

**Approved Minutes of the Joint Parish Councils meeting held on
Wednesday 9th November 2022 at 7.30pm at Gilsland Village Hall**

Meeting commenced at 7.30pm.

Present:

Thirlwall Parish Council: Cllr S Seymour (SS), Cllr Mark Barwick (MB), Cllr Emma Guerrero and Cllr P Jameson (PJ)

Upper Denton Parish Council: Cllr Dan Newrick (DN) and Cllr Tim Gordon (TG)

Waterhead Parish Council: Cllr David Rackstraw (DR) and Cllr Jovan Nicholson (JN)

Cumbria City Council: Cllr Keith Meller (KM)

Clerk: Mrs Sue Hatt (SH)

Members of Public Present: JB, JM, GD,

54/22 Welcome and Apologies for Absence: Cllr SS welcomed everyone to the meeting and accepted apologies from:

Cllr Alan Sharp (Northumberland), Cllr Mike Mitchelson (Cumbria) , Cllr Wilson Makepeace (Upper Denton) and Cllr Elaine Packer (Waterhead)

55/22 Declarations of Interest: None

56/22 Public Questions

No questions were submitted.

57/22 Speaker: Gillian Cowell on Broadband Initiative and Digital Connectivity

She introduced the guest speaker, Gill Cowell, Business and Community Engagement Officer for Northumberland County Council.

Gillian Cowell first explained that she supports digital inclusion in the county and is working to bring better broadband connectivity to schools in the county, in particular rural primaries which do not have extensive in-house IT capabilities. She works with residents, businesses and communities to look at solutions to bring faster speeds/gigabit capable connections.

Broadband:

She explained that current reported broadband coverage in Gilsland was at 90%, which is deemed acceptable in relation to the 95% for Northumberland. However, this figure does not reflect the large areas which are struggling to get reliable internet connection. As Gilsland is a rural area, speeds are not always accurate and mask vast areas of poor connectivity. She is working on Project Gigabit with Building Digital UK (BDUK) and broadband suppliers and offering support to businesses and residents looking for solutions to connectivity issues.

She reported that all properties in Gilsland, including those in Northumberland, are included in the Cumbrian GIGABIT Project which is due to be announced in November. Project Gigabit is a £5 billion Government infrastructure project aiming to deliver ultrafast, reliable broadband across the UK. Building Digital UK (BDUK) is responsible for delivering the infrastructure as part of the project and has launched phased contracts throughout the UK. GoFibre have been announced as the successful bidder and work on the contract is due to start in Spring 2023.

Any properties not included will be given vouchers towards connection through the Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme, although the amount of the vouchers has not yet been announced.

Additional top-up funding has been made available by Northumberland County Council for rural properties that have speeds of less than 30Mbps. The top-up scheme is due to launch once the changes to the current voucher scheme have been announced by BDUK. Suppliers active in Northumberland will be notified at that time by BDUK.

Mobile Coverage:

Mobile coverage in Gilsland is very poor and the Shared Rural Network (SRN) is a collaborative programme between the Government and the four main mobile network operators (MNOs) - EE, O2, Three and Vodafone which aims to:

- Provide coverage to an additional 280,000 premises and for people in cars on an additional 16,000km of the UK's roads.
- Improve geographic coverage to 79% of Areas of Natural Beauty, up from 51%, and 74% of National Parks from 41%, benefitting millions of visitors every year.

SRN aims to improve 4G mobile coverage for people living, working and travelling in poorly served rural areas. The network aims to ensure geographic coverage from at least one operator to 95% of the UK by the end of 2025. There will also be a significant increase in the areas where all four operators deliver coverage from 66% in 2020 to 84% by the end of 2025.

Emergency masts are still being talked about, even though they were first mentioned in 2015 and nothing much has been done about them.

Gill did encourage residents to send in case studies relating to the hazards of lack of connectivity to her or the local MPs.

Landlines:

Landline phone calls have traditionally been delivered over an old telephone network Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), but this infrastructure is old and needs to be replaced. BT has taken the decision to retire PSTN by December 2025 and it is expected that other suppliers will follow similar timescales. This means that in future, landline calls will be delivered over digital technology called Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), which uses a broadband connection. Some of the migration to VoIP is already happening for some residents, such as people who have upgraded their home phone and broadband package, or who have moved house.

