

Chair's Report

Since my last report, twelve months ago, the situation with the pandemic has eased somewhat, however, it has not gone away and there have been many confirmed cases within our community.

The council has continued to operate, with face-to-face meetings restarting in May 2021. However, 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 and the council would like to have better engagement with all members of the community.

In May 2021, I was once again elected to the Chair and the council started the year with only seven of its nine seats filled. Laura Thornley was co-opted in September and Samantha Taylor was co-opted in January 2022 to bring the council back to full strength.

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. Membership of the committees is reviewed annually and in January 2022, the council voted to allow the nomination of substitutes if any member had to send apologies, to ensure that meetings would still take place in the event of absences.

The major project for the council continues to be the 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 £45,000 has been raised in grant funding to finance the project. It was hoped that the project could be finished before the end of the financial year, however, several delays have caused an extension to the project.

Scott Thornley continues to provide valuable services to the council and all of its committees as Clerk and Ian Mitchell continues to provide an excellent service cleaning the public toilets and managing the car park on a day to day basis.

Policy and Resource Committee

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

The committee consists of five members of the council and met seven times in the year. The main focus of the committee in the last 12 months has been the review of car parking tariffs and permits: a public consultation being launched at the end of the financial year and the committee will consider these results before making recommendations to the council.

A review of the council's 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. £7,000 was awarded in total with Dent Pre-School, Dent Primary School, Dentdale Choir, Western Dales Bus Service and the Great North Air Ambulance Service all benefitting. This grant funding is only made possible by ensuring that the car park is well managed with appropriate tariffs being charged for tickets through the machine and for permits.

The installation of the new ticket machine has been a huge success with income at a record high for the year despite the machine only being installed in September. This is probably due to a number of factors including the rise in staycations in 2021 as well as those visitors arriving without coins now being able to pay for parking with a contactless card.

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 precise 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 five 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 was installed adjacent to Sepia Barn and a project to upgrade all of the footway lights to energy efficient, Dark Skies compliant lights is now underway. Many of the lights will be replaced with the type seen adjacent to Sepia Barn with a few being replaced with a more heritage style light in keeping with their location (around the church and on Dragon Croft).

Refurbishment of the red phone box at Greenwell was completed as was the refurbishment of the box outside the Reading Room. The committee agreed the purchase of a defibrillator and cabinet to be fitted to the box at Greenwell, thanks to grant funding from Sedbergh and District Community Fund and Ian Mitchell's Locality Fund at SLDC. The council's thanks go to Andy Horrocks of Fernlea who has completed the restoration work without charge, and has also refurbished the bench dedicated to Alan Meakin adjacent to the river at Church Bridge.

Highways have been a major focus of this committee during the year with a number of bridges requiring repair as well as numerous pothole repairs and resurfacing. The Parish Council has no powers to make road repairs and is reliant on Cumbria County Council for this. However, the Parish Council maintains a good relationship with Karl Melville, Senior Network Manager at Cumbria County Council and meets with him on a regular basis to ensure that the voice of Dentdale is being heard. Improvements to signage have been made during the year with new signs warning of winter conditions installed at the bottom of the Coal Road and Deepdale Lane, as well as new signs advising HGV's not to come down the road at Dent Head. The committee continues to work with Cumbria County Council on improving these further in the coming months.

Playing Field Committee

This committee 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 committee met once during the year and the main focus has been on ensuring the football pitch is in the best condition it can be as the only regular users are Sedbergh and Dent United FC.

A grant was obtained to facilitate the purchase of new goalposts as damage had been caused to the childrens goal posts purchased the previous year. The old goalposts will be available for public use once the new ones are installed.

Further work, including the laying of the hedging and removal of two trees is still to be completed.

In conclusion, the council is proud of the work it has undertaken over the last year, and its ability to contribute to the sustainability and wellbeing of the dale and its residents. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our councillors and our clerk for their sterling work, and especially to all those members of our community who have helped us to achieve so much.

Jocelyn Manners-Armstrong

Chair of the Council