

Slaley Parish Council

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Slaley Parish Council Held on Monday 10th June 2024 at 7.30pm In Slaley Commemoration Hall

1. Present

Councillor Ian Stevens, Councillor Debra Taylor, Councillor Stella Douglas, Councillor Lynda Sale, and County Councillor Colin Horncastle.

2. Apologies for Absence

None.

3. Public Participation

Six residents of Slaley Parish were in attendance.

All residents were present to discuss the pre-approval change of use application for two buildings on South Farm Slaley (24/01632/AGTRES & 24/01633/AGTRES), currently awaiting decision with the Planning Team at Northumberland County Council.

Residents addressed the council with their concerns regarding the pre-approval, if permitted, not requiring further planning permission. They shared further concerns that the development would also cause some property's privacy to be impacted quite significantly, and also raised the issue of no detailed bat or owl survey being produced, even though both of the barns in their current condition are potential habitat's to both species.

One resident visited the architect, Doonan Architects, raising additional concerns as they were informed of future plans for three garages on the site. The resident also relayed that the owner had shared plans for a more expansive development on the site further to these initial plans.

Residents raised the issue of developments being applied for in such a way that, by retaining character features of the original building, they somehow bypass standard planning regulations required for green belt development, and development within the curtilage of a listed building, as appears to be the case with this application. There is also concern that the access road to the property is not suitable to carry additional traffic without improvement.

Residents added that while they are not against suitable development within the village envelope, they don't think the village should be compromised by developments that are not carefully considered within a large green belt area.

All residents were concerned that any and all developments should be subject to the necessary planning surveys and specifications required, especially within the green belt area.

Councillors advised that they were also concerned with the nature of the development and the fact that they were not informed. Due to only being made aware of this application the day before the council meeting, Councillors hadn't had the opportunity to fully inspect the plans, however, Councillor Stevens advised that he had contacted the Planning Team at Northumberland County Council regarding the application and was told that plans of this nature were not required to be submitted to Parish Councils.

Following a brief discussion, residents were advised that the planning applications would be reviewed fully. Residents advised that they would submit their objections and queries to the Planning Team at Northumberland County Council.

Residents were invited to stay for the rest of the meeting but all chose to leave following this agenda item.

Action - County Councillor Colin Horncastle to check with the Planning Team at Northumberland County Council about details of larger developments within the green belt, and the specifics of the pre-approval application process.

Action – The Clerk will investigate the County Council's Local Plan, to identify any specific planning allocations regarding Slaley Parish and green belt areas. The Clerk will also identify the relevant Planning Schedules, and provide the information to the Parish Council and distribute to residents.

4. Short Address by County Councillor Colin Horncastle

County Councillor Horncastle provided an overview of the Highways and Roads department, and the situation they have been dealing with due to the recent extreme weather conditions in the country.

- Maintenance, repairs and improvements to roads couldn't start until the third week in April.
- They had to deal with emergencies first including blocked gullies, two landslips and a road that was completely swept away.
- More money has been added to the extreme weather fund to combat the impact of the extreme weather conditions on the road network - £4.5m added to fund.
- Good weather withstanding, repairs should be forthcoming within the next six months.
- Advised that fly-tipping had become a big problem and was a priority issue for the County Council.

Councillor Stevens advised that he had contacted County Councillor John Riddle in March 2024 about the sub-standard state of Coal Road, (minuted item 3 of 11/03/2024; minuted item 3 of 08/04/2024; minuted item 3 of 13/05/2024) and was yet to receive a response.

Councillor Sale asked what could be done to protect road safety while waiting for the repairs. Councillor Douglas emphasised this point, stating that the roads were dangerous to drive on and required signage to indicate risks, and cones to indicate the potholes.

Action – County Colin Horncastle to talk directly to the Head of Highways and Roads to look at getting the potholes in the Parish prioritised for repair.

Action – Councillor Stevens will request a response from County Councillor John Riddle regarding his email dated 20/3/2024.

5. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Stevens in his capacity as a Governor at Slaley First School in relation to minuted item 8 c., the Integrity of the Parish Council, and minuted item 11., AOB – Removing Playground Equipment.

Councillor Taylor in her capacity as recipient of animosity levelled at her by members of the community, minuted item 8 c., the Integrity of the Parish Council.

6. Minutes of Meeting Held on Monday 13th May 2024

a. Approval of minutes

Councillor Douglas proposed the minutes and Councillor Taylor seconded them as a true record of the meeting.

b. Review of actions, from the:

i. Parish Council meeting

The Actions Log was reviewed and appropriately updated – See Appendix A.

ii. Parish Council Annual General Meeting

The actions from the meeting were reviewed and it was noted that all were complete.

Councillor Stevens drew attention to:

- Item 4 and asked Councillor Sale to complete and forward to the Parish Clerk her '*Members and co-opted members' disclosure pecuniary and other interests'* form.

Action – Councillor Sale to complete and forward to the Parish Clerk her '*Members and co-opted members' disclosure pecuniary and other interests'* form.

- Item 17 d., Stating that the Exercise of Public Rights period (in relation to the accounts) had not been posted on 03/06/24 as stated in the minutes but on 10/06/24. The 'inspection' period therefore would now run until the 19/07/24.

i. Annual Parish Meeting

The action that emerged from the meeting was reviewed and noted as complete.

c. Matters arising
None.

7. Correspondence of significant note

(Councillors are reminded that all Council related email correspondence can be viewed at slaleyppc@gmail.com)

- **From: members of the Parish** – two separate emails (both dated 28/05/24) were received in the wake of a newspaper article being shared between members of the Parish which referenced a sexual offence committed by a local resident. Neither made any specific ask of the Council. Councillor Stevens responded to both emails, prompting a response from one writer via email (dated 3/06/24). Councillor Stevens responded accordingly on 10/06/24.
- **From: Mazars LLP** – acknowledging via email (dated 20/05/24) receipt of Slaley Parish Council's Declaration of Exemption relating to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return.
- **From: Gallagher Insurance Brokers** – email (dated 18/05/24) from the Parish Council's insurance broker that its insurance policy for 2024/25 would be renewed with Hiscox Insurance.

8. Approaches Made to Councillors directly

a. **Correspondence**

None.

b. **Personal**

Councillor Stevens was approached by a resident of Coal Road by phone (on 10/06/24) stating that the road surface remained in a poor state 18 months on from her first complaint, and her FixMyStreet reference had been closed. Councillor Stevens replied that the Parish Council were continuing to press the Highways Team at Northumberland County Council for resolution to this matter.

County Councillor Horncastle shared with Councillors that he would soon be touring the area with the Highways Team to assist them in identifying road surfaces that needed attention and that he would visit Coal Road with them.

Action – County Councillor Horncastle to share the outcome of his 'tour' with the Highways Team with the Parish Council.

9. New Items

- a. **Review of Outstanding Actions Pre 10th June 2024** (led by Cllr Stevens)
The Actions log was appropriately reviewed and updated – See Appendix B.
- b. **Official Welcome to Our New Parish Clerk/RFO** (led by Cllr Stevens)
All Councillors welcomed the New Parish Clerk to Slaley Parish Council. The Clerk acknowledged the welcome and shared her optimism for the future working relationship.
- c. **The Integrity of the Parish Council** (led by Cllr Stevens)
During the week of 19th May 2024, a high degree of animosity was levelled at Councillor Taylor by members of the Parish community due to her partner's activities and her relationship with him. Councillors met on 30th May 2024 to discuss this issue and this agenda item allows their thoughts and views to go on public record.

