

## North Lodge Parish Council

### Annual Report 2012-2013

The most significant event in the life of a Parish Council is almost certainly an election and as May 2013 has been election time, my report this year begins at the end of the year.

Although there were insufficient candidates for a Parish Council election, the election of a County Councillor for North Lodge was vigorously fought and we are pleased to welcome back Peter May, the successful candidate, now an Independent, who won with a handsome majority on a high poll turnout.

Following the County Council re-structuring of the Pelton Ward, there is now single Councillor representation in a new North Lodge Ward and, therefore, we no longer have Jim Cordon as co-Councillor. We have expressed our grateful thanks to Councillor Cordon for all the work he has done for our community over the years of his tenure.

For the Parish Council, three Councillors decided not to stand again. The Council is very appreciative of the work done by Sue Brown, Chris Jukes and Stephen Tones during their tenure and a letter of thanks was sent to each of them. A new Councillor, David Snaith, has now joined the Council and we extend a warm welcome to him. David's mother and father both served the community well as Parish Councillors and we now look forward to working with David for the benefit of the Parish, in particular in Picktree Village. At the time of writing, following the election there were two vacant seats on the Parish Council and we hope to have these filled soon by co-option.

Following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, a new Code of Conduct for Councillors was adopted by the Council.

On a very sad note, the funeral of former Parish Councillor Bill Jackson was attended by the Chairman, Councillor Mrs. Caygill, Councillor Noble-Nesbitt and the Clerk.

The work of the Parish Council is, in the main, divided into various portfolios and in this report I have used these portfolio categories to help define the work done during the year.

I begin with Finance as, in a time of recession and government cutbacks, this is an area which requires close attention.

#### Finance

Financial matters continue to be carefully planned, budgeted for and

controlled by the Council and once again we have received a “clean” report from our auditors. Financial donations were made to Butterwick Hospice for Children, the Great North Air Ambulance, the Royal British Legion, the DERIC Youth Bus and Finchale Training College. During this period of austerity, the precept was reduced from £18,000 to £17092 supplemented by a grant of £693 from the County Council under the Localising Council Tax Support Scheme which was introduced following the Local Government Finance Act 2012. In recognition of the increasing workload of the Council, from June 2012 the Clerk’s hours were increased from 45pcm to 55pcm. From April 2013, the Council is now complying with the new “real time” reporting regulations introduced by HM Revenue & Customs for payment of PAYE. The firm of BDO LLP was re-appointed as auditor for the next five years. Finally, the Parish Council always welcomes suggestions from Councillors and residents for project ideas which might provide lasting benefit to the Parish.

### Horticulture

The Parish Council places great importance on maintaining the area as a desirable place to live and work and also, therefore, on the importance of Horticulture. Portfolio Holders Councillors Carole Walton and Ditte Prest have again devoted many hours to this challenge and we continue to receive many positive comments from residents. Credit is also due to the skill of our Gardener, Frank Leighton through his business, Pot-It-On. To celebrate the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee in June 2012, the Parish Council worked closely with the County Council and North Lodge Residents’ Association (who provided a generous grant of £200 for the purchase of plants) to create bedding displays throughout the Parish, a new rose bed at Picktree Lodge and the planting of three trees (an Acer at the entrance to Lombard Drive and two Prunus at Merlin Drive play area) albeit that much of the planting had to be carried out a little later than hoped due to the unseasonably cold and wet weather. The re-installation of the tree guard around the new Acer is still awaited. However, three celebratory plaques have been installed at sites around the Parish. At Picktree Lodge, responsibility for the circular bed there was handed over to the County Council following confrontational behaviour by a resident towards our Gardener. The Parish Council and the Residents’ Association took part in the County Council’s bulb-planting challenge resulting in hundreds of crocus bulbs being planted at several sites around the Parish. The plinth at the entrance to Picktree Lodge has been cleaned and we are now progressing with the installation of 25 flower tubs around the Parish, funding being provided by County Councillor Peter May. This year’s Big Spring Clean event, organised by Councillor Mrs. Caygill, involved Councillors, the School and the Residents’ Association and was very successful in removing vast amounts of litter from hot-spot areas of the Parish.

### Publicity

Parish Council Chairman Councillor Elsie Forrester is the elected representative of the Chester-le-Street Sub-Committee of the County Durham Association of Local Councils to the Area Action Partnership and this link, together with the many external meetings attended by Councillors, ensures a good flow of information in both directions. The Parish Council's annual Newsletter was again well received. The Newsletter, which was collated by Councillor Noble-Nesbitt and his wife, is delivered by Councillors to each household in the Parish and the Parish Council is grateful to all who contribute to its production and distribution.

### Play Areas

At Merlin Drive play area, a visit was made by Kevan Jones MP to view the new artwork which was well received by the MP. In October, a celebratory event for the artwork was held, the original event, due to be held in July, having been cancelled because of bad weather. The event was attended by residents, Councillors and school children and received a presentation by the artist Andrew Mckeown. A damaged swing seat was attended to by the County Council. At Low Flatts play area, there has been a long-running request to have a dog-fouling notice installed by the Neighbourhood Wardens. Eventually, this has been completed but not to a fully satisfactory extent as the installed notices are insignificant in appearance. Following the prohibited exercising of a horse on the field, a warning notice was erected by the Wardens. Play Areas Portfolio Holder Councillor Margaret Caygill continues to devote many hours for the benefit of residents and this is widely appreciated.

