

DALSTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Victory Hall, Dalston on Tuesday 24th April 2007 at 7.30pm.

PRESENT

Mr Bryan Craig (Vice-Chairman, Parish Council) in the Chair, Mr Trevor Allison (Carlisle City Councillor), PC Colin Hird (Cumbria Constabulary), Mr Mike Gardner (Carlisle City Council) Mr Craig Drinkald (Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service, Carlisle) and forty two Parishioners including Parish Council members.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Collier (Cumbria County Council), Ronnie Auld (PC Chairman), Gary Harrison, Michael Smillie (Parish Council), Mr Jim McCracken (Cumbria Fire Service), Mr Anthony & Mrs Judy Rickerby and Mrs Stephanie Diver.

MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 28th March 2006 were agreed and signed.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Vice Chairman read the Chairman's report on behalf of Ronnie Auld, who was absent due to family reasons. The Annual Meeting had been delayed until April, roughly 1 month later than previously, so that a report could be given on the accounts for the year just ended (2006/2007) as well as reviewing the 2005/2006 accounts.

2006 had been a year of setting things in motion and planning for the future. Many members had felt that the Parish Council had not been particularly good at planning and budgeting ahead, so this year it had made a big effort to look hard at the needs of the Parish as a whole and try to incorporate some items into a 10 or 15 year development plan, at the same time being mindful of the comments and ideas which came out of the Parish Plan. This had been done against the background of a potential upheaval in Cumbria local government structure, which could well alter the picture of local government in Carlisle District, resulting in changes to Parish Councils in the rural areas.

Early in the year the Parish Council carried out its annual review of the Parish Plan and the implementation of some of its major recommendations. Having some sort of festival ranked high in the 'wish list' emanating from the big questionnaire. This was seized upon by a very small group of Parishioners who set about organising a festival for 2006 designed to conclude on the Saturday of Dalston Show. This festival was a huge success, with a parade of floats through the village and onto the Show field as the climax, benefiting the show and bringing Dalstonians out onto the street in their droves. But, throughout the week of the festival, the various events were well attended and much enjoyed. The street party on the Friday night was fantastically well supported with Parishioners coming from all parts of the Parish. The scarecrow competition brought visitors to the Parish and hopefully this benefited some of the local businesses. Inevitably lots of people were involved in the festival (not least the scarecrow makers), but the Chairman specifically mentioned Alan Dinning, John Kelsey, Judy Rickerby, Bryan Craig, Mary Walton, Bobby Nichol and Peter Kirby plus all of the other event organisers for 6 months of very hard work. One of the great results of the 2006 festival, and particularly the floats, had been the involvement of some new young people into the Dalston scene and on the organising committees. Whether or not the Parish can continue to support an annual festival will depend on funding and people's willingness to organise it year on year.

At the annual budget meeting in November 2006, the Parish Council considered a list of potential projects, each one involving capital expenditure. These were:

1. Station entrance improvement
2. Solutions to the growing car parking problem
3. Square regeneration
4. River bank repairs
5. New community building or renovation of Forge Green
6. Village presentation
7. Grasscreting along The Green

It was notable that these projects were all Dalston village centric, but nobody was able to bring forward any worthy projects from the hamlets or other parts of the Parish for consideration.

