

Corsenside Annual Parish Meeting

May 13th, 2019

Chair of Parish Council's Report

Good evening everybody and thank you for being here for the 2019 Corsenside, Annual Parish Meeting. The Parish Council has enjoyed a period of relative stability over the previous year. You may recall that at last years Parish meeting I reported that there was a vacancy following the retirement of Pete Bilton and at that point we had advertised for the statutory period required and, there being no call for an election, we were free to co-opt to fill the vacancy. In order to keep the distribution of councillors the same we looked to East Woodburn and I am very pleased to report that Roz Robinson was willing to take on the position. I thank her for her willingness to get involved and make her contribution to the work of the council and the smooth running of the parish. Whilst speaking of service to the Parish, as of the meeting tonight, Gillian Scott and I have now completed twenty years of service both joining the Parish Council, at the same time, after the local elections in 1999. Thanks once again to Gillian for all your work and your willingness to continue to serve.

As I mentioned last year, being a parish councillor is much more than just turning up to a meeting every month and I make no apologies for taking this opportunity to thank personally, and also on behalf of the parish, all the councillors who give up their time freely and without complaint to represent the parish at various different levels and on the various forums we have input to. Special thanks once again, to Dot Carrington who has carried out the role of Vice Chair most conscientiously. She has chaired meetings in my absence, attended extra meetings, with Northumberland County Council officers for example and continues to provide our in-house first line audit checks. These checks are carried out routinely now, on a quarterly basis, in line with best practice guidelines. Thanks also to Andrew Harding for his on-going work and input as our representative on the steering group for the Reay Estate Wind Power Station and to Carol Hawman, who sends her apologies for being unable to be here tonight, for her 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.

As ever, my very sincere thanks also go to Karen Traill who has continues to provide us with an outstanding service as Parish Clerk. In many ways a Parish Council is only as good as its's clerk as it is the clerk who ensures that councillors are properly informed and cognisant of the issues which concern them during these constantly and rapidly changing times. I believe our parish is extremely fortunate to have a clerk who is so enthusiastic, willing and capable and this in turn allows us to represent the people of Corsenside to the best of our abilities.

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. At the PC AGM on 14th May last year, I was re-elected as chair again and Dot Carrington was elected vice chair. We continue to meet every month, apart from August

where by nature of holidays and availability it is difficult to meet and be quorate. We usually meet on the first Monday of each month and usually in the Parish Hall in West Woodburn at 19:30, though in the colder winter months, usually December, January and February, we decamp to the warmer surroundings of the Bay Horse and we thank them very much for their willingness to have us and for providing a room, separate from the bar, to facilitate our meetings and at no expense to Parish Council funds and the public purse. 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 231 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 2 fewer agenda items than in the previous year, a decrease in the order of just under 1% (0.99% actual). Of these items, there were 8 planning matters for our comment, an increase of one on the number we addressed last year. Whilst this is obviously a slight increase, as I commented last year, the number of planning applications within the parish are much reduced from pre-2015 levels.

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. Agendas, minutes and other more general notices are also regularly posted on the Corsenside Clarion Facebook group and our thanks go to Peter Scott and the clerk for facilitating this. We would encourage as many parishioners as possible to become members of this group.

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. Our internal audit carries on as usual on a quarterly basis thanks to Dot and my thanks also go to Hazel Goodall, a parishioner who is a qualified accountant, who continues to provide annual internal audit services for us. Our external auditing procedures are now scrutinised by the accounting firm PKF Littlejohn. A reminder that the new procedure now for all councils, with an annual turnover of less than £25,000, is to prepare the accounts for scrutiny and advertise their availability in exactly the same way as previously but now we must complete and submit a certificate of exemption to the auditors. It is envisaged that further scrutiny would only occur in extremis or if randomly selected.

Each year of my tenure as chair I have mentioned in my report how frustrating it can be in dealing with Northumberland County Council and this year sadly is no exception. We always try our hardest to bring any matters brought to our attention to a satisfactory and timely conclusion but fully appreciate that it may not seem so to the onlooker or if you have asked us to progress an issue. We will always seek to keep you informed of any progress or the reasons for the lack of it if we know them. But, for any matters which require the involvement of the County Council, the cogs in the County Hall 'machine' continue to turn extremely slowly and with ever tightening budgets this seems ever more to be the case with greatly reduced staffing levels in all departments resulting in the extremely long waiting times we often experience between request and action. I do feel it important to stress once again that it is not inaction on our behalf. Once we raise an issue with NCC we are in constant touch to keep reminding them until action is taken or a suitable resolution arrived at. Indeed, progress often seems to depend upon developing good working relationships with officers of the council and by the extra time and effort put in by the clerk and individual councillors in being persistent with their requests.

