

DARLEY AND MENWITH PARISH ASSEMBLY
MONDAY 26 APRIL 2021 AT 8.15PM
BY CONFERENCE CALL/ONLINE

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Chairman's Remarks (Cllr Sue Welch): The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Assembly meeting (copy of the full report attached below).

2. North Yorkshire County Councillor Stan Lumley and Harrogate Borough Councillor Tom Watson delivered reports on their respective councils (copies attached below).

3. The Parish Clerk (Martin Pearson) delivered his report on Darley and Menwith Parish Council for the year ending 31 March 2021 (copy attached below).

4. Updates from local organisations:

Joanne Hayes spoke to give some background regarding the Darley's Angels WI group. The group has been involved in a wide range of activities, including organised walks, cycling, events such as garden meet-ups and history trails and the Pudding Club. New activities planned include paddle-boarding, gorge walking and more Pudding Club but suggestions for activities that people would like to try are welcomed. Meetings will be held in the Christ Church Community Centre when it reopens.

The group is open to new members who are 18 years and older. Details can be found on the group's facebook page.

5. Current local issues discussed were:

(i) *Village volunteer response to Covid crisis*: The huge number of volunteers who were involved in the Community Support effort were thanked and in particular, the organising group of Nigel Nicholas, Jo McAllister, Andrew Robertshaw and Bryan Dexter, who worked hard to keep the group running throughout. It was noted that meals are continuing to be supplied locally on additional days and that this service is to be run by Nidderdale Plus going forward;

(ii) *Possible creation of wildflower areas in the village*: It was highlighted that members of Darley's Angels WI are keen to create wildflower areas within Darley to increase biodiversity within the village. A pilot scheme on one of the greens within the village is being investigated. It is appreciated that the initiative has strike a balance alongside the fantastic displays of flowers within gardens and by Darley in Bloom and that the village needs to look good. It was noted that parish councils in the area (including Kirkby Malzeard and Otley) have been working with Harrogate Borough Council to establish wild-flower areas.

The idea will be highlighted in the next village newsletter and opinions from others within the parish are welcomed.

(iii) *Dog dirt problems and possible solutions*: Two ongoing problems with dog dirt were noted: owners not picking up after their dogs and owners not putting bags in a bin. The latter has led to significant problems with livestock when bags pushed into walls have been taken out by the animals. It was thought that this was mainly a winter problem (when access to some of the footpaths is difficult).

Other than further permanent notices, no new ideas were put forward to solve the problem. Harrogate Borough Council Dog Warden has been asked to carry out patrols in the village when Covid restrictions allow.

(iv) *Creation of a North Yorkshire unitary authority and devolution*: It was noted that Central Government is currently considering responses to a consultation of the proposed changes to the local authority structure in North Yorkshire. It was confirmed that Darley and Menwith Parish Council had submitted a response to the consultation and had supported the North Yorkshire County Council model on the basis that North Yorkshire County Council currently delivers around 80% of services

across the county and that this model also provides the potential opportunity for the Parish Council to take on a more significant role in the delivery of services in the future (i.e. the devolution of certain powers from the new unitary authority to the Parish Council with funding).

It was thought that the reorganisation would be neutral from the point of view of the planning system (i.e. neither advantageous or disadvantageous).

6. Open Forum

(i) *Climate Emergency*: A parishioner asked whether Darley and Menwith Parish Council should consider declaring a climate emergency, noting that a number of other local authorities (including Harrogate Borough Council and other parish councils) had done this. It was agreed that this should be considered by the Parish Council at a meeting in future.

(ii) *Meetings of Darley and Menwith Parish Council*: It was noted that future meetings of the Parish Council will be in-person from May onwards and are likely to be held in Hookstone Memorial Hall. The next planned meeting is Monday 24 May from 7.30pm.

(iii) *Film night*: The Darley Memorial Hall Film Night returns with Mary Poppins Returns on Friday 28 May. Doors open at 6.45pm and the film starts at 7.30pm

1. Chairman's Remarks

Welcome to all to this Parish Meeting for Darley and Menwith Parish. This is a meeting held annually to allow parishioners to be updated about what has been going on, and for local people to ask questions or make comments about what the Parish Council and other Councils have been doing.

A Parish Assembly was not held in 2020 because of the pandemic, and now on-line, so it is strange to see faces on a screen rather than in person. I am pleased to see some new faces.

There will be a full report from the Parish Clerk, Martin Pearson, but I have just a few words.

Back in 2019, the hot topic was planning and the proposed large developments in Darley which had been put into the Harrogate Borough Council Local Plan, but which looked as if they would be removed following the strong recommendation of the Planning Inspector. I am pleased to report that these were removed from the Harrogate Borough Council Local Plan which covers development until 2035, so it should mean that there will be no more development in Darley other than those already permitted, which include 5 houses on the western side of Stumps Lane, 3 in place of a bungalow opposite the bottom of Sheepecote Lane and a number of dwellings at Darley Mill. The development at Darley Mill is now awaiting consideration of a revised planning application, for additional houses to be built in the car park behind the mill, in order to help fund the mill conversion. Two small developments, at the bottom of Stumps Lane, and Nidderdale Hill View, have been completed over the past two years and we welcome the new households to Darley and hope that they will play a full part in the community.

