



**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MONTHLY MEETING OF**  
**OUSTON PARISH COUNCIL**  
**HELD ON THURSDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2024 IN OUSTON COMMUNITY CENTRE**  
**THE MEETING OPENED AT 7.00PM.**

**1. COUNCILLORS PRESENT**

Chair Mr A Wake, Mrs. A. Bell, Mr G. Batey, Mrs. M. Duncan and Mr. D. Wood

**County Councillors** – Mr P. Pringle

**Other Attendees** – Parish Clerk - Lisa Blondrage, Clare Marshall OCA, Shop Keeper from Cooks Corner and several Residents from The Brooms, Mr B Howlett, Mr J Tate and Mr L Maddison Allotment tenant and helper.

**2. APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE**

CC A Batey

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 28<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2024**

Previous minutes agreed and accepted by the PC.

**5. REPRESENTATION OF RESIDENTS AND ALLOTMENT TENANTS**

Mr Howlett said a speed visor discussed 5+ years ago had been stopped by DCC. Cllr Wood said there is a Pelton Division Visor that is rotated. He asked if the proposed traffic calming scheme, was any further forward. Cllr Wood said funding for Pelton Division had been secured. The Consultation will take place after Purdah but no date has been set yet. Cllr Wood to follow up.

The Shop Keeper from Cooks Corner and Residents from The Brooms attended to discuss the on-going issue of gangs of youths gathering at the BMX track. They said there were large groups gathering, drinking, setting fires, throwing bricks at houses resulting in damaged to property including smashed windows. They added that fly tipping and Antisocial Behaviour has increased since the track has been reinstated. Wheely bins have been stolen (replacement cost £25) and set fire to also.

A resident asked, who had authorised the BMX Track. Cllr Wood said there had previously been a track there and it was reinstated so there was no planning process. He added that two consultations had taken place and it had been stated on Labour leaflets delivered to every property. It was also recorded in the Parish Council Minutes and on local social media groups.

Residents are worried about motor bikes and cars using the track, and drug use. The Cllrs said the residents must report everything to the Police and Neighbourhood Wardens. Antisocial Behaviour must be reported to the Wardens and criminal damaged to the Police. Cllr Wood said the data for March and April 2024 shows only 3 reports for each month. The Cllrs said everything must be reported to the Wardens and Police and we will get more support.

Cllr Wood gathered contact details for the residents to arrange a meeting with the Police and Wardens.

Mr Howlett said a man had been found badly beaten on the farm track – police are aware.

**6. COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT**

CC Pringle said DCC are in Purdah. For further information, please contact the County Cllrs.

## **7. OUSTON COMMUNITY CENTRE**

### **7.1 Information from the OCA Board**

Clare Marshall said the Asset Transfer is progressing. The Heads of Terms have been sent to CC Batey and OCA. OCA need to appoint a solicitor. OCA to contact Durham Community Action to see if they know any solicitors that work with Charities. The transfer will be a Pepper Corn rent, £1. Legal Fees and Surveys will cost £2500.00, plus other solicitor fees, cost unknown. OCA asked OPC for a donation towards the legal costs. OCA to find out more details and email OPC.

Clare Marshall said OCA are putting together the events schedule. She added that on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May (half term) they are hoping to host a Petting Zoo event. It will cost £280.00 but no donation is required as there will be a cost per child (chargeable event).

The OCA Board meeting will take place on 6<sup>th</sup> May. LB asked if the location of the letter box library could be discussed. The PC asked if King Charles' portrait could be displayed in the Community Centre, to be discussed at the OCA Board Meeting.

## **8. DATE FOR PARISH ASSEMBLY & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MAY 2024**

LB suggested Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May for the Parish Assembly and AGM. Cllr Wake said he was concerned about the length of the PA due to the ongoing ASB problem. Agreed in Principle.

## **9. ALLOTMENTS**

### **9.1 Site Manager**

LB said Cllr Wake stated, in the previous meeting, the appointment of a Site Manager was on hold but was to be kept on the agenda as ongoing. Mr Maddison said he would like to be considered for the position of Site Manager when it came up. Cllr Wake said he would like to see a non-tenant in the role as they will be neutral.

### **9.2 Allotment Rules**

The PC are to meet on 16<sup>th</sup> May to discuss the revision of the allotment rules.

The water logging on Plot 3 has not improved since Cllr Batey visited site. He added that the entrance area near Plots 1 & 3 is also boggy and water logged. Cllr Batey added he now has a gate key to visit site, and will attend the next OAA meeting.

Plot 30 has now been let. The new tenants asked Parish Council if they could be exempt from inspections until they get it cleared and cultivated, it is in an over grown and poor state. The PC said they would be exempt from inspections this growing season (2024) but the PC will still monitor their progress.

