

DALSTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at The Victory Hall, Dalston on Tuesday 13th May 2025 at 7.30pm.

PRESENT

Ann McKerrell (Parish Council Chairman in the Chair), 26 parishioners including Parish Council members. The Parish Clerk and the Responsible Financial Officer were also present.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Irving, Cllr Drouet and Mick Ryan

The Chairman welcomed everyone.

MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 7th May 2024 were approved as a true record.

2. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL – Cllr McKerrell

It's been another busy year for the Parish Council.

We continue to make small but positive improvements around the Parish. To give you examples, we have levelled more areas in the Churchyard and plan to do several more, I think the Churchyard is looking tidy and feels tranquil. It is a pleasure to walk around, and we get many positive comments from residents. We are trying to keep on top of the artificial flowers and loose objects which hinder Wigton Town Council as they are cutting the grass – but we do inspect the area frequently to keep it free of debris.

There has been a new path installed in Summerfield play area between the car park entrance and the path leading from Summerfield. It was quite a muddy area, and the new path has tidied it up well.

345 trees have been planted around the Parish, a mammoth task carried out by a very small group of Councillors. Thank you and well done.

The Kingsway has been registered to the Parish Council and is now in the process of being registered as a Village Green to secure the area for the use of parishioners. It's been a long and complicated task, but we feel it was important to preserve this area against challenge for the future of the village.

A beacon has been installed on The Green, it will be a great asset particularly to the teams of people who organize events and a much safer way of holding the small bonfires we have when commemorating or celebrating events. Those of you who have helped at these events in the past will understand.

The Parish Council have supported several events including The Rural Funtime activity days, a children's event held over three separate days during the summer holidays and run by Greenwich Leisure Limited. This event is held in the Recreation Centre, and it has been the only location to be fully booked every year.

We facilitated a defibrillator training session in the Victory Hall which was well attended.

We maintain a good relationship with our local PCSO Graham Kirkpatrick who has resumed the police desk which is held in the Co-op. For those who do not have access to the internet it is a good opportunity to talk to Graham about any concerns. It's important to keep reporting incidents as it helps the police to build up a picture of crime in the area. I would urge people when they post criminal events on Facebook to also report the crime with the police.

The Parish Council are proactive in applying for grants to subsidise larger projects within the Parish. The beacon and grave levelling are two examples, and we are looking into placing grass crete at Bridge End near to the bus shelter.

I couldn't do my report without mentioning the extreme inconvenience we, the residents, have experienced and will continue to suffer for the foreseeable future, during the road closures and the many other disruptions on our roads. It has been a very difficult time, and we can only hope that the end result will justify the frustrating and lengthy delays and diversions we have had to endure.

I would also like to mention while we're talking about roads and other facilities that the Parish Council has a limited remit of things we can achieve. We cannot fill potholes, we cannot repair streetlights, stop speeding, though we are currently looking into ways of monitoring the speeding issues. The public toilets which are currently closed due to staffing issues are the responsibility of Cumberland Council. We can and do make frequent representations on behalf of residents and indeed are very happy to do so, our first responsibility is always our residents, however we have no more influence over the council than anyone else. The more people who report problems the better the response. Safety in numbers, it is a shared responsibility to show a degree of vigilance and care for our neighbours.

We have been blessed in previous years with some excellent volunteers but as they retire we are finding it increasingly difficult to replace them. If you or anyone you know wishes to help around the Parish there is always lots to do. Many hands make light work.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Parish Councillors for their support, their knowledge both local and general, expertise and advice during and after meetings which is invaluable. Your regular attendance and support is much appreciated.

Thank you all for attending our Parish meeting.

Also I would like to thank the ladies from Dalston WI for providing the refreshments and to thank our two Parish Council clerks.

3. QUESTIONS ON THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A parishioner enquired if the roads were going to be repaired after the work on the Carlisle Southern Link road was completed. Cllr Allsion agreed to take the enquiry on board.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 - Margaret Watling (Responsible Financial Officer)

The income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 March 2025 and current asset statement was available on all seats.

The budget for the year ended 31 March 2025 was set in November 2023. It was anticipated the year would end with a small surplus of £116. It was still an uncertain time. Locally, the new Cumberland Council was only part way through its first year. Nationally, the annual rate of inflation although beginning to fall at that time was still almost 7% and a General Election would need to take place within the next 12 months. Happily the year ended with a surplus of £11,198 before Dalston in Bloom and transfers to reserves.

