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Middridge Parish Council

Minutes of Council Meeting

Monday
17th May 2021

Time: 6.45 pm

Present: Cllrs H Howe (Chair), A D Jordan, R Carr, E Hayman

In Attendance: Cllr Tony Stubbs (DCC), Cllr David Sutton-Lloyd (DCC)
David Batey, Donna & Carl Beal, David Harker, Paul Dicker

Official: T Towers (Clerk)

NOTE – Owing to the COVID-19 situation, this Meeting was held using Video Conferencing.

41/21 NOTICE OF MEETING

The Notice convening the Meeting was taken as read.

42/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Paul Howell MP, Michael Stead (DCC), Mary Jeffrey & Roger Howe (Middridge Allotment Association).

43/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Emma Hayman declared an interest as being related to Ian Hayman who carries out grass cutting and maintenance of the Parish Council footpaths.

44/21 ELECTION OF CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL 2021/2022

Alan Jordan proposed that Harold Howe be re-elected as Chair of the Parish Council; seconded by Emma Hayman.

45/21 DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE OF CHAIR

Harold Howe accepted the Office of Chair, and read aloud the Chair's Declaration of Acceptance of Office (as it was impossible for this form to be signed at this virtual Meeting).

46/21 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL 2021/2022

Harold Howe proposed Alan Jordan be elected as Vice-Chair of the Parish Council; seconded by Emma Hayman.

47/21 DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE OF VICE CHAIR

Alan Jordan accepted the Office of Vice-Chair, and read aloud the Vice-Chair's Declaration of Acceptance of Office (for the same reason as above).

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48/21 COUNCIL MATTERS

The Chair welcomed the new Parish Councillors and Durham County Councillors to the Meeting. He placed on record his grateful thanks to Alan Jordan for his assistance and guidance over his 7.5 years of service as Parish Clerk, and welcomed Tony Towers to his new role. He also acknowledged the service rendered by the retiring Parish Councillors Sue Smith, Helen Alexander, Wally Mellors and Philip Makinson, requesting that letters should be sent thanking them for their service and commitment; this was agreed.

Action: Clerk

It was proposed that the Council pay for a plaque to be erected in the Village Hall to commemorate Wally Mellors long service to the community. This was agreed in principle, and an estimate is to be sought.

Action: Clerk

CDALC are providing a Training Course for new Councillors, and it was agreed that in principle Middridge Parish Council (MPC) should pay for this. Enquiries are to be made as to whether CDALC can bill MPC directly for the cost of this training, or whether individual Councillors will have to pay, and then be reimbursed by MPC.

Action: Clerk

49/21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting of 1st March 2021 were accepted, and will be signed by the Chair as a true record.

50/21 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None

51/21 POLICING

Residents reported ongoing problems of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the Parish, in particular cases where large quantities of used syringes have been found lying on the ground behind the Village Hall, and on the Parish footpaths. Councillors stressed that the public should not touch any hazardous materials, nor attempt to dispose of them themselves, but should immediately call the Police, or contact Durham County Council (DCC); details of how to do this may be found in the Parish Noticeboards and the Parish Website (under Contacts). Councillors confirmed that they are well aware of this serious issue, and the Police have been contacted on numerous occasions, who take details, which are passed to their liaison team, who investigate further. David Sutton-Lloyd suggested that we need to explore a joined-up approach to the problem of ASB. Residents also asked if drug issues are largely confined to Middridge, or whether neighbouring villages and communities are also affected? David Sutton-Lloyd confirmed that there are issues with drugs in Newton Aycliffe.

The lack of recent PACT reports was also highlighted, David Sutton-Lloyd suggested that this may be as a result of the COVID 19 situation.

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52/21 “ELDON WHINS” DEVELOPMENTS

Residents enquired as to who decides for what purposes the Section 106 money levied on Developers is used, and how much is allocated for various projects. It was explained that this is the responsibility of the DCC Planning Department, and in general MPC have no idea how this is decided. With reference to the “Eldon Whins” Developments, MPC have no knowledge of, and certainly had no say in, the decisions to allocate:-

- (a) £92,920 for highways development.
- (b) £86,480 for the provision of improvements to allotments.
- (c) £60,400 towards improvements to outdoor space within Aycliffe North and Middridge.

However, the £15,000 for biodiversity improvement projects within Middridge Parish was included following discussions between MPC and the DCC Ecology Department regarding “the Paddock” Wildflower Grassland proposal.

