Broomhaugh and Riding Parish Council

Minutes of the annual Parish Meeting

Thursday 15th May 2025, 7 pm, held at the Parish Hall, Millfield Road

Present: Cllr. Christine Howe (Chair), Cllr. Andy Dunhill, Cllr. David Irwin, Cllr. Barbara Wood, Cllr. Lucie Armstrong, Cllr. Andrew Ayre, County Councillors Anne Dale and Nick Oliver, Reverend Diana Johnson, Adrian Banger, (VHT Chair), Chris Higgins (VHT Trustee) and Judy Wilthew (VHT Trustee/Secretary).

23 members of the public were present.

In attendance:
Catherine Harrison – Parish Clerk
Helen Somers-Joce, Dawn Naylor – Representatives from Tynedale Hospice at Home

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1. Apologies

Cllr. Ellen Rutherford, Cllr. Bridget Jones, Suz Hart (Executive Headteacher, Corbridge & Broomhaugh First Schools), Nicki Burton (Deputy-Headteacher, Broomhaugh First School.

2. Guest Speakers – Helen Somers-Joce & Dawn Naylor, Tynedale Hospice at Home

We were pleased to welcome two representatives from Tynedale Hospice at Home who gave an informative overview of the Hospice, starting from its initial foundation to the operation it is now and the services it offers. Services are free of charge and include specialised end-of-life nursing care and support to patients in their own homes, patient transport services, complementary services and family bereavement support for children and adults. The charity covers an 800 square mile radius across Tynedale, Ponteland and West Northumberland. Residents were surprised to hear how little government funding the hospice received and learned instead that it relied on fundraising and legacy gifts. Helen also described the volunteering opportunities and fundraising events planned which the Clerk offered to share with residents.

3. Minutes of the 2024 annual Parish Meeting, which had been displayed on the Parish Council's website in draft form since June 2024, were agreed to be a true record.

4. Matters arising from the previous Minutes

There were no matters arising.

5. Broomhaugh CE First School Report, Suz Hart, Headteacher

A summary of this report was given at the meeting by Cllr. Howe.

At Broomhaugh Church of England First School, we have the Christian values of respect, forgiveness, truth, thankfulness and kindness guiding us in all we do, helping us to be courageous advocates who make a difference in our local community and the wider world.

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'Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.' 1 John 3:18

Through high expectations and encouragement, we empower our children to believe in themselves and be the best they can be!

School Information

Number of children on roll: 65	% SEND pupils: 19%
Age range of pupils: 4-9 years	% of disadvantaged pupils: 9.4%
Number of children on roll living in Riding Mill: 33	Percentage of children on roll living in Riding Mill: 50%

Key Developments (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education)
The whole school ethos, and promotion of personal development, are enhanced through collective worship, RE, the work of the Buddies, the work of the School Council, the Eco-Council the Diversity Council and Reading Ambassadors. Picture News is used in whole school worship to discuss current affairs; pupils can access the content at a suitable level. The use of Picture News encourages discussion and debate through links to current affairs. Pupils are encouraged to talk about things happening in the world right now, becoming courageous advocates for change.

Staff look at how the Bible can be linked to Picture News. The worship schedule is on the school website so that parents can use links from Picture News at home and know what has been discussed in school. Children have accessed further, special assemblies including a live Black History Month assembly, a presentation on anxiety delivered by the Be You Team, weekly worship with Reverend Diana and a suite of assemblies on gender stereotyping and respect, delivered by the headteacher.

Reverend Diana has established a team of worship leaders at school, who write and deliver prayers for the whole school and during church services.

Reading Ambassadors and a Diversity Council have been established.

The PSHE enrichment calendar has been updated for the year across the Federation; it includes, for example, Black History Month, Christianity projects, Anti-Bullying Week, STEM, Remembrance Day and World Mental Health Day. There is a strong focus on the purpose of the days and why the school takes part. Loti Nambombe, a public speaker on race, came to speak to the children about the racist bullying he has experienced throughout his life and the deportation threats he has faced. He led dynamic sessions with all KS1 and 2 children, really helping them to understand what his lived experience has been.

