

# WEST RAINTON AND LEAMSIDE PARISH COUNCIL

## Annual Report 2021/22

### 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.

### Parish Council Election May 2021

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 were advertised and filled from a co-option process during the period July to September.

### Membership of the Council

Councillors serving during the year were:

- Councillor Avril Wallage (Chair)
- Councillor Ian Haddick (Vice Chair) Resigned April 2022
- Councillor Pam Lowrie
- Councillor Peter Morson (appointed July 21)
- Councillor Maureen Boettcher
- Councillor Ian Diggory (appointed July 21)
- Councillor Bill Kellett (appointed July 21)
- Councillor Elaine Bulmer (appointed July 21, resigned April 22)
- Councillor Gillian Warby (appointed September 21)

### 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 village planters
- 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 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 2021/22**

### **Annual Plan 2021/22**

As only 3 members were elected unopposed, the new Parish Council was not in a position to consider any firm plans for the year until it had wider community representation from more members.

The start of a new 4-year term of office was an ideal time for the Parish Council to review its priorities by taking stock of projects in progress, outstanding actions from previous community led plans, feedback from other community consultation and new initiatives and funding opportunities.

At its September meeting, with full membership, the Parish Council approved an Annual Plan for 2021/22 setting a programme of work for the year.

As part of this Annual Plan, we have been considering a number of improvement projects to be funded from an earmarked Village Improvement Plan (VIP) Reserve and external funding opportunities that may arise.

Much progress has been made in the last 6 months in considering and developing projects, however, not as quickly as we had hoped. Inevitably, many projects involve working with others to develop and deliver projects. A key partner in many projects is Durham County Council and, due to unforeseeable circumstances beyond our control, some projects that we have agreed have not yet been completed. These will be carried forward to next year.

A copy of the plan, showing the status of agreed actions is attached at Appendix A

Of particular note is our memorial tree project which will provide a new service in our cemetery for families to commemorate a loved one by way of an inscription on its granite leafs. This service is expected to be operational in the next few months.

Another exciting project being developed is the School Avenue Park Project. The Parish Council would like to invest in a project to help improve residents' health and wellbeing by developing the School Avenue Recreation Area to create a park that could be enjoyed by all ages of our community. To supplement the existing young children's play area, we are working with Durham County Council to develop plans to provide:

- a) A family seating area, consisting of benches, picnic tables and a tree seat
- b) An Adult Outdoor Gym with equipment designed for use by residents of all abilities and fitness.

The gym equipment would also be suitable for use by teenagers.

### **Grants to other voluntary and community organisations**

Due to Covid-19 restrictions some community activities during the year could not go ahead. Grant awards made during the year for events in 2022/23 are as follows:

Brownies, Pantomime - £250  
 The Big Lunch - £580  
 Durham Area Youth Service - £5,000

## **Financial Position**

At our January meeting the Council considered a draft budget for 2022/23. 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 increase funds set aside for Village Improvements to £30,000.

A breakdown of where your money was spent in 2021/22 (and 2020/21) is attached as Appendix B. A revised budget for 2022/23 reflecting the outturn position as at 31/3/2022 will be prepared once the accounts for 2021/22 have been finalised.

## **Major Planning Applications**

During the year, in response to residents' concerns, we have submitted objections to 2 major planning applications that we believe will have a significant adverse impact on our community. These are the proposed Russell Foster Football Centre, off Pit House Lane, Leamside and the proposed fishing ponds commercial development at Rye Hill Farm. Both applications are still being considered by DCC and we will continue to monitor progress and fight these proposals.

### ***Looking ahead to 2022/23***

#### **We will:**

Develop an Annual Plan setting out our priorities and objectives for the 2022/33.

#### **We will continue to:**

- Fill any councillor vacancies to ensure maximum community representation on the Council
- 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 the Village Improvement Plan detailing a number of projects and initiatives to improve our community.
- Identify and explore potential external funding opportunities.
- 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.
- Finalise the achievement of the Foundation level of the Local Council Award Scheme.

**Cllr Avril Wallage**

**Chair**