Tony Stubbs kindly offered to try and clarify how such decisions are made, and explain in layman’s language, so everyone will have a clear and unambiguous understanding.

Action; Tony Stubbs

MPC have still received no details of the Persimmon Homes Planning Application for the proposed “Acorn Gardens” Sculpture (a carved horses head representing the Byerley Turf). Our DCC Councillors were requested to investigate.

Action; DCC Councillors

Residents (and Parish Councillors) expressed grave concerns about the recently built roundabout providing access to “Acorn Gardens”, which is far too small for large lorries or articulated vehicles to safely negotiate. On at least one occasion a lorry has been seen going the wrong way round this roundabout, and it is considered to be “an accident waiting to happen”. Parish Councillors stated that concerns about this roundabout, and the other new roundabout providing access to “Elder Gardens”, which has an adverse camber, had been previously raised with the DCC Planning Department, who replied that their design fully conformed to current Planning Regulations.

Residents also complained about the disgraceful state of the main road between these roundabouts, which in it’s current state is a danger to vehicles, which may suffer tyre damage if they drive over the ragged and undefined road edge. There was a suggestion that this may be due to COVID 19, because housebuilding in both Developments is behind schedule, and the Developers are giving this priority, rather than the maintenance of the public highway. There were also the usual complaints of mud on the road, which is not being cleaned often enough.

Rebecca Carr stated that she understands that the planned Play Area in “Elder Gardens” may be moved due to flooding issues, or is even not to be provided at all. Councillors stated that since a Play Area was part of the Planning Permission for this Development, it should be built somewhere within the estate.

Rebecca Carr has a planned Meeting with Keepmoat Homes, in which she intends to raise the issues of the state of the main road and the proposals for the Play Area. The Chair and David Sutton-Lloyd will try to attend this Meeting if possible.

Action: Rebecca Carr

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Depending on the outcome of this Meeting, these issues may need to be raised with DCC Planning Enforcement Team.

Action: Clerk

There is a rumour that a medical incineration plant is to be built near the “Eldon Whins” Developments; MPC have no knowledge of this. Our DCC Councillors kindly offered to investigate, and establish whether this rumour has any foundation.

Action: DCC Councillors

53/21 “THE PADDOCK” WILD-FLOWER GRASSLAND

Residents expressed grave concerns that, after talking with members of the Middridge Allotment Association (MAA), they were given to understand that proposals to extend the current Allotments are a ‘fait accompli’, and that MPC have decided to proceed with transforming “the Paddock” into a Wild-flower Grassland. The Chair categorically denied that either of these was the case.

These residents also drew MPC’s attention to the Meeting held in December 2019 to discuss the proposed Wild-flower Grassland, when the overwhelming majority of the small number of residents who attended were opposed. It was pointed out that MPC were well aware of this fact, and had been working since this Meeting to try and modify the proposal to address the concerns raised by residents. However, it was also pointed out that both the MAA, and DCC (who own all the land concerned), are completely independent of MPC, and any decision as to the use of Section 106 money to improve, and extend, the Allotments, was ultimately a matter for them, and neither MPC, nor residents, were likely to be able to alter their decision.

Concerns were also raised that a Wild-flower Grassland would see an increase in ASB, and that the Allotments could be the target of Arson attacks (despite the proposed Security Fence). However, it was suggested that there is some statistical evidence that Wild-flower Grasslands can actually reduce ASB; this is to be investigated.

Action: Emma Hayman

Concern was also expressed that increasing the number of Plots would increase Traffic through the Village, as most Allotment Holders come from outside the Parish.

It was also pointed out that a previous DCC attempt to establish a Butterfly Meadow in Newton Aycliffe had proved to be a failure, due mainly to vandalism, and had left an unsightly wasteland; the MAA and the DCC Ecology Department are to be asked to comment on this.

Action: Clerk

MPC will continue to work to try and produce a Wild-flower Grassland proposal which they believe addresses (as far as practical) all residents legitimate concerns. If this proves possible, then residents will be consulted by some form of survey, and MPC will abide by their decision; the Chair stated that to act in any other way would be patently undemocratic. He also reassured the concerned residents that any such survey would be accompanied by a document, setting out the history of the proposal, and as many facts as possible, so that residents would be able to make an informed decision.

