

Annual Report for the year ending March 31st 2014

The Council has held 6 Ordinary Meetings with a Special Meeting being held to consider an application for a Premises Licence at Lartington Hall.

The latter was a matter of great concern to many in the village. Whilst not objecting to the original application to convert the Hall into a Wedding and Conference venue, the Council has always taken a strong interest in measures designed to ensure that the impact of the development on residents is kept to a minimum. It was for this reason that close attention was paid to proposals in regard to music and dancing and to conditions regarding the sale and consumption of alcohol. Having carefully considered the proposals presented by the applicants and listened to the concerns of residents, it was determined that the Council would not object to the application but would write to the Licensing Authority to ensure that residents concerns were a matter of record and making it clear that the Council would apply for an immediate review of the Licence should issues of noise and nuisance occur. This is an important building, however, which must be put to good use and which could well make a very important contribution to the local economy.

Another issue of concern is, of course, the successful application to extend the Lartington Lane Caravan Site. Our worries are a matter of record and we felt aggrieved when a well researched and presented case was dismissed by DCC Planning Committee (although supported by local councillors). Having considered making a request for a Judicial Review of the decision, we were pleased when Stuart Timmiss, Head of Planning, agreed to meet with us to discuss our concerns. This gave Stuart an opportunity to explain the constraints within which planners work and for us to show that we think carefully about the planning issues which confront us and try to ensure that the opinions we give are measured and should be properly considered. Whilst judged a very successful meeting, holding breath is not advised!

We were rather more successful in meetings with the DCC Footpaths Officer, Elaine Crowe. The state of the footpath (or bog) at Cat Castle was our most urgent concern and we have successfully applied for a small grant to stabilise the area around the stile. Elaine also helped with waymarking the route to Cat Castle and negotiated with Lartington Estates to repair stiles on the route. We are grateful to them both.

We were disappointed, however, in Lartington Estates' response to proposals to improve the land on the south side of the village, sometimes called the Village Green. The Heart of Teesdale Project was prepared to make a substantial grant available for a number of projects associated with this, including some shrub and small clearance in a bid to improve the health of established and important trees. In rejecting these proposals, the Estate insists that the trees are in good condition - we hope that they are right!

Traffic speed through the village has always concerned us - the introduction of a speed limit being something for which we campaigned over many years. We were then the first Parish Council to work with Durham Police on a Community Speedwatch project, this being repeated last September. Traffic was intermittently monitored over a week - resulting in the issue of 19 advisory letters and one ticket.

Finally, two matters of routine business. Firstly, Council Meetings have been hosted in private homes for some time but new reporting regulations make this untenable. Future meetings will be held in Cotherstone Methodist Hall. The Council also judged that it was necessary to make a substantial increase to its precept (rates!) for the first time in many years, largely due to a desire to significantly increase the number of hours worked by the clerk and to align the hourly salary with national minimum recommendations.

Although too small to provide any direct services, we hope that this report again demonstrates that the Parish Council continues to work hard to ensure that the interests of local people are well represented and that the agencies charged with providing the services that they need are held to account.

Richard Campion Chair

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