

SKELSMERGH & SCALTHWAITERIGG PARISH COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

From 1st April 2015 the two parishes which, until then, had operated for several years as a combined parish, were formally joined as a single parish consisting of two wards. Rather unfortunately there were no nominations for the Scalthwaiterigg ward so the May 2015 election saw the then existing councillors returned en bloc without a ballot. Happily, Phil Yates of Mealbank agreed to be co-opted in January 2016 and it is confidently expected that the second vacancy will be filled after the AGM.

The Community Plan of 2009 having substantially run its course, a new consultation was devised by a steering group and circulated to 200 households, resulting in 72 replies (a 40% response rate). The results of consultation and a proposed Action Plan for the ensuing five years was printed and distributed to all households together with a complimentary copy of the Church and Community News.

Some examples of issues of general concern to our residents related to the control over siting and appearance of new housing, highway maintenance and dangerous traffic, the need to extend the availability of broadband, the absence of a bus service to Mealbank and on the A6, poor mobile coverage and the need for a defibrillator. More localised issues concerning dog fouling, road surfacing and drainage, and amenity issues arising from the Mealbank trading estate were highlighted by Mealbank residents. A full account may be found on the website (see below).

The Council has a role to perform in representing residents' interests but in most, if not all, has to proceed by persuasion of other bodies, having few direct powers itself.

One power it does possess is to grant-aid from the precept and at every opportunity it encourages groups and organisations to put forward applications for grants to assist in projects which can benefit the community – for example the commitment, in principle, to support the repair of the Mealbank bridleway/road.

In the current year the Council has itself promoted projects to repair a public seat at Gurnal Bridge, the WW1 memorial seat at Oakbank, and a step-over stile near Holme House (undertaken by a volunteer group from the Dry Stone Walling Association). These and similar projects, though small in scale, help to promote the enjoyment of the parish environment which all respondents to the survey valued highly. It is depressing that roadside litter continues to accumulate and disfigure our environment but heartening that volunteers continue to support the Environment Group's twice yearly clean-up. Elsewhere volunteers also spent time clearing overgrown vegetation from rights of way.

Other issues which have concerned us were the delay in repairs to Laverock Bridge, now largely resolved (with reservations about the appropriateness of the coping stone) and a collision at the Kiln Croft/Skelsmergh Hall entrance which led to a call for traffic safety measures and is being actively pursued via the Casualty Reduction And Safer Highways (CRASH) group. The concentration of three private and two highway junctions within a short

stretch of the A6 where excessively high speeds are commonly noted creates a high accident potential. The misuse by HGVs seeking to access Mealbank Estate via Scandale is also being pursued.

Since the Community Plan was published broadband cabinets have appeared at Watchgate and Garth Row with consequent benefits to residents in the vicinity. Efforts to replicate these benefits elsewhere in the parish will continue via contacts with BT Openreach and the private operator, B4RN as it extends its range in adjoining parishes to the south.

The business of the council may be followed via the website at <http://www.skescalppc.org.uk> which contains not only official minutes but articles and image collections, the footpath guides and a link to the Community Hall website.

The Cenacolo Forum continues to meet annually to discuss any issues of concern. The council is grateful for the support which the Cenacolo Community gives to the litter clearance events.

In light of the above, 2016/17 promises to be a busy and interesting year for the Council.

John Chapman
Chairman
Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council.