1. Station Entrance Improvements The project had been in the planning phase for a couple of years. It was designed to provide a safe walkway for pedestrians along the side of the hedge, together with tidying-up of the island and surfacing of part of the carriageway, hopefully to be adopted by Cumbria Highways. For all sorts of reasons, mainly due to difficulties with title and bureaucracy at Cumbria County Council, it had been extremely difficult to progress, but the project had started and hopefully the improvements would be finally completed in 2007.
2. Car Parking It was hard to find a more obvious problem seeking an urgent solution. The parking issues had been creeping-up on Dalston for some time and, over the next year or so they could become critical. Parishioners and visitors need to be kept safe while walking around The Square and it should be easier for customers to use the village based businesses. The key to the problem might be the introduction of a 20mph speed limit running throughout the Square area and extending to Caldew School, as this would allow fewer intrusive signs to control car parking. Cumbria County Council had been asked to pursue this. The village was indebted to the Victory Hall for making available the land at Glave Hill as a community car park. This facility was heavily used, although not sufficiently by the long-term parkers, some of whom still used The Square. It had been hoped to make a similar arrangement with the Dalston Agricultural Society to use the top-end of the Show field for village parking, but unfortunately a satisfactory financial arrangement could not be made and so this plan was no longer under consideration. The proposal was for the Parish Council to fund the surfacing of this area, attend to the entrance and maintain the inevitable fencing. This might have cost the Parish as much as £100,000, but it would have enabled the Council to begin to address some regeneration in The Square. The Parish Council was very anxious to address car parking in Dalston and was looking at other areas within its control. Proposals were to be drawn-up for schemes on or adjacent to the Kingsway and put forward for community consultation.
3. Square Regeneration This was totally bound-up with the solution to car parking and perhaps the introduction of a 20mph limit through the village. Nothing could be done until car parking was solved.
4. River Bank Repairs The Parish Council was responsible for the bits of riverbank adjacent to Parish land. This is a heavy responsibility, as riverbank maintenance is expensive and environmentally difficult. Some small signs will be placed along The Green part of the riverbank to draw people's attention to the dangers of the displaced rock armour.
5. New Community Building and/or Renovation of Forge Green The Forge Green property is a major capital asset for the Parish Council. This building could be sold to specifically finance the provision of a new building or some significant improvements were required to the existing fabric. The Parish Council had tried to market the property, but, for reasons mainly due to common land issues, it failed to obtain a satisfactory price. During the marketing phase, the Parish Council examined a number of other sites around the village and was still in discussion with Caldew School over a small site in that area. The renovation possibilities for Forge Green had been explored and this was on-going. The Parish Plan clearly substantiated the fury of parishioners over the closure of the static library. As well as a book lending facility, it was a village community centre for people of all ages and it was starting to be a useful means of access, particularly for older residents, to the internet for email etc. The vans had not proved to be very popular or access friendly. Plans were advancing for the provision of a new library facility in The Square, with the Parish Council acting as the lead agency in this development, provided that the County Council were prepared to commit to the project with a letter of intent and a provisional agreement with the landlord. Thanks were due to Mrs Peggy Jackson, and through her, the Jackson Trust, for offering a lease on part of the Manor House, 28 The Square, so that a community library facility could be established in Dalston once more. Thanks were also due to Carlisle District Councillor, Trevor Allison, for doing all the early work in turning Mrs Jackson's idea into a workable project. Councillor Allison had recently conducted a survey among Dalstonians. As at 11th April he had 100 respondents, 91 of whom were in favour of a new library facility in The Square and 20 gave their names as willing volunteers to staff the premises in order to extend the hours beyond the normal County Council staffing periods. As well as the normal lending facility expected of a library, the respondents suggested more than a dozen additional roles for this proposed Parish community facility. The success or failure of this project was in the hands of Cumbria County Council, but without its firm commitment, this project will not go forward.
6. Village Presentation An allocation, in the Parish Council budget, of a sum of money to be spent on improving the decorative aspects of the Parish. The Parish Council had given £200 towards a new garden at St Michael's School and it was hoped to improve the outside appearance of the public toilets, as well as provide more plants for the Jubilee Garden.
7. Grasscreting on The Green More grasscrete on The Green *might* alleviate some of the parking pressure on The Square and filling in the gap between the Victory Hall and the Methodist Chapel

would certainly improve the appearance of The Green, especially during bad weather. However, it would also improve the amenity for the houses on that part of The Green and the Parish Council might be seen to be spending public money which was perceived to be to the benefit of the few.

Projects such as these place a burden on the finances of the Parish. Historically Dalston had been well down the list in terms of local precept contribution per household, but in the last couple of years, the Parish Council had significantly raised the precept to address some of the issues listed. It would also try and maximise the outside funding from grants and other sources.

The Parish Council considered and rejected a scheme to install a modest CCTV scheme in and around the churchyard to try and help with the problems associated with vandalism to gravestones and the fabric of the church. The Parish Council was also unwilling to implement a Police proposal to remove many of the higher bushes from the cemetery and to erect a railing fence around the entire plot. In terms of Youth Provision an idea was floated for the formation of a Youth Council. Some investigations had been made into how this could be achieved, but, so far, no progress had been possible as people with the time, energy and interest to give to this type of youth activity were needed. Thanks were expressed to the volunteers who currently ran youth activity groups of all types – the Recreation Association, the leaders of the Cubs, Brownies, Scouts, Guides, sports clubs etc., in fact anyone giving of their time to organise anything for the younger members of the Parish.

It was noted that the face of local government in Cumbria was likely to change dramatically in the coming years. The Government, triggered by last year's Local Government White Paper, was considering a proposal from Cumbria County Council to disband the present County Council and all of the District Councils, and establish a new unitary authority for the whole of Cumbria. The initiative for this had been grasped by the County Council, with the District Councils failing to provide an alternative proposal within the Government's timescale. During the consultation period, comments can be made direct to Government or through links on the Dalston website. Whatever the outcome it was vital that local councils, such as Dalston Parish Council, were able to exert greater influence over principle authority decision making. Some Parish Councils in Cumbria were interested in taking-on some of the service provision from a higher authority, but this was dependent on finance provision and professional structuring. One thing that might come out of the unitary principle would be the amalgamation, or clustering, of adjacent Parish Councils in order to lead to greater efficiency.

Alan Jackson, a Parish Councillor for quite a few years, resigned last month, but hopefully a replacement member had been found from the Raughton Head area. Alan Jackson was the Councillor who proposed and then saw through the highly successful signpost project a few years ago and it was hoped that he would continue to pass an interested eye over the cast iron signposts and urge the Parish Council to keep them up to scratch. Thanks were given to Alan for this and his other valuable community work on the Parish Council.

The Chairman expressed gratitude to all those on the Parish Council who put in so much of their valuable time, not just at meetings, but planning and organising projects. Specific mention was given to David Cowen and Gary Harrison for their help with the various building projects currently under consideration and the past chair persons were thanked for their help in keeping the Chairman nearly on the right track throughout his first year in office.

The most underestimated person in the Parish Council world was the Clerk. The Chairman saw at first hand how much was involved in Parish administration and that any clerk had to possess a wide range of skills for the job. The thanks of all the Councillors were extended to Liz Auld for the work that she did for Dalston Parish Council. The WI was thanked for providing the refreshments.

PARISH COUNCIL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDED 31/03/06 & 31/03/07

Copies of the accounts for 2005/06 were made available at the meeting. Expenditure exceeded income so the deficit was £3,354.61 for the year. The total balance carried forward was £28,849.75. Grants had been received towards the Buckabank footway work, Primrose Hall kitchen refurbishment and a concurrent service grant including an additional amount for burial ground expenditure. Additional costs had been incurred with Forge Green re-wiring and outbuilding roof repairs. Office development plans, the re-building of the Cemetery access lane wall, the Station entrance improvements and Parish Plan expenses were all budgeted costs. Grants given to local organisations totalled £5,037.

The un-audited accounts for 2006/07 showed a net profit of £3,332.40. The precept had been increased by £10,000 to £30,000. Burial income and Forge Green rents were down. Grants were gratefully received from Carlisle Parish Councils Association (Carlisle CC and Cumbria CC) for the Cemetery access wall, Station entrance, Gaitsgill railings repairs/painting and Primrose Hall kitchen cupboards. A Historic Buildings grant was received for Forge Green roof repairs and £732.50 from the Cumbria CC Parish Paths Initiative scheme. Insurance, open spaces and Cemetery costs were higher, with additional expenditure on the Cemetery access lane wall. Grants totalling £5,370 had been given to local organisations. A grant refund of £3,175 had been

made to the Countryside Agency for under spend on the signpost project. £8,000 was carried forward out of the Station entrance budgeted funds. The Clerk explained what the fixed assets were to those present.

OBSERVATIONS ON PARISH COUNCIL FINANCES 01/04/07-31/03/08

The precept had been raised by £2,000 to £32,000. It was hoped to receive 50% grant funding for the Station entrance capital project. The grass cutting, ground works and Cemetery maintenance expenditure had increased. Some notice board replacement/refurbishment was budgeted for.

