

Minutes of Newbiggin by the Sea Parish (Town) Meeting

Held on Monday 18th February 2019 – 7.30pm at
Simonside Hall, Simonside Terrace, Newbiggin by the Sea. NE64 6PU

PRESENT:

- Conveners – Gail Penman, Suzanne Ramshaw (minute taker), Alison Sutherland, Alison McLean, Helen Armstrong and Irene Donald
- Appointed Chair – Reverend Marie Attwood

IN ATTENDANCE: 60 members of the public

INTRODUCTION

As neither the Chair nor Vice Chair of Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council was in attendance one of the conveners welcomed and thanked the residents in attendance.

She explained how this meeting was convened and introduced the other five conveners. She explained that only residents on the voters roll could participate in the meeting.

(To note:- our records show that only two of those in attendance were not Newbiggin by the Sea Electors and neither of those people spoke or voted in this meeting. One was a County Councillor, the other lived outside of the town). She explained that the information gathered would not be shared or used for any other purpose than to prove the fact that they were electors.

She advised that the Town Council Town Clerk had that afternoon written to them, despite having had the agenda for seven days to advise that the final agenda item 'Any Other Business' was not a legitimate item for a Local Government Act meeting. The Conveners took advice from the UK website 'askyourcouncil.uk' which states '*a skeleton agenda is usually published ahead of the meeting, but often items are added up to and even during the meeting.*'

She then said that she would now amend the 'Any other business' agenda item to be 'Urgent Business' to comply with Town Council guidelines.

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

A convener explained that had the Town Council Chair or Vice Chair attended this evening, they would have had been required to Chair this meeting. As they had chosen not to we needed to appoint a Chair for this evening. The conveners asked an independent and impartial member of the Community, Reverend Marie Attwood – Minister of St Mark's and St Andrew's Methodist Church in Newbiggin by the Sea. A convener asked the residents if there were any objections to Marie chairing the meeting. NO OBJECTIONS were noted.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Before apologies Marie asked if anyone in the room has any objection to the meeting being recorded – this was not for publication but purely to ensure views were captured as accurately as possible. NO OBJECTIONS were noted. Marie also said she expected the meeting to be conducted with dignity and respect. We may not all agree on points but we will be respectful of each other's opinion.

Marie explained to the residents that although some Town Councillors were in the room, they were only attending as residents – they were not permitted to answer questions in their capacity as Town Councillors. One of the councillors, attending as a resident, did at this point say that if there was information she could help with as a resident she was very happy to do so.

AGENDA ITEM 1 – PROPOSED CRESWELL ARMS PUBLIC TOILET REFURBISHMENT

Marie now invited motions from the floor

Motion 1
Elector - I realise the toilet proposal has been cancelled but this still leaves a high rise in our precept. My motion is to move that this precept is reduced or if not possible, that the precept payers are fully consulted on what the money is to be spent on and the item is put on to the agenda at the Annual Assembly.
Seconded by:
Elector
Discussed and debated
<p>A councillor in attendance as a resident explained that a legal time limit exists for Town Council to advise County Council of precept that has been set and that time limit has now passed.</p> <p>An elector wanted to know where the precept is going and why the Town Council's own finance committee's proposal of 3% was ignored in favour of more than 11%.</p> <p>Another elector suggested that bringing a last-minute amendment without consultation. All amendments must be fully researched.</p> <p>An overview of how the precept rises for the last two years were arrived at was given by one of the conveners. In 2018 the Town Council's finance committee budgeted and recommended a 0% rise in precept. This was approved at committee level. However, when this went to full council, a last minute request for an extra £28,000 was made by the Vice Chair – he said this was £20,000 for refurbishment of toilet block and £8,000 to improve the entrance to the car park on the Moor Estate. He had no costings / paperwork whatsoever and yet the motion was passed on a majority vote.</p> <p>Fast forward 12 months to 2019 and this time the finance committee were going to recommend a reduction in precept but due to some expenses at County level and salary rises which were beyond their control they recommended a moderate increase of 3.1%. This was approved at committee level. But when it went to the full council, again the Vice Chair put forward a motion to raise an addition £20,000 for his toilet block project. This was again approved by a majority vote. He also advised that the total project cost had now risen to £71,000.</p> <p>Over the course of the next couple of meetings it was discussed how they would find that extra £31,000 – at first, they said they'd take out a loan. Then they said they'd use two years' worth of Section 106 money.</p> <p>This is money that our council and others get from the windfarm people. It's approximately £14,000 per year. It's previously been used to refresh children's play areas. For the next two years they planned to spend it on toilets.</p>

Chair Marie Attwood – It certainly seems to me that you are telling me about lack of transparency and poor practice. They are your representatives and if they are conducting themselves in this manner then don't vote for them.

