

Corsenside Annual Parish Meeting

May 11th 2015

Chair of Parish Council's Report

What a year it's been. I think that since the last annual Parish Meeting, in May last year, the Parish Council has seen more change than in any of the other sixteen years I have served as a councillor!

Firstly we saw the resignation of our clerk as she moved on to pastures new and no longer had the time to give to the PC. We wish her well in her new appointment and thank her for her 18 months of service to Corsenside. We advertised for a new clerk and were very fortunate in securing the services of Karen Traill, from West Woodburn, who was able to quickly get to grips with all that the role demands. Thanks to Karen's commitment to the role and an enormous amount of hard work, I believe her guidance has now placed us in a stronger position than ever we have been with respect to complying with all the regulations and expectations now placed upon a PC. We now have in place a year planner, an assets register, standing orders, risk assessments, a publications scheme and the website is enjoying a new lease of life. My thanks on behalf of the whole PC and also my personal thanks go to Karen for this diligent work and her ongoing commitment and enthusiasm for the role. We are fortunate to have her as our clerk.

We then found out in July that Mikey Parr, our chairperson, was moving away from the area in September, though, as he continued to own property within the area, was still able to serve as a councillor, all be it in absence, until we could appoint a replacement. This was most useful as it allowed us some breathing space in the autumn to allow our new clerk to become established and the councillors to get used to their changing roles. The Parish of Corsenside owes a huge debt of gratitude to Mikey for his work as a councillor over some 14 years and especially in his work as chairperson over the last few years, his thoughtfulness, insight and wise counsel will be much missed.

We then found out that another stalwart councillor, Margaret Rogerson who had served for 15 years, was also leaving us to be closer to family and grandchildren in the North West. Margaret's straightforward and no nonsense approach will also be sorely missed and our grateful thanks go to her for all her work on behalf of the parish. We wish her well in her new life in Cumbria.

This then left us with two vacancies to fill over the course of the year. Each was advertised separately for the regulation amount of time, and thankfully there was no call for an election as we are lead to believe that election costs are enormous and such costs must be borne out of parish funds. This left us free to co-opt and I am pleased to welcome Dot Carrington from Ridsdale and Peter Bilton from East Woodburn as new Parish Councillors, I'm sure both are more than equal to the demands of the role and look forward to working with them. Our heartfelt thanks to both for stepping into the breach and making the commitment to the work of the council, it is much appreciated.

To routine matters now, your PC consists of seven councillors including a chair and a vice chair elected annually by the rest of the council. We meet every month, with the exception of August, usually on the first Monday and usually in the Parish Hall in West Woodburn at 19:30. Notices of meetings along with agendas and minutes of previous meetings are displayed on the three noticeboards in West and East Woodburn and in Ridsdale. This information is also available via the website or directly via e-mail upon arrangement with the clerk. In the eleven meetings since the last annual Parish Meeting we have addressed ourselves to some 220 different agenda items, some simple and easy to resolve, others taking considerably more work and effort and indeed some are still on-going. We routinely now add on going issues to an action point list which is reported upon at each meeting so we can monitor and report on progress or unfortunately in some cases the lack of it. We are often frustrated at how slowly the wheels turn at county level when we make requests of various different departments within NCC. Things in this respect are generally much better these days but there is still room for improvement. If you have brought an issue to us which hasn't been resolved, please accept our apologies. We will always keep you informed of what we are able to do and of what we have done and will ALWAYS do all we can to address any issue. We are, however, often reliant on the services of others to bring these issues to resolution, services for which we sometimes have to wait.

The problem of dog fouling continues at various locations throughout the Parish but I think to a slightly lesser extent than in previous years. We have done everything within our power to address this issue including signage, the provision of dog waste bins, sending out flyers to appeal to owners on several occasions and arranging visits from the dog warden but, unfortunately, some dog owners persist with their thoughtless actions in leaving their dog's mess for others to encounter. Within the county of Northumberland a byelaw exists which states that an owner must clean up any mess deposited by their dog **wherever** it may be. This is different from the national picture where it is only mandatory to do this within 30mph zones. We can only hope that the message gets through to those few who spoil things for others - we live in hope!

