

Broomhaugh & Riding Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 30th April 2009 at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall, Millfield Road.

Present: Cllrs. Tulip, Stephenson, Reid, Eakins, Mills and Dunhill were present. Also present were Cllr. Dale, one member of the press and 7 members of the public.

1. Apologies were received from Cllrs Heslop and Williams, Mrs Jen Stephenson and Mrs A Lawrence.

2. Minutes of last year's annual Parish Meeting were agreed as a true record.

3. The Chairman's report is as follows:

The majority of your Councillors have now served for just over a year. In October John Eakins joined the team bringing the number of Councillors to eight.

A variety of items arise some of importance others rather more routine and mundane. I shall give a brief overview of the year.

- 20 planning applications were received and processed

- At the beginning of the year concern was expressed at the condition of some trees in Marchbanks Wood including a fallen tree in the Marchburn. The fact that some of the weir stones had been displaced was also brought to our attention. However, following inspection by the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission we were advised to 'leave nature alone'. Minor repair works to the deck and handrail of the timber bridge have been carried out.

- The play area has not only had its weekly inspection by one of the Councillors but also the annual check by ROSPA. Minor repairs have been carried out including replacing some of the boundary fence. A new seat has been installed- kindly donated in memory of Andrew Pusey.

- After much lobbying the closure of Dipton Foot Bridge for ten weeks was averted – the installation of a temporary one way system, traffic light controlled, resulted in only minor delays.

- A proposal to make the Nick into a BOAT – byway open to all traffic was amended and is now classed as a Restricted Byway.

- The Council agreed to pay the cost of hiring the Supper Room to assist our local Police Constable holding monthly public interest meetings.

- We are grateful to County Councillor Anne Dale for financial assistance to enable a new street light to be provided on the footpath between the station and Broomhaugh. Two new mirrors have been acquired to assist in road safety. Both on the A695 one will replace the old mirror at Hollin Hill Terrace the other at the exit road from the Wentworth Nursing Home.

- A 'housekeeping' item has been improved. In financial matters your council took the view that more information should be made available to the public. Many of you may have noticed that since May 2008 a monthly sheet is posted listing all incoming receipts and detailing all cheques going out. The information you have for this meeting is taken from those monthly sheets.

- We have created a number of working groups to consider how the council deals with various issues. On finance we are currently considering how we can monitor the budget more effectively and hope to have an improved system implemented by the autumn. Another group has been looking again at the council's policy on Covenants. Work on this however had to be held in abeyance pending the Audit Commission's decision on a complaint made by a member of the public regarding monies received for release of a covenant in the 2006/07 accounts. As

that decision was sent out on the 10 March this year and the complainant then released the information to the Hexham Courant I shall deal with this matter now. I must, however, state that the Council at the May meeting will have to consider whether to accept the Audit Commissions recommendations and of course there may be a wish to Appeal the decision. Notwithstanding the above, as, according to the Courant, the complainant was 'jubilant' at the decision, it is important we clarify both the complaint and the decision. The objector considered that a transaction in the Council's accounts was illegal. This concerned an amount of £9000 and solicitors fees, relating to the release of a covenant, included in the Council's accounts for 2006/7.

The objector asked that the Audit Commissioner –
- write a public interest report under section 8 of the Audit Commission Act 1998.
and / or
- ask the courts for a declaration, under section 17 of the Act.

The decision received a few weeks ago concluded that, and I quote –

'there is no unlawful item of account – the Parish Councils legal advice is clear that it may charge for the release of covenants and it has acted in a way which is consistent with this advice; and, it is for the Parish Council to determine an appropriate charge for the release of the covenant in question which it has done with regard to the advice of the District Valuer.

It is my view that for each of the reasons set out above, there is no basis upon which I could reasonably conclude that the item of account objected to is contrary to law. It is also therefore my view that the second objection in relation to the declaration in the annual return must also fall.

The council at its next meeting in May will be asked to accept the three recommendations he then makes which are

***In reviewing, developing and implementing its revised policy for managing the covenants in which it has an interest the Council should
---commission and consider expert legal advice on the Public Law aspects on the enforceability of the covenants generally and in the northern sector particularly where there is some doubt in the current advice as to their enforceability
---frame its revised policy with regard to this advice and deal explicitly with the issue of enforceability; and
---devise and implement a reporting system which demonstrates how the policy is being applied.***

These three recommendations are of course in line with the work already commenced by your councillors which hopefully can now be progressed following the May council meeting.

