

# Pennington Parish Council

## Chairs report to Pennington Parish Council



Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023

This is my first report as the elected Chair of Pennington Parish Council and it is an underestimation to say it has been anything other than another incredibly busy year.

I think it's important to start with the most significant event of the past 12 months; the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, in September, which led to a period of national mourning. Locally we opened up Pennington Church to enable members of the community to take time for personal reflection on the life of Her Majesty and to sign the book of commemoration. The sad passing of Her Majesty came just three months after the national celebration of her Platinum Jubilee which saw street parties and festivities up and down the country. Her Majesty the Queen achieved so much during her 70 year reign bringing stability to the country through times of change and uncertainty with dignity and a sense of service to others. In the words of Paddington Bear, thank you, Ma'am, for everything.

There are still flags and bunting in place for the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III which brought more street parties, concerts and celebrations, with many events held within the local community. We send His Majesty King Charles III very best wishes for a happy, long and healthy reign.

Locally we have seen the completion of the roundabout at Cross a Moor which appears to have improved the flow and safety of traffic at the Cross a Moor junction. I'm not sure whether the impact of the roundabout has been fully felt by the local community just yet due to the ongoing utility works taking place along the Swarthmoor and Three Bridges stretch of the A590 which causes what feels like daily queues of vehicles. Hopefully, the utility works will come to an end soon and residents will experience an improvement in the flow of traffic. The completion of the roundabout project resulted in some Community Infrastructure Levy funding coming into the parish council, which will be used to enhance the local area. The wetland area has created a well used space which is attracting walkers as well as a range of flora and fauna. The landscaping of the roundabout is less successful; there doesn't appear to be a range of wildflowers, the hedgerows appear very patchy in parts and a number of the trees have blown over. Hopefully, the environmental issues will be dealt with by the contractors employed to manage the site and we will see the plants and trees start to flourish over the coming years.

The completion of the roundabout in will bring fresh challenges to the community not least the potential for the construction of a significant number of houses at Cross a Moor. A consultation event organised by Storey Homes was held at Pennington Memorial Hall which was well attended by members of the local community despite not being widely advertised. We will continue to watch for progress of any planning applications and ensure that members of the community have the information required to contribute and respond to any public consultations and planning applications.

Local government reorganisation has now concluded and as of 1<sup>st</sup> April our services and amenities are delivered by Westmorland and Furness council. The changes to the structure should have had very little impact on the wider community with regard to local services such as bin collections, street lighting, highways maintenance etc, with the clear message that it is 'business as usual'. Locally, we have a change in representation of Elected Members and are very happy to have support and input from Cllr Ben Cooper and Cllr Matt Brereton. During the period of transition one of our Elected Members, Cllr Janet Willis, confirmed that she would not be standing for re-election and was going to retire from her post as Elected Member for Low Furness. I'd like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to Janet for all of her support and input into parish council meetings and matters. Janet was a great source of information and guidance with council issues; we wish her the very best for a long, happy, healthy retirement.

Further to LGR, there will be changes ahead which could impact on the function and responsibilities of the Parish Council. We will address these changes as they arise, and any decisions taken will continue to be recorded in the minutes as a matter of public record.

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 topics including parking and bus shelters. Parking issues had to be 'parked' due to the impact of LGR, however, we hope that we can pick up on this item with Elected Members and the Community Team in the near future. We worked closely with the local community at Birkrigg Park to replace the old bus shelter and are very pleased that this has led to increased representation of Birkrigg Park residents at Parish Council meetings. Our Parish Clerk was successful in securing funding to fully replace and remove the old shelter – thank you Lynn for all of your hard work in bringing all of the information together to bring additional funding into the parish. We look forward to supporting the residents with their plans to install a defibrillator on the Birkrigg Park estate to provide an important resource in the event of a health emergency in the High Carley area. I'd like to thank all members of the community who take their time to attend and contribute to Parish Council meetings.

The local elections were held in early May, the seats on Pennington Parish Council were uncontested and we still have 2 vacancies. We will continue to raise awareness of the vacancies through social media and community chat – it's important that we endeavour to have representation from across the parish.

Being a member of the Parish Council involves more than attending a monthly meeting. Parish Councillors continue to be active in the community; from assessing the condition of and maintaining our buildings, managing allotments, developing the community led plan, linking with the local school, representing concerns of their local communities and assessing the condition of local pathways, our Parish Cllrs continue to be busy – I'd like to extend thanks and gratitude to fellow Parish Cllrs for giving their time, skills and talents to supporting their local and wider communities.

The playgrounds in Loppergarth and Swarthmoor have been maintained throughout the year providing safe outdoor space for children and young people to gather and play. It was a pleasure to meet with Peter Clerk, Locality Officer, who inspects the playground areas and equipment on our behalf and I'd like to thank Peter for taking the time to meet and explain how inspections are carried out.

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 continue to meet with other parish councils in order to share good practice and to stay up to date on council matters and priorities.

The parish council suite of protocols and procedures have been updated during the past 12 months. Time on the agenda was set aside to ensure that all parish councillors had the opportunity to read the policies and to ask any questions about the contents. The updated policies are now available on the parish council website and are used to frame our practice as and when appropriate. We were pleased to utilise the refreshed Grants policy recently to support the Reading Room Management Committee with their plans to start drop in sessions at the Reading Room for members of the community. I'd like to wish the management committee the very best of luck with their endeavour and hope that the community find this a useful resource.

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. The production of magazine has been handed over to a new team, with support from original team members. We look forward to building links with the new team and supporting them to keep this important publication going.

Our Parish Clerk, Lynn, continues to go above and beyond in her work for the Parish Council and on behalf of fellow parish councillors I'd like to thank her for her support and commitment. I'm sure I speak for us all when I say that we value and appreciate all that Lynn does to keep us on track and to ensure that we discharge our duties in keeping with the law. I'd also like to congratulate Lynn on achieving her recent qualification which she has worked hard to achieve – well done Lynn.

There's more work for us to do including –

- Upgrading the parish council buildings
- Improving outdoor seating across the parish
- Raising community concerns about parking
- Maintaining and upgrading playground areas
- Be prepared for supporting the community when we receive a planning application for the site at Cross a Moor

Here's to the next 12 months and being prepared for whatever comes our way.

Lorraine Thompson, Chair, Pennington Parish Council