

WEST RAINTON PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Report 2017/2018

Introduction

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

Membership of the Council

2. The latest election took place in May 2017. However, there were only 7 nominees for the 11 places available. Consequently all candidates were duly elected unopposed.
3. Attempts to fill these vacancies after the election were unsuccessful and Durham County Council (DCC) advised that this position could not continue indefinitely. As a result the Parish Council agreed to start a Community Governance Review to reduce the composition from 11 to 9 councillors. As part of this review, the Parish Council propose to seek to change its legal title from "West Rainton" to "West Rainton and Leamside" Parish Council. A petition in support of these proposals was signed by more than the minimum required number of residents which meant that the process could progress. The review request has now been submitted to DCC for consideration. There is no anticipated cost associated with this review.
4. The Parish Council has subsequently filled two vacancies through co-option.
5. Regretfully, Councillor Clifford, former Chair, resigned in March 2018. We are hoping to make a new appointment through a co-option soon.
6. Councillors serving during the year were:
 - Councillor Avril Wallage (former Vice Chair – appointed Chair in March 2018)
 - Councillor Iain Clifford (former Chair)
 - Councillor Mark Gilbank
 - Councillor Pam Lowrie
 - Councillor Iain Haddick (appointed Vice Chair in March 2018)
 - Councillor Peter Morson
 - Councillor Maureen Boettcher
 - Councillor Gary Storey (co-opted November 2017)
 - Councillor Anne Fisher (co-opted January 2018)

7. Employees of the Council (Part-Time)

- Parish Clerk, Mark Ramshaw
- Project Officer, Graeme Keedy

Main Activities

8. The Parish 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 keep abreast of legislative changes to ensure compliance with the statutory framework under which we are required to work. This includes; accounting and audit requirements; the need for transparency and accountability regarding how decisions are made and data protection. This requires on going training for officers and councillors
- To manage and maintain the open cemetery
- To maintain the Heritage Garden
- To maintain the war memorial
- To maintain the Parish Clock in St Mary's Church Steeple
- To liaise with DCC and other public bodies, regarding residents concerns and improvement of their services
- To liaise with community groups and the Village Partnership to ensure that we can work effectively together for the benefit of our community
- To prepare and review regular crime reports, produced from information provided by Durham Constabulary, regarding their work in our area
- To consider planning applications that may impact on the well being of residents and our environment and to raise any residents concerns with DCC to aid their decision making process
- To provide financial support to voluntary organisations, charities and community groups that provide activities or services for the benefit of residents which meet the Council's criteria
- To alert you to relevant information and news through regular updates in Village News, the two parish notice boards and our website.

Specific Activities during 2017/18

Cemetery Improvements

During the year a more robust maintenance contract was awarded to help improve the appearance of the cemetery.

Health and safety checks have also been carried out on memorial headstones to identify and make safe unstable headstones.

A review of cemetery charges was also carried out, the first for four years.

Opencast Mining – Field House Farm

A Parish Council representative has attended the Community Liaison Committee (CLC) meetings during the year.

The primary purpose of the CLC is to hold Hargreaves, the developer, to account. It has an important role to play in providing information as work 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.

Work has now begun on site in preparation for the start of coal extraction. Extraction is expected to start once the numerous planning conditions have been met.

Further updates on progress will be given in the village newsletter.

Parish Plan

The Parish Plan was formally adopted by the Parish Council in June 2017.

In adopting the Plan, the Parish Council is responsible for monitoring the delivery of all actions agreed by community groups/organisations, as well as those the Parish Council is leading on, and for the updating the Plan as and when necessary.

The Plan has helped the Parish Council to determine its' priorities for the year and will continue to do so in future years.

During the year the Parish Council completed a number of actions and supported a number of others. Others are in progress.

In October a "Pride in Our Village Day" was held in response to residents concerns about litter, fly tipping, dog fouling and anti-social behaviour. The day involved a community litter pick and a Neighbourhood Team drop in event in the Jubilee Hall. The event also involved community bulb planting on the "Rec" village green and in the church yard. This contributed to actions in the plan to improve and maintain our green spaces.

