

North Lodge Parish Council

Annual Report 2022-2023

This report covers the year from the Council meeting in May 2022 to the meeting in April 2023.

At our September meeting, we marked the sad death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with a minute's silence followed by a call of God Save the King. On Sunday 11th September at 4pm, at a public event, Chairman Dennis Hall announced the Proclamation of Accession of King Charles III.

Other notable deaths in the community were those of Derek Briggs, a much respected community volunteer, and Beaty Bainbridge, Chairman of Durham County Council.

The work of the Parish Council is divided into various Portfolios and a summary of each one follows.

Communications and Media Development

In May, Portfolio Holder Councillor Chris Veitch set up the Parish Council Twitter account to add to the already established Facebook page. Over the year, there has been an increasing quantity of both local and national information posted and there has been a corresponding increase in views on both sites. The website continues to be up-dated at regular intervals by the Clerk. Council Minutes, Agendas, dates of meetings, financial information and items of interest and information are contained on the site.

The Council recognises that social media is essential to engaging with the community and Councillor Veitch continues to develop ideas to enhance this.

Crime and Community Safety

During the year, we received helpful and informative presentations from Joy Allen, Durham Police and Crime Commissioner, and from PCSO Christine Taylor with whom we discussed how the Council and the Police could best work together. We continue to experience very low crime levels in our Parish. There have been just a few instances of graffiti and anti-social behaviour. This included theft of a poster from a display in a bus shelter, litter and dog waste, an incident of fly-tipping, inconsiderate parking and raw food being dumped in woodland. We liaise closely with the relevant authorities whenever any such incidents occur. There were several cars broken into but this was part of a town-wide problem which was proactively investigated by the Police.

Portfolio Holder Councillor Jackie Gregory maintains a close link between the Council, the Police and other agencies which greatly contributes to the low levels of crime in the Parish.

Finance

Financial matters continue to be carefully planned, budgeted for and controlled by the Council and we again received a “clean” report from our auditors. After much discussion and negotiation by Portfolio Holders, we were able to maintain the Precept for 2023/2024 at £31.53 per Band D equivalent house, last increased in 2018/2019. We recognise that, in these times of pressure on household budgets, it is essential that we continue to provide best value for our residents. The Precept enables the Council to provide enhanced services, such as play facilities, flower beds and bus shelters, to those provided by Durham County Council (DCC) and also allows us to engage with organisations such as DCC on matters of importance to individual residents. Organisations receiving a donation from the Council included the Poppy Appeal and Park View Lower School.

Councillor John Waugh is our Finance Portfolio Holder and he takes an active role in this central aspect of the Parish Council’s activities. The Parish Council always welcomes suggestions from Councillors and residents for project ideas which might provide lasting benefit to the Parish.

Highways and Community Assets

In May, Councillor Patrick Driscoll was appointed Portfolio Holder for this extended Portfolio which now includes regular informal inspections of bus shelters and public seating. Matters reported to the relevant agencies included the unsatisfactory condition of roads and footpaths in the Vigo Lane area and damage to the pedestrian refuge on North Road near to the junction with Low Flatts Road. The replacement bus shelter for the worn out metal-framed one on the west side of Picktree Village has now been installed. With the help of a resident and the MP, we continue to seek engagement with Sustrans regarding the much needed re-painting of the bridge over North Road. We are also continuing to seek a suitable site to install a defibrillator in Picktree Village. The Council has agreed in principle to take ownership of the proposed artworks for the North Lodge Remembrance Group at the entrance to Lombard Drive and for the Drum Business Park.

Councillor Driscoll also voluntarily carries out general cleaning and tidying of the bus shelters and seating which helps greatly in presenting the Parish in its best light.

