

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council

2016/17

Chairs Annual Report

2016/2017 has been an extremely busy year for the members of the Parish Council, and I would like to update you on some of these challenges/opportunities and how we have addressed them.

Meetings

During the past year we have held 7 Parish Council meetings, and in addition to this we have met to discuss several planning applications. We held a public meeting during the above period to discuss an application for 14 houses situated to the West of Gate Lane Low Coniscliffe. Following this meeting an Action Group was set up to support the Parish Council in respect of these major/ complex planning applications and other planning developments that we have anticipated.

Finance

The precept for this coming year has been set at £10,390, this is a significant increase on last year, however we felt that due to the planning issues we will encounter during the coming year (2017/18) and bearing in mind that our reserves have been depleted by the purchase of 2 speed visors for Merrybent, we felt that it was wise and appropriate to increase the precept.

On a rolling annual basis we also pay for the following:

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 the parish clerk's hours of work and his experience in this role.

The council is committed to keeping the villages of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent looking their best, and we employ a contractor who carries out work that is not covered by DBC. e.g. keeping weeds down, restoring and painting parish benches, cleaning out the bus shelters, trimming of hedges and strimming of the embankments, plus other work as requested by the Parish Council.

For 2016/17 we employed Elm Ridge Garden Centre to carry out and maintain our Summer and Winter bedding which proved to be very successful, and created the lovely flower displays seen particularly throughout the summer, consequently we have agreed to engage them again for 2017/18.

Other outgoings include:

Parish Insurance, Village Hall Hire, Christmas Carols event, Parish Council Audit, Consultancy Fees and miscellaneous expenses including printing, advertising postage etc. The end of financial year balance carried forward to 2017/18 will be £5,312.34, details of all our income and expenditure can be found on the Parish Council website.

Other issues/achievements that have kept us busy during the year:

Planning

The Parish Council is now having to make more complex decisions following the reduction in some of Darlington Borough Council's services, and the change to planning regulations due in part to the absence of a Local Plan and the cost of the appeals process. It is anticipated that a new Local Plan will take at least another year to complete, and in the meantime the National Planning Policy Framework plays a large part in decision making. We are trying to protect the rural areas of the parish but this is becoming increasingly difficult and we are now at the stage where we need active support from the people of the parish.

We have received 2 major planning applications during the year. One was for outline planning permission for 14 houses situated to the West of Gate Lane, and a further application for 34 houses to the East of Gate Lane. We are also anticipating an application for 1,520 houses (Coniscliffe Park) to the North of

the Baydale Beck pub through to Staindrop Road, however this is still in the pre application stage therefore no application has yet been received.

The application for 14 houses to the West of Gate Lane has recently been refused however we have received no information as to what the outcome of this will be.

As stated earlier we now have an Action Group supporting the PC in dealing with planning issues and we have also engaged the help of a professional planning consultant.

The parish councillors continue to liaise with specialist departments in the town hall and with our two Ward Councillors who wherever possible attend our Parish Council meetings and who take back our issues/concerns to the appropriate people in the town hall.

Neighbourhood Plan

We are now in the process of producing a Neighbourhood Plan and have recently been successful in obtaining an initial grant to support this . Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. We now have a steering Group who will be working with other members of the community who are interested in, or affected by, the neighbourhood planning proposals to allow them to play an active role in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan. We would encourage anyone interested in joining the Steering Group to contact the Parish Council (particularly any residents of Merrybent), and we will shortly be hosting an open event for consultation with the people of the Parish .

Parish Event June 2016 to celebrate the Queens 90th Birthday

This event proved to be a great success and thanks were extended to all who organised, participated and attended. We are intending to hold another similar event this year.

Speed Visors Merrybent

Two speed visors were purchased at a cost of £4,919.88, however we have recovered £819.98 in vat. We understand that the visors are proving to be an effective traffic calming measure.

Parish Council website

We are delighted to announce that we finally have a website, you can find us at <http://www.lowconiscliffeandmerrybentpc.org.uk>.

Once again we received a grant of £1,449.16 from Durham County Association of Local Councils to support this and we appointed a designer to develop the website.

Superfast Broadband 2016

Superfast Broadband came to Low Coniscliffe in September 2016 which was great news. We hope that it has been successful for everyone taking advantage of the improved speed.

Litter Free Durham Big Spring Clean

A number of people took part in the litter pick which proved to be very successful. I would also like to thank the people of the parish who continue this work solidly throughout the year to help make our villages look pleasant and clean

Christmas Carols at Low Conisliffe

Once again this was a very successful evening with Cockerton Band providing the excellent music. Many thanks go to Keith and Borsha Gunning who kindly welcomed us to their home. We also had a visit from Santa!

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 2 notice board located in Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent at least three clear days before the meeting (Merrybent will have a new notice board soon)

We meet every 2 months in St Edwin's Parish Church Hall at 7.00pm (usually 2nd Tuesday in the month) however please check the notice boards and the parish website for actual dates.

Finally, I would like to thank our clerk Mark Bailey, whose excellent work and dedication to the village and its residents has been outstanding this year. We are very lucky to have such a highly qualified, experienced and hardworking clerk and we owe him many thanks.

I would also like to thank Cllr Liz Steel (Vice Chair) and my other fellow councillors for their hard work and continued support.

Finally I would like to thank all the residents of our parish. We live in such a lovely community and many people have taken the time and trouble to give us positive feedback on the initiatives that we have undertaken, which means a great deal to us.

Kind Regards

Margaret Ellerton Chair

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council

Margaret
Ellerton
16/5/17