

## **DALSTON PARISH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Victory Hall, Dalston on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014 at 7.30pm.

### **PRESENT**

Ronnie Auld (Parish Council Chairman in the Chair), Bryan Craig (Parish Council Vice Chairman) Cllr Trevor Allison (Cumbria CC and Carlisle CC) and 26 parishioners, including Parish Council members and the Clerk.

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Cllr O Roberts, Cllr P Ebbatson and Cllr P Dalton.

### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 24th April 2013 were agreed and signed.

### **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

The Chairman welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the 2014 Annual Parish Meeting, and planned to keep his report as short as possible with the Clerk having circulated a very comprehensive set of accounts and with it the Clerk's report, which covered some of the points which might normally be made.

Cllr Auld reported that 2013 was another very busy year for the Parish Council. To put this council in context Dalston is one of the bigger parishes in Carlisle District and as such has a precept to match. For the coming year, 2014/15, Dalston has maintained the precept increase in line with inflation.

In October 2013 the Parish Council welcomed Cllr Trevor Smith as a co-opted member. This followed the resignation of Cllr Cynthia Millar. Cllr Auld thanked Cynthia for her work and support where she takes great interest in the open spaces around Dalston village, but perhaps her biggest contribution was her help and advice on employment matters. She was able to bring her wealth of experience in local government HR in helping to solve issues relating to clerk employment and performance monitoring, greatly assisting Councillor Bryan Craig during the difficult period of 2012. The Chairman was delighted to say that Cynthia continues to take a great interest in Dalston cemetery and serves on the special Cemetery Working Group which was set-up at the beginning of 2014.

Cllr Trevor Smith who is was already bringing his financial experience to the Parochial Church Council, has been able to provide similar help and guidance to the Clerk in his first year with the Parish Council. The accounts presented at the meeting were taken straight from the new system which Trevor Smith has helped to design and maintain. The Excel based system will make it much easier for Cllrs to see at a glance the true state of the Parish Council finances. The Council are grateful to Trevor for his input and especially the considerable time that he has devoted to this project and for his continued support to the Clerk.

Thanks were recorded to Mr Dave Couling the Internal Auditor, for the work that he does at the end of every year in the audit of the accounts. This is a legal requirement and the Parish is fortunate to have Dave Couling in the village.

The Chairman recorded that the Clerk has now been in post for a full year, and that he knows from experience how complex a job this is in a modern Parish Council and that to become really effective in the role a clerk needs at least one full year, probably two, to grasp all of the issues, meet and get to know the local characters, and members of the various local government groups that the Parish needs to work with. The Clerk has made his mark in his first 12 months and has had to deal with the usual run of difficult issues.

Cllr Auld advised the meeting that following Cllr Bryan Craig stepping down as Chairman of the Parish Council at the end of the last financial year, and having had previous experience as Chairman of Dalston Parish Council, he had agreed to take on the role once again which was why he was now in front of the meeting.

He commented that one of his biggest tasks in the year has been helping the Clerk make an effective start to his time as Parish Council Clerk. Other Cllrs have been involved in specific areas and the Chairman expressed an indebtedness particularly to Bryan Craig, Pauline Dalton, Trevor Smith, Ann Byers, Felicity Kaye and Trevor Baxter, as well as Liz Auld who has continued to assist the Clerk in many areas, especially in the early weeks when she was closely involved in his training.

As a planning consultee Parish Councillors have considered 85 planning applications. These were the usual mix comprising single in-fill housing development, extensions, listed building consents and of the major 121 house Story development on land between Townhead Road and Station Road. A great deal of time was taken up with this latter application. Much of the work was entrusted to

a small group of councillors under Cllr Auld's chairmanship. Going on he spoke of his particular indebtedness to Cllr David Cowen and the other members of this group for their dedication and hard work in trying to make this planning application better.. The submissions which were made to the planners were detailed and reasoned, always citing the appropriate planning policies.

It was with great disappointment that all the work which had been done and the proposals presented were dismissed by the members of the Carlisle City Council planning committee who stated that there were no planning reasons why the application should not be approved, although morally they felt that it ought to be refused. This was not a good outcome when the Parish Council was very keen to enter into a dialogue to improve the inevitable development.