Income exceeded expenditure for the General Parish Fund by £6,113. Building Society interest rates have remained good and we managed to obtain reimbursement from Cumberland Council for the repair of the road surface at the entrance to Glave Hill car park which for safety reasons we had paid to repair in the year ended 31 March 2024.

We continue to monitor costs and try to source grants to help with expenses whenever we can. We did receive a grant from Cumberland Council Community Panel toward the cost of The Beacon. But grants are now much harder to obtain.

New contracts were agreed for grass cutting and insurance. Energy bills decreased. Tree work was one of the larger expenses. There were some windblown trees and Cumberland Council identified trees with ash dieback disease which need to be removed. Further work was required from the parish tree survey. We also paid for some garden maintenance work in the village which had previously been carried out by volunteers. We continue to be thankful to the volunteers who continue to do jobs in the parish which keep our expenses down.

Income we received from the solar panel farm and a contribution from the Parish Council was paid to the Dalston Parish Charitable Trust who used the funds to award grants to support groups within the Parish. More will be said about the work of the Charitable Trust later in the meeting.

The Cemetery income surpassed budget although it was not as high as in previous years as there were fewer new grave spaces sold. The £2,800 income from the sale of the 4 new grave spaces in the year has been transferred to an earmarked fund known as the cemetery diminishing asset reserve to be used for the eventual extension of the cemetery.

We continue to receive a grant from Cumberland Council towards the running of the Cemetery.

After resurfacing footpaths in the previous year to 31 March 2024 attention was turned to the levelling and turfing of sections of grave spaces. This is a major expense which will continue into the current year however it will make the work of the grass cutting contractors much easier.

Forge Green was fully occupied all year. The surplus of rental income over expenditure was £9,123. There were no major expenses in the year however the replacement of the roof is an ongoing consideration. The work is dependent upon ecological surveys due to the presence of bats which are a protected species. A further £5,000 has been set aside in the roof replacement reserve for this work.

The Dalston in Bloom fund stands at £3,119 and £102 for Kelseys Meadow. Two small grants were paid out and the sign at Kelseys Meadow was repaired after being vandalised.

As we start the new financial year we will continue to monitor expenses to maintain and improve the Parish for those who live, work and visit here.

There were no queries on the report.

5. RECREATION COMMITTEE UPDATE – Rachel England

For those of you who don't know, we run the recreation ground just down the road. We have a playground and a hall. The site is also used by the bowling, tennis and football clubs.

We have had another busy year this year in the hall and have nursery in 3 days, yoga, table tennis, karate and cubs in regularly. We also continue to be popular for children's parties.

At the start of 2024 we fitted a new boiler and we also received a grant in the year for some new benches and a fridge. Over the recent Easter break we also had the floor refurbished.

While we have had a busy year we are struggling for committee members. There are currently only 4 of us and we all have busy day jobs and young families. It would be good to have some new members if anyone is interested or knows someone who may be interested. We all share the work and usually have one meeting a month. If anyone fancies coming along to a meeting please get in contact.

Looking to the future, we hope to take on one big project a year and this year we are looking to replace the fence around the playground. It is quite damaged from people sitting on it and cars hitting it so we would love to replace it, as it should make the site look really smart.

6. DALSTON CHARITABLE TRUST UPDATE – Cllr Kyle

A copy of the receipts and payments account for the year ended 31 March 2025 and a leaflet was available on all seats. Cllr Kyle drew attention to the article featured in the May Parish Paper which explains what the Charitable Trust does. The trust was formed ten years ago and now administers four funds. The leaflet highlighted the type of things the Trust would consider for grant funding. Cllr Kyle also encouraged parishioners to consider leaving a legacy to the Trust in their will as being free from Inheritance Tax is a tax efficient way to leave funds to benefit the Parish in years to come.

7. DALSTON FESTIVAL 2025 UPDATE – David Fowler

Thank you to everyone who supported the Festival last year which was the best one so far. Everything was well supported. 2025 will be the 21st Dalston Festival. Festival week will begin on 2nd August with the carnival on The Kingsway. It is great news that the Bluebell will be open for Festival Friday this year. The scarecrow festival will return. A traditional theme will hopefully attract more entries.