It is heartening to be able to report progress with several items that have been on the council's agenda for quite some time. The problem of speeding is a standing item on the agenda so I am happy to report that funding has been promised from John Riddle, our County Councillor, for one flashing speed warning sign for Ridsdale and our thanks go to him for this. There is also a possibility that further funding for a second sign will be forthcoming from another source, so there can be one on the A68 at each end of Ridsdale, as there is in West Woodburn. Also, following a lot of back and forward communication, I eventually secured a meeting with Highways department officials regarding the misplaced speed roundels on the road. I am pleased to say that the Highways department have promised that soon they will be moved to a more appropriate and visible location, hopefully their impact will then be more noticeable. We have also been discussing the speeding problem with PC Helen Spencer and she is doing all she can to increase the amount of mobile camera checks taking place in both West Woodburn and hopefully, soon, also in Ridsdale. The commemoration memorial stones for the Queens Diamond Jubilee offered to us by Marshalls Quarries are eventually going to be put in place. The project was held up for quite a while whilst discussions about siting the stones and relevant permissions to do so were undertaken with various departments of NCC. This was finally agreed but by then Darney quarry, where the stone was coming from had stopped quarrying operations! However, the quarry has now re-opened, the stone is available, stones have been selected, stonemasons are being sourced and we hope to have them in position this year - just three years after the event. Thanks to Dot, one of our new councillors for taking the lead on this, on behalf of the PC, and her husband Steve, having both been involved in the

original organising committee which planned the stones back in 2012! Your staying powers are to be commended.

In the coming year we hope to take control of the village green in West Woodburn. This has long been an aspiration of the PC in order to maintain the land in its present form and protect it from the possibility of future development. Following the failure of a very protracted application for official Village Green status, we are now a long way through the process of a Community Asset Transfer which will bring the green into the ownership of the parish and have been led to believe that this is likely to be successful. It was great to see the green used for the Parish Show last September and my thanks and congratulations go to the organising committee for all their hard work in making the inaugural show the great success that it was. We look forward to its continued success and hope it can remain a fixture in our annual calendar. This kind of event is truly what the village green is for. Work will continue in transferring the custodianship of the Parish Hall from the diminishing Parish Hall Committee to the Parish Council and investigating ways of maintaining a viable and sustainable Parish Hall in to the future. We must thank the members of the Parish Hall committee both present and past for their huge efforts in keeping this valuable community resource open and available for use, they have truly been the swans legs, working hard and unseen, their work has been much appreciated. We also hope to continue development of our PC website and would like to see it become the 'go to' place for any information on Corsenside.

We also hope to see a significant improvement in communications from NCC in the coming year. As recently as last Wednesday, I attended a NCC liaison meeting with Dot Carrington and Karen Traill. We were able to meet with senior officers of the CC and were able to put to them our concerns regarding the often poor record of various NCC departments in responding to queries or requests. This experience was borne out by other parishes in attendance at the meeting. There did seem to be a genuine desire, on behalf of NCC, to ensure that this situation improves. Indeed one of the senior officers present described himself as a kind of a 'chaser' or 'trouble shooter' and was keen to offer his services to resolve any short term problems and work towards a better system of communications between NC and the parishes in the long term. We will be meeting again in six months' by which time we hope to have seen a marked improvement. We watch in hopeful anticipation of a positive change.

Lastly but by no means least may I say a huge thank you to all the Parish Councillors, on your behalf and also from me personally, for all the hard work they do on behalf of the parish, for giving up their time, entirely free of charge, and for their willingness to serve the wonderful parish of Corsenside. It is, as ever, a privilege to serve and work alongside you all.

Thank you.

Carl Hamilton

May 2015