

Annual Report for the year ending March 31st 2019

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.

We have continued to work closely with Durham Police and their "Speedwatch" initiative and members of the Council have conducted frequent exercises – usually continuing to note a worryingly high proportion of drivers travelling significantly in excess of 30mph. We were pleased that, with the help of Cllr. Bell, we were finally able to persuade DCC to include the village in their "Speedvisor" programme – unfortunately the post arrived long before the "Speedvisor" but we should see this regularly in coming months.

We have considered a number of planning applications, most of which we have been happy to support. We were particularly pleased to support a number of plans to bring new life to redundant farm buildings at North Gill. It is a matter of record, however, that we felt it necessary to oppose the application to install electric gates at Western entrances to Lartington Hall as we believed that their installation would be detrimental to the open relationship between the village and the Hall which was so valued in the DCC Conservation Area Character Appraisal of 2012 and that they could create traffic problems for those living in the area. Now in place, we hope that the use of these gates will result in the proper use of the eastern parkland route for vehicles taking guests to and from weddings and conferences at the Hall as was determined by planning conditions imposed in 2012. Whilst 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.

Data Protection is the other issue which has caused the Council concern. Residents will probably be well aware that new rules governing Data Protection have come into force and the Council's policies regarding this can be found on the website. Other than the Clerk's PAYE details, Members' Registers of Interest, and some addresses needed for routine contact we hold no personal data.

We have also become very concerned about the condition of the historic aqueduct over the lane to Cat Castle, which has sometimes leaked very badly. The situation has been improved by the efforts of the owners of the stream bank as it approaches the structure but the structure continues to leak. We have asked DCC to pursue this matter on our behalf and will continue to monitor the situation.

We were sorry that Mike Whetstone had to resign from the Council due to increasing personal commitments but are grateful to him for his period of service. A vacancy was advertised and there was no call for election so the Council is able to co-opt as it sees fit. We would welcome, therefore, expressions of interest from anyone who may wish to join us.

Turning to matters of finance, we were pleased that our accounts continue to show a healthy reserve and that we have lived well within our means this year. In part this was because the Clerk's salary, the biggest item of expenditure, has remained unchanged for some time. In setting our annual budget, therefore, it was agreed that this be increased to bring it in line with the National Salary Scale but that there should be no increase in the precept raised – the cost of the council to a Band D property remaining at £23.15pa. This compares 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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