You may not be aware that when an objection is made by a member of the public it is the Parish Council who must bear the legal costs.

So what price is 'jubilation'. At last year's APM I reported that the legal costs involved may reach £3000. In November last, when setting this year's precept, we made a provision of £3500, but I can now report that the actual invoice excluding VAT will be £5925. This represents 24% of the precept.

- At this time last year the Tennis Club were considering a move to a new site. However the Club has now decided to retain its presence on the existing courts Concern has been raised by a member of the public regarding the validity of a new constitution. We are in discussion with the new Club Chairman to see whether the current status satisfies the requirements of the lease. We remain committed to an active club in the village. More recently the Pre-school with the help of the 'garden invaders' approached the Council seeking a small area of land which the children could cultivate as part of the school curriculum. Both we and the Tennis

Club are happy that they use the small strip of land between the single tennis court and the path.

- Millfield Road has been on the agenda again – not least during the flooding of September last year. Immediately following that event we arranged for County Council to check the bridge and on 16th September we received confirmation that all was well. You may ask, following the adoption attempts of 2008, has Millfield Road as an issue gone to sleep. The answer is no. Many of the current councillors joined the Council not only to halt the sale of amenity land but and perhaps more importantly to stop a large amount of the proceeds being used to provide a 40 tonne bridge over the Marchburn. However, we felt bound, like countless councils before us, to pursue the dream of adoption. We have stated in Council that we are still seeking a solution and have been in discussion with the County Council. As a Council we have agreed that if and when we have a proposal for consideration it will be given to the whole village at the same time. We hope this may be possible in the autumn.

- We have during the year held discussions with the First School and the County regarding the provision of a pedestrian crossing on the A695. The initial traffic study last summer showed that the national qualifying criteria could not be met – we therefore join the club of about 200 other hopefuls. We then asked what if we paid for this? Initially it was a question of safety. Could the ideal position – corner of Millfield Road across to the corner of the pub be suitable for a Zebra crossing or would it have to be the much more expensive Pelican type (traffic light controlled). Despite some initial hope we were then informed that unless we satisfied the criteria a crossing on an A class road would not be approved.

We would consider reopening this discussion but would welcome any public support to strengthen our argument.

Last year two members of the public, without reference to the Council made an application to have the amenity land, adjacent to Millfield Road, which includes the two tennis courts, designated as a village green. You may recall that the County Council solicitor, Stephen Rickitt, came to a council meeting to explain the process. In October, one of the applicants contacted the County by telephone, confirmed in a letter to the Parish Council, from which I quote-

'I spoke to Mr Rickitt by telephone stating that I saw no reason why the Parish Council should not execute a 'declaration of trust', I think such a declaration would be uncontentious and the simplest way of satisfying the intent of all parties.'

As the process unfolded all parties were informed that the application was going to fail. However Mr Rickitt confirmed that the original deeds already included a 'declaration of trust' therefore satisfying the requirements stated in the applicant's October letter. Your Council is satisfied with the outcome.

- I'm sure you will all have noticed a new asset – the bus shelter at Broomhaugh. It was a while in construction but worth the wait. In Council, the matter of a shelter at the west end of the village has already been raised. The topography is more difficult but an elevated position may make it possible to see the approaching eastbound bus in time to make a safe crossing of the road. This will be investigated further.

That's the end of my report but in closing I would like to offer my thanks – to Philip Latham, for his many years of service to Tynedale District Council and his help to the village - and in this my first year as a councillor my thanks to our clerk and my fellow councillors, and to our County Councillor for her continued support and good counsel.

Following the report, it was noted that the main reports would be forwarded to the Parish News so the information would go to the public before May next year. There was a brief discussion on the Pedestrian crossing. New Schools legislation might assist the arguments in the future and it was also suggested that letters from the public would aid the cause.

4. Cllr Dale gave a short report on the changes with respect to the unitary Authority. She summarised the transition period between the old district, old county council and the new Unitary as being a difficult time with much hard work being entailed. Many staff have been made redundant but a significant number have moved to the new Authority. Budgeting problems are proving the hardest matter, and they will not ease for some time. She has covered a huge range of topics in response to members of the public. Cllr Stephenson noted that Cllr Dale has been to all Parish Council meetings and has researched well.

5. Financial Statement: This was distributed for information to the public, taken from the monthly statements. There were no questions.

