

Pennington Parish Council

Chairs report to Pennington Parish Council



Monday 9th May 2022

It has been another busy year for Pennington Parish Council as we emerge from online zoom meetings and the ubiquitous 'You're on mute!' and 'Can you hear me?' to resuming face to face meetings and eventually returning to business as usual.

Parish council business has been delivered against the backdrop of two major changes to infrastructure, the first of which is local government reorganisation (LGR). As of April 2023 Cumbria will no longer exist as a county, we will reside in the county of Westmorland and Furness. The new Unitary Authority is intended to improve public services and ensure better, more efficient use of public money. The local elections on May 5th marked the start of the shadow authority which will be responsible for forming the new authority and setting out how services will be delivered. We must be prepared for the changes this will bring to us at Parish Council level and will require us to work with our Elected Members to understand our roles and responsibilities within the new structure.

Our second structural change is more tangible in the form of the roundabout at Cross a Moor. As each week passes we can see the roundabout, junctions and pathways emerge from the mounds of earth and mangle of machinery. The impact of constructing the roundabout is being offset by environmental improvements including the wetland area, and planting new hedgerows and trees. The wetland area will encourage flora and fauna so enhancing and enriching the natural environment which can be enjoyed by residents and visitors. There will be an outdoor learning area for children at Pennington School to build on their environmental awareness and studies. The construction of the roundabout has presented challenges to the community, in particular to the residents living alongside the works and on diversion routes on both sides of the A590. The Parish Council has, wherever possible, supported the Highways team to consult with the public and raise issues on communications with local residents. Parish councillors have had the opportunity to meet with the Highways team through online meetings and a site visit. Building positive relations with the Highways team has been important for our own communication with the community and enabled us to resolve any issues directly with the team. We are grateful to the team, particularly the Project Manager, for their ongoing liaison with the Parish Council.

I would also like to extend our grateful thanks to the Highways team for their actions to support the annual Remembrance Day service held at the Cross at Cross a Moor. The team removed the barriers to enable the service to go ahead, placing a wreath on the Cross as a mark of their respect. We appreciate their consideration and kindness.

The completion of the roundabout in August will bring fresh challenges to the community not least the potential for a significant numbers of houses on the site at Cross a Mor.

There is also the potential impact on parking at Pennington School for staff and parents/carers dropping off and collecting children at each end of the school day. Parking across the parish as a whole has been raised by members of the community through public participation at meetings and through feedback to the community led plan. The Parish Council is working with the Community Engagement Officer to hold a public consultation for residents to share concerns, ideas and solutions for parking.

Public participation is an important part of the agenda. During this year we have had questions and concerns posed by the public on a range of aspects of parish life from parking to planning issues to road safety.

Members of the public attended a meeting to raise their concerns about the potential closure of the Reading Rooms in Swarthmoor. We are delighted that the Reading Rooms Board of Trustees has been re-established and that the

venue has reopened for use by the public and community groups. The Reading Rooms are an important asset in the community; the Parish Council will seek to support the Trustees with any future developments.

We were very pleased to welcome a young resident to the meeting, who was planning to walk from Swarthmoor to Barrow, via a game of rugby in Dalton, to raise funds for charity. We were very impressed by the young person's determination to raise money – he should be very proud of his fantastic achievement and we look forward to hearing how he progresses.

Being a member of the Parish Council involves more than attending a monthly meeting. Parish Councillors are active in the community; the Millennium Gardens has been given a fresh lease of life with funding secured for new planting providing space of relaxation and reflection; footpaths have been walked and faults listed which have been shared with the Countryside Access team for repair; allotments have been tended, given up and reallocated with allotment holders expressing their appreciation for the support they receive, and, walks are encouraged with many families enjoying what is fast becoming an annual tradition of following a trail around the parish looking for clues and searching out knitted animals as well as residents decorating windows and gardens with a themed display. Parish Cllrs have also accessed training opportunities and professional development to ensure we are discharging our duties appropriately.

The playgrounds in Loppergarth and Swarthmoor have been maintained throughout the year. We were delighted to support Loppergarth Community Group with their fundraising for new playground equipment. The order and installation of the new equipment wasn't without challenge, however, the issues have been resolved through the dogged determination of our Parish Clerk.

Bus shelters have been replaced in Swarthmoor, again this has not been without problems. We are reliant on other teams and services to complete their part of the process in order to proceed with installing one of the bus shelters. This is an ongoing challenge we seek to resolve speedily. The bus shelter at Birkrigg Park has been damaged on a number of occasions which has led to consultation with the local community there to find a resolution. This situation is ongoing following further contact from the community which we will seek to resolve as soon as possible.

In times of challenge it is important that we follow legal and professional guidance. We are grateful for the clear, concise advice and guidance we benefit from as a member of CALC. It is also important that we meet with other parish councils in order to share good practice and to stay up to date on local authority matters and priorities.

Communication is key in all that we do. We communicate with local residents through the parish website, social media and parish noticeboards as well as through the Community Chat magazine. There are changes ahead for the magazine with the existing team making plans to step back and hand the gauntlet to a new team. We extend our grateful thanks to the Community Chat team for producing an interesting and informative free magazine which reflects the local community; we wish the team the very best of luck for the future.

The year ahead already looks busy for the Parish Council, with many tasks including:

- Being prepared for the impact of LGR on Parish Council business
- Being prepared for the impact of the roundabout at Cross a Moor on the wider local infrastructure
- Setting up a public consultation event on parking in the parish
- Complete the replacement of bus shelters
- Liaise with residents of Birkrigg Park regarding the repeated bouts of damage to the Perspex
- Review and update the community led plan
- Plant trees in the parish to commemorate Queen Elizabeth's Platinum jubilee
- Measure our carbon footprint and find ways with which to reduce it
- Review and publish parish protocols and procedures
- Encourage more residents to put themselves forward to represent their community on the Parish Council

The functioning of the Parish Council would be impossible without the hard work of our Parish Clerk; I want to thank Lynn for her support and commitment. We value and appreciate all that Lynn does to keep us on track, to ensure

that we discharge our duties within the law, and to seek out up to date advice and guidance when we're unsure and unfamiliar with procedure.

Last but definitely not least, this year saw the retirement of our long standing Chair, Steve Bertram. Steve served as Chair for two decades, leading the Parish Council with dedication, authority, knowledge and a deep respect for his community. In tribute to Steve we are very proud to have marked his retirement through renaming the meeting room in the Parish Rooms as 'The Bertram Room' with a plaque proudly in place. We wish Steve the very best of luck for the future and thank him for his leadership and guidance over the last two decades.

Here's to the next 12 months and whatever it may bring.

Lorraine Thompson, acting Chair, Pennington Parish Council