



HALE PARISH COUNCIL

OF THE HALTON BOROUGH IN THE COUNTY OF CHESHIRE



MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF HALE PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT HALE VILLAGE HALL ON MONDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 8.00pm

Present: Cllr Roberts, Cllr McNamara, Cllr Lewis, Cllr Healey, Cllr Trevaskis

In attendance: The Clerk, and seven member of public were also present

1. **Apologies** – Received from Cllrs Wright, Anderson, and Williams.

No apologies were received from Cllr Cleary

2. **Declarations of Interest** – No declarations of interest were registered

❖ *With permission from the Chair Item 8 was addressed as item 3*

8. **Ditton Bridge Problems** – It was agreed that Cllr John Anderton from Halebank Parish Council should be allowed to speak on behalf of his Council regarding the condition of Ditton Bridge, its regular closure for maintenance, and to express his concerns about the proposed increase in local housing developments and the apparent lack of attention to the required infrastructure in the area.

Cllr Anderton gave a very detailed presentation in which he informed the meeting of an appetite to share information and hopefully work with Hale village in respect of monitoring both the historical and the recent issues forcing the closure of Ditton Bridge. Cllr Anderton presented documents from over 20 years ago and explained that when the planning application for 500 additional houses was submitted to Halton Borough Council, grave concerns were expressed by residents as an additional estimated 1000 domestic vehicles could be anticipated. It was suggested that as many as 800 houses may ultimately be built with no significant addition to facilities or infrastructure planned. Halebank Parish Council feels that they are fully justified in raising concerns given the additional predicted loading on the bridge. In addition, recent enquiries have uncovered some very concerning information regarding previous inspections of the bridge and also regarding the legal position of the bodies responsible for managing it's on-going maintenance and inspection.

Cllr Anderton contacted both Halton Borough Council's Structures Manager, Nigel Case and Network Rail to enquire about any structural records that they may hold to establish the existing integrity of the bridge and its ability to cope with the additional predicted loading from additional traffic. Network Rail are responsible for the structure directly above the railway track and the remainder is under the jurisdiction of Halton Borough Council. On that basis a request was made to Mr Case who confirmed in writing that no such documentation exists. Despite many requests

Network Rail have never been able to supply proper evidence that the bridge is structurally sound. Ditton Bridge is over 150 years old and after a great deal of encouragement an email was received from Network Rail via Halton Borough Council expressing a view that the bridge is safe. This is not sufficient in the Parish Council's opinion so Highways England (who sent us a protocol for inspecting bridges such as Ditton Bridge) were also contacted. Essentially, inspections take place in a 6 year programme cycle, during which there are general interim inspections at 2 and 4 years and then a principle inspection at 6 year intervals. The definition of a principle inspection is that the inspector should be able to lay hands on every aspect of the structure (sometimes called touching distance testing). This often requires scaffolding and is very expensive to carry out. It is believed that a mixture of tests and surveys including visual inspections and various types of testing to ensure safety, durability & functionality of these structures. It is felt by Halebank Parish Council that only by carrying out these procedures can formal decisions regarding repairs and safety be made.

Network Rail have been asked but have never sent copies of any reports for the required Inspections highlighted above and have only confirmed the bridge's safety in a one line email to Halebank PC via Halton BC.

In 2002 Halebank PC received an email from Halton BC which confirmed that an assessment of the bridge's capabilities showed a failing

In 2006 a supplementary planning document was produced which raised concerns about the bridge's structural integrity and which identified that the bridge had failed a recent assessment and needed to be fixed, upgraded or rebuilt.

In 2007 D Twigg MP replied to a member of Halebank Parish Council stating that negotiations with network rail and designwork were ongoing for the replacement of the bridge

In 2019 a Transport supplementary document update was published stating that "this point is often congested and with predicted growth across all sectors this pinch-point may constrain the potential growth of this key area. The provision of a new bridge over the railway will alleviate this problem supporting inclusive growth through improved access to job opportunities" The report went on to say that the re-opening of Ditton Railway Station would complement the proposed improvements

In 2021 – Halton BC approved a planning proposal for the building of 600 houses with no mention of improvements to the infrastructure. In the opinion of Halebank PC none of this makes sense.

