

Slaley Parish Council

Chairman's Report – May 2023

This year saw the retirement of our longstanding Parish Council Clerk. After 44 years Pat Wilson left the service of the Council with our best wishes and heartfelt thanks. Pat's contribution to parish life cannot be underestimated or overstated.

Our new Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer is Clare Loughlin. Clare who resides in the Parish, is a very welcome addition to the team.

Other changes have taken place within the Council too. Ian Stevens is now the Chairman, and Lynda Sale joined as a Councillor at the beginning of the year. One vacancy still remains around the table though which we remain keen to fill.

During the year Councillors have spent much time considering how to make the Parish Council more accessible to the community and how best to represent its residents. We believe it is important that everyone can have their say, especially when for the first time in seven years the precept (the money contributed to the Parish Council locally via the Council Tax), has been raised (by 5%) to meet the increasing costs of the activities we deliver. In 2023/24 we hope to introduce regular surgeries staffed by Councillors to meet that accessibility goal.

A significant amount of the Parish Council's expenditure goes on maintaining the aesthetic appeal of the Parish and maintaining/renewing its assets. The grass cutting in the village is the most obvious example of the former, whilst a new seat (on the B6306) and waste bins (at Dipton Cut and Trygill) illustrate the latter. We are also responsible for ensuring the play equipment in the Community Play Area remains safe to use and that the defibrillator is available in an emergency

The precept is also used to support the major institutions within the Parish, such as the Commemoration Hall, to which £1,600 was donated to help the Trustee's progress their sustainable energy initiative there. It also illustrated the Council's own commitment (on behalf of the community) to environmental issues which are at the fore of its decision making, following Councillors declaring a Climate Emergency last September. Smaller charitable contributions are also made to other organisations in Northumberland from which the community may benefit, such as the Great North Air Ambulance Service and ADAPT. This year has also seen us supporting the publication of Slaley News, funding activities at Slaley First School, adopting Lord Thumberland (our Illuminated Sheep) as part of the county's Lindisfarne Gospel celebrations and initiatives to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Sadly, darker days were to follow that weekend, upon which a moment of reflection might now be appropriate.

Away from their management of the precept Councillors have worked hard throughout the year to bring change to the community. Long running issues relating to road safety have been resolved, with the Glen Crossroads becoming a much safer road junction to use (our thanks to local residents and the County Council for bringing about the change) and new traffic restrictions near Slaley First School making it a safer place during drop off and pick up times.

Allied to that we are working with Northumbria Police to reenergise their Speed Awareness Initiative locally – with the first of the volunteers here now being vetted.

Looking ahead to the coming year, a number of challenges face the Council. Relatively new faces to it will bring about a change in the way it does its business, but on a wider scale, Councillors seek to create change to make the Council more accessible and accountable to those it represents and to better understand their expectations of it and the way they wish it to work for and support the community.

You can keep abreast of Parish Council activity by visiting www.slaley.org.uk/page/parish-council/. Should you wish to become actively involved in the Council one of the current Councillors would be delighted to share their experiences with you.

Cllr. Ian Stevens, M.B.E
Chairman, Slaley Parish Council