

CALDBECK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Caldbeck Parish Hall on Monday 14 May 2018 at 7:35pm.

Cllrs Present: Norman Atkinson (Chairman), Ian Shaw, Paul Doherty, Richard Hellon, Angela Glendinning, Tim Cartmell

Also Present: Simon Smith (Clerk) and 5 members of the public.

Apologies were received from Alistair MacFadzean, Colin Smithson (holidays), Alan Tyson, Christina Coulthard (work commitments).

Cllr Duncan Fairbairn (County & Borough Councillor) also sent his apologies.

MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 9 May 2017 were agreed and signed as a true record.

CHAIRMANS REPORT

The Chairman presented his report (copy attached below). He provided the latest news concerning the Hesket Lonning Footpath as the long awaited report from the County Council had been received late that morning. There had consequently not been time to consider the report in any detail but it was hugely disappointing to find that the report failed to consider the merits of the decision and concentrated on processes, recommending improved documentation of decisions and better sign posting of the public participation scheme. The County Council had missed its own internal deadlines for responding to complaints by 4 months and also missed the statutory Freedom of Information deadlines by two weeks. The Parish Council would need to review the report and decide on its next steps, as the County Council had provided its final response and advised the Parish Council would need to contact the Local Government Officer if it were not satisfied.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & OPEN DISCUSSION

Strong support was voiced in favour of pursuing the footpath and the Chairman was thanked for all the work undertaken by the Parish Council in pushing for the footpath. A question was asked about the need for affordable housing in light of rented affordable housing available in Hesket Newmarket. The Chairman reported that affordable housing schemes could provide a mix of models - subsidised ownership, shared ownership, rented accommodation. Schemes were very flexible including self build. A number of residents had expressed strong support and wished to see housing made more readily available for younger people and families. Significant grant support was available. Enthusiasm was expressed for the restored historic road sign in Caldbeck and encouragement given to a programme of similar restorations.

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

The Clerk highlighted the key figures in the accounts, with balances increasing by £1,900 to £121,900. The bulk of these were for the footpath. The Parish Council had earmarked reserves to fund improvements in street lighting, winter gritting and elections. The Internal Audit report was pleasing, with internal controls well established, and on line banking allowed faster payment of bills. The three year grass cutting contract was welcomed.

Fairtrade refreshments were provided during the meeting.

The Meeting closed at 7:35pm and was followed by the Annual Parish Council Meeting.

Annual Parish Meeting 14 May 2018 - Chairman's Report 2017-18

Welcome everyone and thank you for coming tonight. For those of you who do not know me, I'm Norman Atkinson and I am currently Chairman of Caldbeck Parish Council, having held the post for the last four years. However, it is my intention to now stand down as Chairman and let another parish councillor take the helm.

The Chairman's report is the opportunity for me to give you a summary of the Parish Council's work over the last year. However, before I do this I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our parish councillors for the service they have given to our community over the last 12 months. Often much of the work goes on unseen and without favour or reward, while at other times it can be overt and controversial. I do know that to the best of your ability, you represent the whole parish and always have the best interests of the community at heart. So thank you.

Before getting down to business I must mention one obvious change to the parish council's structure and that is the appointment of Simon Smith as our new Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer. Following a selection process, Simon took over the role on the 1st July 2017. During the 3 month interim period, between the previous clerk resigning and Simon starting; we were indebted to our Locum Clerk, Andrea McCallum, who provided support to the parish council at very short notice.

And what a find Simon has been. Despite no previous experience as a Parish Clerk he has quickly taken to the role using his previous accounting and analytical skills and is now an integral part of the Parish Council structure. His counsel and guidance is much appreciated by us. His commitment to the post is commendable and over the last 10 months has introduced new financial procedures, such as online banking, as well as amending the layout of the associated reports, minutes and agendas. In particular he has shown great support for the Caldbeck to Hesket Newmarket Footpath Project and has also looked to progress the opportunities presented with affordable housing. I must add this commitment is time consuming and it will have been a steep learning curve, I do note that you have voluntarily worked double your contracted hours. So on behalf of the local community, parish councillors and in particular myself, thank you Simon.

So now to the year's events.