An elector suggested perhaps there should be a vote of no confidence.

Another elector wanted to make it clear that not all Town Councillors acted in this way. But four in particular did.

Another elector said that anyone in business would tell you that you need costings and itemised estimates to which Chair Marie Attwood agreed and said any church projects much have three estimates to choose from. There were two estimates on this occasion but they were not available to the electorate. Another Elector suggested that despite being in building trade for many years they'd never been 40% out on an estimate before.

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 2

Elector– As there is no more toilet proposal what happens to the next two years Section 106 money which was set aside for this project. I propose that it is discussed and suggest that our play parks are updated – many residents told us in person and via social media that they wanted this.

Seconded by:

Elector

Discussed and debated

Short discussion around what 106 money has previously been used for.

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Engagement Policy

Marie read out the objectives from the Town Council Community Engagement Strategy document

1. To encourage effective local community engagement.
2. Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them.
3. Adopt modes of communication which enables as many people as possible to be reached.
4. Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc. obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
5. To inform residents of the role of Town Councillors and the Town Council.
6. To enhance the well- being and prosperity of the town.

Marie said from what she's heard so far tonight none of those objectives are being met.

Marie invited motions from the floor

Motion 3

Elector - proposed that we ask the Chair of the Town Council to explain why, after signing an Engagement Policy, did he choose not to engage with the electorate about something that was obviously causing high feelings in all age groups within the village. (Toilets proposal) Can the Chair explain at the next Town council meeting what the engagement policy is and how they intend to implement it?

Seconded by:

Elector

Discussed and debated

An elector asked why all of the councillors have not attended tonight – a convener advised that they were all invited as a courtesy. Another of the conveners advised that had the Chair or Vice Chair attended tonight the rules suggest they would have had to Chair this meeting. And if they had done that, they'd have had to answer your questions – no 15-minute limit – all of them. The elector who asked the question suggested that would be why they weren't here.

One Elector advised that she'd attended her very first Town Council meeting recently and was absolutely appalled at the clear disconnection they had with the public. They referred to residents as 'the audience' and had a general air of aloofness and an 'I'm alright jack' attitude. I was surprised and disappointed.

A councillor in attendance as a resident explained that the 15 minutes for questions which is set out in Town Council standing orders is a national guideline but is at the discretion of chair.

Another elector asked if we have no confidence in the council can we not change it without waiting two years. Chair Marie said there was legislation that could be looked at.

Another elector said there were some members supporting the community whilst others were not and that a couple were just 'nodding dogs'.

Another elector said that he attends all the meetings and has done for some time and there is a complete lack of financial transparency at meetings. Four councillors which included Chair and Vice-Chair just constantly block motion after motion that would improve transparency. It's disgusting.

Another elector stated that the labour councillors were doing the work whilst the Lib Dem 'independents' were not.

Another elector stated that despite the residents talking about bad behaviours and bullying tactics etc this is an improvement on how things were before the meetings were videoed.

Marie suggested that the residents start to document these instances of poor behaviour into statements – dates, times and names. She asked this conveners of tonight's meeting if they would collate and they said yes.

Marie asked for a show of hands from the residents if they felt the other 4 councillors were doing a good job – this was a unanimous yes.

An elector explained that when questioned at the last Town Council meeting they admitted that they'd not consulted the residents since 2010.

One of the councillors in attendance as a resident discussed that there had been some engagement around the 10 Year Town Plan and that in fact in 2016 a survey went out to every residence in Newbiggin. Only 44 were returned. She advised a new survey would be coming out soon and encourage residents to complete. The 2016 survey said the number one priority was events. She also advised that procurement of works is the same as the County Council have to do and they follow the same rules. This was challenged by an elector who again as per her motion sited the lack of transparency.

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – URGENT BUSINESS

Marie now invited motions from the floor

Motion 4

Elector– When will we get a post office – Can the issue of the Post office be raised at Town Council level?

Seconded by:

Elector

Discussed and debated

Marie discussed that a town of this size, a local Post Office is really needed for the mature folks
It was discussed that two units in the new development are standing empty.

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 5

Elector– I'd like to raise the issue of the Town Clerks. We recruited a Deputy Town Clerk quite some time ago – this was because the Town Clerk was to retire. My proposal is that the Town Council tell the people of Newbiggin exactly how much they are spending on administration i.e. Town Clerks and confirm if and when the Town Clerk is retiring.

Seconded by:

Elector

Discussed and debated

No debate required

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 6

Elector– I'd like to ask why the Town Clerk answers more questions at the Town Council meetings than the Councillors do. He has far too much say. The Councillors are responsible and they should answer. I propose the Town Council supply the Job Description of the Town Clerk and clarify his duties at the next Town Council meeting.