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54/21 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE & GENERAL REPAIRS

(a) Village Green

Two donors are proposing to donate Bench Seats to be installed on the Village Green.

- i. Meg Andrews (Wally Mellors' daughter). This Seat is to be placed at the end of Northside where the Village Green has been damaged by vehicles, and should prevent this recurring.
- ii. David Bloomer (Betty Cain's grandson). This Seat is to be placed somewhere near Betty's house, facing the "Bay Horse", where it will not interfere with the arrangements for the Annual Village Fete; the precise location is yet to be agreed.

The necessary arrangements are in hand.

Action: Clerk

(b) Parish Paths

The Parish Paths Partnership (PPP) have just indicated that they are prepared to fund replacing the rotten/damaged fencing at a stile on Path 7, and widening the Stile to provide easier access. MPC agreed to proceed on this basis, and an Estimate for for this work is to be sought.

Action: Clerk

(c) Middridge Quarry

A number of issues raised by residents regarding the Middridge Quarry, which is a designated area of Special Scientific Interest (SSI), were discussed:-

- i. ASB. Youths frequently meet there to consume alcohol, take drugs, and set fires. They often sit on the edge of the quarry top, which is likely to result in a fatal accident. This problem is believed to have increased due to the COVID-19 lockdowns, with discussions on Social Media, and residents being asked for directions to the Quarry.
- ii. Litter. This is a growing problem, with the Quarry apparently being used as a dumping ground for waste (although it is unclear how this is being transported to the Quarry).

MPC are already trying to organise a Meeting with the PPP, the Police, and the Quarry Owners (Wards) to discuss these issues, and what can be practically done to reduce or eliminate them (subject to SSI restrictions). Tony Stubbs kindly offered to help expedite this Meeting.

Action: Clerk/Tony Stubbs

(d) Bus Shelters

Following considerable confusion, it has now been ascertained that MPC are liable for the maintenance and upkeep of both the village Bus Shelters. Following discussion, MPC agreed that the Bus Shelters will need to be insured to cover the cost of their replacement; this is to be investigated. Suitable Contractor(s) to clean and generally maintain the Bus Shelters are also to be sought.

Action: Clerk

55/21 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Two Planning Applications were considered:-

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- (a) Little Hare Farm - essential to allow to legally live on this site in a caravan.
- (b) 19 Northside – re-tiling the roof.

RESOLVED that MPC will not oppose either of these Planning Applications.

56/21 CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA

An HSE qualified resident has pointed out there is an issue with the Climbing Frame, where there is a gap in the Safety Rail around the Platform at the top of the Frame, where a child could fall backwards, resulting in serious injuries. Such an accident has occurred in similar circumstances elsewhere, and the equipment owners were held liable, and heavily fined. Following discussions with the Climbing Frame manufacturers, an Order has been placed for suitable modifications to eliminate this risk. They will also repair the damaged surface under the Junior Swings.

The Cabin/Slide requires repairs to replace some rotting wood, and the anti-slip surface. A suitable Contractor has examined the problems, and his Estimate is awaited.

Action: Clerk

57/21 ROAD-TRAFFIC

Residents again raised their grave concerns regarding the long-standing issue of Speeding through the Village, which has become worse during the COVID-19 lockdowns. It was suggested that DCC have sufficient funds to install two one-way systems at either end of the Village (like the successful system outside Sunnysdale School in Shildon).

MPC pointed out that they have made many attempts over the years to persuade the DCC Highways Department to address this issue seriously, but unfortunately all without success. It was suggested that one solution would be for individuals to personally complain to DCC about speeding, as if they receive numerous complaints, they are more likely to take some form of action. Tony Stubbs kindly offered to establish the best way in which residents could do this.

Action: Tony Stubbs

MPC have also recently arranged for the Rumble Strips to be reinstated in the Village, although it is accepted that these have only a marginal effect on speeding.

It was also suggested that a sub committee of concerned residents should be formed to review this issue. It was pointed out that there is a Police Community Speedwatch group, which is to be trained to use Police Speed-monitoring equipment, which interested residents are welcome to join. Unfortunately this equipment has been undergoing maintenance for some time, and the Police are to be pressed to get this sorted out.

Action: Alan Jordan

The GAMP Roadwatch Project, which place a new piece of Artwork on the Village Green (to replace the previous sculpture which was damaged, and eventually deteriorated beyond repair), with the aim of making drivers think about not speeding, has unfortunately been delayed until 2022 (due to COVID-19), but the funding is still available. A further Meeting with Greenfield Arts is to be arranged to discuss an Artist's suggestions.

