

SKELSMERGH AND SCALTHWAITERIGG PARISH COUNCIL

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CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

The council has recorded another busy and productive year following-up initiatives commenced in the preceding year and identifying new ones to take forward.

Highway issues are a perennial concern, Sprint Bridge re-opened in December after a series of setbacks to the repair programme, though Ford Bridge, Burneside, remains closed to HGVs. The landslip near Gurnal Bridge is, as yet, unrepaired but representations about the damaged culvert below Garth Row were finally heeded and the lane is now restored. Elsewhere, at the Scandale/Appleby Road junction persistent pressure eventually induced Highways to erect signs to deter use by HGVs but not before a number of drivers found Laverock Bridge impassable and had to be extricated with difficulty and some annoying damage to local boundaries. Our representations also resulted in crash barriers being erected beside Laverock Bridge Lane. The case for traffic calming on A6 between Low Groves Lane and Lane End mentioned in last year's report has been accepted in principle but now awaits an allocation of funding by Highways, only time will tell whether this will find a place in their priorities.

The community consultation indicated strong support for a defibrillator at the Community Hall and, finally, after some initial technical hitches one has been installed. In January a 'Heart Start' course teaching the basics of CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) was well-attended and may be repeated according to demand.

Grant-aiding is a means by which the council can benefit groups within the community. This year they were disbursed to install Wi-Fi at the Hall, to provide refreshments for volunteer litter-picking days, towards a new mower for the Hall and for maintenance of the burial ground. In addition, a new notice board was commissioned to replace the dilapidated one at Kiln Croft/Skelsmergh Hall.

The council has been engaged in a debate with the management committee about the future of the Hall, which for many years has relied on the enthusiasm and energy of a small group of dedicated volunteers some of whom now feel that it is time for a change of personnel. The council is entirely sympathetic but believes that it would not be appropriate for it to take a direct role. Nonetheless it can use its access to sources of support, training and advice to assist in securing changes which will promote continuity of this valued local resource. The Community Gathering in April attended by some 75 residents was gratifying evidence of the level of local interest. Translating that into active participation is the next task.

Many people were attracted to the gathering by the chance to hear from Hermann Moisl, vice-chairman and Broadband Champion about the potential for improved broadband connection now that Garth Row and Watchgate have cabinets. The level of demand in Mealbank is evident and this will be important as representations are made to Connecting Cumbria and Openreach. The possibility of linking to B4RN via the Greyhound/Paddy Lane may yet prove too expensive.

Much of what is achieved in the parish is the work of volunteers and I should like to commend the activities of the Environment Group in organising the Litter-Picks, whose participants have collected hundreds of bags of roadside litter, sometimes, as this year, in foul conditions. Our countryside would not be the same without them. On the lighter side, the annual parish walk remains popular as do the

working days at the Parish Woodland. New members interested in promoting and understanding conservation in the parish are always welcome and will find plenty of opportunities to join in both discussion and working parties, dealing with a bad outbreak of invasive Himalayan Balsam being but one example.

Once again the finances of the council show an unspent balance accumulated from the past and it has not been necessary to increase the precept. The aim is to steadily reduce the balance by supporting local initiatives in the form of grant applications: groups and organisations take note.

Representation on the council is vital if it is to continue to be able to speak up for local concerns. I am sorry to record that two councillors, Phil Yates and Phil Rigby, have been unable to continue due to personal commitments. We are now taking active steps towards filling those vacancies by co-option for the remaining two years of the current council's term. Phil Yates gave invaluable help to the Mealbank road improvement scheme and Phil Rigby has been very much involved with the Sports. I thank them both for their work with the council.

Finally, I record thanks to those remaining on the council, Claire MacClaine, Hermann Moisl, Tim Maggs and Mary Chapman and especially to Karen Little, our clerk, whose role is vital to our business.

John Chapman, Chairman of the Council