

WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

April 2021 – March 2022

I would like to start by saying that I hope everyone living in the parish, and all your families have stayed safe and well through what has been another difficult and challenging year.

The Parish Council has had a busy and productive 2021/22 and continues to work to meet the needs of the community by listening and responding to local issues. The Parish Council has continued to work closely with the Police, Neighbourhood Wardens, Durham County Council, County Councillors, community groups and local organisations on matters which affect the parish area.

I would like to thank all Members of the Parish Council for their continued support during my year as Chair of the Parish Council. I would also like to thank the County Councillors Lucy Hovvels and Chris Varty for their support during the last year.

J Miller

Chair to Wheatley Hill Parish Council

The Parish Council has had an active and productive year. The annual report gives a small indication of some of the Parish Council's activities over the past year.

1. Precept

The Council's budget for 2021/2022 was set at £127, 855.

The Parish Councils budget is financed by a Precept which is part of the Council Tax that is collected from local electors via their Council Tax payment. The Parish council is also reliant upon Central Government grant support. The grant called the Council Tax Support Scheme is paid direct to Durham County Council who then redistribute the grant to parishes. The County Council is under no obligation to do this and since its introduction the grant the Parish receives has been reduced each year. Wherever possible the Parish Council uses reserves to keep the precept as low as possible for residents.

For the financial year 2021/22 Wheatley Hill Parish Council received a Council Tax Support Scheme grant of £12,672.

The Parish Council required £127,855 for the 2021/2022 financial year. It used £3,683 of reserves to provide a precept of £111,500 which together with a grant of £12,672 gave a total of £124,172.

2. Finance

The Council remains in a healthy financial position. The main areas of expenditure during 2021/22 included the Cemetery, grounds maintenance and floral arrangements, allotments, youth provision, changing rooms, Section 137 donations, and financially supporting the Greenhills Centre.

3. Cemetery

The Cemetery continues to be a significant focus for the Council. The Cemetery is home to the Heritage Centre Building which houses a permanent exhibition of an East Durham Colliery Home as well as many artefacts and photographs which have been donated by local people, and friends and families now living away from the village. The Centre is staffed by a small team of dedicated volunteers and continues to thrive.

The Cemetery is home to the grave of miners' leader, Peter Lee which is the only listed monument in the East Durham area. Also located in the Cemetery is the Thomas Kenny VC memorial stone and "The Last Shift" a miner memorial sculpture by local artist Ray Lonsdale.

4. Allotments

The Council owns and manages 23 allotments and stable blocks at Quilstyle Road.

The Parish Council has worked closely with tenants, the Police and Neighbourhood Wardens to tackle issues such as fly tipping and criminal activity at the site.

The Parish Council is investing in improving the site and the programme of improvements to the boundary fenced will continue during 2022.

5. Planning

The Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications submitted to Durham County Council. This allows the Parish Council the opportunity to comment, object or support any application submitted from within the village. During 2021/22 the Parish Council was consulted on 8 planning applications within the parish area.

6. Front Street

The Parish Council continues to work with the Police, Neighbourhood Wardens and Durham County Council to tackle problems on the Front Street and in the vicinity which includes anti-social behaviour, absentee landlords and empty and boarded up properties.

7. Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is still an issue particularly around the Front Street area. The Parish Council will continue to work closely with the Police, Durham County Council and the local Neighbourhood Wardens to tackle the problem.

8. The Greenhills Centre

The Parish Council wants to provide activities and events for children and residents in the village. However, with no staff to deliver on a large scale it works in partnership with Wheatley Hill Community Association.

The Parish Council provides the funding for a wide range of activities and events which are delivered by the Greenhills Centre. During the 2021/2022 financial year the Parish Council funded a programme of activities costing £15,000.

9. Changing Room Facilities – Football Field

In September 2021, the Parish Council took the decision to provide a permanent changing room facility at the Parish Councils football pitch.

The option of building a changing room was considered but due to the costs involved this was not a feasible option and the decision was taken to purchase a secure portable changing room unit.

