

Corsenside Annual Parish Meeting

May 8th 2017

Chair of Parish Council's Report

Good evening everybody and thank you for being here for the 2017 Corsenside, Annual Parish Meeting. The years 2014 to 2016 were years of relative upheaval for the Parish Council, years which saw the replacement of the clerk and the departure of three longstanding parish councillors including the chair and the vice chair, I am pleased to report that during the year 2016 – 2017 we have enjoyed a period of stability in terms of personnel. My thanks, once again, go to Dot Carrington, Peter Bilton and Andrew Harding who filled the vacancies left by the outgoing councillors. They have quickly got to grips with the role of a parish councillor and have, during their tenures, each made outstanding contributions to the work of the council. Thankfully, we didn't frighten them off our new comers and all seven of your parish councillors put themselves forward for re-election at the local elections last week. There being no other nominated candidates, I'm pleased to say that all your councillors have been returned to office uncontested. I would like to think that this means the people of the parish of Corsenside have confidence in our desire and ability to represent their best interests in the most effective and efficient way we can, it is certainly our hope to do so.

Being a parish councillor is much more than simply turning up to one meeting per month and I would like to thank personally, and also on your behalf, all the councillors who give up their time freely and without complaint to represent the parish at various different levels and the various forums we have input to. Special thanks go to Dot Carrington who has carried out the role of Vice Chair most capably and conscientiously. She has attended many meetings, with Northumberland County Council officers for example, to represent the parish and also provides our in-house first line audit checks, on a quarterly basis in line with best practice guidelines. Many thanks also go to Pete Bilton who is always ready to apply his practical abilities and experience to various maintenance tasks as they arise throughout the parish; to Andrew Harding for his on-going work and input as our representative on the steering group for the Reay Estate Wind Power Station; to Pete Saunders for his work as our representative on the Parish Hall Committee; and to Gillian Scott and Pete Saunders for their representation of the parish on the revitalising Redesdale Committee. These are just a few of the extra commitments your councillors take on to ensure that our parish is represented, has a voice and plays its part as a member of the wider community we live in.

My thanks also go to Karen Traill who has become an outstanding clerk. Her diligent and conscientious work ensures that we are properly informed and up to speed with the issues which concern us during these constantly and rapidly changing times. We remain fortunate to have someone so enthusiastic, willing and capable as our clerk.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Anne Pender, for her continued commitment, even though no longer a parish councillor, to organising the Christmas performance by the NTC in the Parish Hall every year. This is always a fantastic performance, enjoyed by all and her contribution is very much appreciated.

To routine matters now, your Parish Council consists of seven councillors including a chair and a vice chair, elected annually by the rest of the council. I was re-elected as chair again and Dot Carrington was elected vice chair at our AGM last May. We continue to 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, though in the colder winter months, usually December, January and February, we usually decamp to the warmer surroundings of the Bay Horse and we thank them for their

willingness to have us and for providing a room separate from the bar to facilitate our meetings. Notices of meetings, along with agendas and minutes of previous meetings are displayed on the three PC noticeboards in West and East Woodburn and in Ridsdale. In the eleven meetings since the last annual Parish Meeting we have addressed ourselves to some 226 different agenda items, as ever, some simple and easy to resolve, others taking considerably more work and effort and some still on-going. This represents a small decrease in the number of agenda items from last year, in the order of just under 1% (0.88% actual). Of these items, only 4 were planning matters approximately half of the number we addressed last year which at the time represented a notable decrease from recent years.

As ever all agendas and previous minutes continue to be available on line. On the website, you will also find contact details for your councillors, an events diary, a news page and information and links to local clubs, societies and groups.

We continue to work to the highest levels of financial scrutiny to ensure complete transparency and accountability and are confident that we adhere to the best possible practice. The annual audits from both external and internal auditors carry on as usual, as we are legally obliged to do, and my thanks to Hazel Goodall who continues to provide our internal audit. Our external audit, by the accountancy firm BDO gave us, as we expected due to our high levels of internal scrutiny, a clean bill of financial health finding no issues with our accounts.

