

Chopwell Regeneration CIO

Public Meeting

15.03.2025

At 4.00 p.m. at The Bank



Agenda

1. Welcome & Apologies

Tom opened the meeting by welcoming all present. There were thirteen people in attendance. Apologies had been received from Stacey, John, Marie, Sarah, Regina.

2. Minutes of last public meeting (attached)

There were no matters arising from the last minutes, apart from the spelling of Adrien's first name (which has now been corrected in the saved version of the Minutes). Other topics were due to be covered in the current meeting.

3. Acceptance of new trustee

The meeting accepted Bernie Andrews as a new trustee. Her acceptance was proposed by Jacky, seconded by Bob. Tom welcomed her to the Board.

4. Chopwell Food Strategy (Than)

This item was brought to the top of the agenda as Than needed to leave the meeting early. See Than's presentation (attached). Highlights pointed out by Than, and following discussion:

- A new title has been agreed: Can Chopwell Feed Itself?
- The aim is to address the root causes of local food issues
- The report should be placed on the CRG website (Jodie)
- 8 new planters to include edibles (herbs / fruit / nasturtiums / courgettes etc.) People will be able to help themselves (there will be signs to explain this, plus information on social media)
- The next step should be a steering group to plan ways forward
- There is a need for a dedicated group of volunteers to do the hard work (Mark)
- 8 fruit trees plus fruit bushes will also be planted.
- More funding will be needed as well as an umbrella organisation for all the ideas needed:
Action: this should be an item for CRG's next trustees meeting (Jodie). A business plan will need to be written to make it happen as there is no CRG staff capacity. Fraser agreed – we need to find a way to do it. Than emphasised the need to work in partnership with other organisations in the village. (Jodie) The most immediate need is to turn the report into a plan for next steps.
- Val suggested that a van would be very helpful, and Jodie agreed that this is something CRG would love to be able to provide.
- Bob pointed out that there are currently a number of separate meetings taking place re the Park etc. It will be crucial to ensure co-ordination
- Than – there is a need for work to be done to decide how the various groups will work together. The allotment is the priority at the moment.

- Ronnie – we need to work out next steps as so many groups are working on similar things. Possibility of employed person, ideally someone from Chopwell? An important part of that person's brief would be to reach out to other organisations.

5. **Financial report** (Jodie)

Jodie gave a summary of the current financial position, which remains strong.

- The main concern is that some multi-year grants are soon ending and we have experienced several big rejections. This may be because we are not as new & exciting as at the beginning – and there is more & more competition.
- We had a very positive visit from the Royal Foundation last week, and they were extremely complimentary about what CRG is doing.
- We want to do more, and have the ideas, but it's hard to make long-term commitments when the funding's not in place (yet).
- We need replacement apprentices. Apprentices give opportunities to expand (Fraser). It may be that we need to be prepared to take a few more risks, in the confident belief that we will receive further grant awards.
- Our income is increasing. The Café is doing well. There is always the balance to achieve between the need to generate profit and yet to be affordable.
- Overall there are many positives.

6. **Programme Manager's report** (Sarah)

Sarah had been unable to attend, but sent the following notes:

- We recently completed a maths and cookery course where Terry taught people how to cook healthy meals on a budget whilst improving their maths skills. The funding enabled us to bring in more staff resource to run the workshops. All participants received a certificate in cookery skills too. One of the participants is now volunteering in the kitchen which is a great outcome for her and for us.
- Thanks to a Digital Inclusion grant we have been able to acquire some new IT equipment to support staff with digital processes including access to online training as part of the apprenticeship programmes.
- We are continuing work on recruitment of children and young people as part of the Alternative Education programme in partnership with Gateshead Council. This is a slow process but we have done a lot of preparation work and are ready to go once the children are in place.
- We have recently linked with Gateshead Virtual Schools who support young people in Care, who have helped us to set up a work experience placement and subsequent volunteering in the café for a 16 year old. We hope to continue this relationship with Virtual Schools and support more young people. Fraser has provided top class support and training.
- We have completed year 1 of our STEM skills programme at The Regeneration Shop. This includes volunteering, work experience placements, after-school kids' repair club, clothes alteration courses, a 3D printing workshop, knife sharpening events etc. Hal has supported over 200 participants to get involved with STEM learning in the last 12 months.
- We have received some funding to deliver activities and food for kids in the Easter holidays at The Bank. This is ringfenced for children who receive free school meals.
- The AQA certificate programme continues and we have now awarded 67 certificates in a range of skills including barista skills, food preparation & cookery, repair skills and customer

service. This programme helps people seeking employment and also gives them a boost in confidence.