No action is needed until the provider advises that the telephone service is changing, or if changes are made to the telephone service. Once a home phone service is moved from PSTN to VoIP, the phone will generally work in the same way as it always has, but it will need to be plugged into a broadband router instead of into the phone socket on the wall. However, with the poor connectivity in Gilsland, this would be a real problem. JG asked about the impact this might have on vulnerable people. In the village, with no access to broadband. Cllr KM advised people to contact their MPs about the possible dangers of being digitally cut off in Gilsland. Gillian Cowell also explained that providers would have to supply battery packs or mobile phones in case of power cuts, but again this would be dependent on good mobile coverage.

Cllr DR asked about the radio network, which prevent people using DAB radios in Gilsland. Gill Cowell said she would find out about this and report back.

Cllr SS thanked Gill Cowell for her contribution and her advice on behalf of all coucillors.

58/22 Matters for discussion:

58/22.01 Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr SS explained about the proposal for a cross-county Neighbourhood Plan and a possible link to the Gilsland Action Plan created in 2006. The Action Plan mentioned a Brampton Area Parish Plan that was drawn up and it was agreed that a copy should be obtained.

Action: SH to get a copy of the Brampton Area Parish plan

Cllr TG commented that the Gilsland Action Plan provided a starting point in the development of the village and that a new Action Plan might provide a benchmark for the Neighbourhood Plan. He volunteered to be a member of any steering committee. Cllr EG also agreed to be on the steering committee.

Cllr DN noted that Gilsland now had less facilities but a larger population.

It was agreed to set the wheel in motion for creating a Neighbourhood Plan.

Action: SH to contact Rob Naples about next steps and possible funding

58/22.02 Samson Inn

Jane McDaid updated the meeting on the progress of nominating the pub as a Community Asset. She explained that a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is a process that allows a community organisation to take over publicly owned land or buildings in a way that recognises the public benefits that the transfer will bring. A steering group has been created with 7 separate sections based on the areas of expertise of the members. The target is on agreeing a legal structure at the next meeting on 15th November which will allow the purchase the Samson Inn. Then a bank account can be set up and funding can be sought through shares offered to the local community, providing the opportunity to bid for 50% matched funding in February 2023. A request for an initial amount of £1020 was requested from the 3 Parish Councils to cover start-up costs. Jane clarified the various items and explained that these costs were merely estimates but would enable the steering group to access funding.

JG asked what kind of structure would be used for buying the pub and Jane said that the group were looking at using a Community Benefit Society or a Cooperative. JG offered the Village Hall as a facility and a possible registered address for the steering group. She would confirm arrangements once she had consulted the other member of the committee.

The current owners of the Samson Inn have been notified of the initiative and were very supportive. Jane thanked David Rackstraw for his work and contributions to the process.

TG asked whether collaborative software was being considered to enable the steering group to operate effectively, but Jane explained that not everyone has mobile phones/ software/ computers, so communications were still very basic. TG also suggested crowd funding and was told it was being looked into. Once the legal side is sorted out, more members can be appointed but until the group is registered, there is no financial protection for individuals.

Thirlwall Parish councillors then voted unanimously to donate £500 to the steering group. SH would release the funds when needed.

58/22.03 Speed limit in Gilsland

Mike Mitchelson has requested an extension of the 30mph speed limit eastwards from Orchard House and westwards to a point near the Hill before the residential properties. The meeting will take place in the New Year.

58/22.04 Play Park

Cllr AS has offered to pay for solar lights for the Play Area and these will be purchased and installed over the next few months. Cllr SS explained that the steps to the slide needed to be repaired and that a quote for £8500 had been received from Stephen Ferguson to carry out the work. There were also requests from the users to convert the basketball court into a football area, moving one piece of equipment to make the area larger. Possible financing was discussed and the S106 fund was noted. JG suggested that disability access could open up avenues of funding and said she would look into this. KM suggested that funding information sent to Burtholme Parish Council could be shared with the Gilsland Parish Councils.

The issue of parking was discussed as visitors to the Play Park were blocking the drives of local residents and parking illegally on the highway. It was suggested that the station land might be signposted as an overflow car park.

It was agreed to get a detailed quote from Stephen Ferguson, allowing him to carry out the work at a suitable time of year and to use Stephen McClelan's land to dispose of stones and waste soil.

Action: Cllr SS to get detailed quote

59/22 Any other business

Northumberland County Council are granting money to get cycling route redirected towards Scotland and one of the Cycling Hubs will be in Gilsland. DN is trying to link this to the reopening of Gilsland Station.

DN reported that some development might be planned for the land at the Spa but that the owners are not engaging with the community.

60/22 The way forward

Minutes to be sent out and discussed at next Parish Council meetings.

Meeting concluded at 9.20pm.