The SENDCo works closely with a number of external partners to promote positive emotional wellbeing and mental health in school; she has put in place a range of strategies to support pupils and parents. An action plan details the ongoing work. The SENDCo is a highly skilled practitioner who has a sharp focus on achieving the best outcomes for all pupils. Last year, the school was awarded the bronze award by Carnegie for its mental health work. A parent newsletter focusing on SEMH (following parent SEMH survey) has been created. A section on the school website is dedicated to this. Parent workshops will run this term focusing on the relational approach to behaviour management and helping parents to support the mental wellbeing of their children at home.

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Extra-curricular provision

A wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs are on offer with strong numbers. Provision is always inclusive and funded places are available, so no-one misses out. Attendance is monitored. A proportional representation audit has been completed to ascertain the number of Pupil Premium and SEND children accessing clubs and whether this is in line with Pupil Premium and SEND percentages in school. Musical Theatre Club has resumed at BFS, with more than half the school attending on a Friday evening. This year, they will perform Alice in Wonderland. Following a very successful Autumn Term, choir numbers have grown to 36 at BFS, also over half of the school!

Climate Friendly Schools and our Bee Colony

This year, we have engaged with 'Climate Friendly Schools' and met Beth, our project manager from OASES. With her support, activities such as seed swaps and sales will soon take place in the hope that we encourage families to act in their own gardens, spreading pollinator-friendly plants throughout the local area. We have started work on the existing Secret Garden in school, thanks to generous donations from parents and the wider community. This space will become our 'Peace Garden' – a place for children to find a moment of calm in the school day; to spend time in nature and with each other. The garden will have bespoke seating and thoughtful planting to stimulate the five senses.

We are also on the cusp of establishing our first bee colony – the 'Be the Best You Can Be, Bees'. Thanks to a kind donation from the Parish Council, Tesco grant funding and support from the community, we have set up a hive and purchased bee suits for the children. We are just awaiting the delivery of the bees any day now – watch this space! The children will take part in a 'Bee Day' in school to celebrate this and learn how to care for the new colony, with support from our resident beekeeper, Mrs. Gane!

Special Event and Visits

- Playground buddy training has taken place;
- 'Mini Medics' sessions for all KS1 and 2 children, where they learnt vital lifesaving skills.
- The KS2 tag rugby tournament for the federation took place at Tynedale Rugby Club. This was a great experience for the children as they were able to play at the home of rugby. The club were a wonderful help and ran the tournament brilliantly.
- BFS took part in the St. Andrew's Christmas Tree Festival and a combined Federation Mega Choir sang for parents. Both choirs have been invited back to sing again in July.
- The BFS choir also reached the final of the MPN Christmas Choir Competition and travelled to Morpeth to compete. They were the only non-MAT school in the final and Louise Mallin and Dave Cookson (SIP and School Improvement Lead, NCC) came to support us!
- All children attended Christmas theatre performances of 'The Night Before Chrismouse' and 'Jack and the Beanstalk' at Queen's Hall, Hexham.
- KS2 children visited the Sikh Gurdwara in Newcastle to see their place of worship and share a meal in the Langar.
- Joe Morris, MP visited school in February to tour with the school council and see the fantastic work that is being done.
- KS2 children (and some specially selected KS1 children) took part in a football tournament with Sporting Journeys NE Ltd at QEHS. All of the children were a credit to the schools and modelled our Christian values of respect and kindness throughout. One of our Year 4 players summed it up brilliantly by saying, "It was one of the best days of my life. My whole team lifted me up!"

Rainbow Day 2025

On Friday 31st January we held our annual Rainbow Day, where we celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion. Everyone agreed it was such a magical day. Seeing the children come together on the playground really did encapsulate the wonder of a rainbow: we are all individually amazing but together we make something extraordinary!

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This year we explored gender stereotypes and mental health and wellbeing. Very simply, a gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men. The children across school investigated stereotypes by looking at toys and job roles, and evaluating whether they are for girls, boys or both. Our older children investigated further by looking at books, sports and adverts to see whether these stereotypes were reinforced. All of the children agreed that toys, jobs and hobbies are for everyone, regardless of their gender!

