

Skelsmergh & Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report 2022/23

As I write, the current Council is coming to the end of its term of office and will have been re-constituted by the time of publication, following the election in May. I am comforted by the thought that all the sitting councillors have agreed to be nominated to stand again, although it would be nice to think that at least two members of the community would be similarly willing in order to bring our numbers up to full complement.

The new council will see a new clerk at the table: Ron Anderson took over from Karen Little on April 1st following a smoothly executed recruitment process which, not only filled the post with a well-qualified successor, but did so with time in hand for a one-month hand-over and training period. Ron is retired from a career in education and local government administration and lives locally. We are looking forward to working with him.

On behalf of all our councillors I pay tribute to our our clerk, Karen Little who retired at the end of March, having served the council since 2014 with diligence and devotion, not missing a single meeting during the whole of that time. Her meticulous stewardship of our finances and our 'paperwork' mean that we will start the new term with a 'clean sheet' notwithstanding the difficulties Barclays imposed on us in the transition to e-banking. We were sad to say farewell and wish her every success in the next phase of her career.

Change was also in the air earlier in 2022 when a new administration took over the running of the Community Hall. In response to a request from the trustee committee the Council agreed to become the Custodian Trustee, a non-executive function for the purposes of the Hall's charitable status and of the lease from the Church authorities. The council also nominates two members to the management committee which enables the council to stay in close touch with the running of the hall.

Although the Community Plan has not been re-consulted on since 2015 it was agreed that it ought to be re-published in updated form. It is to be seen on the website. The new council will no doubt wish to consider what form any successor plan should take.

The plan highlights the importance to be attached to local rights of way and it is pleasing to record that Cllr. Mick Crozier will lead work parties in renewing faded and missing waymarks and simple maintenance jobs. Willing volunteers should contact him for further information.

Volunteers once again came forward to support the Litter-Pick in October: if we can't 'Stop the Drop' we can at least reduce its unsightliness. Likewise, volunteers were active in the woodlands, clearing-up after the ash felling and coppicing hazel. Income from products such as hedge stakes, firewood, bean poles and pea sticks helps defray expenditure on professional chainsaw work. Additionally, it was agreed to make the woodlands available to a chainsaw

trainer which at no cost to the council has helped reduce certain of the ash which may have threatened adjacent highway land at Coldharbour Quarry on the A6.

Sadly, we noted that our beekeeper has decided to retire without a successor and he will be taking his hives with him. David Walmsley used the Parish Woodland to train beekeepers which we felt was an important, if indirect, contribution to the community. The honey which came in part from these hives will be missed by its fans.

This year saw the preparations for the new Westmorland and Furness unitary authority gather pace and we were grateful to our district and county councillor members for their advice and assistance. We shall miss the support of Pat Bell and Stan Collins who both retired with the outgoing councils. However, we found it necessary to remind Cllr. Jama (who continues in office) of his non-attendance at any of our meetings and this remains a disappointing fact to date. At an informal private meeting with two of our number we were able to discuss locally concerning issues but we will continue to emphasise the need for formal attendance. Hazel Hodgson has, however, been a loyal and regular attender whose support we value.

Both the damage to Laverock Bridge and the continued closure of Paddy Lane were emphasised to the district and county members. It appears that, although funds for repair have been put aside, the bridge will continue dilapidated until time can be found for repairs. Paddy Lane has at long last been re-opened. By contrast, when Garth Row residents pleaded for a timely drop of highway salt the response from highways to our request was instantaneous and almost overwhelming: it also included a priority gritting chart for the area which in future may be consulted on the website: skescalpc.org.uk

The website had to be re-published in 2022 and is still under development. Whilst it complies with statutory requirements councillors are agreed that it could benefit from more general and attractive content. Ideas and contributions would be welcomed and if any younger resident(s) were looking for a community project, something to enhance the website would perhaps make a change from footpaths and woodlands!

During the year we commented on twelve planning applications, raising serious highway issues in one case and landscape issues in another. It is not often that our comments are heeded so that it was gratifying to note that our plea for more tree cover in the case of the proposed Meadowbank Business Park led to a revised submission reflecting our critique.

At the year-end we shall have a carry-forward of £2502.00 in unspent balances which will be available to spend on community-led projects and initiatives. Applications from groups and societies are always welcome. For example, a well-attended First-Aid refresher course in January was provided by Kendal First Responders who received a donation in lieu of a fee. The new council will have substantial resources to commence its term of office with: all it will need is ideas.

Finally, thanks go to my fellow councillors for their support and confidence, to our outgoing clerk, Karen and to Linda Barron, our auditor.

John Chapman, Chair