



## **WEST RAINTON PARISH COUNCIL**

### **Annual Report 2016/2017**

#### **Introduction**

1. Welcome to this year's Annual Report from your Parish Council. The purpose of this report is to summarise what the Parish Council has been doing over the last year and what it has planned for the year ahead.

#### **Membership of the Council**

2. The council consists of 11 elected representatives who serve for a term of 4 years. 2016/17 was the last year of this 4 year term with Parish Council Elections scheduled to take place on May 4 2017.
3. During the year we had 1 casual vacancy due to the resignation of Councillor Elaine Bulmer. As there was no request from residents to fill this vacancy through a bi-election, the Council attempted to fill this position through a co-option process. The position remained vacant at the end of the year.
4. Councillors serving during the year were:
  - Councillor Avril Wallage (Chair)
  - Councillor Iain Clifford (Vice Chair)
  - Councillor Mark Gilbank
  - Councillor Susan Patterson
  - Councillor Elaine Bulmer ( Resigned June 2016)
  - Councillor Andrew Swinburn
  - Councillor Pam Lowrie
  - Councillor Iain Haddick
  - Councillor Peter Morson
  - Councillor Cynthia Cochrane
  - Councillor Maureen Boettcher

#### **Employees (part –time)**

5. Our Parish Clerk (and Responsible Financial Officer), Kate Cuthbert, unexpectedly resigned at short notice in June 2016. Our project officer, and former Parish Clerk, Graeme Keedy was duly appointed as interim Parish Clerk until a replacement for Kate could be recruited.
6. Mark Ramshaw joined us as our new Parish Clerk in September 2016. Graeme continues to provide support in the temporary position of Project Officer.

## **Main Activities**

7. The Council's main activities are as follows:

- To provide a forum for residents to raise concerns or issues that are important to them either in writing or in person at monthly public parish council meetings
- To manage and maintain the open cemetery
- To maintain the Heritage Garden
- To maintain the Parish Clock in St Mary's Church Steeple
- To liaise with Durham County Council and other public bodies, regarding their service provision
- To liaise with community groups and the Village Partnership to ensure that we can work effectively together for the benefit of the community
- To receive regular update reports from the Police regarding their work in our area.
- To considering planning applications that may impact on the well being of residents and our environment and to raise any residents concerns with Durham County Council to aid their decision making process.
- To consider and provide financial support (in line with Parish Council policy) to voluntary organisations, charities and community groups that provide activities or services for the benefit of residents

## **Specific Activities during 2016/17**

### **Administration**

8. The Parish Council continues to improve and update its policies and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose and support informed decision making.
9. We continue to receive a high volume of correspondence and requests for information that we have a statutory duty to provide within defined timescales. To help make best use of our resources, where possible, we direct people to our web site where we publish as much information as possible.
10. We continue to communicate with residents via regular updates in the Village Newsletter to alert you to anything coming up that we think will be of interest and you need to be aware of. Information is also posted on the 2 Village Notice Boards.

### **Cemetery Improvements**

11. We have now received the report from Cemetery Development Services (CDS), the specialist company the Parish Council commissioned last year, to:
  - carry out a site burial survey,
  - produce new burial plans,
  - design layout and landscaping plans for new burial space identified
  - provide a management brief for a financial administration and an annual maintenance programme.

12. Work has already begun to implement the recommendations made by CDS. This will continue in 2017/18.
13. To ensure the Parish Council fulfils its statutory health and safety responsibilities in relation to the management of the cemetery, a suitably qualified contractor was appointed to undertake, "stress testing", of all headstones. Notice of the intention to carry this work and action to be taken as a result of any, "fails", was given well in advance. The testing was carried out in April 2017. As a result a number of headstones have been identified as being unstable. Warning tape has been applied to all headstones failing the test and notices will be added to advise memorial owners of their responsibility to make good. The Parish Council does recognise that such action may cause distress to relatives tending graves marked in this way, but this was necessary for their personal safety, as well as that of all other cemetery visitors.

### **Grant and Donations to Community Groups and Organisations**

14. All grant applications received during the year, in accordance with the council's grant and donation policy, were approved. These are to be funded from the council's 2017/18 budget. Details of grant awards are as follows:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
St Mary's PCC	£200	Hire of portable toilets for Big Lunch 4 June 2017
St Mary's PCC	£250	Provision of Planters for New Church Yard Path
West Rainton Youth Club (via Village Partnership)	£2000	School Holiday Activities during 17/18

The Parish Council also continued to provide financial support to the Citizen's Advice Bureau during 2016/17 for its drop in sessions held in the Jubilee Hall.

A £100 donation was also made to Pitlington Brass Band, in lieu of any fee being levied, for playing at the, "Carols round the Christmas Tree" event in the Heritage Garden.