One of the Council's responsibilities is scrutinising and commenting on planning applications. The Council supports most applications but having voted on the issue sometimes decides to object, having taken into account local views, correspondence and any other material factors. Planning applications are advertised on the National Park website, in the local papers, on statutory notices and are on the Parish Council Agenda for each meeting, which is published on all the parish notice boards. Residents can give their views to both the Parish Council and to the National Park Authority, either in support or to object to a particular application.

Over the last 12 months the Council dealt with 22 planning applications, of these 17 were supported and 3 were objected to. Both objections related to the removal of local occupancy clauses at Dalebeck Barn and the Old Map Shop. There were a variety of

applications comprising of minor extensions, barn conversions, and new buildings which included domestic and agricultural premises, as well as tree felling. It goes without saying that the length and variety of debate on these varied considerably, depending on the application under discussion.

At the September meeting the Parish Council had a presentation by Paul Taylor, Allerdale's Community Led Affordable Housing officer who gave an overview of the housing situation in Caldbeck and the Lake District in general. The impact of second homes, house prices and how they impacted on affordability, particularly for the young, were discussed. In March this year he gave a second presentation and highlighted the support available for affordable housing, including grant funding from Allerdale for developing proposals and site acquisition, as well as the need to work with the National Park Planners. It was agreed that further exploratory work would be undertaken to look at the possibility of securing potential sites with land owners, which are acceptable to the community at large. If the prospects seem positive and there is sufficient interest from within the community, it would then be necessary to form a group to provide the necessary leadership. It's early days and we remain optimistic, however, I must stress that it needs real involvement of local people, as well as the parish council for it to succeed.

The original Parish Plan ran from 2005 to 2015. Much of the thinking behind the Plan remains relevant today. The Parish Council has updated the Plan in a short document which captures progress and highlights actions for the next two years. For the time being we believe this represents a sensible approach to planning and avoids the need for the major effort which would be required for developing a Neighbourhood Plan.

The Parish Council liaises regularly with County Highways Department, reporting potholes and other damage to roads, drainage problems and damaged or broken signs. The state of roads in parts of the parish remains a great concern and we recently met with the Highways Engineer with responsibility for the area. Although there was money available for minor drainage schemes of work, there appeared to be nothing forthcoming to repair potholes properly. We expressed our frustration at the number of times we have reported those on Heskett Lonning, which is a busy road, while noticing that last year that some roads in the locality, which are much less used, have been resurfaced completely. There appears to be no logic in Cumbria County Council Highway's approach, which from what we can gather came about as a result of money from central government following the 2015 floods. As we understand it, the County Council contracted the work to a third party out of County, who also took on the responsibility of deciding where would be resurfaced. Whatever happened to common sense local decision making?

On a more positive Highways note work is due to begin later in the year to repair and strengthen Heskett Newmarket Bridge following the 2015 floods. The Parish Council have got reassurances from them that the current gross vehicle weight restriction will not be increased. Consideration is being given by Highways to improving the drainage there, as surface water from Heskett Newmarket currently runs into a pipe and out onto the embankment above the road leading to the bridge and is causing severe erosion. We will continue to press for a proper solution to this problem. The Parish Council has been instrumental in ensuring that debris, mainly fallen trees that block the natural flow of the

river, are removed from there with the appropriate Environment Agency permissions in place.

The Parish Council has responsibility for the grass cutting on Hesket Newmarket and Caldbeck Greens. Each year the contracts for cutting both Greens are put out to tender and last year's contractor, Mark Binney, was successful again this year and cutting is already underway. This year we decided to award the contract for 3 years to cut down on bureaucracy.

You may have noticed that the traditional black and white signpost at the top of Brewery Hill, next to main road, opposite Hodden Court is looking pristine. It had become a bit tatty and needed some TLC. Cumbria County Council Highways were reluctant to be involved and suggested that we contact a restoration company, which would have cost in the region of £2,000 to £3,000. Deciding that we could do it much cheaper ourselves, it was dismantled, shot-blasted, welded and then painstakingly repainted, at a cost of just over £200. I'm sure Richard and Carol Hellon can't wait to get the brushes out again. We are now looking to do some of the others in the parish, as we feel they are an important part of our local heritage and worth preserving.

