

Chair's Report

The last twelve months have been challenging for everyone. Little did we know back in March 2020, that lockdowns and restrictions would last for more than twelve months. Our community has managed the pandemic very well, with very few confirmed cases. However, our families, businesses, and charities have all suffered and it has been a very unusual time for all of us.

There is light at the end of the tunnel, however, and Cumbria is ahead of the UK average for the rate of vaccinations. It is hoped that all adults can be vaccinated before the end of July 2021.

The council has continued to operate through the pandemic, with virtual meetings being conducted via Zoom. It has been difficult, and there have not been any members of the public at most of these meetings, which is a shame, as public input is always valuable to the council.

In June 2020, the council bid farewell to Graham Dalton who stepped down from the council after many years of service, including a long tenure as Chair. Graham departed with the thanks of the council for his service. The council also received the resignation of Chris Evans who had also been a long serving councillor. Chris left with the council's thanks for his long service. I joined the council in June as a co-opted member, together with Michael Akrigg, and in July we also welcomed Les Howes as a co-opted member.

In August 2020, the council lost its Chair, Juliet Hoggar, who moved out of the area. Juliet left with the thanks of the council for her 15 months as Chair. Later in the month the Car Park Administrator John Hyde resigned from his position on health grounds. John had served the council for around 13 years and he was thanked for his long and dedicated service.

In September 2020, I was elected to the Chair until May 2021.

Currently, the council has 7 sitting councillors with vacancies for two more.

The committees that were set up in May 2019 continue to operate and we hope that the community can continue to see a more effective Council delivering change for our community. We believe the council has achieved a great deal on behalf of the parish in the last 12 months and we continue to make improvements in a number of areas.

A review of the structure of the Council's committees was conducted following the departure of the Chair in August and it was decided to merge the Car Park Committee with the Policy and Resources Committee. Membership of the committees was also reviewed with a better spread of workload being achieved.

The major project for the year has been to make improvements to the public car park in Dent village, including the installation of electric vehicle charging points and a new ticket machine that can accept payment by card as well as coins. This project is ongoing and around £25,000 has been raised so far in grant funding to finance the project.

In February, the council received the sad news that long serving former councillor and chair Graham Dalton had passed away following a short illness. The thoughts of all councillors are with Graham's family.

Scott Thornley continues to provide valuable services to the council and all of its committees as Clerk. Having completed his CiLCA qualification in November, he has the skillset to ensure that the council is managed effectively.

Policy and Resource Committee

This committee is responsible for recommending policies, both new and amended, and for managing the resources of the council, including setting the precept.

Since August, this committee has been made up of five members of the council. It has met five times in the year, achieving a great deal; including the integration of the Car Park Committee. This committee has been overseeing the project to make improvements to the car park.

A review of the Risk Assessment was carried out to ensure that all risks that the council are exposed to are minimised or mitigated.

The annual grant awards were also dealt with through this committee. The way that grant applications were administered was improved and linked more clearly with the budget monitoring process to avoid over-spending, and grants were awarded to projects in alignment with the council's objectives.

I should point out that the council's income for the year was severely impacted by the lockdowns and consequent loss of income from the car park. However despite this, the council was able to make grants of £6,000, with Dent Pre-School, Dent Primary School, St. Johns Church, Cowgill, Dent Memorial Hall, Dent School Governors and the Great North Air Ambulance all benefitting. The school governors have also benefitted from a £2,000 interest free loan towards the cost of a new boiler and heating system in the school.

Finally, the budget review and setting of the precept fell to this committee. The procedure for setting a budget was reviewed to ensure a more accurate and formal approach. This led to savings in some areas, and the identification of additional budget lines, to ensure more accurate accounting and reporting.

This committee will continue to review policies and procedures to ensure that the council operates and is administered in a proper, equitable, and transparent manner.

Amenities and Environment Committee

This committee has a sizeable remit, coupled with an opportunity to make significant visible change for our community. The committee is made up of five members of the council with one vacancy and the Clerk as Highways Liaison. It met four times in the year and has continued to improve the facilities available to the parish.

A number of the footway lights were defective during the year and with the help of Philip Middleton and Ian Hutt these have been repaired or replaced. A new light will soon be installed adjacent to the toilet block to replace the one that was removed from Sepia Barn and this committee will be discussing the replacement and upgrade of all footway lighting in the near future.

Refurbishment of the red phone box at Greenwell commenced in October and this will be finished in Spring, along with the box outside the Reading Room. The council's thanks go to Andy Horrocks of Fernlea who has taken on this work without charge, and will also refurbish the bench dedicated to Alan Meakin adjacent to the river at Church Bridge. The committee is currently considering the installation of a further defibrillator in the phone box at Greenwell.

With regard to roads, this committee has been involved with verge maintenance, carriageway repairs, protecting our bridges by working on new signage and road markings and has engaged with Cumbria County Council on the faults and issues that currently impact upon our community. Regular meetings with the county's Senior Highways Manager, Karl Melville are taking place and there have been a

number of repairs carried out. An ambitious £500,000 programme of works is planned for summer 2021.

Playing Field Committee

This committee already existed within the council but had been dormant before the new structure was introduced in May 2019.

It is made up of three members of the council (currently one vacancy) and two co-opted members. The committee has responsibility for all matters to do with the Playing Field and its use.

The main focus of this committee has been on spending the £6,000 grant it received from the Dentdale Show Committee. Extra sand has been spread on the football pitch resulting in the best playing surface for many years. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, it has not yet seen much use. The fence that runs along the bottom of the field was replaced and brought into the field by around 1 metre to widen the adjacent footpath. Walling repairs were completed in October.

New signs have been erected, advising dog owners that dogs should not be exercised on the field and that they must stay on the designated footpath around the edge.

The committee also agreed in February to install a children's pitch, next to the senior pitch and this will be marked out shortly. Suitably sized goalposts have been ordered and will be installed.

Further work, including the laying of the hedging and removal of two trees will be completed in spring.

Currently the only regular users of the field are Sedbergh and Dent United Football Club.

Other matters

The council commissioned a new website in October to ensure that it complied with new regulations surrounding accessibility. The new site www.dentwithcowgillpc.co.uk now contains all Parish Council information.

There are currently two vacancies for Parish Councillors and the council would love to see some new faces. Please do contact either me or Scott if you would like to get involved in supporting our community; you would be most welcome.

Jocelyn Manners-Armstrong

Chair of the Council

4 May 2021