Horticulture

Horticulture is a key function of the Council as we strive to keep North Lodge an attractive place to live and work. There are many flower and shrub beds planted up together with several flower barrels. In a significant change, having carried out a comprehensive review of our requirements as part of our aim to obtain best value for our residents, we have appointed Makepeace Landscapes as Gardener to the Council in place of DCC. This was not an easy decision as DCC had been our preferred provider for many successful

years and we hope to continue to work with DCC on other horticulture matters on a one-off basis as we go along. DCC have now completed for us the clearance and renovation of stonework of the two shrub beds at North Road and we are discussing the planting of these beds with Makepeace. We continue to discuss with DCC the reinstatement of the beds at the entrance to Picktree Lodge. As well as the long established Christmas Tree in North Road which carries lights each Christmas, we have again provided a locally grown tree with lights in Picktree Village. We have planted daffodil bulbs at Merlin Drive play area (with the help of Park View School students and a teacher, a resident and Councillors Maureen May and Margaret Caygill), on the east side of North Road near the Longdean junction and at the Northlands shrub bed. On the west side of North Road between Kingsmere and the Sustrans bridge, we hope to revitalise a small untended area but it is proving difficult to establish who is the landowner there. The plinth at the entrance to Picktree Lodge has been cleaned and planted and the lettering re-painted. At Lombard Drive, the border round the Jubilee tree has been widened. Councillor Sue Brown led our consultations with DCC on the planting of trees by DCC on the Baffle Bank and the desire for a tree as part of the Queen's Green Canopy. Councillor Brown also established a good contact with Lambton Estates which should be a benefit in many applications of the work of the Council. The work of the Horticulture sub-group, both in making recommendations to the full Council and carrying out various individual tasks, has been of enormous benefit to the Council and our thanks go to the Group members for all their valuable work. Thanks also go to Councillor Maureen May as Portfolio Holder for this busy section of our work.

Meetings of Partnership Organisations

Portfolio Holder Councillor Elsie Forrester continues to provide regular and important information from the Area Action Partnership (AAP) and from the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC). Councillor Forrester was re-elected as the Chester-le-Street CDALC area representative to the AAP and elected as Chair of the CDALC Smaller Councils Forum. Councillor Forrester is therefore well placed to bring forward views and proposals. She attends numerous meetings on behalf of the Council and her feedback ensures that all Councillors are kept up-to-date on matters affecting local government and people in Chester-le-Street and the County. The Parish Council's annual Newsletter was again well received in 2022. The Newsletter, collated by Councillor Maureen May with our grateful thanks, is delivered by Councillors to each household in the Parish. The Parish Council thanks all who contribute to its production and distribution. The Newsletter can also be accessed via the Council's website.

Planning

With many new-builds, extensions and improvements, both residential and commercial, within the Parish, we are grateful to Councillor John Waugh for overseeing this Portfolio including taking a close look at the weekly lists of planning applications provided by DCC. We have discussed several new planning applications and submitted comments to the DCC Planning Department. Councillor Waugh also appraised the DCC consultation on its Highways Design Guide and Residential Amenity Standards. We raised a concern with DCC after £100K of funds accruing from a commercial development at Drum Business Park for ecology purposes was diverted to another area of the County without the Parish Council being given the opportunity to make proposals for the funds. In February, we received a presentation from Julie Anson, DCC Community Economic Development Manager, on the regeneration of Chester-le-Street.

Councillor John Waugh monitors all new planning applications in the Parish and advises these to all Councillors so that any opinions or comments can be gathered quickly.

Play Areas

The two play areas in the Parish are extremely important for the welfare of residents. The Merlin Drive play area is owned by DCC whilst the Low Flatts play area is Parish Council owned. Portfolio Holder Councillor Margaret Caygill monitors both, and liaises with DCC on any issues that arise. The refurbishment of Merlin Drive has been completed by DCC and that for Low Flatts is currently underway with DCC being the project managers on behalf of the Parish Council. Funding for Low Flatts was obtained from the monies accruing from the Vigo Lane housing developments and the design was voted for at a site meeting attended by residents and Councillors with Councillor Caygill's proposal that the existing multi frame be retained being welcomed. Also at Low Flatts, the goal posts are being repainted. There were many molehills but it was expected that these would be flattened by the grass cutters.

Policy and Governance

Councillor Dennis Hall, as Portfolio Holder, has kept the Council informed on many matters affecting our sector of Local Government and this enabled discussions on such matters as the proposed North East Devolution Deal and the Boundary Commission proposals for County Durham (on which the Council made a successful submission that this Parish should be unchanged). An Environmental and Biodiversity Policy was agreed and adopted and the Council signed up to the Civility and Respect Pledge.