6. Report of the Village Hall Trust. Mrs Shepherd gave the following report: It is the function of the Management Committee to maintain and manage the two Village Halls so that they can be used and enjoyed by the residents of Riding Mill. As we all know, the Hall is used by people from further afield and they enrich the activities of the Halls by their participation. Both Halls continue to be used by people of all ages, with provision for education, exercise, culture and for social occasions too.

The Development Committee continues to raise money for the improvement of the Parish Hall – currently they have banked and have promises of £103,000. There is also, at the time of writing, an appeal which has been delivered to all houses in the Parish, for the further £24,000 which will ensure that the work can begin in early June. I hope to have, by the time of this meeting, a figure which will tell us how we are progressing towards this goal. (~ £14,000 has been raised to date).

In September, for the first time in many years, the Development Committee ran the Village Show. It is hoped that this will become an annual event and actually become the major fundraiser of the Village Hall Trust. This year, it will be held on 5 September but the venue is, as yet, uncertain. Lots of help will be required! The Development Committee met with the Village Hall Trust and it was agreed that the work to improve the Hall would be run as a self-build by the Development Committee. This will be built at cost.

Several ladies who do a lot of catering for village events have begun to give their profits to the Trust – initially as the 'new cooker fund'! We received a grant of £500 from Age Concern and the 'Dotty Cooks' so far have added £1,410 to that sum.

I have been Chairman since November during which time I have learnt that the older Parish Hall costs a lot of money to maintain. We have attempted to sort out the damp patch in the Main Hall by having the drains cleaned out. In the space of one week, a boiler broke down, Yasmin our Caretaker left the village to live in Stocksfield and the drains on the opposite side of the Hall blocked! We hope that as a Council, you will continue to support the Hall financially – for this, we will be very grateful and we will spend the money wisely.

We have decided to rent out the Caretaker's Flat. This will give us an income to pay a Cleaner-in-Charge and will release us from the costs of electricity, gas, community charge, water rates and telephone rental. Recent employment law no longer allows property to be given in lieu of work. We will be using the services of a letting agent and obviously will check that insurance policies etc are in place before this happens.

Thank you for your continued support.

Mrs Shepherd also noted that the Parish hall will be closed for the first phase of improvements from the end of May until mid-October.

7. Broomhaugh & Riding first School report: Mrs Stephenson was away so Cllr Tulip read her report:

I hope this Report gives you an idea of school life at the moment. Our numbers have increased to 65 children. This is the most that we have had since I joined Broomhaugh six years ago, so it is very busy!

I am glad to say that we still have a dedicated team who are committed to doing their very best for all the children in the school. This year one teacher was on Maternity Leave – due to return in July, however, we were lucky enough to appoint a fantastic teacher who has continued to provide a stimulating curriculum for the children in top class.

The summer holidays saw a complete new heating system put into school. This, along with all windows now double-glazed should mean that school is not only economical but more eco friendly. We have also had a new security system put in which will hopefully mean false alarm calls are lessened.

We continue to work with the curriculum ensuring that children find their learning interesting, exciting and fun. More and more classes are making use of the school grounds for all aspects of curriculum from Drama to Maths.

One thing that the parents often comment on are the after school activities that we hold. Thanks to the enthusiasm of teachers we continue to have three after school clubs each week. These offer all children a huge range of activities – football, drama, skipping, computers and recorders – and the children often come up with new ideas for our clubs.

We continue to have our after school club (Squirrels) that enables children to stay at school until 5.45 so allowing working parents that extra time to get back from work. It is an essential part of our school for several families on a day to day basis and several other families need the facility periodically. More and more other small schools are having to close their after school clubs but if this were to happen here I fear that we would lose children.

Although a lot of the children who attend Broomhaugh do not actually live in the village, they are always pleased to be invited to join in with village events. Some children have even asked me if we are making scarecrows again this year!

Just before the Easter holidays we had our Ofsted Inspection. I am delighted to inform you that we received an 'Outstanding' judgement. This gives due recognition to the hard work that goes on in school from all members of staff, children and parents. We are continually grateful for all the support and interest that the parents of our children, Governors and villagers pay in the school and are always willing to listen to new suggestions or ideas. Apologies for not being here in person to answer any questions however if anyone would like to forward questions via Monica, I would be more than willing to answer.

Cllr Stephenson asked what proportion of children were from the village and the catchment area as opposed to those from outside. The Clerk would refer the question to Mrs Stephenson.

8. Minor Matters: The Clerk reported that the problem with the Tennis Club rules had been resolved. Mrs Shepherd made a plea for notices to be taken down after they are finished with.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.