

BRANXTON PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Council website: www.branxtonparishcouncil.org

**Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 9th April 2024
In Branxton Village Hall at 7pm.**

PRESENT: Chairman N Wood
Parish Councillors A Darbyshire, A Miller, I Ainslie (from Min 656)
& J Straughan (from Min 656)
County Councillor M Mather
Clerk I Hunter
6 members of the public
Police Officers: Curtis Ritchie & Dan Perry

New Parish Councillor: Alan Miller signed a Declaration of Acceptance form and joined the Parish Council at that point.

Apologies for Absence: None

Declaration of Interest: None

Request for Dispensation: None

Minutes of the Meeting: The previously circulated Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 5th December 2023 were agreed as a true record. The Chairman signed a hard copy.

Any urgent matters arising from the minutes if not already on the agenda-

Min 656- Parish Council vacancies

- Parish Councillors noted the resignation of Parish Councillor S Rudge.
- Parish Councillors noted the display of the vacancy notice.
- Parish Councillors considered the written requests received Ian Ainslie & John Straughan for the 2 vacancies for Parish Councillors.
- Parish Councillors agreed to co-opt Ian Ainslie & John Straughan to fill the remaining 2 Parish Councillor vacancies.
- Ian Ainslie & John Straughan each signed a Declaration of Acceptance form and join the Parish Council at that point.

Min 657- Community Police – Police Officers: Curtis Ritchie & Dan Perry provided the following update:

No crime in the Branxton parish since the last meeting. Always good to report that being the case especially in isolated rural areas.

There was a report of poaching in February in the area but there's been no other reports since. Always advise if you suspect anyone of taking part in poaching or other rural offences to contact us via the appropriate means.

Engagement wise I believe my colleague has been out doing community speed watch recently in the area and this will continue to happen when and where we can.

There was a debate on local policing issues etc.

Police Officers: Curtis Ritchie & Dan Perry left the meeting at that point.

Min 658- County Councillor report- County Councillor M Mather provided the following updates:

- **Bus Service-** There will be a new bus service running twice a day for 5-days per week from Cornhill to Newcastle via Morpeth, this will allow people to travel to work in Newcastle or for Further Education in either, Ashington, Kirkley Hall or Newcastle. The first bus will arrive in Newcastle by 8.35am and the return service will leave Newcastle at 5pm. There will also be an additional bus service from Wooler to Newcastle and back which will be in between the 2 Cornhill to Newcastle Services as there is insufficient time to have 3 full services within the day.
- **Planning training-** Northumberland County Council Planning Officer will deliver planning training including Enforcement for Parish Councillors in Wooler (venue to be confirmed) on 19th June 6-8pm please consider attending.
- **Robbie Moore Minister for Defra-** I have met with the Minister recently and he is positive about future investment as well as employment etc for farming.
- **Highways-** Please report potholes, highway signage issues, right of ways issues and many other local issues on Northumberland County Council's Fix my street, and if there is no action, please update the Parish Council and/or myself as County Councillor with the issue including the Fix my street report Reference No and we will follow up the issue. Northumberland County Council prioritise the filling of potholes on A roads, however, Northumberland County Council have an additional highway's team who are working on rural U & C Roads.
There will be £11m spent on cleaning out gullies across the county via an organised programme in the next 2 years, however, not all the flooding is caused by blocked gullies or is the fault of Northumberland County Council. We are in the process of compiling a document which should be available by the end of May explaining who it responsible for what covering, trees, flooding etc.
There will be an additional £4.5m spent in 2024/25 on repairs to rural U & C roads. We are still awaiting a feedback report on the 2023/24 £500,000 trial on cutting & patching potholes, this is due to be presented to Scrutiny Committee in May. It will be dependant on the costs involved if this format continues and is rolled out.
He reminded the meeting that there are no tar plants in Northumberland therefore all the tar used on Northumberland roads has to come from Newcastle, however, we are looking to improve the facilities at Powburn which will help improve the pothole filling as there will be less miles involved to access tar.
Northumberland County Council Highways Officers continue to build up the data file on the road conditions of all roads which Northumberland County Council are responsible for.
- **Leisure-** Active Northumberland have been an excellent partner to Northumberland County Council in running all the county's Leisure Centres. However, the contract has been retendered and Place Leisure were successful in gaining the contract. Place Leisure would like to extend the leisure provision into the rural communities.

- **Log bank-** We are looking for a new storage home for the log bank, the Fire & Rescue Service will continue to make the deliveries.
- **Communities Together-** When residents contact the officers requesting help from the log bank, the officers will check to see if that resident has other needs and are accessing all available support.
- **Training-** Wooler Parish Council are working with NALC to hold a training day in Wooler.

Min 659- Financial Statement-

- Bank Balance £1056.42 Includes £291.88 for defibrillator.

Min 660- Accounts for Payment –

- E I Hunter £ 61.75 Expenses (£61 annual website fees)
- Northumberland CC £450.00 By-election costs.
Parish Councillors agreed to defer the payment to Northumberland County Council until the Parish Council can obtain additional funding to cover the 2024/25 Parish Council running costs.

Min 661- Finance Update- The Clerk provided a verbal update on the Parish Council’s current financial position referring to the previously circulated report:

- The Parish Council will not receive a precept in 2024/25.
- The Parish Council does not have sufficient funding to pay the 2024/25 accounts. There are 2 options available to the Parish Council
 - 1-The Parish Council accepts a £1300 loan from Northumberland County Council which will need to be repaid in 2025/26 via an increase in precept which will be added to the Council Tax account for residential properties within Branxton Parish in 2025/26. The precept charge per property in 2025/26 will be the Parish Council’s request, the £1300 loan + 6.56% interest which will be charged by Northumberland County Council for supplying the loan.
 - 2-The Parish Council delivers a letter to each residential property in Branxton Parish asking residents to consider making an anonymous donation to the Parish Council to the level of precept that they would have been charged in 2024/25.
- Parish Councillors debated the options and agreed the following:
 - 1- Accept option 2 and issue a letter to each property in the Parish, however, if there is a shortfall of the £1300 required to cover the Parish Council accounts in 2024/25, the Parish Council accept a loan from Northumberland County Council for the difference.
 - 2- The Clerk contacts Northumberland County Council to ask if the Parish Council can start the loan process, stating it may be either reduced or not required depending on the level of donations received.
 - 3- The Clerk drafts a letter for Parish Councillors to approve ahead of distribution.

1 member of the public left at that point

Min 662- Annual Audit 2023/24

- Parish Councillors agreed the appointment of Mr E Rathbone as the Internal Auditor for the Parish Council accounts for year end 2023/24.

- Parish Councillors undertook the Annual review of the Asset Register and agreed it was up to date.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

Min 663- King Charles 111 portrait- The Clerk advised the meeting that the Parish Council had received a free portrait of King Charles 111, and asked Parish Councillors where they would like to display the portrait.

Parish Councillors agreed to offer the portrait to Branxton Village Hall Committee as this would allow it to be displayed in the Village Hall.

A member of the public who is also a member of Branxton Village Hall Committee agreed to take the Parish Council's request to the next Village Hall Committee meeting.

Min 664- Public Question Time- A member of the public asked: What funding events have the Parish Council undertaken.

The Chairman replied that the Parish Council organised a fundraising event in 2023 to raise funds for the maintenance of the defibrillator, which included a First Aid course. He concluded by saying the Parish Council will organise fundraising events if there are specific projects requiring funding.

Date of the Annual Parish & Annual Parish Council meetings 14th May 2024

Meeting closed at 8 p.m.

Chairman_____