

DUNSTON with COPPENHALL PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held at Dunston Village Hall on Thursday 11th May 2017

Present: Parish Councillors; Mrs G Diggett (Chairman), Mrs H Jones, Mr J Bagnall, Mr G Pliva, Mr J Richardson.

Clerk: Mr D Jones; 3 members of the public.

01; Councillor Diggett welcomed those present and the meeting started at 19 30 hrs.

02; Apologies had been received from County Councillor Mr M Sutton, District Councillor Mr L Bates, Parish Councillors Mr I Collard & Mr P Thompson.

03; Chairman's Report on the Parish Council activities;

First of all I would like to congratulate Mark Sutton on his resounding victory in last week's local elections. I would like to thank both him and our District Councillor Len Bates for attending our meetings whenever they are able, and giving us support in various matters when required along with keeping us informed of events and policies which may not only effect our Parish but the wider community. I would like to thank all our Councillors and for their hard work and attendance at the meetings. Once again, a special thanks to Jeff Bagnall for his continued maintenance of the website. Thank you to Parish Clerk Derek for all his hard work in what have been difficult circumstances at times this year.

You will have to excuse me if this year this is not so much a report but more a bit of a pep talk, but it has been a quiet year in terms of what we have actually achieved and so there is little to report. We have continued to keep the precept at the same level this year, but it is a concern for the future that we may not be able to continue to do this if the County pass over some of their responsibilities regarding maintenance of roads and footpaths to us.

Unfortunately, we have had issues, to deal with in the weeks after Christmas, which became contentious and brought to light flaws in some of our procedures. However, I am pleased that now that these have been identified and having sought advice from our regulatory authorities we can move forward and improve. I am also happy that we have put aside our differences and I am sure we can continue to work together once again as amicable colleagues, not afraid to have lively debates as we have done for many years as I feel we are a good cross section of individuals who can give a balanced view.

It must be remembered that we are only a small Parish Council with a small precept; we must not overestimate our influence. Our influence is only effective in that we can keep our residents informed of matters which affect them and encourage them to have their say and how to say it, and what we say should reflect our residents' views not just our own personal opinions. If our residents are emotional or passionate about anything that concerns them, then we should be listening, which is what we did when Dunston residents wanted to adopt the telephone box.

We are all volunteers, who have become councillors because we care about our community. We meet for a couple of hours every 3 months. We are not highly paid individuals doing this role day in day out with an army of administration behind us. We have a Parish Clerk who we pay the equivalent of 2 hours a week. Our role is also made more difficult in that our council consists of 2 separate Wards which are almost 3 miles apart with very differing issues

Most of us have demanding full time jobs and other commitments, and having been councillors for many years would be only too happy to pass the reins over to other people, but as we know from experience, when we have tried to replace councillors who have died or moved away from the area, it is nigh on impossible to get volunteers to take on the role. The same of which can be said of Parish Clerks.

For the most part it can be a thankless task as most residents' greatest concerns are the state of the roads, pavements and fly tipping. Apart from continually haranguing the local authority, there is very little we can do, and this is no longer as effective as it once was, in these days of council cuts.

However in the past we have been influential in galvanising our residents to attend meetings and put forward their views to the Planning authority, which have influenced Planning decisions

We may not have been doing everything to the book unknowingly, but I believe that we have always acted with honesty, integrity and common sense and none of our actions will have compromised the council, in the same manner as no doubt hundreds of small Parish councils do all over the country. County Councillors and District Councillors have attended our meetings and never complained or questioned anything we have done. In the time I have been a Parish Councillor, we have had 2 very experienced Parish Clerks who have both worked for 2 or more councils and neither of them has ever shown any concern for the way we do things. We shall be soon addressing the concern that our Standing Orders need updating, which although they are not a legal requirement, they are advisable in regularising the way we may deal with certain matters, they will unfortunately perhaps affect the flexibility, and spontaneity of our meetings, which in the long run may be detrimental as we only meet every 3 months.

I did say last year that I wanted to stand down as Chair this year due to personal circumstances and also I have been coerced into taking the role for quite a few years now and we did say that we didn't want to go back to the days where Chairmen were in office for 30 years. However my circumstances have since changed and if the Councillors wish me to carry on as Chair I will do for a little while longer unless any of you have a burning desire to take over from me.

04; A vote of thanks to the Chairman for her work was proposed and agreed unanimously.

05; The minutes of the last Parish assembly held on May 2015 were discussed, no issues raised

06; Hyde Lea & Coppenhall Village Hall matters reported by Councillor Jones.

Hyde Lea & Coppenhall Village Hall had another sociable and profitable year with just short of £3000 profit. Although we did not have a Summer festival in 2016, we had an enjoyable time supporting the Church fete. We had a number of social events; Jazz Night, Wine Night, 60's Night, Quiz Night, and Rock & Roll Night. The loft was boarded and loft ladder fitted for £620 and we received a grant from Staffordshire County Council through the Capital Grants Scheme.

07; Dunston Village Hall matters reported by Councillor Pliva;

The village hall has had a successful year and is showing an operating profit. The legacy received will be spent towards a new kitchen, electrical work and an extension to the end of the hall.

08;

Other parish matters including Dunston village green, Internet speed and school parking will be covered at the Annual parish meeting.

Meeting ended at 20.00hrs