Project Development, Business and External Relations

The Portfolio Holder is Councillor Craig Martin who also being our County Councillor is in an ideal position to guide the Council on these matters.

Projects under development at present include the artworks for the Drum Business Park and for Lombard Drive. Early in 2023, a meeting was held with the artist for Lombard Drive to establish the vision for the project. A design is now awaited.

Meetings and Events Attended

During the year, Councillors have represented the Council at many external meetings, workshops and events, some of which have been virtual ones. These include meetings of the CDALC Chester-le-Street and District Sub-Committee, CDALC Smaller Councils Forum, the DCC Area Action Partnership, training events, meetings with representatives of Park View School and meetings with officers of DCC. At the greatly appreciated North Lodge Remembrance Group event on 11th November at North Road, several Councillors including the Chairman, who laid a wreath, were in attendance. At the Remembrance Day Service on 13th November, the Chairman accompanied by Councillor Forrester, with other Councillors also in attendance, again laid a wreath on behalf of the Council. The Chairman, on behalf of the Council, and Councillor Forrester, attended the funeral of Beaty Bainbridge. The Parish Council thanks all those Councillors who have represented the Council in these many and various matters. This is a function that is of great importance in establishing and presenting the views of our residents.

Royal Events

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

To celebrate this significant event, our flower barrels were planted with a red, white and blue scheme. Our flower beds contained crowns and cyphers (with many thanks to Councillor Veitch for his work on this). Students of Park View Lower School were presented with Platinum Jubilee badges. The themes for the entries for this year's Civic Arts Awards Scheme with Park View Lower School was the Platinum Jubilee and local history. Posters of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd placed and Commended entries were displayed in the bus shelters' display cabinets, in the noticeboards and at the Lambton Worm and Wheatsheaf pubs. We provided a donation to Park View School for planting to celebrate the Jubilee.

The Coronation of King Charles III

In celebration of this event, to take place on 6th May 2023, our flower beds again contained crowns and cyphers (thanks again to Councillor Veitch). We will also be presenting students of Park View Lower School with Coronation badges and the School will again hold a poster competition for display in the bus shelters, noticeboards and pubs.

Thanks are due, for both events, to the Councillors who formed the judging panels for the posters, to the Chairman for making the presentations of badges and to the County Councillor who contributed towards the funding.

Other Community Matters

Through the efforts of Councillor Gregory, a commitment was made by DCC to continue to collect and advise to the Council the pollution data for the Northlands roundabout area, and a commitment was made that the "Santa Bus" would this Christmas make a stop in North Lodge. A notable event was when Kevin Sinfield OBE passed through the Parish on his Ultra Marathon Challenge to raise funds for Motor Neurone Disease. We provided a donation to Park View School to support the provision of a Mental Health Counsellor. We have been contacted by residents on many varied matters and have responded in, we hope, a manner that encourages such contact. We expect to deal with all contacts in the speediest and most effective way possible. Residents can contact the Council by using the contact link on the website <https://www.northlodgeparishcouncil.gov.uk/> or by telephoning 0191 3892516 or in writing to 21 Lyndhurst Avenue Chester-le-Street DH3 4AR or by contacting any Councillor directly. Our noticeboards are situated at North Road (near the Lambton Worm pub), at the entrance to Lombard Drive from North Road, at Merlin Drive play area, at Picktree Village alongside the stone-built bus shelter, at Picktree Lodge estate (between numbers 28 and 30) and on Vigo Lane at the west entrance to Barley Gate.

Working with the County Councillor

The Parish Council considers it extremely important and beneficial to have a good working relationship with the County Councillor and such a relationship is well established with Councillor Craig Martin. The Parish Council will continue to seek a strong and positive relationship to provide the best service to our residents.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the Chairman (Councillor Dennis Hall), Vice-Chairman (Councillor Patrick Driscoll) and all Councillors who have contributed so much time and effort to the achievements of the Council. Thanks are also due to County Councillor Craig Martin for his close involvement and interest in the

Parish. The Parish Council values its relationships with 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.

Finally, there is one seat available on the Parish Council for any resident interested in serving the community. Please contact the Clerk or any Councillor if you would like more information. 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

9th May 2023