

Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council

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Chairman's Annual Report 2017-18

The first significant item to report is the co-option of Freya Burrill and Danny Seddon-Roberts at our meeting in September 2017, following the resignation of two former councillors reported at last year's AGM. I am pleased to say that both new councillors have taken an active part in council business and it has been a great relief to me to have a fully constituted council once more. The co-option arose from the interest in the council stimulated by the highly successful Community Involvement meeting hosted by the Community Hall Committee which the council supported with a grant towards the refreshments. A similar event is proposed for an evening in June this year.

The aftermath of Storm Desmond continued to affect the parish. Works undertaken by South Cumbria Rivers Trust to stabilise the banks of the Mint were noted by a local resident but not soon enough to prevent interference with a sand martin nesting site. The facts were reported to the council and resulted in a decision to criticise the Environment Agency's decision to authorise the work. It was recommended that the Agency should do more to consult local knowledge of valuable wildlife resources before permits are granted. Sadly, the works will remain at the expense of the loss of an important component of our environment. Elsewhere, no progress towards reinstatement of either the collapsed river bluff or the highway at Gurnal Bridge has been made, although locally it is reported that surveyors have visited the area. However, despite requests to be kept informed it is disappointing to note that the council has so far received no consultation on any proposals which may be in hand.

The problems arising from misdirected HGVs at Laverock Bridge reported last year have continued intermittently but did result in a visit by a traffic engineer who undertook to review comprehensively the signage for HGV traffic in the parish beginning at the upper Mealbank junction on Appleby Road and thereafter at all relevant junctions with a view to leading such traffic via A6 to Helme Lane and thence to the industrial estate. A special plea to lop overhanging branches on Helme Lane was added following a meeting with Kendal Caravans, whose vehicles are currently routed via Laverock Bridge, causing major inconvenience as they negotiate the bridge.

After withdrawal from service for repairs, the Defibrillator cabinet has been successfully reinstalled at the Community Hall and a second Heart Start course

was held by popular request.

As if by magic, after Hermann Moisl's well-received review of local Broadband provision at the Community Involvement meeting, two new cabinets appeared, one at Mealbank and another on the A6, serving Kiln Croft and Skelsmergh Hall. Internet users are reportedly delighted with the signal strength. Elsewhere, however, at Edgebank /Goodham Scales and Oakbank the situation is less good with no grounds for optimism that it will improve. This is a topic we must return to in the coming year.

On the practical side a number of matters have received attention. A new notice board has been erected at Kiln Croft. Two litter sweeps have taken place and been well supported. The area always looks so much better afterwards: would that the motoring public could refrain from littering and making the job necessary. At the woodland we held a successful and productive coppicing day in December: beanpoles and firewood are on sale and ready for collection. Honey sales from the 'busy' bees produced income so that it can be said that the woodland is a revenue, as well as, a capital asset.

Grant aid is an important means whereby the council can stimulate community activity and involvement. The local road improvement works in Mealbank village were finally completed this year thanks to the untiring and dedicated work of local volunteers led by Hermann Moisl. A grant of ~£70 was given to a project to cultivate wildflowers around the notice board in Mealbank and one of £500 towards replacement of the Bowling Club's mats at the Community Hall has also been given. Although the annual precept has been held at a figure of ~£3.7k for the four years the council still finds itself with a small carry-forward each year which it would like to see put to good use within the parish. Groups societies and clubs are positively encouraged to apply.

Thanks to an initiative by Claire MacClaine a number of courses delivered by Cumbria County Council, including an ongoing Healthy Hearts session and craft days, have provided useful outlets for local people and extended usage of the Hall.

Finally, on behalf of the whole community whom we represent, my thanks are due to my fellow councillors for their support, encouragement and sound counsel and especially to our clerk Karen Little for her careful management of the council's business.

John Chapman,

Chair - Skelsmergh & Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council