Events since the meeting on the 30th May 2024;

- Further email correspondence on 3rd June 2024 from a resident, responding to Councillor Stevens' reply to an initial approach to the Parish Council via email on 28th May 2024. Councillor Stevens responded to this new email on 10th June 2024 in line with the Parish Council's position of 30th May 2024, together with some personal commentary in relation to inferences being made against Councillors.
- Rumour had been spread that not all councillors were present at the meeting of the 30th May 2024 and that not all councillors shared support for Councillor Taylor.
- Councillor Stevens asked all Councillors for the record if they still supported the position they agreed on 30th May 2024 – See Appendix C.
- Councillors Douglas, Stevens, Sale, and County Councillor Horncastle all confirmed their support for Councillor Taylor and her position on Slaley Parish Council.
- Councillor Stevens and Councillor Taylor shared information of telephone conversations held with the Head Teacher of Slaley First School requesting that Councillor Taylor and her partner agree not to be in the village when the children were doing planned activities outside of the school grounds. Currently, the school has decided not to allow children to make community visits during school hours. Although Councillor Taylor initially considered the request, she and her partner concluded that it was unprecedented and unfounded, and subsequently refused.
- Councillor Taylor shared how saddened she was by the situation.

- Councillor Douglas shared her disgust and offense at the request and continued to share how she has been the recipient of personal remarks based on false allegations and has refused to respond to such vitriol.
- Based on a number of allegations, Councillor Douglas chose to shut down the Parish website for a few hours on 9th June 2024, to establish their veracity. Her review proved the inaccuracy of the allegations.
- Councillor Colin Horncastle thanked Councillor Stevens for the phone call alerting him to the situation. He confirmed his support for Councillor Taylor, praised her performance as a Councillor, and her service to the community of Slaley. He thought the situation was horrendous, as the matter was personal and did not affect Councillor Taylor's ability to be a good councillor. He shared that County Council would offer Councillor Taylor legal support if it was requested.
- Councillor Sale suggested that the Parish Council should work with the community in an attempt to de-escalate and normalise the situation. She suggested mediating with the leaders of the community, to find a way forward. Councillor Stevens stated that he didn't feel he was the right person to undertake this task. Councillor Douglas volunteered to mediate any discussions with community leaders. All Councillors affirmed this as a way to hopefully move forward.
- Councillor Stevens advised that he had a Governors meeting at Slaley First School the following night and that he would share elements of the Parish Council's discussion there and offer their support to de-escalate and normalise the situation for the benefit of the community.

Action – Councillor Stevens to discuss ways of moving forward with the school governors.

Action – Further discussion as to which Councillor would be suitable to mediate any future discussions between community groups and leaders.

d. **Dates of Future Parish Council Meetings** *(led by Cllr Stevens)*

Councillors agreed to change monthly Parish Council meeting dates to the second Tuesday of each month at 5.30pm – See Appendix D.

e. **Election of Vice Chair** *(led by Cllr Stevens)*

Having failed to elect a Vice Chair, the Clerk to Council will investigate the legal implications of the Vice Chair positions being vacant.

Action – Clerk to investigate the legal implications of the Vice Chair position being vacant.

- f. **Dog Fouling Review** *(led by Cllr Stevens)*

Action – Councillor Stevens to add an item in the Slaley News reminding dog owners to clean up after their animals.

- g. **Heritage Review** *(led by Cllr Stevens)*

As set out in the Council's Yearly Planner, this item was due to be reviewed at this meeting. Councillors noted, however, that it was kept under review monthly via the action tracker resulting in no further action needing to be taken at this time.

- h. **Annual Parish Event** *(led by Cllr Stevens)*

The current view amongst those consulted was that an Annual Parish Event might work. Councillors agreed that a 2024 Christmas event should be explored.

Action – Councillor Stevens to draw up an outline plan for a 2024 Christmas Parish Event.

- i. **Parish Council Drop-in Events** *(led by Cllr Stevens)*

The first drop-in event at the village shop was scheduled for 28th May 2024 but did not take place. As per the original minuted item 6 f. (08/04/2024) the Parish drop-in event will go ahead on Monday 24th June, between 10.30am and 12pm at the Slaley Community Shop.

