

Broomley and Stocksfield Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Monday 7 January 2018 at Stocksfield Community Centre

Present: Ms M Hunt (Chair), , Mrs J Furniss, Mr C Liddle, Mr D Parke, Mr M Parker, Mrs H Rae, Mrs J Robson, Professor R Thompson, Dr P Vickers.
Mr N Spencer (Clerk to the Council).

Apologies: None

Also present: Mrs A Dale (County Councillor), Mr S Pearson, Mr W Martin, Mrs J Page (all representing Stocksfield Golf Club), Mr R Jones and Mr J Carslake.

The Chair opened the meeting at 7.30pm and wished those present a Happy New Year.

19/1/1 Declarations of Interest

Prof Thompson (as a member) and Dr Vickers (as a relative of members) declared personal interests in the item concerning Stocksfield Golf Club.

19/1/2 Public Participation

There were no items of public participation.

19/1/3 County Councillor update

Mrs Dale said that the street lighting upgrade and the design for a road safety scheme in New Ridley village are both ongoing. She is working with the Painshawfield Estate Committee in relation to drainage and has asked Northumberland County Council's (NCC) Scrutiny Committee to look at the issues of consistency in the provision of night time services at Hexham Hospital. She is also discussing with NCC issues around section 106 funding for road safety measures in connection with the planning application at Low Prudhoe.

19/1/4 Stocksfield Golf Club: Financial position and planning application

The Chair reminded members that the item is not to consider the planning application which has now been submitted but to receive information from officials of Stocksfield Golf Club as a result of the letter considered at the last meeting. The formal consideration of the planning application will be an agenda item at the next meeting of the Council.

Mr Pearson, the club's president, thanked the Council for the opportunity to address the meeting and referred to the letter mentioned by the Chair. He highlighted the Council's website and statements about it acting on behalf of the community it represents and helping to provide and maintain the facilities that the community wants to see in the area. The club recognises the Green Belt issue but the club's committee does not believe this is a normal application as the consequences of the club not getting a positive decision, and ultimately the capital injection it needs, will result in closure of the club at some point. On the back of that there is a real risk of a housing development on the site and demolition of the clubhouse. The community would lose a facility that has been in place for 105 years, provides local employment, social interaction and, through golf, enhances the wellbeing of an ageing population.

Mr Martin, the club's finance director, said that the club, in line with an increasing number of other golf clubs, is struggling financially. Trading figures for the years ending March 2017 and 2018 have produced losses and it is expected that this will be repeated in the year ending March 2019. The club operates an overdraft facility and is close to the limit at each year end. Expenditure has been controlled – for example the head green keeper's post has been made redundant which should enable the club to break even in future years. Initiatives are being tried which are aimed at boosting players and membership but other local clubs are in the same position and taking the same actions. It has been impossible to fund the improvements to the course which are necessary to retain existing and attract new members. Nationally the average age of members is increasing and greater reliance is placed on golf buggies – at Stocksfield

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buggies cannot be used year-round which impacts on membership. He said that breaking even in the future will not provide the club with funds needed to invest – at least £100,000 is needed for improvements. Funding is needed to pay off loans and to remove the club from a continual overdraft situation.

Mrs Page, the clubhouse director who is overseeing the planning application, said that part of the area subject to the application is Green Belt but some is previously developed as a car park and access road. The club's argument is that in order to overcome the restriction on building in the Green Belt, the club believes it has very special circumstances – the community facility has been in place for 105 years and it provides health and social benefits for a very wide range of people (whether golfers or not). The club needs to prove that benefits will be lost and cannot be provided elsewhere. There are documents on NCC's website which provide greater financial information than the previous application. This shows where the cash injection would be spent providing investment in the club rather than being used for running costs. A five year business plan has been prepared and submitted to NCC as a confidential document. The club continually monitors its compliance with the plan. She asked if the club had to close its doors, what do people think will happen to the site? There would need to be an orderly exit of the site before loans are called in by creditors. One option would be to make a different application altogether and the club knows that more than thirty dwellings could fit on the land which is classed as previously developed. This would raise enough money to pay creditors before deciding what the next steps would be – whether that would be a porta-cabin somewhere on the site or a smaller clubhouse elsewhere on the site would be decided. The club feels certain that the people of New Ridley would not like that to happen. She said there are 170 acres that will start to go to ruin and be sold off in lots. She asked what would it look like and what would the future be? In planning terms the club thinks there may well be a lot more development in New Ridley and as a Stocksfield resident, Mrs Page said she would not look forward to that either. The club asks the Council to look at this in a balanced way and to support the club in what it is trying to do.

