

# Whessoe Parish Council

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## MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting of Whessoe Parish held at Whessoe Parish Hall on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024, at 6.30 pm.

**Present:** Councillor S Goldfinch (Chairman)      Councillor C Stewart  
Councillor F Minay      Councillor A Blanchard      Councillor D Woodley  
Councillor T Musson      Councillor S Patterson

Parish Clerk – B Goldfinch

**Apologies:** Apologies were received from Borough Councillor R Lawley

### Welcome

Councillor S Goldfinch welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

She said “I’ve been proud to have chaired Whessoe Parish Council for another year - that makes it at least 5 years now, and it is time to hand the baton on to someone else, though I will continue to sit as a Parish Councillor and offer my full support to whomever succeeds me.

I’d like to formally record my thanks once again to my vice-Chair, Dave Woodley as well as Councillors Fiona Minay, Sharon Patterson, Caroline Stewart and Trevor Mussen who have continued to support the Parish throughout the year. Ian Thomas resigned as a Councillor during the year, but we are delighted to have Angela Blanchard as a new Councillor, who is already making her presence felt after just a few months.

### **FINANCE:**

In last year's report I talked about how we needed to continue to build following the loss of a number of regular hirers of our Hall. Individual one-off hires have increased - largely, given the competitive hall hire rates we offer - but while we have been able to attract a couple of new regular users the number of hours the Hall is used for has still not achieved pre-pandemic levels, which of course impacts our income.

The Parish Council has 2 sources of income; income from the precept that is added to the Council Tax bill for each home in the Parish, and income from Hall hires. We have had to significantly increase the precept this year to enable us to cover our most basic costs and our Clerk has continued to seek savings as far as possible across our various outgoings. Nevertheless, money is very tight, and there will be difficult decisions to be made as we go through the coming year - most notably it is unlikely that we will be able to afford to sustain the upkeep of the Green at Harrowgate Farm, where the cost of grass cutting etc has more than doubled, meaning that landscaping costs account for more than a third of our precept income.

As previewed in my report last year, the income from our regular Quiz Nights is now used to support putting on a Christmas party for the children in the Parish, and we feel it’s important that we continue to do this within our community. On the subject of Christmas, you may have noticed that

we did not have a Christmas tree outside the Hall last year, though we did (and will continue to) make the Hall and car park look festive with Christmas lights.

#### **PERFORMANCE AGAINST LAST YEAR'S ACTION PLAN:**

In last year's report I set out an action plan for the year ahead, and here's what we've done against each of those plans:

##### *Encourage the community to come together for social events, both at the Hall and on the Green*

During the year we ran 7 Quiz Nights in the Hall which continue to be very popular and attract a core of regular attendees. So much so that these are sold out well before the event in most cases and I'm sure we could run them more often if we were able to. My thanks go to the Councillors who have taken turns to set the quizzes and act as Quiz Master for the evening. I know this takes a good deal of time and thought to put together. We do now have a couple of volunteers from regular punters who will be setting the quizzes over coming months.

There has been only one event held on the Green since my report last May - a summer fayre in July, though it had to be postponed from the original planned date due to adverse weather. Hopefully the summer fayre we have planned for this year will have sunny skies. These are expensive to run and attendance was disappointing last year - hence our rethinking the value of continuing with our licence for the land, which expires next year.

At Christmas we held a party for the children in the Hall with a fantastic entertainer and a competition with the winner switching on the Christmas lights. We have already booked and planned the event for this December.

##### *Continue to maintain the Hall and encourage new users.*

Despite having increased our hire charges last year we remain competitive against other halls locally, and there was a definite up-turn in the number of private parties held. Regular classes and groups continue including a new evening Pilates class, t'ai chi, computer coding and children's dance classes. Groups including the Darlington Divas WI, a long-standing embroidery group and private dance tuition also use the Hall. Additionally, the Parish Council supports a local parent with a disabled child who needs space to undertake physiotherapy each week, and the Hall is made available free of charge for this.

##### *Seek grant funding to undertake the works identified in the Condition Survey for the Hall*

Unfortunately, there have been limited opportunities to apply for grant funding to undertake works needed at the Hall, and we will bring this forward to the action plan for the coming year.

##### *Continue to seek opportunities to improve and increase the facilities we can offer.*

To assist with Coderdojo and for the benefit of all Hall users we now have faster, better broadband and Wi-Fi in the Hall.

#### **OTHER COMMENTS ON THE PAST YEAR:**

- The Berrymead Farm developments are well underway, and we are hopeful that pedestrian access to the Hall will be easier with the new road layout that is already taking shape. We continue to monitor the impact of the new junction from the developments on the A167.

- We have commented on numerous planning applications throughout the year, including providing further comments relating to the proposed Burtree Garden Village which has recently had planning approval. Representing the Parish view on planning applications is one of the most important roles we have as a Parish Council, and we take it very seriously.
- We received a £445 donation from the Darlington Borough Council Stronger Communities Fund via Councillor Richard Lawley, which will be used to help to fund the children's Christmas party.
- Our committees have continued - the Hall Management Committee, Social Committee and Staffing Committee meet regularly and report up to the full council.

#### **THE YEAR AHEAD:**

Turning towards the coming year, we will

- Continue to encourage the community to come together for social events both at the Hall and on Harrowgate Farm.
- Continue to maintain the Hall and encourage new users, particularly those who can enhance and enrich the lives of local residents.
- Seek grant funding to undertake the works identified in the Condition Survey for the Hall.
- Continue to seek opportunities to improve and increase the facilities we can offer.”

Sue Goldfinch JP MCIPD MCIPS MCMI

#### **Open Forum**

There were no members of the public present.

#### **Close of Meeting**

Councillor S Goldfinch closed the meeting at 7pm