- j. **The Neighbourhood Plan** *(led by Cllr Stevens)*

At the Parish Council's AGM of May 2024 Councillors agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan should be rekindled. It was agreed that Councillors would meet off-line via Zoom to appraise themselves off where the Plan had got to and consider next steps. To make those discussions more fruitful, the Parish Clerk has begun investigations on the area's assets and started a portfolio of relevant information.

Action – Clerk to bring Councillors together via Zoom to discuss the current status of the Neighbourhood Plan.

10. Planning Applications

- **Planning Appeal Notification:** Old Farm East Woodfoot Hexham Northumberland NE47 0DF
Proposal: The proposals include a two-storey stone extension to the south creating a study and additional bedroom; two-storey timber-clad extension to the west to form additional living space and a master bedroom suite; and relocation of some existing windows and rooflights and addition of others.
Current status: Appeal under Section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The original planning application, as sent to the current Slaley Parish Council for comment was **REFUSED**. Slaley Parish Council raised no objection to the application upon consultation.

11. Finances (led by Cllr Taylor)

A brief overview of the Parish Council's finances is shown in Appendix E.

Councillor Taylor stated it was a very quiet month, however, was concerned that invoices for the printing of the Slaley News for both April and May hadn't been received. The Clerk was asked to follow this up.

Action – Clerk to request invoices from Hextol for payment.

12. Any Other Business/Urgent Matters

- a. Report received from the Head of the school requesting that the Parish Council support the removal of the large climbing frame from the school grounds/ community play area due to risks associated with its height, and minor defects that can't be repaired. – See Appendix F.

Action – Councillors to review the report.

Action – Clerk to co-ordinate views of Councillors during the week commencing 16/06/24.

- b. Councillors noted that the Parish Council notice board had been reinstated at the church. Councillor Stevens advised that posts and labour to facilitate this had been given voluntarily by Trathans Sawmill of Chopwell. Councillors requested that Councillor Stevens send a thank you card to recognise their support. The notice board is now lockable, and it was agreed that Councillor Stevens should retain the key.

Action – Councillor Stevens to send thank you card to Stephen Trathans of Trathans Sawmill.

13. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 9th July 2024 at 5.30pm at Commemoration Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.25pm

ACTIONS LOG FOR SLALEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING OF 13th MAY 2024
(including items/resolutions agreed/approved)

| Log Ref. | Minute Ref. | Action | Owner | Due Date | Complete Y/N |
|----------|-------------|---|-------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | 3 | Revisit Coal Road, assess the state of the surface and press for a response from the County Council. RESPONDED | IS | 10/06/24 | On going |
| 2 | 8.b.i | Grass outside 'South View' to be cut. COMPLETED | IS | 10/06/24 | Y |
| 3 | 8 b. ii. | Tidy up the small tract of land between Slaley First School and 'Tree Tops'. COMPLETED | IS | 10/06/24 | Y |
| 4 | 12 a. | Respond to Northumberland County Council regarding Emperor Homes pre-planning application for 10 housing units in the village, eight of which would be affordable houses. RESPONDED | IS | 28/05/24 | Y |
| 5 | 12 b. | Procure insurance for 2024/25 from Hiscox insurers. RENEWED 18/05/24 | IS | 01/06/24 | Y |
| 6 | 12 c. | Advise the Head Teacher of Slaley First School of Councillors views on supporting the removal of play equipment financially (should that come to pass). COMPLETED | IS | 10/06/24 | Y |
| 7 | 12 d. | Secure lid of village salt bin. OUTSTANDING | IS | 10/06/24 | N |
| 8 | 12 e. | Liaise with Slaley Women's Institute regarding the proposed wording relating to those organisations that have supported the funding of the Parish notice board. COMPLETED | IS | 10/06/24 | Y |

Outstanding actions from previous Slaley Parish Council meetings – 2023 and 2024

| Log Ref. | Mtg. type | Mtg date | Minute Ref. | Action | Owner | Due date |
|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|--|-------|----------|
| 1 | SPC | 08/04/24 | 4 | <p>County Councillor Horncastle to discuss the on-going deterioration of the roads in Slaley Parish (particularly Coal Road, the road through Slaley village and the road between Wooley Grange and West Woodford) with County Councillor Riddle.</p> <p>Updated 10/6/24 - COMPLETED</p> | CH | Y |
| 2 | SPC | 13/10/23 | | <p>Formally engage with the local history group in order to establish their willingness to progress the Asset Register on behalf of the Parish Council.</p> <p>Updated 10/06/24 – Issue moved to next meeting to discuss with new Parish Clerk to progress after agreeing requirements and actions with Councillors.</p> <p>Updated 13/05/24 – DT reported that no progress had been made. Councillors to consider using the services of the new Parish Clerk to progress this.</p> <p>Updated 08/04/24 – No further progress. DT to nudge.</p> <p>Updated 11/03/24 – Meeting held with DT and SD in attendance with Mrs. P. Wilson and Mr. I Hancock.</p> <p>Agreed actions being progressed by the latter, with a catchup being scheduled for early April.</p> <p>Updated 12/02/24 – Meeting confirmed for 25/02/24 with DT attending on the Parush Councils behalf</p> <p>Updated 08/01/24 – A suggested meeting with the History Group to discuss this issue has had to be rearranged.</p> <p>Updated 11/12/23 – Progress being made. DT continues to pursue the issue.</p> <p>Updated 13/11/23 – Action has been taken but DT needs to encourage the local history group to progress this item further.</p> | DT | On going |

SPC - Monthly Slaley Parish Council Meeting

Slaley Parish Council – In Support of Councillor Taylor

Background

On 30th May 2024 Slaley Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk met to discuss a newspaper article circulating in the village that had led to a degree of 'hostility' towards Councillor Taylor (and other members of the community). The aim of the meeting was to establish the Council's position on the issue and formulate a set of words that all its members could use in a consistent way if they were asked to comment on the issue. Their agreed position is set out below.

The response of Slaley Parish Council

On 19th May 2024 Slaley Parish Councillors became aware of a newspaper article dated June 2023 circulating amongst the community highlighting an historical offence committed by one of its residents. In the same piece reference was made to that individual's relationship with Parish Councillor Taylor.

In its wake, some within the community have implicated, amongst others, Councillor Taylor for not sharing her knowledge of the offence and for her relationship with the individual. The integrity of the Parish Council and Councillors themselves has also been called into question because of its and their professional relationship with Councillor Taylor and her continued presence on the Parish Council.

Since the newspaper article came to light, Parish Councillors have sought to go behind the headline to better understand the issues it raises for the Parish Council itself, individual Councillors, and the concerns it has prompted amongst some in the community. This has involved reviewing their own systems of governance together with the Local Government Act of 1972 and contact with the Police and Probationary Services. Councillor Taylor has committed no offence, criminal or otherwise that would bar her from serving as a Parish Councillor and therefore at a meeting held on 30th May 2024 Parish Councillors showed their on-going support for her and her position on the Council. Personal comments made about Councillor Taylor in this context by some members of the community are therefore considered inappropriate by Councillors.

Whilst not an accusation levelled at the Parish Council, Councillors are aware that others in the community, who saw the newspaper article when it was published, are being blamed for withholding that information from others. Whilst recognising this has potentially added to the anxiety experienced by some upon reading the article recently, in the Parish Council's view this is also unfair and inappropriate.

It is the role of the judiciary, the police and/or the local authority to communicate any relevant information to the community, all these bodies have expertise and a vast wealth of experience in the issues the article highlights and would have acted if they had considered there was a need to do so.

Slaley Parish Council – Meeting Schedule 2024/25

| Month | Monthly Council Meeting | Other Meetings | Location | Time |
|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------|
| July | Tuesday 9 th July | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| August | Tuesday 13 th August | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| September | Tuesday 10 th September | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| October | Tuesday 8 th October | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| November | Tuesday 12 th September | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| December | Tuesday 10 th December | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| January | Tuesday 14 th January | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| February | Tuesday 11 th February | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| March | Tuesday 11 th March | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| April | Tuesday 8 th April | | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| May | Tuesday 13 th May | Annual General Meeting | Commemoration Hall | 5:30pm |
| | | Annual Parish Meeting | Commemoration Hall | 6:00pm |
| May | Tuesday 13 th May | | Commemoration Hall | 6:30pm |

Slaley PC – Income and Expenditure from 10th May to 9th June 2024

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Income: | |
| Interest from Savings Account | £19.48 |
| TOTAL | £19.48 |

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Expenditure: | |
| Gallagher – Council Insurance | £1,003.91 |
| Hire of SCH for AGM and Monthly meeting | £24.00 |
| TOTAL | £1027.91 |

| | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Bank balance: | |
| Current Account | £692.34 |
| Savings Account | £19,082.02 |
| TOTAL | £19,774.36 |



**Slaley Parish Council
Commemoration Hall,
Slaley, Northumberland,
NE47 0BQ**

Dear Parish Councillors,

RE: Metal climbing frame within the grounds of Slaley First School. NE47 0AA

I am writing on behalf of children, staff and governors at Slaley First School about a subject that has been a topic of discussion for quite some time now.

At the bottom of our school playing field, we have a large metal climbing frame. See pictures from various angles (appendix 1 attached).

The climbing frame is high, and during the school day, our children know our school rules prohibit them from playing on the frame. In our opinion, it is too high for the age of the majority of our children and hence why we have established this rule. I have also informed our parents, that, at home time, when the children are handed back into their care, they must also not allow the children to play on the metal frame. Most parents abide by our wishes, but occasionally, we have spotted one or two children playing on the equipment. On one particular occasion, a child was climbing on it with their backpack on; an obvious concern for health and safety reasons.

I am also concerned about the climbing frame being used by the community. As you are aware, sometimes children access the school grounds after school, unsupervised by adults. No doubt there is therefore a chance that some children may be using the equipment who may not be at an appropriate age to access it.

The frame, along with the rest of the equipment in the yard is regularly inspected and some time ago it was reported as having a defect (see findings report January 2024 below). I am aware that an attempt to source a part to replace has been carried out, but to no avail. This is an additional issue in itself.

INSPECTION FINDINGS - Minor Defect, requires monitoring

| Question | Response |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Equipment Long Description | Metal climbing frame |
| Equipment Reference | NCC001-PLAYEQ-PGPRU009_004 |
| Equipment status | Minor defect, requires monitoring |
| Detail of defect | round step missingQ |

I have attempted to find out more about the origins of the climbing frame and it seems that it may have been funded originally by a 'Groundwork' programme and co-ordinated by the Parish Council and a lady who was subsequently a member of our Governing Body. The information I have, indicates that the frame may have been installed circa 2008/09, but the lady who we think may have been involved in the project did not join our Governing body until 2015. Although there are no written records to be certain, this seems to indicate that there may not have been a member of staff from school involved in the decision to install the climbing frame on our grounds.

In summary, myself and all current Slaley First School governors are in agreement that we would like to arrange the removal of the metal frame. (N.B. Ian Stevens abstained from being involved in this decision, due to his position on the Parish Council.) We already have a reputable company booked to remove a wooden play slide that we have in our Early Years yard, and if I can obtain the agreement of the Parish Council, then I will arrange for both pieces of equipment to be safely removed from the school grounds. I would therefore be grateful for a decision to be made before school embarks upon the summer holidays on Friday July 19th if possible.

I hope that this letter contains all of the information you require in order to make a decision on the matter and whilst we know it may not be possible for the Parish Council to cover the full cost of removal (approx £600), a small contribution towards this would be gratefully received if possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further questions. I am available on 01434 673220.

Yours Sincerely,



Mrs Angela Hayward HEADTEACHER



Appendix 1
Photographs of the climbing frame

