

Slaley Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Slaley Parish Held on Monday 13th May 2024 at 6.30pm in Slaley Commemoration Hall

This meeting was chaired by Ian Stevens, Chair of Slaley Parish Council

Present: Councillor Ian Stevens, Councillor Stella Douglas and Councillor Debra Taylor.

Also present, Mr. and Mrs. Chute of Slaley Parish.

1. Apologies for Absence

County Councillor Colin Horncastle and Councillor Lynda Sale.

2. Agreement of the Minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting of Slaley Parish.

The minutes of the 2023 Annual Parish meeting were proposed as a true record by Councillor Douglas, this was seconded by Councillor Taylor. They were duly signed by the Chair of the Parish Council.

3. Chairman's Report.

The Chairman's Report was read out by Councillor Stevens (Chair of Slaley Parish Council) – a copy of which can be found at Appendix A.

Action: Report to be uploaded to the Parish council website.

4. County Councillor's Report

Due to the absence of County Councillor Colin Horncastle there was no report.

5. Matters Arising

a. Actions from the Annual Parish meeting of May 2023

- i. **Action.** Parish Clerk to approach Northumberland County Council (Highways) to establish the protocol(s) that the new school safety scheme designed to.

COMPLETE - Northumberland County Council responded that the scheme had been designed to current approved standards.

- ii. **Action.** Parish Clerk to approach Slaley First School to verify the time that the automatic lights operate during the day.

COMPLETE – the lights currently operate between 07:50 and 09:00 and 15:10 and 16:30.

- iii. **Action.** Parish Clerk to raise the issue of the non-operational speed sign at Townhead at the June 2023 meeting of the Parish Council.

COMPLETE – Councillors noted that the sign was defective and that no company could be found to affect a repair. Both the removal and replacement of the sign were considered but the expense of undertaking one or both was deemed to prohibitive to progress. Councillors proposed to take no further action at this time.

- iv. **Action.** Parish clerk to approach Northumberland County Council (Highways) to establish road resurfacing schedule for the village and the Parish.

COMPLETE – Northumberland County Council advised that the road through the village did not fall into the resurfacing criteria and was therefore not on a schedule.

- v. **Action.** Parish Clerk to approach Northumberland County Council (Highways) to establish their proposals for addressing the deteriorating surface of the footpath through the village.

COMPLETE – footpath resurfaced in August 2023.

b. Residents participation

Mr. and Mrs. Chute raised concerns about the ‘high’ speed with which some vehicles passed through the village (cars and tractors were referenced specifically) and the safety risk this posed to residents, those using the village and in particular the children at Slaley First School.

Councillor Stevens said the Parish Council shared Mr. and Mrs. Chute’s concerns and those of other residents, around this issue and indeed had taken steps to monitor/address it. He stated that on a six monthly basis the Parish Council review data supplied by Northumberland County Council to gauge the size of the issue and that on a semi-regular basis teams from Northumbria Police Support Volunteers (prompted by Councillors) come to the village to undertake speed checks. He went on to say that Councillors were actively seeking to recruit more volunteers in the community to undertake speed checks.

Whilst acknowledging the issue, it has to be noted that it is in fact only a small percentage of drivers that come through the village at speeds higher than those permitted. Indeed, it is because the numbers are so low that the police will not take action and the County Council will not consider the introduction of a traffic calming scheme.

Councillor Stevens concluded by stating that this issue would remain on the Parish Councils radar and where Councillors could take action they would.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6.58 pm.

Slaley Parish Council

Chairman's Report – May 2024

Since the retirement of our longstanding Parish Council Clerk in March 2023, we have struggled to find a replacement. Two appointments were made to the post during the year but for different reasons neither applicant remained in the role for any length of time. A new Clerk will however begin work with us from 20th May 2024. In the absence of a Clerk for most of the year, the responsibilities of that role have been met by Councillor Stevens (administration) and Councillor Taylor (interim Responsible Finance Officer).

As well as struggling to recruit a Parish Clerk, the same is also true of Councillors. One vacancy has remained for over a year and a second presented itself with the resignation of Councillor Storey in April this year. Councillor Storey contributed much to the Council and through it, to the community, over his four years in the role – his enthusiasm will be missed by his fellow Councillors.

With only a limited number of Councillors and the demands upon their time, together with the absence of a Parish Clerk, the hopes and aspirations Councillors had for 2023/24 were not fully realised, particularly in terms of progressing a Neighbourhood Plan and developing a closer relationship with Parish residents (an issue to be addressed from May 2024 by holding drop-in events at the community shop).

That notwithstanding, Councillors have done much to deliver two of the Parish Councils key objectives. In relation to the first:

- *promote and represent the best interests of the Parish for the betterment of the local community*

they have:

- throughout the year kept pressure on the County Council to improve the nature of the roads and pavements in the Parish and resorted to direct action (where it has been appropriate) to address infrastructure related issues themselves e.g. improving sighting at the Townhead/B6306 road junction
- addressed local concern about the speed of traffic through Slaley village by reviewing Council data and instigating random speed checks by Northumbria Police Support Volunteers
- monitored fly-tipping in the area and where identified reported it or taken direct action to clear unsightly tipping
- continued to oversee the grass cutting contract in the Parish and accessibility to the Community Play Area together with commenting on all planning proposals
- supported agencies promoting rural life and communities, with affordable housing coming to the top of the agenda at the beginning of the 2024 and championed causes highlighted by members of the community, such as the reliability of the post van towards the end of 2023

The second objective:

- *allocate precept resources to the benefit of the people of the Parish and provide a high standard of cost-effective services to fulfil our obligations*

councillors have delivered in the following manner:

- taking the decision not to increase the precept in 2024/25, leaving it at its 2023/24 level (£13,400)
- reviewing the Parish Councils Grants Policy to ensure the community has the potential to benefit from any funds allocated to third parties. During the year, financial support in the form of grants was given to:
 - the Commemoration Hall Trustees, to support their work in developing an emergency hub for the community
 - Slaley Show to ensure its long historical association with the Parish
 - Northumberland National Park Mountain Rescue Team
- Fully funding a first aid course, free to residents and meeting the publication costs of Slaley News
- making the precept work harder for the community and seeking to make appropriate savings wherever they can. For example, since January, Precept monies have been held in an interest yielding account, whilst in terms of savings the Parish Council notice board damaged in recent storms has been fully restored at a tenth of the cost of a new one

Looking ahead to the coming year the Parish Council will continue to deliver against its core objectives, with the recruitment of a new Parish Clerk greatly assisting with this. That appointment will also allow Councillors to refocus on some key issues particularly around making the Council more accessible and accountable to those it represents.

You can keep abreast of Parish Council activity by visiting www.slaley.org.uk/page/parish-council/ or following us in Slaley News.

Should you wish to become actively involved in the Parish Council we would love to hear from you. Just drop us a line at slaleyipc@gmail.com and we'll do the rest.

Cllr. Ian Stevens, M.B.E
Chair, Slaley Parish Council