

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council

2016/17

Chairs Annual Report

My first thoughts this year have to be how saddened the Parish Council were in hearing of the sad death of Councillor Sue Gatenby. Sue was an excellent Councillor and a great friend who served her community well, and was highly liked and respected by her colleagues. She made a significant contribution to the parish and beyond during her time as councillor, and Sue will be dearly missed by us all. We offer our sincere condolences to Peter and all her family.

Once again 2017/2018 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 6 Parish Council meetings, and in addition to this we have met to discuss planning applications. A meeting was also held with 2 members of the Local Authority Highways department to discuss renewed lighting within the village of Low Coniscliffe. The Parish Council and members of the public present were concerned that the proposed style of lighting was unsuitable for a rural location. However despite opposition from the Parish Council and some residents the new lighting proposed by Darlington Borough Council has now been installed in the village.

Finance

The precept for this coming year has been set at £11,450, this represents an increase of 10.2%. Given the financial constraints on Darlington Borough Council and the decrease in services that in the past we have enjoyed, the Parish Council felt that it was wise and appropriate to increase the precept by this amount. The end of financial year balance carried forward to 2018/19 was £5,634 with a further £1,448 Neighbourhood Grant residue and £1,260 from

donations in respect of the Action Group. Details of all our income and expenditure can be found on the Parish Council website.

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 over the past several years we have employed 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. Unfortunately at the moment this position has not been filled, however there is budget set aside for this work therefore the Parish Council will endeavour to fill this role as soon as possible.

For 2017/18 we employed Elm Ridge Garden Centre to carry out and maintain our Summer and Winter bedding which proved to be successful, and created the lovely flower displays seen particularly throughout the summer, consequently we are in the process of arranging this for our summer bedding. We will be consulting more closely with Elm Ridge over the type of flowers we wish for them to plant up this year as one or two displays were slightly disappointing.

Other outgoings include:

Parish Insurance, Village Hall Hire, Christmas Carols event, Parish Council Audit, Consultancy Fees, donation to 4 villages fete, legal fees and miscellaneous expenses, including printing, advertising and postage etc.

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

Planning

The Parish Council continues to make more detailed and 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 be drafted and ready for consultation during this summer period. However DBC have announced that they do now have a 5 year housing supply plan, which will be taken into consideration in the decision making process of the planning authority and their ability to place more weight on material considerations.

We have received 1 major outline planning application during the year. This was the re application for 14 dwellings West of Gate Lane, which is still being considered by the planning authority. However to date there is no indication as to when it will go forward to committee for determination. The Parish Council have once again objected to this application.

Regarding Coniscliffe Park (outline planning application for 1520 dwellings) the Parish Council was instrumental in its endeavours to ensure that an Environmental Impact Assessment be carried out on Emmissions, Traffic and Noise, and the Secretary of state has upheld this. This application has been parked pending ongoing discussions between the local highways department and Highways England.

The Action Group continue to support the Parish Council in dealing with planning issues and we also continue to engage the help and support of a professional planning consultant.

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 and departments in the town hall.

Neighbourhood Plan

We are now in the pre consultation period of our submission of the Draft Neighbourhood Plan, this will end on 2nd June 2018 when (subject to any changes) it will go forward for independent examination before a referendum is held of all the parish. To assist us in completing this we have been successful in obtaining a further grant from Locality of circa £9,000 plus a third technical support grant.

The Steering Group has worked exceptionally hard to produce this plan and all the supporting documentation, and I would like to personally thank everyone involved for their effort and commitment, which has been truly amazing. Our recent drop in day proved to be a great success, and my thanks go to all who attended.

When completed the Neighbourhood Plan will give the parish more say over the type of new development in the villages, but this will still need to be done within the governments planning framework.

4 Village Fete

This event proved to be a great success and thanks were extended to all who organised, participated and attended. We are holding another similar event this year on 8th July in the field at the bottom of Gate Lane

Speed Visors Merrybent

Sad to say that one of the speed visors were vandalised earlier this year and needed to go for repair, however they are still proving to be a valuable traffic calming measure through the village, and I would like to thank Councillor Stuckey for his hard work in maintaining them.

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 boards located in Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent at least three clear days before the meeting (Glad to see the new notice board in Merrybent)

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.

I would like to thank our clerk Mark Bailey once again for his hard work and dedication this year. The past two years have been extremely busy and challenging and Mark has been a great support to the Parish Council throughout this time.

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

Our parish is of great importance to us all and I would like to thank you the residents for the positive feedback that we continue to receive, this means a great deal to us.

Parish Council website

at <http://www.lowconiscliffeandmerrybentpc.org.uk>.

Kind Regards

Margaret Ellerton Chair

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council