

Planning, Contract & Works Meeting, 16th January 2019**1819/158 Resident's Letter**

An email response was sent to Mrs Mary Palmer (who requested to be named in the record of the meeting, as on the agenda) who was heartened by the response and praised the Front Street traders we have. Mrs Palmer acknowledged that the Town Council must appreciate the importance of the 'pavement culture' and do as much as possible to maintain the Front Street to a very high standard. Mrs Palmer felt the lack of a central park was detrimental to Prudhoe.

1819/159 Funding for Detached Youth Service via Prudhoe Youth Project (previously referred to as PYI)

Following agreement at the 2019/20 Budget Meeting on 23rd January 2019, the clerk has advised Prudhoe Community Partnership Chair, Mr George Hepburn that the Town Council will make £20,000 available towards the 'Detached Youth Service' proposal that was received under this minute.

1819/160 Television Licence Refund Scheme

The clerk issued the following press release on 17th January 2019, online as well as at the Karbon Homes counter:

Cessation of Prudhoe Town Council TV Licence Grant Refund Scheme for those aged 65 and over.

The TV Licence Scheme was launched in 1980 by Prudhoe Town Council. It was said to be the second such scheme in the country, the first having been set up by Sheffield City Council. The initial licence grant was for £12 per application, paid to qualifying residents in the form of TV Licence stamps. Until 2008-9, the value of the grant was £15 per licence, but it was then raised to £30.

Over the years there have been a number of changes to the administration of the scheme, the result being that the council now pays £30 cash to those eligible residents who seek the grant, following eligibility checks being carried out by the Karbon Homes customer services desk in the library.

The Scheme is not means-tested, providing you are a Prudhoe resident, in receipt of state retirement pension and have paid your TV licence, the £30 refund will be paid over.

At its meeting last night, the council considered the future of the scheme, taking into consideration the following points:

- *That the council has to be able to satisfy itself that the benefit of the scheme is proportionate to the expenditure incurred.*
- *That further changes are required to the administration of the scheme in view that Karbon Homes is no longer able to support the council, and following questions from the council's external auditor.*
- *That the council should ensure that all those entitled are aware of the scheme through better advertising and should budget accordingly; we currently commit £12,000 in the budget to this scheme.*
- *That currently all those entitled to the £30 grant do not claim it. (Based on the last published census the cost would be £32,850 if they did; 1,095 population between age 65-74).*

In June 2020 the Government will cease to fund the free TV Licence for the over 75's and the decision as to whether it continues will be taken by the BBC. It is probable that the BBC will not support this, subsequently increasing the likely number of claimants.

In considering the above points, the council agreed at its meeting last night that the TV Licence Refund Scheme should cease at the end of the financial year.

Councillors were mindful that if better publicised the scheme could result in a far greater expenditure than the council had ever committed to the scheme and therefore a bigger burden on the council tax payers of Prudhoe.

Councillors were concerned about the impact on those in real need of discontinuing the scheme, but in view that it is not means-tested were accepting that there was no way of establishing this.

The refund will continue to be paid until 31st March 2019 to those who have not have not already claimed in the current financial year.

There was also a report in the Hexham Courant, following which the office received one telephone call checking if the resident would be able to claim if the refund was due after March.

1819/161 Prudhoe East Centre – Community Asset Transfer (CAT)

The clerk has spoken Prudhoe Community Partnership Chair, Mr George Hepburn to clarify the position of PCP, if Prudhoe Town Council decided it did not wish to lead on a CAT; there was a supposition at the meeting but not a confirmed response.

The following information was emailed to all councillors:

With regards the future of The East, George has informally (as he would need trustee support) offered that if PTC no longer wished to lead a sole asset transfer or long-term lease application to NCC that PCP would be interested in doing so and that they would welcome x2 Cllrs being on any group set up so that the Town Council was represented. George was clear that PCP would have to weigh up the risks and they would welcome any financial support for a business plan. There is a safety net in regards the building being put up for sale as PCP some time ago registered a 'community right to bid', therefore, they would be offered first refusal if a sale was ever pursued by NCC.

The clerk also issued procedural advice regarding revisiting any decisions taken on this item as it was clear members were concerned about the processes followed.

1819/162 Town Council Website

A request for 'Expressions of Interest' has been published and shared; the closing date was 6th February 2019. This agenda asks for approval of a small working group to go through the information received and make a recommendation to the March PCW's Committee.

1819/163 Castle Dene Allotments

A written response was sent to Northumberland Estates that included the following:

Following your letter of 13th December and our conversation on 17th December, I am writing to confirm that Prudhoe Town Council received your letter at a meeting on 16th January 2019, therefore I am in a position to respond formally, as per the council's instructions.

Members of Prudhoe Town Council and members of Prudhoe Gardener's Association, who manage the allotments on behalf of the council, would like to request that any increase in rent is in line with inflation, rather than the 100% increase proposed.

Other Reports

1. Work on the trees at the rear of the Road Ends toilets has been completed. We need to look at possibly removing some concrete fence post within the boundary as Prudhoe Methodist Church are erecting a new wooden boarded fence. The lock on the women's WC is broken, this is in hand.
2. Site meetings have taken place at Edgewell Old Cemetery regarding essential and improvement works; costs will be brought to cemetery meeting on 19th February, prior to coming to full council.
3. Due to comments on social media regarding the locking of the cemetery gates, the clerk has issued a Press Release containing the council's decision which was taken in November; OM 1819/132.
4. Costs have been sort for a replacement Space Net at Highfield park; this is on the agenda.
5. Following the agreement of the Town Council's budget and precept demand, which was given to Northumberland County Council on 25th January 2019, the clerk has produced charts that help explain the budget and compare previous years.
6. Following emails regarding dog fouling, the clerk issued a poster encouraging residents to report to NCC rather than post on-line. There is however a feeling among those reporting that reports are not acted upon or counted. This is reported by operatives to have increased the number of reports.

7. The New Local Plan consultation has been publicised. As well as being part of the Local Area Council meeting on 12th February, there is a public event at Waterworld Bowls Pavilion as previously advised (Saturday 16th February, 10am – 3pm)
8. Following a tour of the town on Monday 4th February and a visual inspection of town council assets and areas of responsibility, a number of minor repairs have been agreed and actioned in consultation with the chair of the council. More substantial work with regards the play safety surfaces at Castledene Play Area and West Mickley Play Area will be added to a future agenda of the PCW's committee.
9. Requests have been received for a litter/dog bin between Edgewell and Mickley; this has been discussed with the NCC Neighbourhood Team and will be brought to the March PCW's Committee.