Throughout the day, the children took part in different activities and workshops to help them better understand the theme. The Be You team came to lead assemblies across school and workshops with our KS2 children. There were sessions on wellbeing, mindfulness and the Zones of Regulation, as well as friendship-based activities. The children also played 'feelings bingo' and thought about all of the things that make them happy.

A Rainbow Bake Off was held in each school to raise money for our nominated charity: Tanga Club, Hexham.

Spring Music Concert
Without a doubt, one of the highlights of the year is the Spring Music Concert. What a talented bunch of children we have at Broomhaugh CofE First School! Music is at the heart of our school and it was lovely to celebrate all of the wonderful learning as part of the music curriculum, as well as enjoy performances from children who have peripatetic lessons in school, and those who attend the choir. For many of them, this was their first time performing on a stage. They loved looking out at all of the smiling faces of their friends and grown-ups, and seeing the joy that music can bring. Music is a wonderful thing to have in your life - it is a way to lift you up, to express yourself and share joy with others. Our children certainly did this, and then some!

6. Village Hall Trust Report, Adrian Banger, Chair

The charity's purpose is to provide, manage and develop our two village halls to meet the changing needs and expectations of the community with a guiding principle of '*For the community, with the community*'.

Governance and management

The charity is managed by 4 Trustees following the resignation of Jenny Brydie, and recently Pam Waldron who is continuing as a volunteer. The Chair took on the Treasurer's role when Jenny left. All the Trustees are volunteers and have an agreed purpose, vision, and values as a basis to guide future decision making.

We never anticipated that our transition to a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) would be such a long process. There were significant delays in getting the Parish Hall lease reassigned to the CIO but thankfully that is now completed and we expect to have all the remaining legal hurdles sorted in time to start trading as the CIO from start of our new financial year on 1st September.

Our cleaners and Booking Secretary provide their services on a self-employed basis

The halls are really powered by our engine of generous volunteers. In excess of 50 volunteers are involved in some way or another – some regularly and some for one-off events e.g. jumble sales, garden parties.

Our 'Garden Invaders' maintain the considerable grounds at the Parish Hall and our Market Table team puts out eggs, locally made preserves, and other items such as plants for sale daily with money

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going into an honesty box and profits going into hall funds. Café in the Foyer opens up on a Monday and Friday morning. We were all greatly saddened by the death of Val Thompson. Her contribution to the community and particularly to the running of the v h was invaluable. She will be missed not just for the practical help she gave tasks but also her sunny disposition and can-do attitude.

Review of activities

Our village halls are used both daily in the week and regularly at weekends. The activities span all age groups and include Cubs & Scouts, Karate, Youth Theatre, Yoga and Pilates, Badminton, Choral, Art, Bridge, Carpet Bowls, and Seated Exercise. Monthly social events include Pot-Luck Lunch and Film night.

Valuable opportunities to meet are provided by the twice weekly Café in the Foyer and the weekly Drop In event. The halls have also been used for private events and celebrations throughout the year. Drama Club productions are a twice-yearly popular event attracting the wider community.

The Market Table, which was set up during lockdown, continues to make a significant contribution to RMVH income. It is available all day every day in the open but covered section of the Parish Hall porch. It sells eggs and home-made jams, marmalade and chutneys, with an honesty box. There is also a free book exchange facility. It requires a significant and regular commitment from our volunteers but has helped to raise the profile of the hall within the community.

Many visitors to the Parish Hall are unaware of the extent of the garden to the side and rear of the hall which is cared for by the volunteer Garden Invaders team. An audit of all of the trees on RMVH land has been carried out and remedial action is ongoing. Of most concern has been the oak tree behind the Millennium Hall which was recently pollarded following the latest report on its health and stability.

Some users of the hall are unaware that there is a 2-bedroomed flat above the Parish Hall the rent from which contributes towards hall cleaning costs.

