

WEST RAINTON AND LEAMSIDE PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Report 2018/2019

Introduction

Welcome to this year's Annual Report from your Parish Council. The purpose of this report 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

Councillors serving during the year were:

- Councillor Avril Wallage (Chair)
- Councillor Iain Haddick (Vice Chair)
- Councillor Mark Gilbank
- Councillor Pam Lowrie
- Councillor Peter Morsen
- Councillor Maureen Boettcher
- Councillor Gary Storey
- Councillor Anne Fisher (Resigned Sept 2018)
- Councillor Ian Diggory (Co-opted May 2018)
- Councillor Bill Kellett (Co-opted Dec 2018)

Employees of the Council (Part-Time)

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

Main Activities

The Parish Council's current 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 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 consider requests for financial support, in accordance with its grants and donations policy, from voluntary organisations, charities and community groups that provide activities or services for the benefit of residents
- To represent the community on the Opencast Community Liaison Committee
- To alert you to relevant information and news through regular updates in Village News, parish notice boards and our website
- Provision of Village Christmas Tree/Lights and "Carols around the Christmas Tree" event

Specific Activities during 2018/19

Cemetery Improvements

We have continued to improve the appearance of the cemetery. We were successful in obtaining grant funding of £6,010 during the year (from S106 monies and DCC ward members neighbourhood budget). This has enabled us to demolish the old derelict sexton's hut which was in a very poor state of repair. Diseased trees have been removed and the area outside the cemetery has been improved with tree and bulb planting.

The addition of a notice board at the cemetery entrance has also helped to improve our communication with cemetery visitors.

A grave adornment policy came into effect from March 2019 and we continue to work in partnership with grave owners to improve the overall safety and appearance of the cemetery.

A new grounds maintenance contractor and a new waste management contractor have been appointed from 1st April 2019. Both appointments achieved savings on previous contracts.

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 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.

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

Of particular note, 8 new waste bins have been provided throughout the village to aid the responsible disposal of litter and dog waste.

In response to residents concerns regarding speeding, we have had discussions with the County Council and Durham Police about potential road safety measures in various parts of the parish.

As a result, Durham Police undertook surveillance on the Old Sunderland Road to determine speeding statistics. The results endorsed residents concerns. This was followed up with the Roads Policing Unit targeted the area. In a 2 week period in March, 7 drivers were issued with a traffic offence notice (Fine/Points). More police targeting is planned.

The independent police statistics provided the necessary evidence to progress the implementation of appropriate road safety measures with DCC. DCC have agreed that 6, "SLOW", signs will added to this stretch of road. The £3,000 funding required is to be met from AAP grant.

5 volunteers have also come forward to support community speed checks.

Youth Service

We have supported the continued provision of Youth Services in the village by providing £6,000 funding to Durham Area Youth. (DAY)

DAY reported regularly to the Parish Council on the activities and services provided during the year. The new management arrangements in place have seen a gradual increase in the number of young people engaging with the service. The younger group sessions have grown from strength to strength and involved a mixture of centre base, outdoor activities and community projects. An after school club has also been established in partnership with the primary school for young people who don't attend other sessions.

The older age group is, as expected, more challenging. Activities for this age group moved to detached youth work at Adventure Lane Park.

Grants to other voluntary and community organisations

During the year grant funding totalling £1275 was approved as summarised below:

- The Village Partnership – The Big Lunch, Flower Tubs, and Wild Flower Planting in the Churchyard.
- The Green Group – Village tubs
- The Brownies – Trip to the Pantomime

A £250 grant award for wild flower planting was subsequently refunded as this was not required.

Future of Jubilee Hall

Following an approach made by West Rainton and Leamside Community Association (WRLCA), outlining proposals for the future of Jubilee Hall involving the Parish Council and DCC, we have been working during the year to confirm and clarify DCC's expectations and support available.

The Parish Council have been asked to consider applying for grant funding from DCC to purchase the Hall and put new management arrangements in place to run it.

As a result, the Parish Council has set up a working group consisting of 3 parish councillors. The working group has been tasked with preparing a draft business plan to assess the sustainability of the Hall over a 3-5 year period. This business plan is being prepared in consultation with the WRLCA, the Village Partnership and the wider community. Durham Sparks, (a regional development programme designed to connect aspiring community enterprises with business coaches), have also been engaged to provide independent expert advice and support. Once complete, the draft plan will be reported back to the Parish Council to decide the next step.

Planning Applications

Following consideration of concerns raised by numerous residents, the Parish Council objected to a proposal relating to the Medulin, The Dene. This related to a change of use from a residential property to a care home for young people with ancillary parking. The main reasons for objecting were:

- A children's home of this nature and size, (7 bedroom), will detract from the character and appearance of the surroundings and from the amenities of existing residents
- The proposal will generate traffic which would be detrimental to road safety and would have a significant affect on the amenity of occupiers of neighbouring properties and the wider community given that the access road is also a public right of way
- There is no demonstrable need for a home of this size which the Police have advised is unsustainable.

Planning permission was refused.

Provision and Maintenance of Village Planters

The Parish Council greatly appreciates the work undertaken by community groups in relation to the provision and maintenance of village planters. However, current arrangements have developed piecemeal and are uncoordinated. If left solely to the responsibility of volunteers, current provision may not be sustainable going forward.

The Parish Council recognises it has an important role to play in helping to improve our environment and wants to do more. In consultation with the Village Partnership we have agreed to lead on the direct provision of planters and planting throughout the parish from 2019/20.

Financial Position

At its' January meeting the Council considered a draft budget for 2019/2020. To ensure that the Council has adequate funds to maintain and improve the services we provide, and ensure that we have adequate reserves to meet any unexpected costs, the Council considered a 3% increase in the precept was necessary.

The precept for West Rainton Parish Council, included in your annual Council Tax Bill for 2019/20 increased from £49.30 (Band D Property) to £50.78. This equates to 12p a month.

A breakdown of where your money was spent in 2018/19, (and 2017/18), together with a summary of the current budget for 2019/20 is attached as Appendix A.

Looking ahead

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.
- Work with DCC and WRLCA to try and secure the future sustainability of the Jubilee Hall.
- Support voluntary and community groups to help maintain and improve services and activities that benefit our community.
- Support DAY next year. During 2019/20 parish council funding will be used to support additional sessions and school holiday activities. We will continue to monitor outcomes.
- Work in partnership with the Village Partnership, DCC and other public bodies to maintain and improve existing activities and services and identify the need for others.
- Identify and explore potential external funding opportunities
- Work with grave owners to improve the safety and maintenance of the cemetery
- 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.
- Progress consideration of further cemetery developments to optimise the use of land and improve the overall appearance.

In addition, we will:

- Develop a Parish Planting/Environmental Improvement Plan and look to secure external funding to help fund delivery.
- Endeavour to achieve the Foundation level of the Local Council Award Scheme.
- Seek to improve our website and how we engage with residents.

Cllr Avril Wallage, Chair