Having now reached the point where building has started, there are four things that the Cllr Auld as Chairman wanted on record about this development:

1. Contrary to some of the village rumour the Parish Council worked extremely hard to make improvements to this application. Having employed the services of a professional planning consultant, careful note was taken of the results of a parish consultation which was carried out by others. The Parish Council spoke regularly with the planning officer concerned and the Chairman had at least one meeting with the developer. It was recommended to the planners that they reject **this** planning application and enter into a discussion around a new plan for the land with a mix of housing more suited to Dalston's needs (subsequently borne out by the Housing Needs Survey carried out during 2013). In spite of this the Parish Council was not listened to. Whilst the Parish Council works with the planners all the time it was reported that, on this occasion, neither they or the developer showed interest in any form of dialogue. Cllr Auld felt that by working together more would have been achieved with a better result for the village.
2. Having already commented in the Parish Paper that he was upset at the attitude of certain members of the community towards the landowners, the Cllr Auld went on to say that some of the things that were said were totally unnecessary and hurtful and he would ask that, in future, people desist from making personal remarks of the nature that had been made.
3. It is important to know that this development alone is likely to net in excess of £1m to Carlisle City Council through the New Homes Bonus, none of which is likely to see its way back to this community. The City Council have also steadfastly refused to implement another government initiative, the Community Infrastructure Levy which is designed to return money to the community via a levy on the developer.
4. The associated Section 106 enshrines the following:
  - o 20 properties designated as 'affordable' both for rent and sale.
  - o A financial contribution of £115,587 towards the provision and maintenance of children's play space and sports pitches within Dalston.
  - o Financial contribution of £325,377 to Cumbria County Council towards educational provision.
  - o Production of a Travel Plan including a contribution of £73,626 to the County Council, plus £6,600 for the ongoing monitoring and review of the Travel Plan.
  - o Financial contribution towards the provision of household bins for each household.

Cllr Auld reported that during 2013 the Parish Council chose to embark on a Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council had intimated to the planners that the Council were likely to begin this process, which is strongly recommended by central government. It was disappointing that the City Council were not prepared to wait, at least until they could have sight of the Housing Needs Survey required for the NP, before making a decision on the Story development. Cllr Drouet and his colleagues were to report more about the NP later in the meeting. Cllr Auld expressed his appreciation and thanks to Cllrs Pauline Dalton, (Chairman of the Steering Group), and Chris Drouet for the detailed work associated with the Plan.

Cllr Auld went on to report that every year the Parish Council tries to have a capital project in addition to the provision of grants to small organisations within the Parish. In 2013-2014 the main capital project was in helping the Dalston Recreation Association with funding towards the ongoing development of their children's play area. The total contribution to the Recreation Association for this vital Dalston project was £8956.00. The total capital project spend in year ending 31 March 2014 was £16,322 with a further £4,871 given to local organisations, making a total contribution spend of £21,193.

As always the community is greatly indebted to the help provided by volunteers. Having already mentioned the work by Cynthia Millar he went on to say that there are many helpers in the village and the hamlets who work away each year, relatively unsung. Particularly reference was made to Bobby Nichol, Jenny and Ian Gray, Cathy Oakley, Joyce Roberts, as well as the Station Gardeners Jenny Baines, Fran Wilcock, and Dallas Brewis. On a sad note mention was made of Frank Todd, whose funeral it was on the day of the meeting, and whose presence will be sorely missed at Barras House as both he and Bob Roberts have been on the Cumbria in Bloom 'scene' for many years.

Cllr Auld stated that Dalston village would look a great deal less tidy if Stephanie Diver was not going round every day picking-up litter. It is interesting looking at the annual figures of bags collected. The really bad years were 2008 and 2009 when the numbers peaked at over 1400 bags per annum. In the last 4 years the numbers have dropped back a bit to just over 1000, which is a reduction of about 28%. Thanks were given to Ian Gray for the dog fouling picking that he does on The Green.

Cllr Auld also spoke of his grateful thanks to the number of other volunteers involved in various activities including the Neighbourhood Plan and the Cemetery Working Group.

Reporting on the Cemetery for which the Parrish Council is responsible, Cllr Auld advised the meeting that ideas are being considered for the old Hearse House. This building is in a poor state of repair and consideration has been given to possibly demolishing it completely or incorporating part of it into a well designed walled area for memorial plaques and a peaceful area to sit and reflect. It is thought that the left hand wall is part of the old cemetery boundary wall, and so should perhaps be retained as a feature.

Dalston has entered the 2014 Cumbria in Bloom competition when will do what they can to make the village look at its best when the judges come round sometime in the first 2 weeks of July.

Residents will be aware that Carlisle City Council is currently consulting on a new Local Plan from the period beginning 2015. The Parish Council has been closely involved in responding to the two public consultations. Cllr Auld thanked Cllr Oliver Rickerby for the tireless work which he has put into this and also the original work associated with the Rural Masterplan which is being used as source material for the Local Plan.

Commenting on the work that Cllrs do, Cllr Auld went on to draw attention to Cllrs Ian Newton and Peter Ebbatson who do a huge amount behind the scenes in the various open spaces for which the Parish is responsible. If something needs fixing, then both of these councillors are willing just to get on with the job without any fuss.