A significant amount of Trustee time has been spent regularising the tenancy and managing the tenancy continues to make demands on our time.

Financial overview

The charity prepares accounts on a receipts and payment basis and accounts for the year ending Aug 31st 2024 have been prepared and independently validated. In summary, the income from hall hire at £29K covered the basic operating costs. A similar amount was fund raised by activities such as Café in the Foyer, market table and jumble sales. We also received £3.4K in grants.

We invested £7K in the building with the new windows to the hall and recirculation fans. This left us with a net surplus of £5.4K but we had to write off £4.4K from the previous year's debtors as they were primarily invoicing errors from previous years. I am delighted to say that thanks to the diligence of Sue, who runs our booking system and June, our volunteer book-keeper, we had only £228 outstanding at the end of the financial year and that was paid before the end of September.

At the start of 23/24 we introduced a monthly reporting system to the trustees, showing the major areas of income and expenditure giving a much needed timely guide to our finances. We are very appreciative of the work by June in ensuring we have this data within a couple of days of the month end.

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The charity has a healthy bank balance, in part due to grants received during the COVID period and to judicious management of finances in previous years. The majority of this is held in an interest-bearing account at the bank. However, the Parish Hall will be 100 years old in 2026 and we are very mindful that, as we are on a full repair and maintain lease, we need to keep a substantial reserve.

The rent for the flat had not been increased since 2020. It was increased by £100 p/m from April 2024 to bring it closer to market rent. Grant-funded loft insulation was installed this year.

What have we achieved?

We have progressed our aim of ensuring legal compliance with e.g. updated fire risk assessments and an asbestos management plan. A food hygiene rating of 5 was awarded to both halls.

One of our main objectives was to improve communication with hall users and interested parties in the community by way of regular Newsletters, User Group meetings, and an annual open meeting. This was achieved with Newsletters; User Group meetings and an Open Meeting in June last year.

Hall users provided valuable feedback to our work revising the hall hire package i.e. Booking Form, Terms & Conditions and Hall Hire Charges. Hire charges had not previously been 'published' and were not on our website. They were published on 1 Sept 2024 - a big step towards providing transparency and consistency.

Networking with other village halls local to Riding Mill has been useful in sharing ideas and confirming that we are not alone in the challenges that we face running 2 village halls.

The Parish Hall is a designated Warm Hub and both halls are community resilience hubs.

What are the challenges ahead?

As we've been moving towards a different constitution as a CIO, it's become clear that existing ways of doing things have to change. Legal requirements and Charity Commission expectations have increased markedly over the last few years. We are, therefore, investing time and energy into developing a rigorous set of policies and procedures to provide a firm base for the charity to move forward.

This change in emphasis from previous ways of working has met some resistance on occasions, but tighter governance and more transparent ways of working are necessary to protect the charity's future.

As part of our report to the Charity Commissioners we have to identify the principal risks facing the Charity. We have identified three main areas:

1) We lease the Parish Hall on a full maintain and repair lease and as it approaches its centenary, we are likely to face significant refurbishment costs; the existing heating system in the Parish Hall is not capable of providing adequate heating during cold periods and requires remedial action.

2) We are finding it very difficult to recruit more Trustees to share the workload. The average age of our volunteers is also getting much older as we struggle to recruit younger volunteers

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3) We are at an early stage of knowledge capture and sharing which is essential to provide a solid foundation for the future. Key data needs to be documented and maintained. It is high risk to depend upon the long-term memory of any individual.

Of these the recruitment of more Trustees and younger volunteers is the biggest threat to the future of the operation of the Village Halls as we now all enjoy them. Without adequate volunteers the whole operation will collapse as the halls could not afford to buy in the whole range of services currently provided for free by volunteers without substantially increasing hire charges. There would then be a vicious circle of increased fees leading to reduced bookings which would then require even higher fees.

This situation is not unique to Riding Mill. Many larger voluntary bodies have significant vacancies for trustees. The solution has to come from the realisation of the community that more people have to share in volunteering some of their time if this wonderful facility is going to be able to be enjoyed by their children. We look to celebrate the Parish Hall's centenary next year. Let's use it as an opportunity to engage more people in securing its future.