LB said all the vacant plots have now been let, except 14b. Mr Maddison asked if that was the plot with the wildlife pond, with the newts in? The PC and the Clerk said they weren't aware of newts on site. Cllr Batey to visit site to check.

LB said the PC had received a noise complaint from the same resident as last year regarding Cockerels crowing during the day. LB said there are no rules regarding Cockerels but there are nuisance rules. Cllr Wood advised the resident should report it to DCC as a noise complaint.

Cllr Batey said the gate near Plot 1 & 3 was left unlocked when he visited site. The PC said notices need to be displayed. LB said there are notices on every gate stating that gates must be locked and closed at all times. The PC suggested writing to all tenants, LB said we have 77 Plots which will be expensive to post the letters. The situation will be monitored and the PC stressed the importance of site security, even more so now with the rise in ASB. Livestock and property could be stolen or damaged. Tenants must lock the gates.

The PC reviewed Plot 44b's structure proposals and agreed they can proceed.

**10. POPPY PROJECT – UPDATE**

The PC agreed that the Poppys will start at the top of Ouston Bank at stone, through the village, to the Perkinsville sign as originally proposed. LB to email Pelton's Clerk to confirm the original numbers.

**11. FLOWER TUBS AND FLOWERBEDS**

As previously mentioned in the last meeting, the volunteer who maintained the flower tubs in the past confirmed in an email that they will no longer plant and water them. Mr Tate suggested that the PC speak to the resident to ask them to reconsider. Cllr Wake said he will plant the self-watering tubs. Cllr Batey said he will speak to the OAA.

**12. CLERK'S REPORT**

Cllr Bell sent the photographs of the steps where the handrail is needed behind the garage. Cllr Wood said he will check the land ownership as although it is unadopted highway it may be private land.

LB said the Portrait of King Charles III has now been delivered. As previously mentioned, the OCA will discuss it in their Board meeting to see if they will display it in the Community Centre along with the lending library.

Cllr Batey said that the Gas Company and Northumbrian Water worked together to replace the water pipe that had corroded and burst. They reinstated the water supply which affected a number of properties in the village.

**Do It Online**

LB reported the overgrown trees / hedges at Ouston House. DCC responded by stating, "An investigation has been carried out and on this occasion your report is not considered to be hazardous, dangerous or essential maintenance. Therefore, we will not be undertaking any work at this location. This is in accordance with our highway safety maintenance regime which follows national guidelines. We will continue to monitor the highway through our routine safety inspections and any repairs will be made if deemed necessary. However, should the condition of the Tree or hedge pruning, removal deteriorate further, please raise a new report on our online forms." To be monitored.

LB logged a request regarding the Tree Cooks Corner – new tree is lying flat on the grass area. Awaiting a response.

The Litter Picker was advised to contact Crime Stoppers regarding the ongoing drug use problem behind the OCA car park. It is still happening and he added that the bottles are mainly Co Op water bottles. Residents are encouraged to report all ASB and criminal damage.

Cllr Wake asked who was responsible for the maintenance of the round about at the bottom of Ouston Bank and who erected the advertising signs? Cllr Wood will make some enquiries.

Cllr Bell asked if part time traffic lights could be installed on Perkinsville / Pelton round about. Cllr Wood said the request had been previously declined as they will cost between £1&2 million. Cllr Wood said it isn't a DCC priority as there are more accidents recorded at other roundabouts.

**13. FINANCIAL MATTERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**13.1 Monthly Accounts & April Invoices**

The expenditure for April was reviewed by the PC's.

**13.2 Year End Bank Reconciliation**

The 2023/24 Year End Bank Reconciliation was review by the PC.

**13.3 Approve AGAR 2023/24**

The Chair approved and signed off the OPC AGAR for 2023/24.

**13.4 Appoint an Internal Auditor**

The PC appointed Gordon Fletcher as the Internal Auditor.

**14. Items to Follow Up for Next Meeting**

The May AGM and Parish Assembly meeting agendas will include:

- Allotments – Site Manager
- Revision of Allotment Rules
- Flower Tubs
- Revision of Policies and Procedures

**The Parish Assembly and Annual General Meeting will be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May at 7.00pm. Business to discuss will be as per Agenda.**

**The Parish Council meeting closed at 8.18pm hours.**

**APPENDIX ONE: CHEQUES SIGNED AT MEETING**

<b>Cheque No</b>		<b>Paid to</b>	<b>Description</b>
102195		L Blondrage	April pay 4 weeks
102196		L Blondrage	April HWA
102197		D Johnston	April pay 4 weeks
102198		HMRC	April PAYE 4 weeks
102199		CDALC	Annual Subscription 2024/25
102200		OCA	Annual 2024-25 Donation
102201		Eric Brown	Allotment Gate Keys