

Chairman's report 2019

Delivering the chairman's annual report is always an interesting exercise as it provides an opportunity to review and reflect what has happened – or in some cases what has not happened – over the preceding year and some of the issues with which the Parish Council has concerned itself.

On this occasion I thought I would begin with a brief backward glance at what was commanding our attentions a year ago.

In my report last year I highlighted two particular issues of concern: future housing development and the impending closure of the village school.

On the former point, relatively little has changed. Planning consent remains in place for three significant housing developments in Acklington village which, when completed, would create almost 60 new homes. For whatever reasons – and they are likely to be numerous - none of these projects have yet to be taken forward.

Whether this conspicuous lack of activity is good thing or not is very much a matter of individual opinion. Personally I think there are positive benefits in expanding the size and diversity of our community and if building more homes helps to achieve this in a controlled way it should be welcomed.

However, I readily acknowledge that such development is not always looked upon favourably by those people most directly impacted by it. There may also be other factors such as whether it's the type of housing which is felt to be most needed.

As a parish council we have an important role to play in making representation to the planning authorities which reconcile these competing aims – difficult though that may be.

The second important issue I raised in my previous report was the impending closure of Acklington First School which has, very sadly, come to pass. While the various justifications for its closure for this were seemingly irresistible, the loss of the village school was still a serious loss for our community.

It is doubtless of a cause of further concern for some parishioners that the village may soon be without a pub.

However, there are causes for optimism. We continue to have a village church which is supported by a loyal congregation, a very busy village hall and an extremely popular micro-brewery.

As for the parish council's contribution to improving the quality of life for the people who live here, we are about to embark on an exciting new project to restore the public rights of way around the parish.

We very much hope we can involve local landowners and those who manage the land in this initiative, as well as the wider community. It would be amiss of me I failed to acknowledge the admirable efforts of Councillor Sean Malone in driving this.

We are taking tentative steps towards creating a Neighbourhood Plan which, if we decide to progress it, will seek the views of the community in how we would like to see the parish developing in future years. And through the noble efforts of our clerk Elaine Brown, we are working towards Local Council Quality Award Status.

Other projects on the horizon include a restoration of the flower tubs and planters, improvements to the ever-popular play area and the pursuit of improvements to our local roads. We very much appreciate the support of Geoff Watson, our county councillor, in this and other matters.

There are a few additional projects I would like the Parish Council to pursue over the coming year – such as a fresh look at how we can deal with the problem of speeding through the village – and I know other parish councillors will have their own thoughts on future priorities.

A review of my report last year reminded me that we had two vacancies for parish councillors a year ago. I am pleased to say we only have one at the moment and I very much hope we can fill this in the near future.

I am also pleased to say the Parish Council remains in a sound financial position. We were obliged to increase the precept slightly to £6500 to keep pace with our financial commitments and rising costs but we continue to be extremely careful about how we use our budget.

Finally I would like to express my sincere thanks to all parish councillors – including Alison Sharpe who recently stood down – for your commitment and support over the last year.

I would also like to reiterate my gratitude to County Councillor Watson and of course to our clerk Elaine for her hard work and ensuring the Parish Council continues to function and fulfil its legal duties.

I very much look forward to working with all of you in the year ahead.

Jeff Newton
Chairman
Acklington Parish Council

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