- New programmes we're planning, dependant on funding include: a Women's project in partnership with Stomping Grounds and project to support isolated older people, in partnership with Karbon Homes.

Ronnie: MHA is keen on collaborative work at the moment, particularly inter-generational collaboration. Ronnie is keen to explore possibilities.

7. The Bank update (Fraser)

- This has been the busiest few months ever, after a disappointing December (due to bad weather & scaffolding, possibly)
- Local market & craft goods have become very popular
- Fraser's world map shows 34 countries represented, proving that Chopwell is a much more diverse community than people think. Many new residents volunteer straightaway so as to get to know the community (and, in some cases, the language)
- Restaurant nights & Juke Box nights will be brought back following a very busy period recently.
- Breakfast has been added to the menu as there is no local competition now – and is proving popular.
- 12 walkers came in this morning & Fraser opened up early for them.
- Pay it Forward was being abused by some – so this has been changed, and is now for kids' free meals throughout the year. (To be advertised on social media)
- People's jukebox – all customers invited to add favourite songs to the playlist.
- The café is close to capacity at times – a few more chairs & tables could be added
- The new Coffee machine is double the size of the old one (bought 2nd hand when the café across the road closed down.)
- Highfield care home work experience arrangement for young people is a really great link and working well. The first student to take part is now volunteering, and feedback from the home about the impact on her is very positive.
- The Shop & Café complement each other very well

Bob asked whether there might be an opportunity to use produce from the allotment & individuals' garden surpluses. Jodie mentioned that the original business plan for The Bank included pickling facilities, and she wondered if we should go back to that idea.?

8. The Regeneration Shop update

Nothing new to report since the last meeting: we are still exploring options for the future.

9. Brightening Chopwell update: (Bob & Barnie)

See the documentation provided before the meeting by Barnie & Bob (attached)

Key points:

Updated results of questionnaire - voting for a general Tidy-up has now reached 87%

- For the Sign at the top of the village it is 60.9%
- For the Miners Memorial it is 52.2%
- Murals attracted 35% of votes.

Discussion on these outcomes:

- The 3 suggestions with over 50% of votes should be taken forward as far as possible.

- Tidy up: we need to work with the Council who may already be planning something similar. A co-ordinated plan needs to be drawn up, possibly via the Lockout meetings? **Action**: Bob to discuss with Councillors.
- Mick – we need to intercept items that shouldn't have been thrown into the skips.
- (Bob) Sign at top of village: needs more research about where: this can be included within other research re siting of planters, arch etc (see below).
- Miners memorial garden – being thought about by Lockout group.
- **Action**: Other suggestions that were put forward will be discussed at the next CRG trustees meeting & will be brought back to next public meeting.

Other points:

- (Barnie) There are 8 new planters that have been made by the Men's Shed and funded by the Chopwell Food Strategy grant. A plan of Chopwell showing potential positions for the planters was shown at the meeting. Jodie thought that permission for locations of these would be needed from Council because of their ground- maintenance work. **Action**: Barnie will check with Lynne Caffrey.
- Brightening of existing planters is ongoing – many have been repaired / replanted.
- Volunteers for planters: Barnie has an updated list of existing ones, but still a few volunteers are needed. Fraser has some possible names. This could be advertised at The Bank, & by word of mouth.
- Signs: for repair / tidying up – survey has been carried out (Bob)
- Chopwell Arch: oak has been delivered to the wood carver; will be ready in summer. Discussion about whether the Arch should be included in a Miners Memorial fruit garden (opposite the Community Centre), or where it originally was. Various views were expressed. It marks the start of Chopwell, but now the Council's new Chopwell sign has been put in place and some felt it was superfluous in that location.
Adrien – have it on the corner opposite The Bank?
Fraser suggested a signpost opposite The Bank to point to all the highlights of Chopwell – this idea was well received.
Entrance to Chopwell via the Park is an alternative possibility (Jodie)
Either put the arch back where it was or explore a new place: majority view for this.
- EOI for power tool training: Bob & Barnie to attend on Monday

10. **AOB & next meeting date** (07.06.25)

- Adrien asked about land where the horses are at the top of the village and asked who it belongs to as it's always untidy
- (Mick) The MHA transport survey is now closed & has been forwarded to bus companies.

The meeting ended at 5.30 with thanks to everyone from Tom.