Given that all this information and documentation has been supplied to Halton BC the Parish Council cannot reconcile the decision made to allow an extensive house building programme without planning for improvements to the existing infrastructure which will be heavily impacted as described above.

Halebank Parish Council has contacted Halton BC recently to enquire how, given the overwhelming indications contained in reports from their own advisors indicating that Ditton Bridge is in immediate need of maintenance at the very least and necessitates a

complete rebuild in reality, they can commit to the planning of the project they have. The Official response from Halton Planning is that “the Council has no Comment”

Croda Europe who are a chemical company based in Foundry Lane in Halebank recently built an increased capacity building which requires larger supplies of energy. It appears that without much forethought they did not recognise that the supplies would have to be routed over Ditton Bridge. This will obviously add to the number of bridge closures being witnessed and as a result add to the disruption of local residents in Ditton, Halebank and Hale Village.

It is quite clear that the bridge is not fit for purpose and residents are actively moving out of the area due to increased HGV traffic. The HGV relief road which has been suggested in a number of previous plans through the years has not materialised so the idea of heavy traffic being diverted away from Halebank through the industrial area around Foundry Lane has never happened. It is still not in the planning today.

Cllr Anderton asked those present at the meeting to lobby Cllr Wharton, one of three ward Councillors for the area who lives in Hale Village and with whom he has shared his concerns and reports without reply. He feels that there is a lot more that the ward Councillor could do to help the region. Derek Twigg MP was also asked to assist a number of years ago by a representative of Halebank PC without success but again he is seen as somebody who might be able to assist with negotiations and a favourable outcome. It is preferred that a Pro-active approach should be taken going forwards. It was noted by the meeting that despite a number of requests to attend, Cllr Wharton has not joined a meeting of Hale Parish Council.

❖ *Cllr Trevaskis joined the meeting*

Cllr Roberts suggested that as a starting point the previous letters and emails should be sent to the relevant authorities and their responses be recorded for discussion at a further meeting and then decide on a course of action.

Cllr Roberts proposed that Hale Parish Council should work together with Halebank Parish Council sharing information and lobbying the higher tier authority regarding an improved infrastructure for the area in the proposed plans. This was seconded by Cllr McNamara

The Motion was approved Unanimously

3. Public Participation

- 4. Minutes.** – The minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of 29TH July 2024 were approved as a true and accurate record

Proposed by Cllr Lewis and seconded by Cllr Healey

The Motion was approved Unanimously

5. **Accounts** – Cllr Roberts proposed that this Item should be deferred. This was seconded by Cllr McNamara

The Motion was approved

6. **Invoice Sampling** – As required by Hale Parish Council Financial regulations 2.2 the appointed member shall check and sign all reconciliations against original Unity Bank statements and report including any exceptions to and noted by the Council.

Cllr Roberts proposed that this item should be deferred. This was seconded by Cllr McNamara

The Motion was approved

7. **Policies** – The Following Policies were approved pending some minor amendments

- i. **Financial Regulations.** – One minor literal spelling mistake
- ii. **Standing Orders** - Amend final paragraph to state that any ambiguity will be voted upon and decided by a simple vote
- iii. **Volunteer Policy** – Accept with no changes
- iv. **Safeguarding Policy** – Amend to make generic for the PC and Village Hall

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr J McNamara

The Motion was approved unanimously

- v. **Social Media Policy** – It was agreed to Amend the current policy to state that “anonymous” posts are prohibited and also to state that Administrator/Officers have the authority to remove any posts which are derogatory, libelous or bring the Parish Council into disrepute. The Clerk will update and re-submit for approval