Regular updates on progress made in delivering the Plan are given in the village newsletter.

A copy of the updated action plan showing overall progress to date is attached at Appendix B.

Youth Service

During the year, Durham Area Youth (DAY), a community incorporated organisation was set up by trustees and other volunteers to continue to provide youth services in the parish and neighbouring areas, following the withdrawal of mainstream funding provided by DCC.

During 2017/18 the service was funded by a grant from the Durham Area Action Partnership.

To protect the service and ensure that it continued throughout 2018/19, the Parish Council has agreed to provide £6,000 funding to DAY.

This decision supports community priorities identified through the Parish Plan consultation exercise regarding the importance of activities for young people and will help address residents concerns about anti-social behaviour.

Future of Jubilee Hall

At its December meeting, the Parish Council considered a report from West Rainton and Leamside Community Association (WRLCA), outlining proposals for the future of Jubilee Hall involving the Parish Council and DCC.

The Parish Council acknowledges the importance of the Hall and agreed to consider the proposal subject to confirmation and clarification of DCC's expectations and support available.

It is disappointing to report that, at the time of writing, despite several requests for definitive information, confirmation and clarification of DCC's position is still awaited.

Planning Applications

During the year, the Parish Council objected to the following planning applications:

Application	Main Reasons for Objecting	Planning Decision
Erection of 5 houses on former Masons Arms Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removal of public footpath• 5 properties seemed excessive for area defined• Parking and traffic implications in an area with current parking issues	Approved.
Amendment of planning conditions relating to approved Station Road Development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concerns that the proposed amendment will delay the implementation of improvements to the highway at the A690 junction.	Approved
Benridge Bank Housing Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduction in cultural identity of village/move to a small town• Adverse impact on wild life and Rainton Meadows Nature reserve• Capacity of Doctors Surgery• Increased traffic flow and parking problems• Surface water capacity• Concerns relating to the proposed S106 financial contributions	Approved

The Parish Council will continue to monitor these developments, as they progress, to ensure that any planning conditions specified are adhered to.

Financial Position

9. The Parish Council recognise the importance of being able to maintain services that directly impact on our local community. Hence the decision to fund the youth service in 2018/19 as outlined above.

10. Other budget pressures which the Parish Council is facing include:

- Funding required to deliver actions in the Parish Plan

- An increase in Data Controller fees as a result of new Data Protection legislation
 - Provision for legal advice associated with consideration of Jubilee Hall proposals
 - The need to maintain adequate reserves to fund unexpected expenditure
11. At its January meeting, the Parish Council considered and approved a draft budget for 2018/19. This reflects; existing service provision and priorities; funding for the youth service and other budget pressures and a forecast of available funding. In order to balance the budget and provide an appropriate level of reserves, the Parish Council made an informed, but difficult, decision to increase the parish precept for 2018/19.
12. The increase in precept has resulted in a rise in your annual Council Tax bill from the 2017-18 amount of £37.92 (Band D Property) to £49.30 for 2018-19 - less than a £1 a week.
13. A breakdown of where your money was spent in 2017/18, (and 2016/17), together with a summary of the approved budget for 2018/19 is attached as Appendix A.

Looking ahead

14. We will continue to implement actions in the parish plan and monitor and review overall delivery of the expected improvements and outcomes. We will update the plan as and when necessary and continue to keep you updated.
15. We will monitor the new youth service provision to ensure that funding provided delivers the expected outcomes.
16. We will continue to work with DCC and WRLCA to try and secure the future sustainability of the Jubilee Hall.
17. We will continue to work in partnership with the Village Partnership to provide co-ordinated, informed activities and services and help identify any potential external funding opportunities.
18. We will monitor the implementation of approved planning developments and strive to make the best use of funding opportunities for the parish arising from the S106 agreements associated with them.
19. We will begin work to implement the challenging requirements of new data protection legislation.
20. We will progress consideration of further cemetery developments to optimise the use of land as additional burial space and improve landscaping.
21. We will continue to progress full compliance with the requirements of the Local Council's Award Scheme.

Cllr Avril Wallage, Chair