I would like to finish by recognizing the immense contribution that our current volunteers make to the success of the halls, we had a fund raising event last Saturday for Hall funds which raised just over £350. The quality of the baking was as always excellent, their sausage rolls were the best I have tasted in decades. I was delighted to see many people coming in and having a chat over tea / coffee and cakes. A social gathering as well as a fund raiser for the halls, really living our purpose of being for the community, with the community.

7. St James's Church Report, Rev. Diana Johnson

This short report is my personal take on how things are going in the Church, and where we might go in future.

The Bishop extended me in post until July 2026, to my 5-year point, and so we must plan on that now – even if I would love to stay with you even longer. Maybe she will relent and let me stay longer? Who knows?

You should also know that I have taken responsibility for Slaley and Healey as well as Riding Mill. They can get quite busy. I am hugely indebted to our lay ministers, to Helen Paterson here, and Dorothy Dryden up at Slaley, who have made our services all possible.

I am encouraged, too, by the numbers of people in the congregation; from our own congregation, yes, and also from the wider village there are non-churchgoing people who are volunteering to do stuff that helps the church along. That's an important point to make here in the wider parish. Getting people to volunteer for anything can be difficult in these times, but people like Neil Turner, the architect, who has taken on oversight of the fabric to ease the load on assistant churchwardens and me, and like John Oswald of Stephenson Coates Ltd. who is now discharging the Treasurer role, working with our bookkeepers – both of those non-churchgoing supporters are making a real and expert difference to helping the myriad congregation volunteers. Thanks also to the Parish Council for helping with the upkeep of the graveyards. We should consider more of the same approach.

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We are still short of a churchwarden to tie things together, yet our four marvellous churchwarden's assistants are supporting me directly and bringing in their own ideas. Maybe, too, they are modelling a new way of operating a parish for the diocese to learn from.

Our finances are moderately healthy, though regular giving is down and reflects a realistic shrinking of our numbers on the electoral roll. Yet look at our Vision picture on the cards in the foyer and you will see that we are stepping up in so many ways to create and sustain the model of a village church you see there.

Due to the kindness of past parishioners, we are able to consider taking on an administrative assistant for a couple of days a week. We can cover that for 3 years and I believe – and the Church Council agree – that it is a critical change that we need to sustain us. More of that in the year ahead.

And our worship remains vibrant. We welcome our Methodist friends to our services and we are delighted that Rev'd Marie Beard is authorised for joint worship, by the Bishop of Newcastle. Maybe that's another model for the diocese about how to run a church in a small village parish.

That's all good stuff, but I want to end with an important reflection. The main focus of my time here has been to ensure that the Church is sustained for the years ahead. To achieve this we should look at one another with soft eyes and a listening ear and love in our hearts; and that's what will take us healthily into a future with Christ. I'll end this report by saying that I trust this church congregation has the capacity and the will to do just that.

8. County Councillor's Report, Cllr. Anne Dale

Due to changes in the ward boundaries, Cllr. Dale was now representing the Stocksfield and Bywell ward which did not include Riding Mill and this therefore was her final report. Instead of reviewing the previous 12 months, Cllr. Dale gave a short overview of the main projects she had assisted with in Riding Mill and some of the more contentious issues she had dealt with over the years. She thanked past and present councillors and the Clerk who she had enjoyed working with and she also thanked the residents for their support. By working together she felt much had been achieved. By return, Cllr. Howe thanked her on behalf of everyone for her time and effort and a small gift presentation was made.

9. County Councillor Nick Oliver

Councillor Oliver introduced himself as the new County Councillor for Corbridge which now included Riding Mill. He explained that he had served as the Corbridge councillor since 2017 and lived in Corbridge although two of his children had attended Broomhaugh First School. He welcomed the opportunity to get to know residents and hear about any issues of concern and, although he didn't intend to run surgeries as such, he was happy to be contacted anytime by email or phone.

10. Chair's report, Cllr. Christine Howe

This last year has again been one of consolidation. The team agreed to concentrate on maintenance and building back the reserves we 'plundered' to replace the mill pond footbridge.