### Highways and Transport

Of most concern was an accident in Lombard Drive where a schoolchild was struck and hurt by a car. Resulting from this, the Parish Council supported County Councillor May in calling for a reduced speed limit of 20mph in the area. The County Council's proposals for Northlands roundabout have continued, throughout the year, to occupy much time and in November the Parish Council and the Residents' Association received a presentation on the County's latest plan. Following this, concerns have been raised with the County Council regarding the proposed widening of Blind Lane, the proposed replacement of the Parish Council's bus shelter just north of the roundabout, the potential additional volume of traffic from proposed developments at Drum Industrial Estate and Marley Hill opencast site, and the extent of the public consultation for the proposals. A meeting regarding Blind Lane was attended by residents (including several Parish Councillors) and the MP who kindly agreed to approach the County Council with the concerns raised. Six speed visors, at three carefully selected sites, were installed to help regulate the speed of traffic through the Parish.

The Highways Portfolio is always a busy one and the Parish Council is

grateful to the Portfolio Holder Councillor Colin Noble-Nesbitt, with help from Councillor Linda LeDune, for their hard work.

### Website

The website continues to be up-dated at regular intervals by Councillor Noble-Nesbitt and the Clerk. A problem with the loading of Agenda and Minutes to the site has now been rectified.

### Planning and Development

During the year, the County Council issued its County Plan Preferred Options documents, a significant step towards the finalisation of the County Plan. These were discussed at length and concerns were raised regarding the proposed extension of the Drum Industrial Estate, the proposed housing in Picktree Village and the extent of consultation with areas bordering the County, in particular with residents of Rickleton. The next stage of the Plan is awaited. In other matters, consideration continues to be given to a Gateway project for the Parish although this is being hampered by the land ownership question at the wide verge outside BOC at North Road. A project is underway, with finance provided by County Councillor May, to install new seats around the Ward. Offers of seats from other sources have also been received and welcomed. The seat outside the Lambton Worm pub was removed when it was found to be in a dangerous condition, and a disused standpipe in Lombard Drive was also removed. The re-opening of the Lambton Worm pub, following a long period of closure then refurbishment, was widely welcomed, and a letter of congratulations was sent by the Parish Council to recognise the restoration of a major community asset. The proposed relocation of the Crown Post Office in the town caused consternation amongst some residents and the Parish Council expressed those concerns to the Post Office. I continue to monitor the County Council's weekly planning application lists for any proposed significant developments in the Parish which are then reported at the Parish Council meetings.

### Police Matters

In September, following the murders of two policewomen in Manchester, a letter of condolence was sent to the Chief Constable. At local level, PCSO Lesley Hunter has continued to be our main contact and we are grateful for the excellent working relationship that exists between us. Although North Lodge is a relatively trouble-free area, we do suffer from some crime which this year has included anti-social behaviour such as graffiti on bus shelters, youth nuisance at the Sustrans bridge at Low Flatts, fly-tipping at Low Flatts and dog fouling (particularly at Low Flatts play area). The cutting back of trees at the copse alongside the A693 road, where much youth nuisance had been experienced, has been delayed until after the bird-nesting season. Problems had also been experienced by residents from youths residing at the YMCA flats in the town. However, following complaints from various organisations

including the Police and the Parish Council, measures were put in place by the YMCA and the situation is now much improved.

### Visitors to Council Meetings

As well as welcoming regular visitors County Councillor Peter May and PCSO Lesley Hunter who both contribute great amounts to the well-being of the Parish, during the year the Parish Council has welcomed County Councillor Jim Cordon and the County Council Northlands roundabout team.

Representatives of North Lodge Residents' Association have been regular visitors and this direct contact with residents is a primary help to Councillors in identifying the work to be done in the Parish.

### Meetings Attended

Throughout the year, Councillors have represented the Council at many external meetings and workshops. These include meetings of the CDALC Chester-le-Street and District Sub-Committee, CDALC Small & Medium Councils Committee, the Area Action Partnership, North Lodge Residents' Association and training events. In November at the Remembrance Day Service, the Chairman laid a wreath on behalf of the Council. The Parish Council thanks all those Councillors who have represented the Council in these many and various matters throughout the year. This is a function that is of great importance in establishing and presenting the views of our residents.

### Acknowledgements

Following another busy year, thanks are due to the Chairman (Councillor Elsie Forrester), Vice-Chairman (Councillor Maureen May) and Councillors who have contributed so much time and effort to the achievements of the Council. Grateful thanks are also due to County Councillor Peter May for his close involvement and interest in the Parish. The Parish Council values its relationships with the Residents' Association, the County Council, our MP, the Police and Park View School, all of whom show that they share our aim of improving North Lodge for the benefit of our residents and for the benefit of those who work here. This year, the Parish Council particularly thanks Arizona Chemical who have most kindly made available for Council meetings their training rooms free of charge.

Finally, we always welcome the involvement of residents and local businesses in Parish matters and we will continue to strive for the improvement of North Lodge Parish.

David Murrell  
Clerk, North Lodge Parish Council  
6<sup>th</sup> May 2013.