

**Blanchland Annual Parish Meeting  
Held in the  
Village Hall on May 23rd 2018**

**Present:** Councillors: M Kennedy, S Graham, T Bowers, M Forster, C Horncastle, Clerk: C Asquith, Helen Savage (BCDO), David Pott (Project Coordinator, Northern Saints Trail) plus 9 members of the public

**Apologies:** Mr M Orde. Miss K Rankine.

The minutes of the previous meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017 were approved

There were no matters arising

**Chairman's report**

Thank you to all.

Introduce Carolyn as the new clerk.

Over the past year we have had on site discussions with highway engineers as well as lots of correspondence with NCC. There was a lot of work done on Baybridge Road but it did not solve the drainage problem and the verges were not cleared. We asked the Highway Engineer to come and inspect and he was not happy with the work that was done and it is now once again on NCC programme.

Following up from last year when parking was discussed for The Square we met With Mr McKenzie from Northumberland County Council on site to consult on the best way forward. Plans were drawn up by him and we had an open meeting to put forward these plans. A consultation document was posted to each household from NCC and only six people replied and of those only 46% were in agreement. So an amended plan was put forward and only 10 residents completed the form. 6 for, 3 against and 1 no opinion. This gave only a 60% agreement and we were advised that on this percentage NCC would not implement the scheme. There has to be over 75% in agreement. We have been advised that as there is a cost to these consultations NCC would not agree to another in the near future as they say opinions will not change. It is disappointing that more residents did not fill in the consultation document as this may have swayed the result. So at this time Blanchland Council cannot progress the matter any further.

(As you know the Sports Club was closed at the beginning of the year, the Village hall had an open meeting asking for assistance in running the premises. The committee of the Hall is in discussion with Savills as to how this can be run.) Minutes of our meetings can be viewed on the Blanchland.org website.

**Questions Raised:**

There were no questions raised.

**Report from Mr M Orde for Lord Crewe's Charity**

This was a digitally received written report as a representative from Savills was unable to attend.

The Baybridge Road Byre is derelict no more, with the project to repair, stabilise and prepare the building for an appropriate future use completed in March 2018. The future use has not yet been decided, although various options are being.

Savills are preparing a Woodland Management Plan for the woodlands occupied by the Charity, which sets out the Charity's plans for managing and improving the woodland over the next 20 years. Objectives include harvesting timber to generate income in line with silvicultural best practice moving woodland structures towards continuous cover systems where appropriate to reduce the landscape impact of harvesting timber increasing species diversity and improving woodland habitats for species such as the Red Squirrel.

Following the closure of the Blanchland Sports Club, we are working with the Village Hall Committee to grant them a new lease for the Village Hall, Sports Club, play area, car park and playing field to enable the combined properties to be managed holistically going forward. Within the Sports Club itself, the Charity have undertaken repairs to the electrical installation, and will be replacing the oil tank and boiler in coming weeks as an investment in this important community facility.

Lord Crewe's Charity was established nearly 300 years ago and as mentioned last year the Trustees are beginning to think about ways to mark the tercentenary (in 3 years' time), further refurbishment or improvement of the Village Hall complex may be an appropriate project to mark the occasion. Please let us know if there are suggestions from the Blanchland community.

**Questions Raised:**

The Clerk was asked to pass on concerns voiced at the meeting by the local community that there was not a representative of Savills and therefore the Trust at the meeting it was asked to be minuted that someone should have been there to field any comments or questions made during the meeting.

The following questions/concerns were raised:

1. Why are there currently so many empty houses in the village, 5 in total as of Wednesday 23rd May 2018? A resident said that there have not been as many vacant since 1957.
2. Who is responsible for the maintenance of the wooden gates on the playing fields? They have fallen into disrepair; the one leading to the path along Clapshaw Bank has fallen down.

3. The question was asked as to who is responsible for the branches and roots, under the bridge/club. Although they are generally kept clear by locals, who does it fall to?

The modernisation of the estate's housing stock continues, with refurbishments taking place between tenancies, notably at Bailiff's Cottage, the Police House and 11 The Square this year. Energy efficiency improvement works have been completed at some properties, and further works are planned over the next 12-24 months where properties have poor energy efficiency ratings.

External joinery repairs and redecoration will be completed at a proportion of the residential properties in the village this year, to improve the functionality and condition of windows and doors, as well as the appearance of the village.

Kate Rankine & Michael Orde

### **Report from County Councillor Colin Horncastle**

Councillor Horncastle apologised for not being able to attend the Annual Parish meeting last year, but he had to attend the first Council meeting of the new Administration. South Tynedale includes 8 parishes of which Blanchland is one; there are a number of problems which affect many of these parishes including lack of services and transport. Northumberland is very unusual in that half of its population live in 10% of the geographical area. The poorest town in Northumberland is Berwick, which relies heavily on its tourism and the port. With the previous Administration investment companies had begun to invest in areas not in Northumberland, these were mass funded and never provided a dividend; the new Administration has now changed this and brought back the focus solely on Northumberland. Planning committees have been reinstated after being absent for 3 years. Local Area Councils are operating but they currently don't resemble what they will look like in two to three years' time. There is an investment in highways however this is a trickle down affect and change won't happen overnight. The key driver is councils working together "The Borderlands Initiative", which involves 5 councils working together, Northumberland, Cumbria, and Carlisle, Dumfries and Galloway and Borders council. The Initiative will see services and communications being shared. Pensions are now dealt with at South Tyneside and Council Tax at North Tyneside, just outside Cramlington. The Council have been looking at the whole of Northumberland and what needs to improve. The proposed move of County Hall to Ashington was stopped and the area previously designated for the council buildings is now set to be used for new shops, cinemas and restaurants, which it is hoped will inject new prosperity into Ashington. The Core Strategy from the previous Administration has been withdrawn as it was seen to be no longer relevant, the priorities and information were out of date. A new core strategy should be in place by 2020; this includes reviewing the new housing figures and adjusting accordingly, down from 26500 to 18500. There have been fewer planning applications this year than in the last four years.