Mr Jones said that he attended the meeting as a current member of the club and as secretary in 2013/14 when the problems arose. At that time the bank were unequivocal in their view of the club. There is a need to look upon the club as a local business, not just a golf club. The Council's recent survey alluded to local businesses being supported by the Council and a successful application would have an effect on the views of the club's creditors.

In response to questions: Mr Martin said the last time the club returned a profit was as a result of an HMRC rebate but with this exception he was unable to say when the club was last in profit; and Mrs Page said that of the 400 members the majority are from Stocksfield and the immediate surrounding area and that a large area of land had been identified as overflow parking to prevent parking on New Ridley Road. Dr Vickers questioned the compatibility of the club's annual financial statement which had been submitted to Companies House and refers to the club as a 'going concern' with the bleak picture of the club's future without capital investment. Mr Pearson said that there are a lot of local golf clubs chasing the same population and a local golf club will go to the wall sooner or later. The club needs to be in a position to ensure it is not Stocksfield Golf Club. Mrs Page added that the club now has a committee with business skills who can run businesses and deliver on the club's aims.

The Chair thanked the club's representatives for their input after which Mr Pearson, Mr Martin, Mrs Page and Mr Jones left the meeting.

19/1/5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 December 2018

It was AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2018 were a true and accurate record (proposed Mr Parker, seconded Mrs Rae). Mrs Dale left the meeting.

19/1/6 Matters Arising

Residents' Survey

The Clerk said that 447 questionnaires had been returned to the survey company plus four from outside the area. An initial report is expected within a week. The Chair added that the survey company had complimented the Council on the standard of its original submission and as the

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majority of this work had been undertaken by Mr and Mrs Liddle, she thanked them for their efforts, asking that the matter be recorded in the minutes.

19/1/7 Finance

a) Approval of December payments

It was AGREED that the payments for December be approved as detailed in the previously circulated and amended schedule (proposed Mr Parke, seconded Dr Vickers).

b) Budget monitoring report to 31/12/18

Members noted the budget monitoring report.

19/1/8 Parish Council Representatives

There were no representative meetings.

19/1/9 Advisory Groups

a) General Governance Advisory Group (GGAG)

i) Notes of GGAG meeting 17/12/18

Members noted the previously circulated notes. Mrs Robson left the meeting.

ii) Public access defibrillators (PAD)

The Chair referred to a previously circulated report of the Clerk which provided information about the existing PADs in the area and options for the future. After discussion it was AGREED (proposed Dr Vickers, seconded Mrs Rae) to allocate £6,000 from the current budget to defibrillators and to consider a future report of the Clerk relating to the potential locations for new defibrillators.

Action: Clerk

iii) Sports Field User Group (SFUG) meeting 14 January 2019

The Chair pointed out that preliminary discussion about pitch improvements was likely to take place at the next SFUG meeting. In order to ensure that an up-to-date analysis of all sports fields users is available for inclusion in grant applications, members of the GGAG agreed that the Parish Council representatives on the SFUG should make a formal request for this information at the next SFUG meeting. The information should include the age group and gender of everyone who uses the facilities, including the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA). Members noted this item.

iv) Donation request – Tynedale Hospice at Home

After discussion it was AGREED to make a donation of £500 to Tynedale Hospice at Home under Sec 137 Local Government Act 1972.

Action: Clerk DISCHARGED

b) Planning Advisory Group

Members noted the planning report and the delegated authorities used as set out below.

18/04223/FUL Beechgrove, 39 Meadowfield Rd	Demolition of existing single storey side extension and replace with two storey extension	No comment Note use of delegated powers
18/04209/FUL West Oak Farm Broomley	Erection of two wooden stables, an open shed and a single storey wooden workshop	No comment Note use of delegated powers

19/1/10 Complaint against the Parish Council

The Clerk referred to a previously circulated report in relation to a complaint from a resident that the Council had failed to provide answers to specific questions raised by the resident. After discussions between the resident and the Clerk, the resident was happy that the complaint had for the time being been resolved satisfactorily. Members noted the content of the report and AGREED to ask NCC for an update about the road safety assessment and scheme that is to be provided for the A695 between Branch End and the railway station.

Action: Clerk

19/1/11 Any other urgent business

There was no other business

19/1/12 Date of next meeting

Monday 4 February 2019

The Chair thanked those present for attending and closed the meeting at 9.10pm.