Thank you to all the groups and organisations who help out and donate to make Festival Week a success.

8. DALSTON IN BLOOM 2024 REPORT – Cllr Byers

The results were announced at the Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Gosling Sike, Houghton. The Chair, Ronnie Auld, gave a résumé of the year's entries with a presentation.

Dalston was awarded a gold for the Pride in Your Community entry. The village is a credit to the combined efforts to make it a special place to work, play and visit despite the southern ring road work.

All the It's Your Neighbourhood entries did very well.

The Jubilee Garden received a well-deserved gold and outstanding level 5.

The Millennium Garden Wooded Area gained gold and outstanding level 5.

Bridge End area had fine displays of flowers and shrubs in planters especially with the recycled litter bins. They were awarded a thriving level 4.

Forge Green Gardens and Kelsey's Meadow received an outstanding level 5. The gardens provide a community facility and engage in environmental responsibility.

Nook Lane Close procured a thriving level 4.

Dalston Square and Churchyard flower beds gained an outstanding level 5. The Square has a floral impact with businesses displaying planters or hanging baskets. The church flower beds have been developed by the members. Paragon Vets, Dalston, were nominated out of 40 entries for a totally new RHS Community Award. They topped the Sustainable Gardening category and went to the National Britain in Bloom Awards in Manchester.

The Dalston Station group also received a thriving level 4 for their impressive work.

Liz Auld resigned as the administrator after 14 years of service. She received a glowing report for her hard work, time, enthusiasm and success with Cumbria in Bloom.

Our success in Dalston is a tribute to our many volunteers in the community who give up their time and take pride in keeping it tidy and appealing. Thanks must also go to Capsticks Nursery whose flowers have given excellent blooms, Wigton Town Council grass-cutting contractors and the appreciated support of local businesses. We look forward to your support again for Cumbria In Bloom 2025.

9. VICTORY HALL UPDATE- Jane Clark

It's great to see everyone here and using the facilities for the benefit of the village.

A big thank you to the Parish Council who have always been very supportive of the hall.

There are 11 trustees including 5 'officers'. A list of trustees with photos is on the notice boards at the hall. We are a great team! Most of the trustees have been in post for 7 years or so and it would be good to have newer members to ensure smooth succession in the future.

The hall has become a busy place! We have a number of new regular bookings and several 'commercial' day time bookings which boost the hall's income. There have been some minor problems after parties and we have had to introduce some new measures to minimise such risks.

The hall is in good order after the recent refurbishments. Our cleaners do a great job keeping everything ship-shape. Apart from general maintenance, our only concern at the moment is the main hall floor which will need replacing in the near future.

We are fortunate that our annual income remains slightly above our expenses, which has allowed us to keep booking fees unchanged for several years. We are also able to offer discounts to local groups and some free bookings for village events. The Annual reports are available on our website <https://www.victoryhall-dalston.org.uk/info> and a copy will be left on the table after this meeting.

OPEN QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

A parishioner spoke to congratulate The Victory Hall for being an amazing facility for the village. He also announced that this year is the 40th Anniversary of Cumbria in Bloom and thanked all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly over the years. There is going to be an article on ITV about Cumbria in Bloom for which he has been interviewed and provided certificates and portfolios from the Dalston entries over the years. Dalston should get some very good publicity from the interview.

A parishioner spoke to also thank the fantastic volunteers in the village and commented however that the village has changed a lot. Whilst new developments have been embraced there was concern about the size of the village and she asked if the Parish Council had discussed how to retain Dalston as a village. In particular had the Parish Council looked beyond the 2030 Neighbourhood Plan? The clerk advised that the Parish Council can only comment on submitted planning applications. The Chairman remarked that the Parish Council are mindful of the expiry date of the Neighbourhood Plan.

A parishioner commented that there were two big success stories to come out of the Parish Plan. These were the Village Festival and the Charitable Trust. It was suggested that there should be another survey to ask residents what they would like to see for the future of the village and perhaps a new Parish Plan and Design Statement.

A parishioner expressed the need for infrastructure and services such as schools and dentists to be in place as the Carlisle boundary encroaches on the village.

There being no further questions the Chair thanked everyone for attending and invited everyone to stay and enjoy the refreshments served by Dalston W. I.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm.