammer**

**RESOLVED:**

Members approved the virement of funds.

**RPC/224/24/02**      **NJC Pay scales. Members to note pay increase of £1290/annum (full-time hours), payable from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024**

Members noted the NJC pay scale increase from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

**RPC/224/24/03**      **Payments. Members are asked to approve the following payments. Chairman is asked to consider and sign the approved schedule against payments to be made.**

PARISH COUNCIL BANK ACCOUNT				
PAYABLE TO	DETAILS	AMOUNT (GROSS)	NETT	VAT
Tarmac Trading Ltd (retrospective)	Gravel, bike track	£488.40	£407.00	£81.40

UCCT	September shoppers bus October shoppers bus	£64.00 £64.00		NIL
Employee	Salary	£1270.02		NIL
Nest	Pension, 2/12/24	£124.18		NIL
M Evens	October village and bike track maintenance	£2677		NIL
Jubilee Institute	Staffing Committee meetings September 2024	£27.00		NIL
Northumberland Association of Local Councils	New Cllr Training – 15/10/24 S Goron	£30.00		NIL
Jubilee Institute	Rent of Blaeberry Room 7/10/24 to 31/12/24	£346.00		NIL
Pete Laing	Bike track maintenance	£806.40	£672.00	£134.00
<b>BURIAL BANK ACCOUNT</b>	<b>DETAILS</b>	<b>AMOUNT (GROSS)</b>	<b>NETT</b>	<b>VAT</b>
Scarpa	Removal of wasps nest, cemetery lodge	£70.20	£58.50	£11.70
Employees	Salary	£2493.53		NIL
Nest	Pension, 2/12/24	£227.62		NIL
M Evens	October maintenance, Whitton Bank cemetery	£848.00		NIL
NE Fire Ltd	Fire extinguisher service	£70.80	£59.00	£11.80
T W Alderson	Replacement rake	£18.95	£15.79	£3.16

**RESOLVED:**

Members approved the payments.

**RPC/224/24/04**

**The following payments have been made as per Financial Standing Order 5.6: Continuing Contracts and Obligations. Members to note payments. Chairman is asked to consider and sign the approved schedule against payments made.**

<b>CEMETERY BANK ACCOUNT</b>	<b>DETAILS</b>	<b>AMOUNT (GROSS)</b>	<b>NETT</b>	<b>VAT</b>
HMRC	Quarterly PAYE	£773.49		NIL
Spar, Shell	Fuel	£70.89	£59.08	£11.81
Lanes Group	Cemetery drainage survey	£2364	£394	£1970
<b>PARISH BANK ACCOUNT</b>				
HMRC	Quarterly PAYE	£632.85		NIL
Easy Hire	Plant hire, bike track	£395.88	£329.90	£65.98
<b>UNITY BANK ACCOUNT</b>	Monthly bank charges	£5.40		NIL

Members noted the payments.

**RPC/224/24/05 Dedicated Parish Council office.**

**1.Members are asked to consider contract for Blaeberry Room, Jubilee Institute.**

**RESOLVED:**

Members approved the contract. Clerk to sign paperwork and forward to Jubilee Hall Committee.

**2.Members are asked to consider office protocol**

Clerk had drafted protocol as follows. The office is for the sole use of Rothbury Parish Council and business pertaining to Rothbury Parish Council. The Clerk will be the keyholder and maintain records of use.

**RESOLVED**

Members adopted the office protocol

**3.Members are asked to consider acquiring office furniture**

**RESOLVED:**

1.Members agreed to obtain surplus furniture available via Support & Development Officer, Clerk to visit office.

2.Members to consider purchase of filing cabinet and safe at a future date.

**RPC/224/24/06 Cemetery Shed. Members are asked to consider quotation(s) for concrete base.**

Three quotations had been received for the works.

**RESOLVED:**

Members resolved to accept the quotation from Lee Charleton, Tree & Building Services, at the cost of £2150 plus VAT.

