

## **DRAFT**

### **Chairman's Annual report 2023-24**

Change underlay a good deal of what I recorded in the last annual report: our long-standing clerk Karen Little, had retired and a new clerk, Ron Anderson, had been appointed, the council had agreed to become Custodian Trustee for the Community Hall and had also resolved to consult on up-dating the Community Plan which was last adopted and published in 2015. The Westmorland and Furness Council had just come into existence to replace the former Cumbria County and South Lakeland District councils and we were readying ourselves to welcome the new councillors to our meetings, a hope sadly unfulfilled to date. A rights of way group was in process of being formed.

Because our July meeting had to be cancelled due to the clerk's unavailability the year's business did not resume until September on which occasion we had the pleasure of co-opting Chris Loynes to fill one of the vacancies. He has recently come to live in the parish and brings with him a wealth of experience in community involvement and the democratic process and has already volunteered to lead on developing the Community Plan, for which an initial budget has been set aside.

Dissatisfaction with the services provided by Barclays led us to investigate alternatives and we have now transferred our account to Unity Bank, which has proven to be an entirely satisfactory move and a considerable relief to our clerk.

A pleasant and instructive day with a pole-lathe turning demonstration took place in the Skelsmergh Woodland in June, which attracted thirteen attendees who all took a turn at tying their hands at shaping and turning green ash recently felled in the woodland as part of the final ash die-back clearance.

After twenty-three years since it was first planted the woodland has achieved a degree of maturity but is also becoming somewhat crowded. Aware of this, and keen to set out a management prescription for future years we invited Cumbria Woodlands to survey the site (small woodland owners get a free survey at the moment.) The recommendation which we have adopted is to obtain a felling/ Thinning licence from the Forestry Commission and thereafter use the proffered services of a chainsaw trainer to thin selected trees during training sessions at no cost to the council (but with the possibility of firewood sales) thus achieving net gains for the council and the woodland environment.

As a postscript to the ash die-back campaign I was able to commission a green-wood chair-maker to create a chair from wood he purchased in which I had the pleasure to ‘chair’ a meeting. It stands as a tangible memento of the first twenty years of the woodland and the rapidly declining ash population now steadily disappearing from our landscape.

Every year the council makes provision in the budget for grant-aiding local groups and infrastructure requirements. In November we were alerted to the possibility of a need for funds towards repairs to the Hall car park and are standing ready for an application from the PCC, whose responsibility it is, as landlords of the Hall. A grant of 50% of the cost of external decoration was made to the Hall committee to spruce-up its appearance. It’s a useful reminder of the way in which the council can help with small projects which benefit the community. Details of how to apply can be found on the website: [www.skelscalpc.org.uk](http://www.skelscalpc.org.uk)

There have been few consultations on planning applications this year ( xxx , no objections) however, an informal local consultation of residents in and around Dodding Holme did raise some concerns. The Well, a ‘Lived Experience Recovery Organisation’, which works with alcohol and drug dependent adults across Cumbria announced that it proposed to occupy the former Cenacolo premises at Dodding Green, from 1<sup>st</sup> April. Residents were invited to an open meeting at the Hall on 14<sup>th</sup> March. I attended together with Ron Anderson to represent the council together with numerous local residents. After presentations by representatives of Well and some of their clients describing what they hoped to achieve at Dodding I had the somewhat onerous task of acquainting them with the conditions imposed by the inspector at the planning appeal in 2004 which limit the use to that of a ‘religious community (sui generis)’ and for the sole benefit of the ‘Friends for a UK Cenacolo Community. This intervention clearly came as unwelcome news, but however worthy the intentions of Well, I submitted that occupation for their purposes would need to be preceded by a planning approval, subject to the necessary local consultations. Until such time I emphasised that the PC would maintain an ‘open mind’ but would be ready to listen to residents’ concerns. We can only now await further developments.

This meeting was reported to our final meeting of the year in March as was another matter of long-standing concern in Dodding Holme, relating to speed limits in the highway. Consultations on both the 2009 and 2015 Community Plans resulted in the inclusion of a call by residents for a 20mph limit to

safeguard residential amenity, a call which was either rejected or not acknowledged by the then highway authority, Cumbria County Council. Times change and the Westmorland and Furness Council are inviting local councils to identify areas which would benefit from speed restraints. With a ready-made proposal still in our plan it was resolved that we should add this to the cases submitted for consideration. Residents may expect to be consulted by W&F Council if our submission is accepted. If it is it would be a vindication of the hard work and commitment put in all those years ago and a tangible outcome of the democratic process. We live in hope....

Change comes upon us at the end of the current year with the resignation of Freyja Burrill, creating yet another gap in our ranks. She has served the council and the community loyally: we are sad to lose her wise counsel and support. This leaves us with two current vacancies: interested persons should get in touch with the Ron Anderson, the clerk to the council.

In conclusion I offer thanks to our councillors, Angela Brand-Barker, Tim Maggs, Mick Crozier and Chris Loynes for their continuing support and to Ron Anderson who has completed his first year in post.

John Chapman,

Chairman