

Pennington Parish Council

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT 2021

The last year delivered some very trying and exceptional circumstances for everyone within the community. Residents have faced a number of difficult situations from public facilities such as parks and play areas being closed to increased footfall on footpaths and public rights of way. Parish play areas were eventually reopened in line with national guidance following a slight delay in essential safety inspections and whilst no permission was granted for landowners to close public rights of way, we tried to educate and unite residents and the community to the best of our ability with guidance from DEFRA, CALC and higher tier local government.

Parish Councillors have also been faced with difficult situations, i.e. not being able to conduct business in the normal way but trying to carry out essential work in the community whilst observing lockdown, restriction of movement and social distancing guidelines. Even though we were unable to hold face to face meetings, we were able to meet via an online platform and Parish Councillors remained in regular contact in order to address issues arising in the parish and to remain as much a source of information and guidance to residents as possible.

As restrictions start to lift, we are met with returning to face to face meetings from 7th May 2021. A consultation took place where Councils across the country lobbied to extend virtual meetings beyond this date. The application to the High Court was dismissed meaning that our June Parish Council Meeting is set to be held back at the Parish Rooms. We will provide further information and guidance on this over the coming weeks.

During the pandemic, the government made available a number of grants aimed toward different sectors and the Parish Council were lucky enough to receive a small business rate relief grant. This has allowed us to replace outdated and damaged play equipment at Loppergarth playground and we would also like to thank the Loppergarth Community Group for their significant and kind donation toward this project. The grant will also enable us to consider additional projects within the community or provide a level of financial security for the Parish Council should we be faced with unexpected expenses in the future.

The Parish Council were working with the Memorial Hall committee to hold an event celebrating the centenary of the Cenotaph at Cross a Moor. This event was due to be held in October but will now be held at a later date when circumstances allow. Even though we were not able to hold the event, the Parish Council placed a wreath on the cross on the 100th anniversary on behalf of the community. The cross was also decorated with poppy themed items by members of the community and Pennington School to mark the centenary and to pay respects to those who gave their lives in war.

Work is due to begin in the Summer on the £7million A590 highway improvement project including the construction of the Cross-a-Moor roundabout. Even though there have been a number of valid concerns over aspects of this scheme, there stands to be potential and significant benefits from the project. Highways England have been extremely helpful with keeping us up to date with plans and look forward to being able to share updated information through community events when Covid restrictions allow.

This year has seen the retirement of our long-serving Clerk, Christine Braithwaite and the resignation of a most valued member of the team, Mrs Angela Scrogam. We thank them for their many years of service and wish them both the very best in whatever their future brings.

We therefore found ourselves with additional vacancies on the Parish Council, 1 in the Pennington Ward and 2 in the Swarthmoor Ward. Mrs Slater was elected to the Pennington ward following Mrs Scrogam's resignation and Mrs Athersmith was co-opted onto the Swarthmoor Ward vacancy that was carried forward from the last election. In addition to this, Mrs Bell was recruited into the role of Clerk. I thank them all for joining us and hope that we have a long and fruitful working relationship. The 1 remaining vacancy should officially be filled in the coming weeks, I welcome Mr Davidson onboard, and I am delighted that we will soon have a full membership. It is important that we continue to represent the views and concerns of residents with local, county, and national agendas and initiatives, this is only possible through community engagement and representation and the diverse skills and knowledge of our dedicated Councillors will help achieve this.

The community has really pulled together in supporting its most vulnerable residents and special thanks are extended to those who have gone above and beyond to help serve those who have needed it. Meals have been provided, prescriptions and shopping collected, and isolation groups set up to ensure no-one feels lonely or isolated, this, often done by those who have their own personal difficulties or health issues. For this, we are all incredibly grateful and would like to thank each and every one of you for your help, support and sense of community.

The community also came together to mark the onset of Spring and easing of Covid restrictions through the Spring Forward event, this year using the spring lamb as a theme. Many households participated in this event through displaying signs of spring in their homes and gardens as well as enjoying the sheep trail walk around the parish. The children and staff at Pennington school produced a display to lift the spirits of the community and provided a point to collect a map and list of clues for the trail. We hope that Spring Forward will become a regular event across the parish.

I would also like to thank the businesses both within the parish and outside of it that have continued to support the community. Generous donations have been made in all forms and kind gestures have been left around the parish for residents to find.

My last but not by any means least thank you is to our existing Parish Councillors Mr Thompson, Mr Stretch and Vice Chairperson Mrs Thompson for their continued support in ensuring the parish and wider community are well served. I extend those thanks to everyone who commits their time to ensuring the Parish Council can deliver its best possible service; the internal auditor, community groups, caretakers and grounds-people, individual volunteers, district and county councillors, the local MP, and our dedicated police community support staff.

I am humbled to be a member of such a kind, caring and dedicated community.

My final thought goes to all of those who have been affected personally by the situation over the last 12 months, the key workers who we have clapped for of an evening that have continued to serve and care for the nation, those who have missed celebrating special occasions with their nearest and dearest, those who have suffered loneliness and break downs in relationships, and those who have sadly lost friends and loved ones and missed being able to say final goodbyes. To those people, I send my sincerest thoughts and hope that we can all rise from the shadow of the Covid pandemic a stronger and more resilient community.

Stay safe, stay well.

Stephen Bertram (Chairperson)

"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members"
- Coretta Scott King