### **Development of the Parish Plan**

15. During 2015/16 the Parish Council gave a commitment to lead on the development of a parish (village) plan to set out what actions residents would like to see to improve services and our community over the longer term.
16. To help us do this we were awarded a £5,000 grant from the Community Capital Investment Fund and engaged the specialist services of Durham Community Action.
17. Following the launch of the Plan at the Annual Parish Meeting in May 2016, a Steering Group was established. The Group, Chaired by Yvonne Probert from Durham Community Action, has met monthly during the year to agree each stage of the process, analyse the results and identify actions to address the issues raised. Following numerous consultation exercises, a Parish Plan has

now been prepared by the Steering Group. A summary version of the Plan will be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting and will also be published on the website.

18. A full comprehensive version of the Parish Plan, incorporating all the analysis and background information used to produce the summary version will also be produced. The full version will also contain an action plan with specific actions to be undertaken by the Parish Council and other community groups and organisations, together with target timescales for implementation. This is currently out for final consultation with the groups nominated to lead on specific actions and will be finalised shortly.
19. The Parish Council would like to thank everyone who completed surveys and /or attended consultation events. Special thanks go to those volunteers who joined parish councillors, county councillors and officers from Durham Community Action on the Steering Group.

## **Financial Position**

20. It has been a busy year for the Parish Council particularly in relation to the development of the Cemetery and the Parish Plan, which have necessitated the engagement of specialist consultants. Despite this additional financial commitment, I am pleased to report that the Parish Council took the decision not to increase the precept when considering its draft budget for 2017/18 in January. Consequently, as last year, there will be no increase in your council tax bill as a result of Parish Council spending plans for next year. .
21. In anticipation of capital works being required for cemetery improvements, following the completion of the work undertaken by CDS, the council earmarked £12,000 from its reserves when agreeing its 2015/16 budget. As details of work to be undertaken have yet to be considered by the Parish Council, this reserve remains intact and has been carried forward into 2017/18.
22. A breakdown of where your money was spent in 2016/17 and reserve balances as at 31/3/2017 are provided in Appendix A.

## **Looking forward**

### ***Parish Council Election Results***

23. Only 7 nominees were received by Durham County Council for the 11 places available and consequently the scheduled Parish Council Election was not necessary. The 7 nominees duly elected as Parish Councillors, uncontested, are:
  - Councillor Maureen Boettcher
  - Councillor Iain Clifford
  - Councillor Mark Gilbank
  - Councillor Ian Haddick
  - Councillor Pam Lowrie
  - Councillor Peter Morson

- Councillor Avril Wallage

24. At its Annual Council Meeting held 18 May 2017, the Parish Council elected Cllr Clifford as Chairman and Cllr Wallage as Vice Chairman for the year. The resultant 4 vacancies can now be filled through a co-option process. The deadline for applications is Thursday 8 June 2017. Any one interested in becoming a parish councillor should contact the Parish Clerk for further information.

### ***Delivering the Parish Plan***

25. Actions agreed for the Parish Council to lead on in the Parish Plan will help determine Parish Council priorities for the current and following financial year(s).

26. In adopting the Plan, the Parish Council will also be responsible for monitoring the delivery of all agreed actions and for updating the Plan as and when required. We will keep residents informed of progress via the website and the Village Newsletter updates.

### ***Further Cemetery Improvements***

27. During 2017/18 the Parish Council will be considering options for further environment improvements to the cemetery to optimise the use of land identified as additional burial spaces by CDS.

### ***Local Council Awards Scheme***

28. In 2016/17 the Parish Council registered for the Local Council Awards Scheme. Full compliance with the requirements of the scheme, assessed externally, will be progressed during 2017/18 to further improve the council's corporate governance arrangements.

### ***Opencast – Field House Farm***

29. As reported last year, Hargreaves won its appeal for planning permission for opencast mining on the Field House Farm site. As part of the planning consent, the developer is legally obliged to convene a meeting of a Community Liaison Committee (CLC). The primary purpose of the CLC is to hold Hargreaves to account.

30. The CLC has an important role in providing information as the project progresses, enabling any concerns in the local community to be addressed. It will also determine the priority of requests for grants to a Community Fund that Hargreaves must provide as part of the legal agreement. The preliminary meeting of the CLC took place in April 2017. Cllr Clifford attended this as the Parish Council's representative. The current position of the development is summarised below:

- There are numerous planning conditions which have yet to be achieved and approved by Durham County Council

- Environmental and wildlife surveys are in progress. Archaeological surveys will follow.
- There is no firm date for the extraction process to start as this is dependent on the outcome of the above

The minutes of the first meeting are on the web site with the supporting papers for our May meeting. There will be a parish councillor representative at all future meetings of the CLC and we will keep you informed of progress via the Village Newsletter and the website.

**Cllr Iain Clifford,  
Chair of the Parish Council**

**May 2017**