Looking at the wider picture Cllr Auld stated that the Parish Council is very conscious of the smaller hamlets and that it represents the whole of Dalston Parish. One of the priorities for 2014 must be to look at the needs of the hamlets and residents of these should be encouraged to contact the Clerk to discuss the needs of their own part of Dalston Parish. He suggested and it might be an idea for each hamlet to have a Hamlet Champion, which, ideally would be their locally living Parish Councillor. However, if a hamlet doesn't have a councillor, then they might like to ask a resident to make themselves known to the Clerk and to keep the Council up-to-date with their needs.

2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the start of WW1. While we are not planning anything specific, Parish Council will support any national acts of remembrance and organise the flag to fly as appropriate. It is planned that red poppy seeds will be sown in the Jubilee Garden which should provide an appropriate show at the right time.

This is election year for the Parish Council and for the first time for a number of years we are going to have an actual election. This is brought about by the retirement of Cllr John Kelsey. Cllr Auld spoke the Council when he gave a special thank you to John for the contribution that he has made over at least 20 years stating that his was always the voice of common sense on the Council and he has always been ready to take part in council matters that are close to his heart. His views have always been robust and valued.

In summation Cllr Auld expressed thanks to the ladies of the WI for providing the refreshment which were to follow the meeting.

Questions on Chairmans Report :

From the floor came questions concerning how the New Homes Bonus which related to the Story development. Cllr Auld responded and commented on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) might benefit the community. Cllr Allison added that South Lakes Council are implementing these but that Carlisle City Council are known to be not keen on the distribution of these funding sources. Cllr Auld added that more funds may come to the local business enterprise through the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

#### **PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2014**

A comprehensive set of draft unaudited accounts were available

The Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer provided a short report expressing thanks to all Cllrs of Dalston Parish Council for their trust and support during the first year in post.

The Clerk went on to provide some statistics of the first year in the role:-

- 12 PC meetings
- 85 Planning Applications

- 8 Committee meetings
- 2 working groups
- Over 1000 phone calls
- Over 3000 inward emails
- Over 1400 outgoing emails of which over 500 were communicated to the Chairman

The Clerk confirmed that the figures circulated were extracted from the new financial spreadsheet which has been developed to provide a better and more transparent set of figures for all concerned. Thanks were expressed to Cllr Trevor Smith without whose considerable support and expertise, this project would not have happened and for the assistance of Cllr Ann Byers for her many hours aid in setting up data, and to the other Councillors who have been involved in overseeing the development of this project.

A few pointers from the report were highlighted

### **INCOME**

Total income including all Grants monies in the year amounted to £75,711. ( against £71833 last year)

Like for like comparisons are misleading. If grant income from all sources is removed from the last two fiscal periods there are only two main variations where core income was up about £1000 on the precept and £1500 from Cemetery fees.

### **EXPENDITURE**

Total expenditure in period was £81935 (2012-2013 = £175099) - which when the associated Kingsway car park costs were removed amounted to £56737. Again if Grant funding for the Neighbourhood Plan is removed, an error of £3000 overpayment by Cumbria CC and the balance of Capital payments carried over from the Kingsway added to the Capital Grant for the Recreation play area, the actual spend is about £55000.

### **OBSERVATIONS ON THE BUDGET FOR THE YEAR 2014/15**

The Clerk highlighted some of the Key points for the year ahead:-

- The Parish Council agreed to increase the annual Precept figure by the rate of inflation of 2.7%.  
2014-2015 precept £44,019 (£1200 increase)
- The year end balances of £61911 included year end adjustments of £12,843
- A Cemetery Working Group is set up to advise on the maintenance and development of the Cemetery with an increased budget to carry out more maintenance. (£5000)
- Approximately £6,000 of repairs to cast iron signposts is carried forward into the new fiscal year as these are currently being re cast/repared prior to reinstatement during 2014
- Additional expenditure is anticipated in carrying out a tree survey for the Parish Risk Assessment schedule. This may result in tree management work being carried in the period.
- A bat survey of the Hearse House prior to a decision on whether to recycle elements of this building which is falling into disrepair.
- Ongoing repairs and maintenance of Notice Boards in the Parish
- Ongoing repairs and maintenance of waste bins in the Parish
- A stone cobble seat to be constructed on the Kingsway. This is a carried over cost from the last fiscal period.

In summary the Clerk confirmed that the Parish Finances are in a strong stable position and that the Parish is ready for more change and invited any interested party to contact him at the Parish Office if they wished an explanation on any aspect of the accounts.

### **CUMBRIA BROADBAND**

Cllr Auld provide an update on the current status of the high speed broadband implementation stating that just under 40% was now completed against the planned completion of 30 June 2014. Whilst some slippage could be expected, it is anticipated that only 65% will see significant changes in connection speeds whilst 93% of the overall community will benefit. He also reported on the plan for 'Digital Carlisle' where free wifi will be available within the city centre, a scheme that may have offshoots into the larger localities.

