

TUNSTALL PARISH COUNCIL – ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday 27 May 2021 in St John the Baptist Church, Tunstall Road, Tunstall.

Present: Cllr Roberts (Chairman), Cllr Hibben, Cllr Rich.

Also present were: KCCllr Wright and a member of the public

In the absence of the Clerk, Cllr Rich was proposed to take minutes.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Roberts welcomed all to the Annual Parish Meeting and ensured appropriate Covid measures were in place.

Apologies had been received from Cllr Burgess who was delayed at work and would join at later stage. Apologies also received from SBCllrs Mr and Mrs Stevens.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 21 MARCH 2019

As there was not a quorum of Councillors who had attended that meeting present, these Minutes could not be signed at this time.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman gave the following report:

“In giving the Chairman’s report for 20-21, COVID has very much impacted on the workings of the parish council. We have been unable to have face to face personal community engagement and moved to online monthly meetings using Zoom.

This was in contrast to the previous year when the parish council worked with the community on preparations for the Armistice Day service, organised and hosted a senior residents Christmas Party and attended Tunstall School special events such as a tree planting.

When we entered the first lock down, even the prestigious certificate for service to the community awarded to Joan Longley could not be formally presented in the usual way. We hope to acknowledge Joan’s service at some point later in the year.

However, in the last year, the parish council has still been very active. We have followed every stage of the Local Plan Review, attending remote meetings and completing all related submissions. Councillors read 100’s of pages of documents in order to fully understand any implications for the Parish and make informed comments going forward. This has obviously entailed many hours of work for Councillors.

We have had strong liaison with Swale officers, other Parish Councils and people in the community. Sarah, who is also Ward Councillor was active in the Swale response to the pandemic. Mavis was involved with telephone support to residents organised by Reverend Alan Pinnegar.

Whilst community projects have been put on hold, every planning application within the parish has been carefully considered. As statutory consultees we have commented and submitted objections where we had concerns. This has also involved speaking at Planning Committees to reflect residents’ concerns to Swale Borough Council.

Our litter picker, Jane has been keeping the streets and pavements tidy when COVID safety precautions enabled her to continue her work. We wish to pass on our thanks to Jane for doing such a good job for us.

Our planters have continued to cheer people up and thanks to Steve Moss of Mossy's who has kept them looking so good for us.

Unfortunately there was flooding in November 2020 outside Pond Cottages and in Chegworth Gardens. KCC undertook some emergency surveying and gully sucking which has involved digging out some blocked drains into Coffin Pond. This now means increased road runoff going into the pond. It has been surveyed by an ecologist, but we are again struggling to get KCC to accept responsibility for its maintenance and upkeep.

In the last six months we have focussed on making sure that our parish policies and processes are up to date and in line with legislation. This is to ensure we are a responsible parish council and a responsible employer.

A new website is now up and running and we hope that residents will sign up to be regularly updated with events. The website has a "Planning Tracker" where residents can see all current planning applications within Tunstall. We hope to publicise the website more widely in a newsletter soon. With thanks to our Clerk for her work on setting up and maintaining the website.

We have now re-started in-person meetings. Today we are in the Church itself. We will then move back to the Midwinter Room for our main meetings at 7pm on the first Monday of the month. We will continue using the Village Hall for ad hoc events and meetings when available. We plan to trial bi-monthly Full Council meetings, with a shorter focussed Planning Committee meeting in between. This will involve modernising the way we do business to a certain extent, including a move to secure on-line banking whilst retaining all security precautions against fraud such as two Councillors approving each transaction.

I would like to remind everyone that we do have Councillor vacancies, so if anyone is interested in becoming a Parish Councillor, they should contact either myself or Wendy our Clerk.

I'd like to finish by thanking our Councillors; Mavis, Vivien, Lee and Sarah who resigned recently to focus on her Ward work with the Borough for all their hard work over the last two years, and particularly Mavis who was a dedicated and hard-working Chair until February this year when I took over."

4. FINANCE REPORT

The Finance Report was given by the Chair, Cllr Roberts as follows:

"Last Financial Year we had a nearly £5,000 [£4,708] underspend on the budget – due mainly to COVID and being unable to carry out planned activities. We spent just under £18,000 [£17,982]. Against a budget of £22,690

The Council continues to fund a litter picker and the planters, but our major cost is that of employing a Clerk, at a cost to the Council of £8,574 last year (including tax and pension costs).

The bank balance at 31 March was just under £44,000 [£43,968], we have high reserves, but may need to employ some expertise on future highways or planning work.

As a consequence of the high level of reserves, we reduced the request for precept for this financial year down by 5% to a budgeted amount of just under £21,000 [£20,859]

We gave grants last year totaling £1,175 to The Red Cross, Marie Curie, Swale Citizen's Advice, Kent Wildlife Fund, Tunstall Church and the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. Further details are available if required.

5. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM PARISHIONERS

No comments were received.

6. ANY OTHER MATTERS

Cllr Roberts said that in the coming year, the council would be continuing to tighten up on governance processes, and consider doing a Highways Improvement Plan assuming Covid restrictions continued to be lifted.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.15pm