Seconded by:

Elector
Discussed and debated
No debate required
Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 7
Elector – I'd like to propose that the Town Council discuss and advise what they are doing with the proposal they had to tackle dog mess on public pathways
Seconded by:
Elector
Discussed and debated
Apparently Town Council say on 14 people have complained about dog mess
Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 8
Elector – I propose that the Town Council office has a book where people can log instances of dog mess and that the Town Clerk records these online. This will help those not computer literate to advise of these issues.
Seconded by:
Elector
Discussed and debated
A discussion started on Town Council office opening hours An elector suggested Town council consider putting up signage regarding dog mess – it's a real problem.
Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 9
Elector – I want to propose that the Town Council investigate and engage someone to properly inspect the beach park for health and safety. I was at the park with my two grandchildren and in my view, it is not safe. One of the items has been removed for repair but they have left the metal plate it was attached to. It's covered over with sand but it's there and is dangerous. The climbing bars are also very dangerous for younger children.
Seconded by:
Elector
Discussed and debated

A councillor in attendance as a resident suggested that there are currently weekly inspections of the play parks

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 10

Elector– I'd like to propose that the Town Council look at the opening hours of their office to make it more accessible to working residents

Seconded by:

Elector

Discussed and debated

Opening one hour a day is no good if you're working 9am – 5pm
Chair Marie suggested a couple of evenings or a Saturday

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 11

Elector– The Town Council last year increased rent on allotments by £10, they are adding on another £10 rise this year and another next year. We've also been told that we are responsible for the outside fences and water mains. A town councillor says we have to.

I propose that the Town Council provide documentation showing that they are the legitimate owners of the allotments and why the allotment holders are being asked to be responsible for external walls and water mains. And also provide justification for the rent increases.

Seconded by:

Elector

Discussed and debated

A councillor in attendance as a resident said that she was unaware of those rises other than the first year's £10 – there'd not been a rise for some time. The allotments are owned by the Town Council and the Allotment Association paid the Town Council rent. She said she would enquire about this.

Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 12

Elector– I'd like to propose that the Town Council look in to extending the opening hours for the front street toilets – they are not open nearly long enough especially in height of summer. You're wanting to attract visitors but then the public toilets are closed too early. You need to negotiate this with County on our behalf.

Seconded by:

Elector

Discussed and debated
<p>A councillor in attendance as a resident explained that the County Council are responsible for opening and closing the toilets but this is done by one person for the whole of Wansbeck area. Therefore they must close up the last set in time to return to their depot by 5pm.</p> <p>Several Electors recalled the Town Council putting a large lump sum of money in to the front street development and didn't feel this was value for money.</p>
Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 13
<p>Elector– I'd propose the Town Council use that 106 money towards funding a dog warden/beach warden role – this person could open and close toilets, put out deck chairs and windbreaks which could be rented from the Town council office generating an income also.</p>
Seconded by:
Elector
Discussed and debated
<p>One of the conveners advised that in the Newbiggin Voice social media page asked residents what they felt Newbiggin's biggest asset was – unsurprisingly they say the bay and prom.</p> <p>An elector asked what had happened to the 10 Year Beach Management Plan and the Coastal Warden. Another convener mentioned that a proposal for a 'man in a van' had been put forward by one of the Town Councillors before.</p> <p>One of the councillors, in attendance as a resident, said that she'd costed a proposal that wasn't taken forward. When asked about the cost she said in region of £28,000.</p> <p>Another Elector again mentioned whether or not it was possible to put in a vote of no confidence – Chair Marie responded that this was indeed possible but legalities would need to be checked.</p>
Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 14
<p>Elector– I'd propose the Town Council explain to the residents what has happened to the 10 Year Beach Plan</p>
Seconded by:
Elector
Discussed and debated
<p>Residents commented that they've never seen so much sand making it onto the high street.</p>
Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Motion 15
<p>Elector – Members of the Town Council have regularly been observed and recorded displaying a complete lack of understanding of the poverty and struggles faced by the town’s working poor. I propose that every member of the Town Council should be volunteering or spending time at charitable organisations that serve the Newbiggin by the Sea residents such as foodbank to put you more in touch with the reality of life here. The ‘Town Council of the year’ (Nantwich) do this.</p>
Seconded by:
Elector
Discussed and debated
<p>It was pointed out that some Town Councillors do this.</p> <p>Again an Elector asked about how they go about putting in a vote of no confidence. Chair Marie suggested that legality should be checked and good representation made.</p>
Outcome - Vote held and carried by a large majority in favour of the motion.

Chair Marie thanked all of the residents in attendance for coming tonight – it just shows how much love and care there is for the town. Please engage with everything that’s going on.
The next Town Council meeting is this Wednesday – 20th February at 7pm at St Bartholomew’s Church Centre.

Meeting closed at 8.55pm

Signed by Chair – Marie Attwood **Date**.....