DALSTON FESTIVAL REPORT AND UPDATE FOR 2007

Alan Dinning reported that the 2006 Festival had cost £4,750, with a surplus balance of £1,750 to carry forward. With various fund raising events, there was £4,000 in hand for the 2007 event. Businesses had contributed to the 2006 Festival and some had benefited by doubling their income during the week. The black and red bunting made by a group of ladies and put up by the Black Reds football team members, more than 80 entries in the scarecrow competition, the superb Victory Hall and Methodist Church floral and art display and memorabilia exhibitions, the Ladies Choir and Dearham Brass Band concerts, the WI teas, little and large tennis, football competitions, Bowling Club Open Day, children's Gala, the Friday market/street party, culminating in the Dalston Show parade and Festival Service in St Michael's Church had all contributed to the community spirit during the week. Arrangements for 2007 were well advanced with a scarecrow competition, Gala Day and opening of the new Recreation building, 'The Way we Were' umbrella display, art exhibition, quiz, Male Voice Choir concert, tennis, bowling and football events, a Gardening Club talk, Square evening and barbecue, parade of floats, a dance in the Show marquee and a village service all being organised

CUMBRIA CONSTABULARY – POLICE REPORT

PC Colin Hird explained that work concentrated on the schools had resulted in a reduction in damage and vandalism. There had been an increase in burglaries from commercial premises and farm outbuildings by gangs from Carlisle. The use of data tags and smart water was recommended. The average age of the offender was 15. The setting up of a Police Post in Dalston was still a possibility, but the original proposal at Caldew School was not considered to be cost effective. Mrs Oakley asked about the introduction of a 20mph speed limit, which would have minimum impact if not enforced. There were seemingly technical difficulties with using a speed gun on the Green. Mrs Craig wondered whether volunteers could be involved in a community speed watch - £1,500 funding would be required for the cost of the speed gun. Mr Craig commented about the number of HGVs travelling through Dalston. PC Hird indicated that there was insufficient time to monitor this and that foreign drivers could currently not be penalised. Mr Rowcroft felt that this should be addressed. Mr Oakley was concerned that there was an increased danger of a fatality occurring if these matters were not attended to. Inspector David Coates joined the meeting briefly and stated that the Community Officers were being pulled in too many directions. It was hoped to have a Police Post and a PCSO in Dalston within the next 12 months. He reported an 18% decrease in violent crime after 4 years increase, a 6% reduction in criminal damage, 26% less theft of motor vehicles and fewer dwelling burglaries. Two new detectives were to be deployed in Brampton in the next year.

GUEST SPEAKER: CRAIG DRINKELD, CUMBRIA FIRE SERVICE

Mr Drinkeld informed the meeting that the aim of fire fighters was not attending fires but trying to extinguish them before they started and prevent vehicle accidents. The Service was working on Arson Audits with local councils, through removal of fly tipping and rubbish. In the previous year there had been 3,000 incidents concerning rubbish being set alight. Road awareness training was being given to 6th formers in schools. Groups were welcomed to visit the Fire Station and free home safety visits were offered together with provision of smoke detectors – contact number 0800 3584777. Mr Drinkeld encouraged everyone to have a home fire plan. This should include identifying a simple escape route; establishing a bedtime routine of closing doors and turning off electrical appliances, keeping keys and a hammer handy and making sure that cooking and electrical equipment were in good order. Smoking was to be discouraged.

GUEST SPEAKER: MIKE GARDNER, CARLISLE CC WASTE MANAGEMENT OFFICER

Changes to household collection had been introduced to reduce the quantity of waste sent to landfill. Safe burning of waste was highly technical and expensive. The recycling strategy cost less and the alternate

weekly collection had been introduced within the existing budgets. There had been some initial problems with the distribution of wheeled bins, garden waste bins, recycling boxes and bags. The amount of waste going to landfill had plummeted since the implementation of the scheme due to the radical change in thinking regarding waste disposal. Mr Kelsey asked about commercial waste, particularly cardboard. There was a £32/ton cost to the contractor, but this was an economic incentive not to use landfill and incur the tax levy. Mr Walsh enquired about plastic and cardboard recycling facilities for rural households – unlikely that the kerbside recycling would be extended. Plastic collected was sold on the open market for reprocessing and it may be sent to China or South America. Old rubbish bins could be recycled, plastic bags and crisp packets might be in the future. Mr Turnbull felt that the plastics recycling bag tended to obstruct the footway and that there was a potential danger of more litter. Shredded paper should only be left for recycling in paper bags.

Both speakers were thanked for their informative talks.

OPEN QUESTIONS

Mrs Dalton requested that the lack of attendance at the meeting of a Cumbria County Council representative should be recorded in the minutes.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm.