

Groomspport Village Association

Minutes of AGM held on Tuesday 24th October 2017 at Groomspport School.

Present

See List attached

1. Welcome

The Chairperson welcomed the Villagers and invited guests, MLAs, Councillors, Council staff and representatives of North Down Community Network to the AGM. He thanked Bronagh Wright for letting GVA use the School premises for the meeting. Bronagh gave a brief overview of the work of the Intensive Support Learning Unit. The School is keen to forge links with the Village and welcomes any proposals that will support this.

2. Apologies : Lady Hermon MP, Peter Gibson, Miriam Gibson, Mike Smith(Committee Member), Cllr Tom Smith, Rev Duncan Pollock and Rosemary Beattie.

3. Minutes of last AGM (Thursday 20th October 2016)

Agreed and Adopted-Proposed by Eric Brown and seconded by Cllr.David Chambers.

4. Chairperson's Report -David Martin

"Overview of the year

How to sum up the past year? It's been a successful year, with awards won; it's been a frustrating year, over funding issues; but for me, it's been a year when the Committee worked hard, but still had a lot of laughs along the way!

Learning from the past

Almost exactly a year ago, there was good news for the Village. The planning application for the proposed Shooting Range was withdrawn in the face of huge opposition.

It's vital that organisations, of whatever size or nature, reflect on past performance in order to learn for the future. The critical learning from the 2015/16 year related to this Association's totally inadequate response to the very significant threat to the village posed by the Shooting Range.

The current Committee has recognised this by reinstating a 'Planning' item to the agenda for each meeting. Happily, there have been no issues this year which have been so contentious, although we have commented to the Planners on a few of the applications.

In my opinion, protecting the village from inappropriate development remains one of the Association's key tasks. This is all the more importance given the natural beauty in which the village is set.

Awards this year

The Association has been involved in three awards won by the village this year.

The village was again awarded a very creditable second place in the Large Village category in the In Bloom competition. There were twenty-seven entries in this category, so second place was a real achievement, and reflected how well the village was looking this year.

This, of course doesn't happen without a lot of hard work and credit is due to Roy McWhinney and his team for their endeavours on our behalf. Indeed, I understand that we're the only community in the Borough who organise work parties to carry out weeding and planting flowers!

This year we suggested that the In Bloom judges look at the Cove Bay development. They did and granted a Special Award for the planting throughout the area. A tribute to those who did the initial planting, those who maintain it and the active inputs of the residents.

The third award came in the 'Best Kept' competition where the village was judged the 'Most Improved' in the Town and Village category. Again, a tribute to the work of Roy and his team.

To put these three awards in context, we were the only group in the Ards and North Down area who had any success in either competition. The challenge, of course, is find ways to improve on this year's performance – so if anyone has suggestions as to how we improve, do let us know-we'd be pleased to hear them!

Events this Year

The first event organised by the Committee was the traditional Christmas party to accompany the switch-on of the tree lights. As usual, this was a great hit, especially with the kids who got to meet Santa. It's a shame that this year's party was to be denied funding by the Council. However, the Committee decided that the show must go on, with or without Council funding and it will, to the same standard as in recent years. Particular thanks to the Stables Restaurant which has offered to provide the food for the party, free of charge.

Another event which was denied Council funding was the Big Lunch. Again, the Committee decided that the show would go on and we provided the funding from our reserves. It was an excellent event, very well attended in glorious weather.

A further highlight, albeit on a much smaller scale, was the visit to the village of the Towerview Primary School Eco Council. It was a pleasure to show these kids around and they took particular interest in the herb garden and the Community orchard, as well as the ice-creams they received for their good behaviour!

During the late Spring and Summer, we co-operated with other organisations in holding a number of events in the village. These included the Beach Clean-up, the RNLI Swim Safe for 7 to 14 year olds, the Coastal Forage organised by the Ulster Wildlife Trust, the Snorkel Safari and the Council's Music and Fireworks event.

It is important that the Association raises funds from sources other the Council and we again marshalled two events for the Multisport organisation – the half-marathon/10K and the Triathlon. Our thanks go to John Crockard who, against considerable odds, managed to find the large numbers needed to deal with the Triathlon.

Our thanks are due to businesses and residents alike who generously sponsored the colourful planters around the village. This is the first year that we have sought such sponsorship and credit again goes to Roy for making it such a success.

The Association hosted two village walk-about with Council officers, the first with the Development/Regeneration team and the second with John McConnell and his team looking at In Bloom issues.

Finally in this section, we had two items with an international flavour. We received two photographs from New Zealand of a gentleman who lived in Cockle Row some years ago and we intend that these be displayed in the Council cottages.

Then we had a request from a South African family asking if we could put them in touch with their relative who lived in the village. Of course we did, and they recently had the pleasure of meeting up for the first time in some years.

Issues this year

Of course the year hasn't been without its problems, the most significant of which was the Council's failure to provide funding for the Christmas party and the Big Lunch. They also failed to provide funding for the Arts event which we had hoped to hold in the village. As I've already stated, the Big Lunch took place and the Christmas event will happen on 8 December. Unfortunately, we couldn't afford to run the Arts event, but we believe that the idea is good, so we may return to it in the future.

To be fair to the Council, they did provide funding for the Association's running costs and for our In Bloom efforts.

However, their decision not to fund the Christmas event has caused us a lot of time and effort and we welcome the attempt by Cllr Tom Smith to ensure that Villages will get automatic funding for such events in the future.

The Future

What then of the immediate future?

After some discussion, the Village Plan, completed some four years ago, is to be updated.

The Council has agreed to our suggestion to re-surface the lane beside the Parish Church which leads to the beach. This will complete a circular route along Donaghadee Road/Main Street/Harbour Road/Beachside path. This could be a valuable addition to the village's attractions and, properly planted, can only help in future In Bloom competitions.

We're currently working with the Donaghadee Community Development Association at setting up an Eco Trail running from Ballyholme to the South Commons in Donaghadee. This will, of necessity, be a medium/long term project, but could be of great interest. John Crockard has engaged with a number of groups including Ulster Wildlife Trust, Belfast Naturalists Club and the National Trust in carrying out preliminary work on the project.

Finally, the Christmas event will be held on Friday 8 December, commencing at 6.15pm in the Parish Church. Santa will be waiting in the Parish Halls once the tree lights have been switched on! The event is being held in the Parish Church this year as part of their 175th anniversary celebrations. A very important anniversary for both the church and the village!

Thanks

I would like to thank all members of the outgoing Committee for their support and tireless work in the past year. As I said earlier, it's been a year of successes, some frustrations along with a lot of laughter!

In particular, I would thank John Crockard, our longest serving member, who is stepping down this evening. Personally, I'm sad to see John go – he's threatened so many times that it's hard to believe it's actually happening. John has been involved in so many aspects of the GVA over the years that I'm not even going to try to list them.

Brian McBride, our treasurer, is another who's stepping down. Brian, who also edited our Newsletter until recently, brought us through difficult times with the amalgamation of the Councils' financial systems.

Eileen Thomson, who has been our Secretary for the past year is the other person stepping down. Thank you John, Brian and Eileen!

These resignations and the fact that I'm stepping down from the Chair this evening mean that there are both Committee places and Officer positions to be filled this evening.

Thanks also go to the Presbyterian Church for hosting last year's Christmas event, The Spar for inputs to the same event, and to Council, in particular, for supporting our In Bloom efforts.

I'm sure that there are many I've forgotten, but thanks to you all!"

5. Treasurer's Report

Brian Mc Bride presented the report for the Financial Year 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. Total income for the year was £7,791, including grants awarded from ANDBC for In Bloom, Running Costs and Festival (Christmas & Big Lunch) totalling £3,700.

Total Expenditure during the year was £5,849.48, including Running costs totalling £1,476.62, Big Lunch and Christmas 2016 Festivals costs of £1,662 and In Bloom expenditure of £2,050 in preparing Groomsport for the summer.

All grant claims have been processed and completed before the year end

Balance carried forward to start of the April 2017 to March 18 period was £3,167.60.

6. Appointment of Auditors

Brian Mc Bride proposed that North Down Community Network be invited to continue as Auditors. This was seconded by Pearl Brown.

7. Garden Awards

The following Awards were made:

- **Best Kept Garden**-Mr and Mrs McCready

- **Quirky Garden**-Pat Chambers
- **Use of Garden Accessories and Colour**-Pearl Brown

The Chairperson extended thanks to the Spar for sponsoring this event

8. Matters notified to the Secretary

Eileen Thomson reported that none had been received.

9. Election of Committee Members

Alan Chambers MLA took the chair for this part of the meeting. He congratulated the Committee on their work and said that everyone could see the effort they put into increasing the quality of life of the Village. He pointed out that while one Councillor had been name checked earlier in the proceedings, that all the Councillors had been concerned about the Council's failure to support the GVA's application for Festival Funding.

Eight places on the Committee were to be filled as two had been elected last year for a 2 year period (Mandy Ritchie, Eric Brown) and there had been four resignations, namely John Crookard, Vice Chair, Brian McBride, Treasurer, Eileen Thomson, Secretary and Nicola Patton.

Four Nominations had been received:

Sharon Cummings Nominated by Roy McWhinney Seconded by Brian McBride

Mike Smith Nominated by Sharon Cummings Seconded by Roy McWhinney

Roy McWhinney Nominated by Mandy Ritchie Seconded by Pearl Brown

David Martin Nominated by Eric Brown Seconded by Sharon Cummings

They were declared to be elected

Nominations were invited from those present

Lee Orr Nominated by Mike Smith Seconded by Mandy Ritchie

Denise Lampard Nominated by Pearl Brown Seconded by Eric Brown

Kay Galloway Nominated by Mandy Ritchie Seconded by Sharon Cummings

No other nominations were received for the 10th place which may be filled through co- option.

10. Any Other Business

The following issues were raised:

- Dave Emerson, Adelboden, expressed surprise that while the GVA had raised a concern in relation to the Planning Application in respect of the proposed Andrew Shorefield Development, the Committee had not gone to the wider Village on this issue. The Chairperson advised that the level of concern did not warrant this.

- Roy McWhinney reflected on the recent weather concerns about damaging storms and asked that all Villagers look out for neighbours at such times.
- A concern was raised about Posters on lamp posts. Advice was given to contact the Planning Department at the Council (it was noted that they had recently fined a Cancer Charity for putting up posters advertising a fund-raising event).
- NDCN said they could look at the option of doing an Art Project in the Village-Mandy Ritchie to follow up.
- Sharon Cummings advised that the GVA would welcome volunteers to support all their activities.
- John Crockard gave an overview of the Biodiversity project that the GVA is considering in partnership with the Donaghadee Community Development Association to establish an eco-trail between Ballymacormick Point and the Commons in Donaghadee.
- Concern was expressed about the recent vandalism in the Groomsport House complex; it was noted that following articles in the local papers identifying that there was CCTV footage of the incidents, that they have ceased for the present

The Chairperson thanked all those who had attended and declared the meeting closed.