I reported last year at our frustrations with regard to the road safety improvements agreed for the A68 at West Woodburn. The package of road safety measures has, for the most part, now been installed though not without problems such as signage installed in the wrong locations and needing to be moved. We do still await the installation of vehicle activated 20mph signs to designate the school safety zone though preparatory work for these has been carried out just last week so the signs will hopefully be operational very soon. These works have been the culmination of some three or four years with many preparatory meetings and site visits and subsequent further meetings to review the proposed plans and chase progress. It is disappointing to note however, that early reports seem to suggest that the new safety measures are not having a great impact on the speed of traffic through the village. A speed survey was promised to assess the effectiveness of the new measures and we have asked for this to take place as soon as possible and for reconsideration of the build out features, included in the first plan but later withdrawn at the request of the hauliers! We feel that these features are the only thing which will truly slow traffic and will continue to press for their installation. Also on a road safety theme we have, within the last week, been promised the installation of a small hard standing area by the bridge to allow the police enforcement camera van to visit the village on occasions, again this is something we have been pushing for for several years so is welcome news.

Last year, I also spoke of our concerns regarding the future of West Woodburn First School in the light of NCC's proposed changes to education in this area. As reported CPC made representations supporting the continuation of WWFS within a three-tier system of education as we believed this was the best fit for children in our parish and represented the feelings which parents had made known to us. I am pleased to report that WWFS continues as a First School and children will be feeding into Bellingham Middle School at Year 5. WWFS is now part of the River Rede Federation and federated with Otterburn First School, which hopefully secures its future. It is under the Executive Headship of Tina Henderson whom we thank for her time and efforts on behalf of our parish school. Whilst I understand that the cohort of children is disappointingly low at present, this will hopefully improve in the future with the continuation of this vital parish resource.

Whilst speaking of vital resources, our community defibrillators continue to be cared for by our community guardians Jo King and Karen Traill, in West Woodburn, and Steve Carrington in Ridsdale. 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.

Disappointingly, during the previous year, youth antisocial behaviour has been an unwelcome development within the parish. Many parishioners reported feeling intimidated and threatened by this behaviour and felt unable to tackle it themselves. The behaviours ranged from the nuisance to the worryingly dangerous and even potentially life threatening. CPC were unanimous in our condemnation of this behaviour but were mindful that it was not within our authority to tackle. We sought immediate advice and help from our local community Police officer and thanks to their input the antisocial behaviour appears to have abated. In considering this problem and seeking long term solutions, whilst we did not feel it excused the behaviours, we recognised the lack of amenities and activities to interest and engage our young people. We felt it would be useful if we could employ a specialist youth worker to work with the young people to conduct a study to find out what they would like. We further recognised that a lack of

youth orientated activities is likely to be the situation in neighbouring parishes and have been in touch with them. Initial meetings, I understand have been promising and will hopefully lead to a joint bid, on behalf of several parishes, to the Reay Estate CIC, to fund this initial scoping work with a further bid likely in the future in order to provide the activities and amenities our youngsters want and facilitate access to them.

Having already alluded to this, it is good to be able to report that the funds available from the wind power station on the Reay estate are now fully available with grant applications now being welcome to the Community Interest Company which was set up to administer the funds. In this establishment phase of the CIC, grant applications can also be made to the Community Foundation who are administering £100,000 per annum of the £270,000 available. My thanks again to Andrew Harding, who represents CPC, and the rest of the Steering Group, for their diligence and hard work.

I am very pleased to report that after a long delay due to problems with contactors and after many requests from CPC that NCC have now replaced all old sodium street lighting with new downward pointing energy saving LED lights so that our environmental impact and our impact in terms of light pollution have eventually been minimised.

It is also good to report that after many years of persistence CPC have secured the installation of several passing places on the Shaw Lonnen, hopefully making this road safer and more convenient for all users. My thanks to Hutton Stone and especially to Border Stone Quarries for their community spiritedness and taking the lead in installing these.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the sterling work carried out by the Parish Hall Committee in the previous year. The Hall has developed a new lease of life under the present committee and, thanks to their efforts, has been the focus of an ongoing programme of improvements. It is now in a better condition and looking better than it has in a long time. My thanks to all the committee members and especially to John Clyde who has agreed to act as the conduit between the PC and PHC in the future.

I would also like to thank all present here tonight, those who have taken the time to send in reports, all of the officers and all those involved with the clubs, societies and organisations you represent. It is your willingness to get involved and make things happen which keeps the parish of Corsenside alive and the vibrant community which it undoubtedly is. Please keep up your good work, it is very much appreciated.

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 amazing 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. I have said this before in previous years but, once again, it has been a privilege to serve and work alongside you all.

Thank you.

Carl Hamilton

Chair - Corsenside Parish Council.

May 2019