I have highlighted our frustrations with Northumberland County Council each year of my tenure as chair and feel it important to continue to state how we continue to be frustrated by how slowly the wheels turn at county council level when we make requests to the various different departments within the council. As ever if you have brought an issue to us which hasn't been resolved, please accept our apologies. We have acted upon it and will always try to keep you informed of what we are able to do and of what we have done. It remains our intention to ALWAYS do all we can to address any issue within our remit. We are, however, often reliant on the services of others at Northumberland County Council to resolve matters and sadly, though we keep asking, often time and time again, we all too often must wait a considerable time for any response to our requests or any action to come about. Whilst we do sometimes see small improvements in the response time from county there is still a lot of scope for future improvement. Indeed the small improvements we do see are often as a direct result of extra time and effort put in by the clerk or individual councillors in being persistent with their requests or in developing good working relationships with individual officers of the council.

Probably foremost amongst our frustrations remains the issue of road condition and road safety within the parish. The problem of speeding persists especially along the A68 through both Ridsdale and West Woodburn and this has been constantly reported and highlighted to the proper authorities and it has been corroborated by a speed survey in West Woodburn. The results of this survey have led to West Woodburns' qualification for extra road safety measures however we continue to be disappointed at the slow speed of implementation of these improvements. I have attended site visits to address this problem with highways officers from NCC on several occasions and still we contact NCC every month to chase progress towards implementation. I understand that a plan has been drawn up and approved and we will keep pestering NCC until the work is carried out.

It hasn't all been frustration though and our persistence over a number of years has led to some positive developments in Ridsdale in the shape of interactive speed signs, for which we thank EDF Energy and County Councillor John Riddle who each provided half of the funding. We have also benefitted from the long overdue resurfacing of Armstrong Street in November last year though are dismayed at the damage caused by a road sweeping wagon which tore up the new surface in several places. We have been assured that this will be properly reinstated, not just patched, once the threat of frost has passed and we will be reminding the highways department of their pledge to do this until the work is satisfactorily completed.

We are lucky to benefit from the community spiritedness of Jan Bilton, Pamela Lawson and Karen Traill, in West Woodburn, and Steve Carrington in Ridsdale who are guardians of our community defibrillators. They carry out

fortnightly checks to ensure the serviceability of these vital lifesaving machines and report on them to the Stephen Carey Foundation who manage the service. My thanks to them for their efforts and commitment to this work and whilst, to my knowledge, thankfully the defibrillators have yet to be used operationally, we are secure in the knowledge that they stand ready for use should the need arise.

It is pleasing to be able to report that after over a decade of effort by the PC we have eventually secured the future of the village green in West Woodburn by means of a community asset transfer which has transferred ownership of the green to the parish. We continued with this aim over many years and have jumped through many hoops during the process as we felt it important to protect the green and secure it as an asset for all in the parish in perpetuity. This protection will enable the continuance of the Corsenside show on the green on the third weekend in September and it is both heartening and encouraging to see the show develop year on year and provide a platform for our three communities to come together as one. I would like to thank Andrew Harding, the organising committee from Corsenside Leek and Vegetable Society and all the volunteers who give their time to make the show such an enjoyable and inclusive community occasion.

Our war memorial has been singled out within the parish, by the relevant authorities, and is now listed as a Building of Special Archaeological or Historic Interest. Sadly though the memorial to Old Hemp the sheepdog has not enjoyed such longevity. Due to a manufacturing defect the information plaque began to detach from the stone plinth and has had to be removed. We await its secure re-fixing by the company responsible for its original mounting. This is being organised by the Telfer family who installed the monument in September 2015.

In my report last year, I had the sad task of reporting an uncertain future for the Parish Hall and its impending likely closure in the light of lack of use and a diminishing management committee. I am delighted that we are still here within our Parish Hall this evening and wish to pass on my thanks to those parishioners who, following a public meeting, volunteered, at the Parish Hall Committee's AGM last May to join the management committee in order to ensure the hall's future. This new committee's conscientious and diligent work has already led to significant improvements to the ageing fabric of the building and there are further plans for more improvement works in the near future I understand. It is my sincere hope that we as a community support their work in whatever way we can, not least by using our Parish Hall for clubs, societies and events for example.

Finally may I, once again, 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 has been, as ever, a privilege to serve and work alongside you all.

Thank you.

Carl Hamilton

Chair - Corsenside Parish Council.

May 2017