**RPC/224/24/07 Rothbury Wrestling Academy. Members are asked to consider community grant application received, under the Local Government Act 1972, The Free Resource, Section 137**

Further information received from Rothbury Wrestling Academy considered. 15 members reside within Rothbury Parish. The group confirmed they had forwarded grant requests to other parish councils whose resident(s) were members.

**RESOLVED:**

Members agreed to grant a sum of £1400.

**RPC/224/24/08 Budget and precept requirements 2025-2026. Members are asked to consider first draft of 2025-2026 requirements and projected receipts and payments year ending 2024-2025**

Members considered the first draft of 2025-2026 requirements and projected receipts and payments year ending 2024-2025. Details for all virements of funds during 2024 to be considered at January 2025 meeting.

**RPC/224/24/09 13<sup>th</sup> Edition Local Council Administration. Members are asked to consider purchase of publication at a cost of £142.40 plus VAT via the Society of Local Council Clerks**

**RESOLVED:**

Members agreed to purchase the 13th Edition Local Council Administration at a cost of £142.40 plus VAT.

**RPC/225/24 Parish Council Governance Review. Members to receive update**

Support & Development Officer thanked all for attending the first governance review session held 31/12/24. Next session to be held 18/11/24 630pm, Cheviot Room Jubilee Institute. Once all three sessions were completed, Clerk and S&DO to re-draft Council policies, ensuring a form of words is brought back to Council to reflect what has been said.

**RPC/225/24/01 .gov email addresses. Members are asked to consider report from Cllr Devin regarding introduction of Parish Council and Parish Councillor .gov email addresses.**

It is inevitable at some point .gov. email addresses will become a compulsory matter for many reasons such as confidentiality, unintended data processing, data accuracy and retention challenges, security concerns, accountability and GDPR compliance. Transitioning to gov.uk email addresses aligns with the guidance of both the ICO and JPAG

There could be initial difficulties in accessing email via APPS, which will require browser use.

**RESOLVED:**

1.Members agreed to give delegation to the Clerk and Vice Chairman to produce a report on the process for discussion at next meeting.

**RPC/225/24/02 Parish Council Biodiversity Policy. Members to be advised informal group to meet 27/11/24**  
Informal group to meet 27/11/24.

**RPC/226/24 County Councillor update. Members to receive update.**  
County Councillor not present.

**RPC/227/24 Borderlands Place Programme. Members to receive update.**  
No progression since last month.

**RPC/228/24 Telegraph Lines Village green. Members to receive update on objection submitted to Openreach Pole Objection Team.**

Openreach have advised Pole 1 had been on the village green for some time and merely been replaced with a new pole, therefore they would not look to remove this. Pole 2 is a Fibre Fusion structure and they would have to be contacted. Clerk advised this is contrary to what Fibre Fusion advised August 2024 - that objections had to be made to Openreach. Clerk had subsequently recontacted Fibre Fusion with response awaited.

**RPC/229/24 External Audit year ending 31/3/24.**

S&DO advised seven points had been flagged in the external audit report, none of an extreme or serious nature.

**1.The Council should hold a register of interests and use this to verify if there are any potential conflicts of interests for Councillors.** To be formally considered during governance review. S&DO advised it is for the individual Councillor to decide whether to declare an interest. In the case of contractors, this is difficult to manage in a small parish.

**2.Email management, gov.uk email addresses. Cllrs must have generic email address for official council correspondence.**  
Discussed earlier.

**3.Accessibility regulations. Council to make clear on website that the Annual Governance and Accounting Return is a scan and will not be fully compliant with the Accessibility Regulations.**  
Comments noted.

**4.The Council should ensure that they comply with the exact 30 days working days for the public to inspect the accounts.**  
Comments noted.

**5.The Council should provide explanations to the external auditor if answering NO to assertions on the Annual Governance and Accounting Return.**

An accompanying letter is required to be included if answering NO to assertions.