## **DALSTON FESTIVAL 2014**

Alan Dinning of Dalston Recreation Association provided a comprehensive resume of the main events and activities scheduled during the Festival week which was taking place from 2nd to 10th August with the Dalston Show on 9th August 2014. Whilst some items may be subject to change, the full programme was being inserted into the forthcoming Parish Magazine.

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

A report from Cllr Dalton was read by Cllr Byers which provided an update on the role of the NP working group and its importance in influencing and controlling plans and planning for the future.

'The Plan was launched last April with a survey, from which the Parish Council was able to ascertain what was important to the people of Dalston Parish about the place where we live and what lies in the future. You might think this is "locking the stable door" after the Story application to build 121 houses was approved. But at the same time Carlisle City Council was preparing its local plan to last the next fifteen years. Dalston Parish Council was consulted on this and we responded accordingly. It became increasingly evident that a Plan for Dalston itself was much-needed. A document to look to future development both for employment and homes in the Parish and to specify where this could take place without threatening the essential character and integrity of the Parish. We are assured that when it is accepted it will be a statutory planning tool. Under the "Localism Act" we are promised that this will carry much more force. The criteria are certainly very rigorous. We have to trust that it is all worth it. A steering group of Parish Councillors and interested volunteers has met eight times. You already know about David and his group's sterling efforts on the environment and while we speak, a business survey is doing the rounds. A Housing Needs survey was commissioned with grant funding from Government money. This produced some interesting responses and showed amongst other things a need for a small number of low cost houses. Details of this are available from the Parish Office. Cllr Bryan Craig is looking at facilities and needs for the young people of the Parish.

Still to come is a section we might call "health and well being". After all that, some policies will be drawn up, which will be presented to you in the form of a (dreaded word) QUESTIONNAIRE!

The responses to this questionnaire will be the evidence base upon which the Plan will be written. That Plan will go to the inspectors and there is some room for adjustment (not much), then it will come to you and there will be REFERENDUM DAY. You can also see that it does depend on the people of Dalston Parish becoming and staying involved. So forgive us if you can't escape us banging on about The Plan until you are fed up of hearing about it, but also think about being able to offer some help in whatever way'.

Cllr Drouet went on to add that the next stage of the plan is that it required to be 'evidence based' which by necessity involved a further survey. He stressed the importance of engaging the whole of the local population citing the 16 – 25 age group as a disenfranchised group. He asked that residents might volunteer in this process by contacting their near neighbours to encourage the completion of questionnaires that are so important in this next stage.

It was hoped to engage as many local groups as possible in the process. More information will be available later in the year.

A question on the role of the Youth Council was tabled from the floor with responses from Cllrs Craig and Drouet advising that talks were being held with Caldew School amongst others and that a newly commissioned office had been created to engage with this age group.

Cllr Drouet went on to introduce Mr David Wilcock emphasising that his talk constituted an important aspect of the Neighbourhood Plan as it focussed on an important element of the 'assets' within the community.

## **PRESENTATION BY DAVID WILCOCK**

David Wilcock provided a stimulating and thought provoking presentation on the River Caldew and its status as a river of Special Scientific Interest (SSI). His talk focussed on the significant issues affecting the waterways and their biodiversity and ecosystems and their position as a migration route for wildlife. In what was a very thought provoking presentation he highlighted the fact that many or possibly most of the British Waterways were likely to fail to meet the standards set to be achieved by 2015. He argued the case that local resources such as the Caldew and local land, woods and forests should under the Localism Act be considered 'assets' in the broadest sense. As such they should be included in documentation such as the Neighbourhood Plan where there is a need to include a statement that should go beyond identifying them but ways to appreciate, use, protect and enhance them which is endorsed by the people of the local community acting as agents of change where biodiversity is being challenged. He closed his talk referring to two web sites [edenc.org.uk](http://edenc.org.uk) and [lwec.org.uk](http://lwec.org.uk) where further information was available. There followed a short question and answer session on his talk.

## **OPEN QUESTIONS**

Cllr Bryan Craig highlighted the opportunity for young people under the age of 25 to apply for a Carlisle CC Educational Charity grant.

Cllr Kelsey raised the issue of road traffic disruption and the lack of cost to the developer compared to the community relating to the ongoing closure of Dalston Road. A question was also raised about the perceived lack of a pedestrian refuge planned for

Station Road where Cllr Auld advised that the Parish Council would be robust in its efforts to ensure suitable arrangements were made by the developer and/or Highways

The meeting closed just after nine pm..

The meeting was followed by refreshments provided by Dalston WI.