Normally Darley is a thriving community, with activities and events each week, and it has been strange to see it go quiet. However, I am pleased to say that when it mattered, local people stepped up to the mark and a Community Support Group was established very quickly last March, offering help to all those who needed it. Many of the 'usual suspects' who volunteer across the village, were classed as vulnerable, so a new generation of volunteers stepped forward. Thank you to everyone who organised the support and delivered it, and to the Village Shop for playing their part as a hub. The Parish Council has agreed to purchase and install a new bench somewhere in the village, marked with a plaque thanking all those who helped during the coronavirus crisis. I hope the support will not be needed for too much longer, but I do hope that these new volunteers will remain active and help with other activities and organisations in the village. You will see a report covering all the local organisations on the website soon. If you think you can help with any of them, please contact the organiser.

A large celebration planned for the 75th Anniversary of VE Day had to be cancelled, though the village did celebrate with several small events throughout the village – including street bingo, live music and a cul-de-sac quiz. Next year is the Platinum Anniversary of the Queen's reign, sparking more celebrations, which will hopefully go ahead. If you have any ideas as to how Darley can mark this occasion, please get in touch.

Next year will also see elections for the Parish Council, so do think about getting involved. Come along to meetings once you are able, and get a feel for what the Council does. Agendas and minutes are posted on noticeboards and on the website each month. There are no local elections this year, other than that for the Police, Crime and Fire Commissioner for North Yorkshire – to be held on 6 May, as North Yorkshire County Council elections have been held off as there is likely to be a change to a unitary authority very soon, when both North Yorkshire County Council and Harrogate Borough Council will cease to exist. More about that later.

Thanks to the Councillors and particularly the Parish Clerk, who helps me to keep the Council on the straight and narrow. We both understand who has the authority (and it is not Jackie Weaver)! Thank you also to the people of Darley. It is a great place to live, and a real caring community. Let us hope 2021 will soon see it back to normal.

2. North Yorkshire County Councillor's Report

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow councillors and clerks for all the support over the past year.

It is a great privilege to serve my community on parish, district and county councils.

I thank parishioners for putting trust in me to represent them and to speak up for our local needs and the county's aspirations and goals.

The planned North Yorkshire County Council elections this May have been cancelled due to the planned local government reorganisation meaning the disillusionment of both North Yorkshire County Council & Harrogate Borough Council next year to form a new single tier council. The geography of the new council is dependent on the final decision by Central Government, with elections to the new council in 2022.

This has been a most difficult year for North Yorkshire County Council and we should be both pleased and proud of the way our staff have stepped up to the challenge of trying to deliver services in unprecedented conditions. Not one has refused to adopt new ways of working. Over three thousand now work from home, this was a huge effort from our IT people to facilitate this.

We have worked well with a range of partners, including other local government people from parishes, districts, national parks, blue light services, NHS, the Army, businesses and especially our great volunteers.

We have organised 25 formal Community Support Organisations, and helped hundreds of smaller more informal groups. All with the same aim of helping those who need it.

Our Public Health teams have been very very busy managing outbreaks wherever they occur, and leading on helping set up test and trace activity.

Our social services team went to a temporary 7/7 working model, which we are now consulting staff on continuing with as good practice.

We have supported the 235 care settings in the County by being in daily contact with them, and have set up Infection Prevention and Control teams, and helped them access PPE and mobile testing.

We continue to implement our flagship Extra Care Housing – two schemes opened this year in Great Ayton and Scarborough, with three on course for next year Skipton, Bentham and Filey.

Our children's services have been rated as Outstanding by Ofsted, the first council in the country to get this rating.

We are transforming our Healthy Child program to make it work even better, working very closely with Health services.

82% of our children now attend a school rated "good" or "outstanding" by Ofsted. We have seen a decrease in fixed term and permanent exclusions.

We have supported our schools throughout the difficult and challenging times of Covid.

We have invested heavily in an area of educational under-achievement on the Coast.

We rolled out a scheme of supermarket vouchers for families in need over Christmas and this will be extended for now, supported by central government cash and North Yorkshire County Council cash.

The music service has changed to online and does over 1,000 lessons a week this way.

We have managed record investment into road repairs this year – sadly there will always be more to do as we manage the largest road network in England.

We have spent money on modernising the rail line from York to Harrogate to Leeds, increasing the frequency of trains per hour, so taking more cars off the road.

We have continued to pay bus operators even when services haven't been running to make sure they are still there when normal running resumes.

We continue to invest heavily in broadband provision, edging ever nearer to 100% coverage – this year should see us achieve 97%. However, we know the final 3% will be the most difficult, and we are determined not to leave them behind.

We are also supporting increased provision of mobile phone coverage, trying to get from 60% to more than 90% of the county's geography.