With regard to Blanchland the council have acknowledged the lack of investment and shortage of money for highways and road repairs. The new Administration has secured further funding, in the region of £4.2 million. Kris Westerby has been promoted to a more senior role but is still actively involved and NCC has invested in hotboxes and pavers for smaller roads to ensure that repairs can be undertaken very quickly. The main cause of the damage to the roads was due to the change in temperatures rather than just being to do with the snow. NCC has a legal obligation to fill in pot holes and make repairs immediately. During the spring/summer 2018 there will be further road works which will look to deal with issues thoroughly, providing long term solutions. Andrew Olive has taken over from Kris Westerby and he and Councillor Horncastle will be travelling around Northumberland to look at the conditions of roads and highways.

Education is a big issue for the new Administration, with a proposed shake-up in Western Northumberland. This will take into account Hexham and Haydon Bridge, empty seats, failing schools and consultations regarding the two tier system. £2 million has been invested into Haydon Bridge, which includes the underwriting of debts, a new sixth form centre which will provide both academic and vocational training courses, and will link closely to universities and colleges. Haydon Bridge which has a capacity of 900+ with only 360 on school role, after capital investment the school will only cater for approximately 700 pupils. In two years' time it will convert to an Academy. Sixteen schools were set for closure, however as Hexham didn't want to see any closures there have been agreements to Federate, with one head looking after three schools and good teachers being utilised more effectively, which means there have been no redundancies and better use of resources, which means only one school is now set to close. Berwick is in a worse state than other areas with a shortage of over 2,400 students, meaning many surplus places.

Councillor Horncastle completed his report by thanking Alice Ellison and saying that she has been excellent to work with.

#### **Questions Raised:**

1. Would there be an improvement in signage in Hexham for the Urgent Care Centre, this is open 24 hours for Urgent Care, the next nearest place is Newcastle, and there is no road signage to make this facility known in the surrounding area.

Councillor Horncastle took note of this question and undertook to look into this.

### **Blanchland Community Development Organisation (BCDO) Annual Report 2017-8**

The BCDO met five times during the year.

Our agendas have been dominated by the following items

- The main item on our agendas during the last year has been the 'Blanchland Abbey and Village Project' which is quickly gathering pace. This seeks to develop the abbey in a way that will benefit the whole community by attracting more visitors to the village who, we hope, will make more use of all the facilities we offer. Plans for the abbey include heating and lighting, modest and sensitive reordering to enable the building to be used for a wider variety of events, including the arts and education. We wish to provide toilets, a small kitchen, a meeting room and better storage space. We also wish to create new and better signage for the entire village. Blanchland is a village of national significance and our hope is that this project will help make that clearer. A project management group has been set up and there will be many opportunities for wider community involvement in the project. Talks with the Heritage Lottery Fund have already given cause for much encouragement. The BCDO has set aside £1K in this first year as pump priming money.
- We have continued publication of Parish Post. An initial small grant from the Weardale Community Action Partnership has now been spent, but the BCDOs own money subsidises the publication. In March we decided to move to bi-monthly publication, but with a bigger magazine and the re-introduction of subscriptions - but it will continue to be available in the shops and other community places. Louise Bartholdi has taken on the role of distribution manager.
- We have continued to be an effective forum for community concerns and have monitored many small, but significant initiatives, most of which we reported on a year ago including the maintenance of highways; the state of footpaths; the need for mobile phone coverage; the television system in the village; the future of the former Sports Club and the playground and the appearance and maintenance of the principle buildings in the village. We have also helped to improve the Shildon Road Car Park.
- We continue to serve as a bridge between the community and the Lorde Crewe Charity Trustees.
- We have worked with other in the community and the Northumbria Dry Stone Walling Association to arrange a training project in the village and to restore the wall bordering the Sports Field, beside the river.
- We have discussed, at length, the thorny issue of obstructive and inconsiderate parking in the village, but, as yet, no solution has been found. A scheme to introduce yellow lines has fallen.
- We provided the Christmas tree and lights and organised the singing of carols and refreshments afterwards.

I would like, once again, to put on record my grateful thanks to George Ellison for his work as secretary, Alice Ellison as Treasurer and to all my fellow the directors of the organisation.

Helen Savage

May 2018

**Questions:**

There were no questions raised.

**David Pott: Project Coordinator, Northern Saints Trail**

David presented to the meeting the routes and relevant information appertaining to the concept of a Pilgrimage walk from Hexham to Durham Cathedral, via Blanchland and Edmundbyers. This will be one of 3 walks in the project all meeting in Durham. The project is in its early stages, David has completed assessing the walk and is currently working on the planning and organisation of the project, which is subject to funding. He asked if there were possible bunkhouses, guest houses or other stop-over opportunities for traveller's taking part in the Pilgrimage. He mentioned Champing, where walkers can stay in Churches overnight. The project was well received. Information, by way of a power point presentation will be made available to the Parish Clerk after the meeting.

No further questions.

Meeting closed at 8.30pm.