Action: Clerk

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58/21 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (NP)

Stewart Smith has unfortunately withdrawn from any further involvement in the NP, and it was agreed that Alan Jordan will now lead this Project.

The GAMP Funding (£2000) to complete a Draft NP has now been approved, and it was agreed that their standard Terms and Conditions should be accepted.

Action: Alan Jordan

59/21 ACCOUNTS

The Clerk is having difficulties coping with his new responsibilities, and feels unable to take responsibility for MPC's Accounts at this time.

RESOLVED that Alan Jordan be appointed as MPC's Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) until further notice..

The 2020/21 Accounts have been approved by MPC's Internal Auditor (Colin Gray), and the necessary Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) forms produced.

RESOLVED that the following are formally approved:-

- (c) The 2020/21 Accounts
- (d) The AGAR Certificate of Exemption.
- (e) The AGAR Annual Governance Statement.
- (f) The AGAR Accounting Statements.

Action: Alan Jordan

After discussion it was agreed that MPC would not renew its membership of the National Association of Councillors.

RESOLVED that the following Accounts be approved for payment:-

Payee	Purpose	Sum
TP Jones & Co LLP *	Clerk's Salary Administration	£73.20
Zurich Insurance plc *	Annual Insurance Cover	£592.09
Northern Tubs Ltd *	New Village Green Tubs	£169.77
Kompan Scotland Ltd *	Play Area Equipment Repairs	£2065.36
Colin Gray	Internal Auditor Honorarium	£70.00
CDALC	Annual Membership Fee	£71.70
	TOTAL	£3042.12

* Payments already made, so formal approval granted is retrospective.

60/21 GAMP & CDALC

The GAMP AGM has been postponed; a new date/time has yet to be decided. Alan Jordan's term of office as a Public Representative on the GAMP Board is due to end shortly, but he intends to apply to be reappointed.

Wally Mellors can no longer serve as the GAMP Local Councils Group's representative on the CDALC Executive Committee, since he is not now a Councillor. Rebecca Carr offered to undertake this role in the interim; this was agreed. The Local Councils Group is

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expected to meet shortly, and should MPC as usual be asked to provide this Group's representative on the CDALC Executive Committee, Rebecca will continue in this role.

It was also agreed that Alan Jordan and the Clerk will represent MPC at Meetings of the CDALC Smaller Councils Forum.

61/21 GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

Nothing to report.

62/21 OTHER MATTERS

(a) **New Website Arrangements**

The new Parish Website is now fully functional, and hosted by Wix. Arrangements to cancel the previous Web-hosting from Zen Internet are in hand.

Action: Alan Jordan

(b) **Armed Forces Covenant**

MPC is now signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant.

(c) **EV Charging Points**

A Site Inspection has shown that the Village Hall Car-park would be suitable for EV Charging Points, and DCC's future intentions are awaited.

(d) **MPC's Statutory Policies**

RESOLVED that all MPC's existing Statutory Policies be formally re-adopted.

(e) **Big Spring Clean**

Due to COVID-19, arrangements for this Litter-pick have yet to be agreed.

Action: Clerk

David Sutton-Lloyd stated there could be a Campaign later this year linking the issues of Litter and ASB.

63/21 ADDITIONAL ITEMS

(a) It was suggested that problems in the Village Hall Car-park could be reduced by the provision of Gates locking off most of the Car-park when this was not required. This proposal is to be discussed with the Middridge Village Association (MVA).

Action: Chair

(b) The Chair advised that he is to step down as a Governor of Byerley Park Primary School around Christmas 2021. In his opinion it is important that Middridge be represented on the Board of Governors, and Alan Jordan has agreed to take his place, and has just been appointed a new School Governor.

(c) The Chair proposed that the Clerk be supplied with necessary computer equipment, at a cost of less than £100; this was agreed.

Action: Chair

(d) It was suggested that a Flyer be sent to all Residents introducing the new Council members; this was agreed.

Action: Clerk

64/21 NEXT MEETING

The next Meeting of the Parish Council will be on Monday, 5th July, starting at 6.45 pm. It is yet to be decided whether this will be held in the Village Hall, or by Video-conferencing.

Action: Chair/Clerk