❖ *With permission from the Chair Item 8 was addressed as item 3*

9. **Environmental Impact of Sewer Overflows on the River Mersey around Hale** – Cllr Trevaskis gave an account of a subject that many of the members and visitors may not be fully aware of. In his work with another Parish Council Cllr Trevaskis is studying the effect that current weather conditions have had upon local rivers and coastal communities who have storm overflows and the number of times that the region within our Parish stretching from dungeon Lane through to the duck decoy has been subjected to an overflow of raw sewage. The treatment centre on Halegate Road last year alone overflowed a total of 165 times into the estuary (total of 2046 hrs or 3 Months continuous contamination.) United Utilities do not currently have the resources to improve the current situation and they are tackling it by allocating attention to the people who shout the loudest. Windermere in the Lake District has

received attention because there is someone who is constantly posting on social media and highlighting these issues. My concern is that our combined system which deals with surface drainage & household waste is only adequate for household waste so any additional can't be managed successfully. Key is that larger areas of land such as the areas in Halebank planned for development will need improved drainage to cope. We need to find out if we can have conversations about this to have an influence. Social Media to be used also

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr McNamara

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 10. Waste Bins within Hale Park** – This Item was deferred to allow the Chair time to speak with Cllr Wharton. Cllr Trevaskis expressed a view that Hale Parish Council might be minded to invest in some larger capacity bins which would not require any additional labour to empty, but which may be sufficient to cope with the amounts of material in question. It was also requested that the PC should launch a renewed campaign against fly tipping and taking rubbish home. Possible School involvement for designs etc should be encouraged.

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr McNamara

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 11. War Memorial Improvements** – It was agreed that the local resident requesting support for improvements to the War memorial should attend a Parish Council meeting and address the Parish Council directly. It was not felt that it was appropriate for the matter to be passed on by a current Councillor. The matter was deferred

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr McNamara

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 12. Hale Village Gardeners** – It was agreed that Hale Parish Council will promote the Gardening group in its literature and online presence, and actively ask for volunteers to join the group.

- 13. LJLA Consultative Committee** – Cllr McNamara reported that he had recently attended a meeting and had asked about the working schedule of John Lennon Airport. He was told that unlike many local airports it is in fact a 24hr Airport. It is believed that a verbal agreement was made some years ago which agreed to keep aircraft arrival and departure to a minimum after the hours of 11pm and before 6am, however there is no formal arrangement in place.

- 14. Annual Civic Service** – Cllr McNamara agreed to head up the logistics of the Civic Service for 2024. A local resident has agreed to cater for the event and Invitations will be sent out in due course.

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr Anderson

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 15. Halloween Pumpkin Event 27th October 2024** – It was agreed that a budget increase of 10% will apply to this year’s funding (£550.) It is expected that approximately 200 visitors will take part.

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr Anderson

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 16. Hale’s Got Talent 23rd November 2024** – It was agreed that maximise the returns on this event The Parish Council will run a bar and provide food

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr Anderson

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 17. Children’s Christmas Party** – It was agreed that a children’s Xmas party will once again take place with a date and times to be established with the Bookings Officer. Details will follow shortly

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr Anderson

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 18. Recording of Parish Council Meetings** – It was agreed that further discussion will take place to compare prices and types of equipment available and to be considered for the recording of all of the Parish Council Meetings each year and to collate the recordings for the archives.

Proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr Anderson

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 19. Co- Option of new member** – It was agreed to leave the position vacant until all residents have the opportunity to submit an application. It was proposed that a good mix of local residents should be sought. The Vacancy will be reviewed again at the October meeting and this item deferred until then.

Proposed by Cllr Trevaskis and seconded by Cllr Lewis

The Motion was approved unanimously

- 20. Pension** – The Clerk agreed to contact Steve Parkinson regarding the tax element of any pension payment and its impact on the annual audit.

- 21. H.R. Advice** – The Clerk agreed to contact Worknest, Peninsula and one other organisation for a quote regarding formal advice about the HR issue which Hale Parish Council is currently experiencing.

- 22. Date of Next Meeting** – 21st October 2024

The Chair Closed the Meeting at 10.30pm