

Annual Report for the year ending March 31st 2018

The Council continues to meet bi-monthly, meetings usually being held on the second Tuesday of the month at Cotherstone Methodist Hall. Agendas and minutes are routinely placed in the noticeboard and can also be found on the council's website - www.lartingtonpc.co.uk.

There are a number of issues which have concerned us this year.

In our previous Annual Report, we reported that Durham County Council had finally agreed to implement measures to reduce flooding in the area of Lartington Green Lane. Although this has taken longer to materialise than we would have wished, the erection of a headwall to protect the entrance to a culvert under the road above the Green and the installation of a number of enlarged catch pit chambers should improve the efficiency of road drainage and finally resolve the problem of flooding which has so badly affected a small number of residents in recent years. We are grateful to them for their patience, to Mr and Mrs Oliver for allowing work on their land and to Cllr. Bell and the officers and staff of DCC for their efforts on our behalf.

We have considered a number of planning applications, mostly of a minor nature, which we have been happy to support. Although usually disposed to support applicants in their ambitions to improve the circumstances in which they live and work, we place a high value on the qualities which make our Conservation Area so special and will always reference our responses to this and the planning legislation which protects it.

Traffic speed through the village continues to concern us - particularly at school drop-off and pick-up times. A recent DCC monitoring exercise showed that 16% of vehicles passing through the village at this time were travelling in excess of 35mph - showing little change from previous exercises. We have met with local police to reinforce our concerns and were pleased to be one of the first to receive a "swagbag" to allow us to conduct speed watch exercises at times which we know to be most effective. We also hope to have finally persuaded DCC Highways to include Lartington in the rotating programme for the deployment of "Speedvisors" - the short-term speed warning signage that most people will be familiar with and will have seen in villages such as Staindrop and Gainford. We are, again, grateful to Cllr. Bell for his support in this matter. Finally, it remains a fact that most transgressors are local people - as will be the victims if there is a speed-related accident!

Data Protection is the other issue which has caused the Council increasing concern. Readers will probably be well aware that new rules governing Data Protection come into force in May. Although the Council holds little personal data beyond addresses, email addresses and the clerk's PAYE details, we have to take a number of steps to ensure that we conform to the new regulations. Most seriously, as a local authority (albeit a tiny one!) we are likely to have to appoint an independent Data Protection Officer - at a cost as yet unknown! The cost of this appointment will be covered by reserves in the forthcoming financial year but if funds are not forthcoming from central government (and they are unlikely to be!) then the Council will have to consider its financial position very carefully and may call an Extraordinary Parish Meeting to approve a significant increase in its precept.

In regard to the current financial year, we again have to regret to report a small increase in the precept (rates) we raise - the cost of the council to a Band D property rising by just over 5% to £23.15pa. This still continues to compare favourably with other local councils and is significantly below many towns and villages in the county.

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.

Sharon Parsons Munn Chair

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