

Report from the Chair of the Parish Council May 2022

I write this report on behalf of the PC as chair having carried out 12 months in the post. We have six elected counsellors and the clerk of the council.

For of us were newly elected last year and it's been quite a steep learning curve. Some of us had no great appreciation for what the parish council did or should do but we all came into the roles with a positive energy and a desire to make our fabulous villages and surrounds better for all.

I can tell you that we now have a very clear understanding and a solid base from which we feel we can help guide and support the village in all its activities and responsibilities over the coming year. I would add that most of us are in full-time work or with full-time responsibilities. The time dedicated to parish council work is given freely and without reward other than a sense that it's the right thing to do. With this in mind I would like to extend thanks to the outgoing chair Lisa Johnstone and former counsellors for their commitment and time over many, many years for some of them.

So, we enter a new chapter. 18 months of national lockdown and Covid restrictions enforced limitations on how parish council meetings could be undertaken. Some loved the online accessibility of Zoom, many didn't! The National Council regulations now prohibit online meetings so the traditional and some might say "outdated" only "in-person" meetings and decision-making is here to stay if anyone wonders.

We have appreciated and welcomed in personal contributions from parishioners who spoke passionately about their observations and hopes for activities and events over the year. This public consultation and involvement has led us most recently to assist in preparations and contribute financially to the Queens Jubilee weekend with ceremonial tree planting, live music and games. The PC is also supporting the proposed herb garden adjacent to the church.

During the early part of 2021 into Summer 2021 our dedicated counsellors secured external funding to put on free youth sports and healthy food on the sports pitches during Easter and summer school holidays. Working with a local sports provider the events were deemed a success. The type of funding secured did restrict to a certain age limit and to village residents or close family. This was dictated to the parish under the funding requirements. If residents want other activities for different age groups, we would love to hear from you and we will do our very best to identify sources of funding or allocate suitable Parish Council resources to supporting these events.

Parish Council life has some quirks and processes some of which, if we are all honest, are at times a little frustrating in a fast paced world. I would say that decisions are most often reached very quickly but the delivery of these decisions into actions can often take more time. Necessary consultation with

external bodies such as Durham County Council, highways, land owners like Raby Estates are required. A good example is the speed visor to the east of the village which took four years to negotiate with Durham highways.

Fundamentally, there are many matters which are difficult but not impossible for your parish council to have an impact upon. This has required residents to be patient. We should all expect that to make our voices heard we should do so through written and personal involvement with our parish council. There are a select number who did this on a regular occasion and their contributions are extremely welcomed. It would be lovely to hear from more of you of all ages because you have a voice.

Communication with parishioners has not always been easy for the parish council. Social media is a fantastic tool, but it can also be very easily abused and often it is the parish counsellors who can come under personal attack which is not acceptable at any level. We are making strives to improve the accessibility and visual content of the parish council website as a way of communicating and informing residences of our challenges and projects, the good things and the things we can improve. We hope that this will become a platform for youth groups, local trusts and societies, the school to help promote and celebrate their achievements and news. Not forgetting our village businesses and amenities who we must support....use them or lose them! We can often be found in the Cross Keys after our meetings if anyone wants to drop in and see us.

Our Goals for the coming year in no particular order and with no particular priority... other than they are all priorities!

Gap- the play park remains closed due to the poor condition of the equipment which has been condemned. The parish council must secure a new lease with the current landowner before a new playpark can be designed and delivered and funded. These negotiations are with the land owner and are positive.

Planting and floral in the village – our long-term gardener and general fixer Paul Ryman has decided to retire from the role. The parish council are sincerely grateful for his work over the years. The parish are seeking interest from anyone first within the village that might wish to take up this role in whole or parts. Mr Ryman will continue to maintain the council paths for which Durham County Council reimburse our costs.

Recent initiatives to wildflower parts of the village have been trialled but we would like to see rolled out over the coming year. Just because something has always been done one way doesn't mean that we all think it should continue. Again, involvement of our parishioners is invited to assist in delivering these projects. If you have an idea, let's work together to make it happen.

Our parish council is an enabling and assisting coordinating body. It will listen to those that wish to make a personal or collective impact on the village and parish in a variety of ways. The Parish Council is a friendly and positive group of individuals but new energy and skills/experience is always welcome and in fact, required for the work of the parish council to be sustained.

In closing we would like to thank every group and individual who has attended this Annual Parish Meeting called by the Parish Council to celebrate the activities of our village.

Andrew Wilkinson

Chair - Gainford and Langton Parish Council