Keeping the public areas of the parish looking tidy is something that is the responsibility of all residents, not just the parish council. The days of the County Council Lengthsman looking after a particular area have long gone. I know a number of you here regularly contribute to keeping the place tidy, so thank you. I'm sure you'll be rewarded in heaven, hopefully not for a while yet. Any help from members of the community in maintaining our beautiful villages is much appreciated, no matter how small. You may have noticed over the last few months Caldbeck Pond is becoming more overgrown with weeds and does not look at its best. It is something we intend to address over the coming months, and again volunteers will be needed.

The winter just gone has probably been the worst for a number of years, I know you'll all remember ones even more severe but I'll keep it to current times. Following a request from a local Fellside resident, the Parish Council's snow clearing policy was put into practice and the contractor duly cleared the road enabling access to the village. Keeping money in reserve for such occasions is a worthwhile use of funds. Back in 2011 we pressed the County Council to reinstate the gritting of the road from Caldbeck to Howbeck. We now feel that it is worth pushing to extend this to Millhouse in conjunction with Castle Sowerby Parish Council and grit the road from Millhouse to the main road at Inglewood Edge.

Cumbria Association of Local Council's Allerdale meetings, National Park Forums and the Local Neighbourhood Forum are regularly attended by members of the Council, which allows us to get a better perspective on issues affecting parishes both in Allerdale and the National Park, as well as those county wide. The future funding of local street lighting still remains an issue and although the push from Allerdale to off-load the cost onto parishes quietened over the last 18 months, it now appears to be back on the agenda, with the possibility of funding being needed from 2019 onwards. We therefore have look to maintain sufficient reserves to cover the costs should the need arise and continue to monitor the situation. What is clear is that there is no money available for additional street

lighting, something that the Council has been looking into regarding an additional street light in Caldbeck, on the way to the school from the village.

The Council continues to work with our local Lake District National Park Area Ranger, Cath Johnson, who is a useful contact for assisting with park maintenance issues. We are grateful to them for repairing the footpath that runs by the river at the back of the old Rectory, between the two bridges. The parish council have made enquiries regarding the feasibility of transferring pockets of land owned by the Park, primarily within both Caldbeck and Hesket Newmarket, into Parish Council ownership. We had hoped to have made some progress by December when it was being discussed as part of a wider review of assets by the National Park, however this came and went and we were then told March, it's now May and after pressing them again, only last Friday, we now have an update. They now are prepared to transfer the land but at a substantial cost; £10,000 for the land in Caldbeck and £15,000 for Hesket Newmarket land. They say that due to best value rules as a local authority they are not allowed to transfer them at nil cost and would not want to set a precedent. When initially discussing this with them we had been expecting these lands would probably be transferred not sold. As for the National Park, we thought they would be considered more as liabilities than assets. The Parish Council will need to consider this bombshell at its next meeting.

David Ward kindly continues to act as representative for the Parish Council on the Northern Fells Group. Due to budgetary and resourcing issues the Police Community Support Officer no longer attends parish council meetings and will only do so if needed to address a specific priority. I could hark back to the 'good old days' but think better of it and we must accept that times have changed. Duncan Fairbairn, our Borough and County Councillor attends our meetings and reports on issues affecting us, as well as listening to any concerns raised and where possible, assists in resolving them. He has been a strong supporter of the Caldbeck to Hesket Newmarket Footpath Project.

Work on the Caldbeck to Hesket New Market Footpath still continues and remains the only item still outstanding within the 2005 - 2015 Caldbeck Parish Plan. Please bear with me as I explain the complexities we have encountered. I'm sure you are already aware of the background to the project, which has now been on the go for four years but briefly £100,000 has been gifted to the Parish Council by a local benefactor, for the sole purpose of creating a footpath. All 10 landowners verbally agreed to the footpath and 8 have signed legally binding agreements. We are grateful for their continued support. Unfortunately 2 years down the line and after much time and £6,000 had been spent, two landowners withdrew their support. After a difficult debate, the Parish Council decided to seek a Footpath Creation Order. Cumbria County Council are the appropriate responsible authority who have the powers to undertake the creation order.