We are striving to keep Council Tax as low as possible. There will be a 1.99% increase this year plus an Adult Social Care levy of 1.5%. This represents an increase of c.£50 per annum for an average sized property. We don't like increasing Council Tax at all, after all we are all payers ourselves, but we have experienced extra spending this year of £75m on Covid activities alone.

Central government have supported us but with all the pressures they are facing, we could not expect 100% reimbursement.

The North Yorkshire County Council Locality grant scheme offers £10k per year to support good causes at the discretion of the elected member. I have been able to support many local venture and projects including a Glasshouses bus shelter renovation, several new Vehicle Activated Signs, Lofthouse school playground improvements, Nidd+ voluntary transport scheme and emergency hub, Pateley Bridge Playhouse modification for COVID and disabled access, musical instruments for schools, Nidderdale 'Men's Shed' charity start-up fund to bring buildings given to the organisation by North Yorkshire County Council up to standard, Darley Christ Church Community Centre safe off-road parking scheme, helping Pateley Bridge Bowling club recover from flood damage and purchase a new grass cutter, a Bewerley Parish Council notice board, road safety cycle signs for Dacre PC, land drainage scheme for the allotment society and supporting Dales bus charity Nidderdale weekend services.

Harrogate Borough Council will cease to exist next May as will North Yorkshire County Council. I am very proud to serve on both councils, and proud of our achievement over many years. The efficient and prudent management of both councils left us in a position to deal with the financial burden that Covid 19 presented and fare better than many other councils in the UK.

I look forward to single tier local government and I welcome a new unitary council for North Yorkshire whichever model is chosen by central government, and once established I very much hope that we will then be able to achieve devolution, with an elected Mayor for North Yorkshire. This will attract significant money and the ability to prioritise projects important to our communities and spend where and when local people decide it is needed and deserved.

Stanley Lumley

2. Harrogate Borough Councillor's Report

Dear Residents

We are living in strange times at the moment with the covid lockdown now being eased.

It is just over a year since the first lockdown started in March of last year but Harrogate Borough Council has continued to deliver services to residents in the Borough throughout the lockdowns with Council meetings being held remotely on Zoom and council office staff mainly working from home.

Local government reorganisation for North Yorkshire is now ongoing with two proposals now out for consultation. The first is one unitary council for the whole of North Yorkshire and the second is an east/west split of North Yorkshire with two councils, both being unitary authorities. The Government is yet to make a decision on the way forward but in the meantime has delayed the election of County Councillors.

Harrogate Borough Council's local plan, which controls planning development in the district, has been adopted. Also, a number of affordable homes have been built in the Dale over the last two years which has been a great help in housing young families with local connections.

The NHS handed back the Harrogate Convention Centre to the Borough Council on 1st April 2021 following its use as a Nightingale Hospital and work is now ongoing to return Harrogate Convention Centre to an exhibition centre as soon as possible.

I would like to thank all volunteers and helpers throughout the Dale for the hard work they have put into supporting the local community in these difficult times. The effort that everyone has contributed has been magnificent and I wish everyone all the best for the coming year.

Tom Watson

3. Clerk's Report

Darley and Menwith Council met twelve times during the year. All meetings were held online/by conference call due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

During the year Councillors also represented the Council or were nominated trustees of at least eleven other organisations, including the Charity of Isabel Day, the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations, Nidderdale Safer Neighbourhoods Group, Darley in Bloom, Darley Playing Fields Association, Darley Memorial Hall, Focus on Darley, Nidderdale Strategic Partnership, Nidderdale Plus and North Yorkshire County Council Unitary Council / Parish and Town Council Working Group.

The Council submitted thirty-three consultation responses to planning applications to Harrogate Borough Council during the year from April 2020 to March 2021 and continues to take an active part in planning matters that affect the Parish.

The Council has invested time to be involved in a number of other key issues which may affect parishioners - fighting the closure of the Grange Medical Centre in the neighbouring Dacre Parish, pushing for open consultation on the proposed extension of the Nidderdale Greenway Cycle route from Ripley to Pateley Bridge through the Parish and being part of the working group for the planned reorganisation of the North Yorkshire County and District Council structure.

In addition to the usual maintenance of the green spaces in the Parish the Council is responsible for, this year the Council paid for the cutting of a number of additional areas (such as Low Green) which had not been cut due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Council also continued to be active in pushing for additional gritting, repairs and improvements to a number of roads and footpaths within the Parish.

The Council has provided grants to support Darley Playing Fields Association towards the cost of the provision and care of the playground equipment, to support the activities of Darley in Bloom in a year when its usual fund-raising events were cancelled, and to support Focus on Darley with the costs of printing the village newsletter.

Personally, I would like to thank the Councillors who commit their time to the Council to make the Parish a better place for everyone. I would particularly like to recognise the Chairman, Councillor Sue Welch, who as Chairman spends many additional hours to help make the Council run smoothly and productively.

Martin Pearson