Nevertheless, there have been changes. We lost councillors - David McKenzie moved out of the area, sadly Brian Singer died suddenly and now Eileen Carew has decided, after 14 years of service, to officially retire. We have, however, welcomed new councillors - Lucie Armstrong and Bridget Jones,

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who are already contributing much to the council's efforts plus our recently co-opted member Andrew Ayre. We still have one vacancy, if anyone is interested?

We say goodbye to Anne Dale and formally thank her for many years of support and backing.

Many of you came to the hustings for the local elections, which gave a useful insight into how each candidate viewed our local issues. We hope that we can build a good relationship with our new councillor, Nick Oliver. Any progress to the footpath to Corbridge would be very welcome, especially in view of our closer liaison with Corbridge.

Tree work maintenance always forms a large part of our expenditure and removal of ash dieback trees continues apace. You will have noticed the removal of the trees on the Nick. Additionally, we are experiencing ground movement in Marchburn woods and have had to undertake expert advice including a slope survey and additional tree inspections. We will shortly be introducing fencing and signs to indicate the unsafe areas of the woods and advising all residents to stay on the main paths. It will be necessary to undertake the tri annual tree survey this year.

The title transfer for the Millennium hall was completed now that the Village Hall Trust has become a CIO.

We agreed a new lease for the allotments and undertook repairs to the boundary wall.

The mill pond is in need of some repairs, but Tyne Rivers Trust will be carrying out a fish count later this year, prior to recommending what work is required.

The play park is also always in need of general repairs.

You may have noticed that the councillors' official emails and the council's website have changed. This is a recommendation from the government that all councils should have a .gov.uk address, as this is deemed to be more trustworthy. The website has transferred to a new domain and we continue to update it with information, for example walks, bike rides, energy saving suggestions etcetera. In addition, we have started a new quarterly e-newsletter with the aim of eventually abandoning the glossy coloured paper one, due to the rising costs.

As you are about to hear, we introduced our Community Champion award. Next year we would like to accept nominations, advertise the list and go on to have a parish-wide vote.

The community actions, which form part of our Neighbourhood Plan are still being progressed. The grant for a feasibility to assess the possibility of hydro power at the pumping station was spent, and unfortunately the economic conditions are not in place for us to progress this. However, the potential of solar power is currently being investigated in conjunction with Northumbrian Water.

This coming year we hope to concentrate on the speeding/safety issues in the village. We really need new mirrors at Dene Terrace junction and possibly Wentworth Grange; we will be looking to enhance the landscaping of the grassed area at the top of Broomhaugh; and a new sports club lease is being drawn up. If you haven't seen the PC minutes, the sports club will be hosting a summer fete on the 24th August, to which you are all invited.

11. Community Champion Award

After due consideration, the Parish Council presented this year's award to Linda Shepherd. Eleven residents had been nominated, some multiple times, and it had been heart-warming to hear the reasons for the nominations and how much each person was valued by the community. Christine

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Howe, chair of the Parish Council explained why Linda had been chosen as this year's winner: "*Linda has lived in Riding Mill for over 20 years and has always been involved in various activities in the village as well as serving as chair of the Village Hall Trust for a number of years. It is Linda who makes and provides the jams and marmalades for sale at the Parish Hall, with profits benefitting the hall. She hosts fundraising events for St James's church and WI jumble sales; she prepares lunches for both social and charity events, meticulously planned, organised and catered for with the help of other members of the village. Her celebratory vintage tea parties for the late Queen, King Charles and VE Day have always been well attended and create a good community atmosphere. Last but not least, she holds weekly exercise classes which are both social and promote good health - all are welcome. As a valued member of our Riding Mill community, she deserves to be this year's Community Champion*".

12. Financial Statement

The unaudited financial statement for the year ending 31st March 2025 was made available. The full accounts would appear on the website shortly (https://ridingmillparish.gov.uk/).

13. Minor Matters

None

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Cllr. Howe closed the meeting at 8.20 pm.

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