We mistakenly thought that such a project which has social, health and economic benefits for the local community, would be welcomed by the County Council and they would willingly undertake the creation order. How wrong we were. We have been met with negativity and contempt from the start, together with reluctant communication both in writing and in face to face meetings, especially with our senior elected council leaders. From the outset they have adopted a can't do mentality despite the sound logical

argument that has been put forward. The County Council's continued response is 'they have a power not a duty to implement a creation order' and there are other pressing priorities and resource issues.

After meeting with two County council officers in March 2017 we were informed that they would liaise with the National Park and report back to us. Little happened, apparently due to the local elections, following that a report was sent by the council officer to Council Cabinet members. We were astonished that this report was sent without any consultation with the Parish Council and in the meantime we had asked to meet with the senior elected council members. They simply ignored these requests. We asked to see a copy of the report but this was initially refused and when we finally saw it, it contained many errors, which they later agreed with. In September we eventually met with the relevant Assistant Director and a Senior Manager and put our case to them. Unfortunately they still reverted back to the same old reasons for refusal.

We then wished to address the elected cabinet members but were advised that it would be better to put our case to the full County Council meeting. In the meantime we wanted to speak with elected members locally and attended the Allerdale Local Committee in December, in order to gain local support. This was a farce and an insult to local democracy. Having sent a prepared question I spoke about the project to the committee and expected to be asked questions on it. Total silence, the Chairman then read out a prepared statement by a council officer, which trotted out the same old reasons for not supporting the Creation Order. Speaking informally to members at the meeting we were told they had been advised by their legal department not to speak to us. It makes you wonder what their reasoning for such a stance is.

We then asked to speak at the full county council meeting in January but were informed by their legal department that because the question we would ask is fundamentally the same as at the Allerdale Local Committee, we would not be allowed to speak at the meeting. We were informed that we could ask for the decision not to support the creation order, to be reviewed by the Council's Chief Executive, which we did and that they would treat it as a complaint. In the meantime the Parish Council thought it best to publicise our dissatisfaction with the County Council and therefore went to the local press, who gave good coverage of the story. We also created an online petition, which attracted over 1600 signatures and almost 200 supportive comments. In addition we did an interview for an online TV channel 'That's Cumbria', reiterating our case. In January the Clerk and I attended a meeting the Cumbria Local Access Forum at Bardsea and sought their support. However although our case was well received, that did not transpire into useful positive action.

Our complaint was initially meant to be dealt with in January; however it was clear this was not going to happen, so we agreed a date to meet with Cumbria County Council Assistant Director, Dan Barton, who was independent of the process. We met with him in early February and put forward our case. He appeared genuine, listened to what we had to say and asked probing questions of us and we initially felt positive about the meeting. He then needed to speak with the council officers who rejected the footpath creation order proposal. After this he would write his report and submit his recommendations to the Chief

Executive, which he thought would take 2 – 3 weeks. It is now over 3 months since that meeting and despite numerous requests we have heard nothing. It has now got to the point where we have submitted a Freedom of Information request asking to see the report. Not surprisingly the County Council have failed to respond to this, which has clear timescales. The Parish Council will decide whether to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner in the meeting that follows my report. I apologise if this seems to be a rant about the County Council but we are frustrated by their overall attitude towards the project.

Clearly we have put a lot of effort into this over the last 12 months and I am grateful for the support given by the parish council to the project and in particular the work put in by Tim Cartmell, Simon Smith and Alan Tyson. Even at this late stage, the door still remains open for Messrs Hodgson and Messrs Mounsey to come on board. We still remain optimistic for the success of the project and will continue until all our options are exhausted, unless it's us that become exhausted first.

On a different note, November 2018 marks the Armistice Centenary celebrations, which are taking place throughout the country, marking 100 years since the end of World War 1. Although there are no bonfires or beacons planned within the parish at the moment, we are grateful to Caldbeck History Society, who are going to prepare a supplement to the November Parish Magazine, highlighting local involvement at that difficult time.

That concludes this year's report, which I hope has given you a good insight into the Parish Council's work over the last 12 months. The Council and I look forward to hearing any comments you may have and listening to any issues you may wish to raise.

Norman Atkinson

Chairman, Caldbeck Parish Council

9th May 2018