**6.Consultant fees had initially been included in box 4 (staff costs), rather than box 6 (other payment).**

AGAR had been amended to include consultant costs in box 6.

**7.Councillors should receive training in the Code of Conduct on an annual basis, and any training provided to be evidenced in a training register.**

To be included within Governance Review.

**RESOLVED:**

All points included in the external audit report were accepted, to be actioned in the future, or monitored regularly.

**RPC/230/24 Internal Auditor engagement year ending 31/3/25. Members are asked to consider applications.**

The Council Development and Support Officer was asked to detail the process employed to identify an internal auditor for 2024/2025. The CDSO confirmed:

1. Invitations were sought by general advert on the Parish Council website.
2. An expression of interest was sought from Safia Kauser ( IA 2023/24), on 10/10/24 by email, and received from a further 2 auditors, based in Northumberland, with each being sent a formal invitation to apply.
3. Candidate A, Safia Kauser, did not progress an application, candidate B indicated the application could not be progressed due to a lack of capacity for this current financial year.
4. One application (Candidate C) had been received and brought to the meeting. Candidate C had completed technical evaluation and is commended for consideration

The CDSO stressed the importance of independent internal audit as an essential element in the legal framework required by statute, and as a requisite to build a robust council able to demonstrate its fitness to manage public resources.

The CDSO considered that in his view an internal auditor would need to demonstrate:

- Experience of internal audit in town and parish councils.
- Experience as a Parish clerk, Responsible Finance Officer, preferably within the rural council environment.
- Practical knowledge of working in partnership, with the principal authority and other key community partners, and the role of the 'accountable' body.
- Thorough understanding of the practices expressed in the local council Practitioners' Guide, and of the regulations applying to burial committees.
- The role of Members and Officers in local councils, particularly in relation to the audit process and the development of internal controls.
- The role of the auditor (external and internal) in relation to legislation and general governance to be reviewed when conducting a comprehensive examination and test of council's practices, and of AGAR.
- A thorough understanding of the processes and procedures underpinning finance for local authorities, including burial committees.
- A proper understanding of legislation and best practice to be reviewed when conducting a comprehensive examination and test of the Council as an employer.

When questioned whether these were mandatory requirements, the CDSO stated they can be considered essential as RPC recognises the contribution IA can make to performance improvement and management. The Chairman expressed concern that this was something that had not been discussed with him as Chairman. The CDSO advised that the Chairman had been

invited to attend a briefing on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November (in an email dated 4/11/24) and had not attended. Following the briefing the Chairman was asked (in a telephone message left by the CDSO on 11/11/24) to contact the Clerk or CDSO should there be any matters on the agenda he wished to discuss. No response was received.

Following discussion of the above, D Nicholson verbally resigned as the Parish Council Support and Development Officer.

As it was 9pm Chairman advised Standing Orders were suspended.

**RESOLVED:**

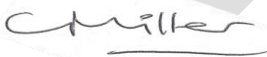
Members agreed to engage applicant C, at the rate of £30/hour.

It is anticipated the audit will take no longer than 25 hours at a maximum cost of £750.

As some members had other commitments, the Chairman terminated the meeting at 915pm.

The following matters were deferred until the next meeting.

- RPC/231/24                    Drainage Survey, Whitton Bank Cemetery. Members to consider report and matters arising.**
- RPC/232/24                    Northumberland County Council, free tree scheme. Members to be advised of scheme.**
- RPC/233/24                    Future Remembrance Day arrangements. Members to consider future planning arrangements for the event.**
- RPC/234/24                    The Parish Clerk will confirm with members that all staff appraisals have now been completed**
- RPC/235/24                    To receive urgent items/items for next Meeting**
- RPC/236/24                    Date of next meeting**



Claire Miller, Claire/RFO

The meeting closed at 915pm