

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council

Annual Report 2015/16

2015/2016 has been quite a busy year for the council, and I would like to update you on some of the challenges and opportunities that have occupied the council members over the past year

We have recently co opted onto the council 2 new Parish Councillors Sue Gatenby and Christine Mc Lay, we welcome them onto the Parish Council and this means that we now have a full PC of 7 councillors.

Unfortunately our Parish Clerk Rachel Mckay resigned in March 2016 due to her work commitments, and we would like to thank her very much for all her hard work and dedication. We have recently appointed Mark Bailey as our new Clerk to the Parish Council and we look forward to working with him.

Meetings

During the past year the council has had 6 meetings, and in addition to this we have met to discuss several planning applications submitted to us by Darlington Borough Council. A Parish Councillor also attends regular meetings with the Darlington Association of Parish Councils.

Finance

The precept for this coming financial year has been set at £5,530 a slight increase on last year, with the bulk of your money being spent on:

The Parish Clerk who prepares and records all of our meetings, deals with finances as our Responsible Financial Officer and deals with all of our correspondence from Darlington Borough Council, Tees Valley Rural Community Council, Darlington Association of Parish Councils and other bodies. The pay rate reflects their hours of work and their experience in the role.

Our 'handyperson' who helps to keep the villages looking tidy and carries out work that is not covered by DBC. E.g. keeping weeds down, restoring and painting parish benches, cleaning out the bus shelters, strimming, and other work as requested by the Parish Council.

Other outgoings include Insurance, Village Hall Hire, Christmas Carols event, Parish Council Audit and miscellaneous expenses including printing, advertising postage etc.

The bank balance carried forward at the end of the year was £10,015 (not including the precept of £5,530 for 2016/17)

Other issues that have kept us busy during the year ;

Planning Issues

The Parish Council is now having to make more complex decisions following the reduction in some Darlington Borough Council services and the change to planning regulations due in part due to the absence of a Local Plan and the cost of the appeals process. It is anticipated that a new Local Plan will take some 2/3 years to complete, in the meantime the National Planning Policy Framework plays a large part in planning applications. We are trying to protect the rural areas of the parish but this is becoming increasingly difficult and it may be that at sometime in the future we need active support from people of the parish.

The parish councillors continue to liaise with specialist departments in the town hall and with our two Ward Councillors who attend our parish meetings and who take back our concerns to the appropriate people in the Town Hall.

Darlington Association of Parish Councils:

A parish councillor regularly meets up with the association at their arranged meetings at the Darlington fire station to discuss issues relating to all parish councils in the area and it is clear that all parish councils are having difficulties with reductions in services, removal of grants and housing development difficulties in green belt areas.

Dog Fouling

Unfortunately this is still an issue particularly along the Teesdale Way at Low Coniscliffe. We still have signs up in the area (although some have been torn down) and have had the dog bin placed in a more prominent position at the bottom of the lane near the car park, however despite these actions we feel this will be a continuing problem due to some irresponsible dog owners . We would encourage those who see this behaviour to report it to Darlington Borough Council via their web site or Tel 01325 388088

Litter Picking: There was an organised litter pick in the parish during May under the Big Spring Clean which was very successful thanks to volunteers from the parish. This resulted in about eleven large sacks of rubbish being collected and disposed of by the Town Council.

FORTHCOMING INITIATIVES

Superfast Broadband 2016

Through consultation with BT and Digital Durham we will now have Superfast Broadband in Low Coniscliffe by late summer. (a recent update from BT stated that it was now in the planning stage) This is great news for Low Coniscliffe .

Summer/Winter Bedding 2016/17

The parish Council has recently taken out a pilot contract with Elm Ridge Garden Centre to plant and maintain some flower arrangements within the parish over the summer and winter period of 2016/17

Speed Visors

A second joint project is underway to assess the viability of a moveable speed road visor to be shared between High Coniscliffe parish and our parish.

Queens Garden Party June 12th

The parishes of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent, High Coniscliffe and Piercebridge are holding a joint celebration in the form of a fete to celebrate the Queens 90th Birthday we look forward to a lovely day (and lovely weather!) all are most welcome.

As always we would welcome people of the parish to attend Parish Council meetings thereby having the opportunity to express their views and ideas for the general improvement of the parish. The agenda is always published in the two notice boards located in Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent at least 3 days before the meeting.

We meet every 2 months in St Edwin's Parish Hall High Coniscliffe at 7.00pm, and our next meeting will be in July 2016 (usually second Wednesday in the month) however please check the notice boards for actual dates.

Finally I would like to thank Cllr Liz Steel (vice chair) and my other fellow councillors for their continued support.

Regards

Margaret Ellerton (Chair)

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council