An application was made to Durham County Council for £21,180.79 Section 106 money which was successful.

The new changing rooms provide a fantastic facility for anyone using the football pitch.

10. Durham City Youth Project

During 2021 the Parish Council provided funding for Durham City Youth Project (DCYP) to deliver weekly youth sessions in Wheatley Hill. One session was for juniors, aged 8-11 years and the other was an outreach session for seniors, aged 13-19 years.

The junior session gave children the opportunity to engage in a range of activities, including sports, arts and crafts, cooking and educational workshops. It provides a safe space to meet and make friends, build confidence and self-esteem and reduce risky behaviour. The sessions were free and provided sports, games and activities to those who would not normally be able to afford them and as a result increased health and wellbeing.

The senior sessions were delivered outdoors. Youth workers were building relationships with young people hanging around the streets and engaging them in relevant activities, such as playing sports, providing support and advice and workshops around drug and alcohol awareness.

Youth provision was a priority and the Parish Council give an initial commitment to fund the youth project for a period of 6 months.

11. New Play Park at the Greenhills Centre

During 2021 Wheatley Hill Community Association (WHCA) obtained quotations for the supply and installation of a new play park at the Greenhills Centre.

The cost of the new play park was £102,000. WHCA had successfully applied to Durham County Council for £65,000 Section 106 funding. They received £5,000 each from County Councillors L Hovvells and C Varty and £10,000 from County Councillor Jake Miller. The Parish Council contributed £10,000 leaving £7,000 to be funded by WHCA.

Work started on the new play park in April 2022.

12. Section 137 Donations

During 2021/22 the Parish Council provided grants and donations to local groups and charitable organisations. All requests for assistance are made in writing to the Council. Listed below are the groups and organisations who received financial assistance during the 2021/22 financial year in line with the budgeted allocation.

All Saints Church	250.00
Wheatley House Moving Forward	1,000.00
Great North Air Ambulance	100.00
All Saints Church	150.00
2nd Wheatley Hill Scout Group	100.00

Wheatley Hill Community Nursery	100.00
Wheatley Hill Workmens Club	100.00
All Saints Church	15.00
TOTAL	1,815.00

13. Dodds Close

Following on-going problems related to off-road and quad bikes damaging the grassed area at Dodds Close the decision was taken to fence the entire area.

Section 106 funding was available for use in Wheatley Hill and an application for £30,000 was made to Durham County Council to fence the area. Believe Housing also contributed £4,000 towards the project. The application for funding was successful and during 2021 the entire area was fenced preventing further damage to the grassed area.

14. Community Defibrillator

In 2020 the Parish Council purchased 2 community defibrillators. An internal defibrillator is located at the Greenhills Centre and an external defibrillator is installed in a locked cabinet on the outside wall of the Heritage Centre located in the Cemetery.

In 2021 the Parish Council provided a further community defibrillator at Abbots Court nursing home. A defibrillator is a life saving device that can help save the life of someone experiencing a sudden cardiac arrest.

15. Pit Pony – A181 Roundabout

In 2020 an attempt was made to steal the pit pony located on the A181 roundabout. Due to the help from quick thinking residents the pony was recovered but was badly damaged and in need of repair. The Parish Council approached the People’s Workshop who had made the original pony to undertake the repairs.

Trimdon Foundry and Thornley Parish Councils were asked to consider contributing towards the cost of the restoration and re-siting and a very generous donation of £750 was received from Trimdon Foundry Parish Council.

The Pony was restored and re-sited on the A181 roundabout in August 2021.

16. Dog Fouling

As in previous years the Parish Council provided free Poop bags to all residents living in Wheatley Hill. To combat dog fouling and encourage responsible dog ownership it is proposed that the provision of free bags, for residents living in Wheatley Hill, will continue for the

foreseeable future. Dog bags are available from the Heritage Centre, Wheatley House and the Community Centre.

17. Salt Bins

During 2021 the Parish Council purchased an additional 10 salt bins which could be sited anywhere around the village during periods of bad winter weather.

For further details please visit our website www.wheatleyhill.parish.durham.gov.uk

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