



WEST RAINTON AND LEAMSIDE PARISH COUNCIL Annual Report 2020/21

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 Ian Haddick (Chair)
- Councillor Avril Wallage (Vice Chair)
- Councillor Mark Gilbank
- Councillor Pam Lowrie
- Councillor Peter Morsen
- Councillor Maureen Boettcher
- Councillor Gary Storey
(Resigned/Disqualified in February due to being unable to attend meetings due to increasing work pressures).
- Councillor Ian Diggory
- Councillor Bill Kellett

Employees of the Council (Part-Time)

- Parish Clerk, Mark Ramshaw

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 only public clock in St Mary's Church Steeple and fund 50% of essential repairs in accordance with a maintenance agreement with the Parochial Church Council.
- To liaise with Durham County Council (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 consider planning and licensing 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
- To alert you to relevant information and news through regular updates in Village News, on parish notice boards and our website
- Provision of Village Christmas Tree and illuminations and “Carols around the Christmas Tree” event

Specific Activities during 2020/21

Virtual Meetings

Like all of us, the Parish Council had to adapt during the year to follow guidelines introduced by the Government for the COVID-19 pandemic. In April the Government passed an Act that permitted council meetings to be held virtually. This meant holding a meeting using the internet and one of the platforms that are currently available. We utilised 'Zoom' and on 16th April we held our first ever virtual Parish Council Meeting. Zoom meetings have gone well and have allowed the council to continue to conduct essential business throughout the year. All meetings remained open to public with details of how to join our zoom meetings being given in advance on the published agenda for each meeting.

Cemetery Improvements

We have continued to improve the appearance of the cemetery. We have cleared, levelled and grassed over the area following the demolition of the old Sexton's Hut and the area immediately behind this. We have also cleared the top right hand corner of the cemetery and created a fenced compound for spoils.

More trees have been cut back and some removed which has improved the appearance and allows easier maintenance.

Youth Service

We have continued to offer support to the provision of Youth Services in the village. As part of our budget setting process, we agreed £5,000 grant funding to Durham Area Youth (for room hire and an additional youth worker). Unfortunately, as with so many things during the year, the service was unable to function as planned, and this grant offer was not taken up by the service.

Grants to other voluntary and community organisations

During the year grant funding totalling £2433 was made to community groups as follows:

Village Partnership, Miners Banner Project - £1,000

Brownies, Virtual Pantomime - £50

WRL Community Association, Jubilee Hall Running Costs Contribution - £1361 to offset lost income while the Hall was closed due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Future of Jubilee Hall

During the year we concluded our review of an approach made by West Rainton and Leamside Community Association (CA) outlining proposals for the future of Jubilee Hall. The proposal involved the Parish Council considering applying for grant funding from DCC to purchase the Hall and then putting new management arrangements in place to run it.

After detailed consideration of the proposal, the Parish Council decided that the business case for this proposal was not viable. The reasons for this are summarised below.

1. There was insufficient DCC grant funding to purchase the Hall at a fair price.
2. Without external funding, there was no demonstrable business case to support the financial sustainability of the Hall in the medium term if new management arrangements were put in place.
3. The existing charitable organisation was considered best placed to secure the future sustainability of the hall as a community asset as:
 - The debt was reducing and estimated to be in the region of £75K
 - The CA was already supported by some of the volunteers who have expressed an interest in joining a new management committee. If the management committee could be strengthened and / or better supported and external funding opportunities pursued, the debt could be reduced sooner.
 - Once debt free, the CA could then apply to the Charity Commission to convert to a CIO without the complication of asset transfer. This may attract more new trustees to come forward as they would have no personal liabilities. Once debt free, the door would then be open to access capital funding available to the voluntary/charitable sector, essential for the longer term investment required.

Following the decision, the Parish Council has liaised with DCC and the CA to try and ensure that the grant funding set aside for the potential purchase of Hall is used to support the Hall in some other way. Discussions continue with DCC and the CA in this regard.

Provision and Maintenance of Village Planters

During 2019/20, the Parish Council was awarded £5,000 from the Hargreaves Community Fund towards delivering a Parish Planting Plan. Last year 12 cherries trees and 30,000 spring bulbs were planted. During 2020/21 we purchased 15 new planters to replace the old wooden barrel tubs and provide some additional coverage. These and the existing black square planters will be maintained by the Parish Council with bi annual planting

Christmas tree

During the year we secured grant funding of £7,800 from the Hargreaves Community Fund towards the cost of DCC providing a mains electrical installation/connection. This means the Parish Council can now provide a bigger and brighter Christmas tree every year. Regretfully, due to Covid-19 restrictions we were unable to mark the switching on of the lights in any way or hold the, "Carols around the Christmas Tree", event in December. We are hoping that we will be able to make up for this in 2021.

Financial Position

At our January meeting the Council considered a draft budget for 2021/21. The level of reserves set aside to meet known and unknown budget pressures was considered adequate and no increase in the precept was necessary. In addition, the healthy general reserve position has allowed us to create an earmarked Village Improvement Plan (VIP) reserve to help fund a number of new project initiatives over the longer term.

A breakdown of where your money was spent in 2020/21 (and 2019/20) is attached as Appendix A. A revised budget for 2021/22 reflecting the actual outturn position as at 31/3/2021 will be prepared once the accounts for 2021/22 have been finalised.

Looking ahead to 2021/22

Parish Council Election May 6

The closing date for nominees wishing to stand for election for the scheduled Parish Council Election on the 6 May 2021 was the 9 April. Only 3 nominees were received by Durham County Council for the 9 places available and consequently there was no need for an election to be held.

The 3 nominees duly elected as Parish Councillors, uncontested, are: Maureen Boettcher, Ian Haddick and Avril Wallage.

The remaining 6 vacancies can be filled through the Parish Council's co-option process. Details of how this works can be found on our website. Anyone interested in becoming a parish councillor should contact the Parish Clerk.

Bag & Bin the Poo Campaign

In response to growing concerns about the amount of dog fouling across the parish over the last few months, we are launching a, "Bag and Bin the Poo", campaign. Responsibility for dealing with dog fouling is that of DCC, but the Parish Council wants to help reduce this nuisance by encouraging all dog owners to be responsible and pick up after their dogs. Posters and stickers with the message, "*bag and bin the poo – any public bin will do*", will be going up around the parish shortly. We will also be publishing details of how to report any concerns about dog fouling to DCC.

We will:

Develop an Annual Plan setting out our priorities and objectives for the 2021/22.

We will continue to:

- Seek to improve how we engage with residents.
- Work in partnership with the Village Partnership/community groups, DCC and other public bodies to maintain and improve existing activities and services and help identify the need for others.
- Develop a Village Improvement Plan detailing a number of projects and initiatives to improve our community.
- Identify and explore potential external funding opportunities.
- Look to identify further improvements required in the cemetery to enhance the overall appearance and the experience of visiting 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 the achievement of the Foundation level of the Local Council Award Scheme.

Cllr Ian Haddick

Chair