

Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report 2024/25

In my last annual report for 2023/24 I mentioned the support which the council can give to local projects which benefit the community and the encouragement it gives to local groups to apply for grants. The power is 'capped' by an annual spending limit set by government: in 23/24 it amounted to £ 9.93 per elector in the parish so that the clerk's arithmetic has to be carefully obeyed! However, it does allow us to use our budget to assist larger projects quite generously.

This year the Community Hall was faced with crisis over the failure of the pump which distributes the ground-source heating. The committee were successful in obtaining grants from various sources but to complete the funding the council agreed to put in £2000 to support this important local facility. Happily, all is now restored and the Hall is once more fully functional.

The Parish Survey initiated last year was completed this year following distribution to all households with an invitation to complete on-line. The response-rate of 25% was somewhat disappointing but sufficient to gain an understanding of local aspirations and preferences. A full account of the survey will be found on the website and once the plan has been adopted it, too, will be published there. We are grateful to Chris Loynes for progressing the survey so effectively.

The website has a new look and a new title: www.skelsmerghandscalthwaiterigg-pc.gov.uk Please consult it on all matters relating to the council. There are also facebook pages for the council, the community Hall and the Baby and Toddler Group, which meets in the Hall.

Whenever we become aware of new residents we deliver a 'Welcome Pack' including a letter of introduction, list of councillors and contacts, a set of the Parish Walks and a copy of the Church and Community News to familiarise new residents with all of the local 'media'.

The council has always endeavoured to maintain a dialogue with County and District Councils, now subsumed into the Westmorland and Furness Unitary Council, via elected councillors. Where once three councillors attended regularly, our single representative never has. To redress this to some extent we were pleased to welcome Cllr. Peter Thornton to the January meeting. As Cabinet member for highways, Peter was at pains to describe the extent and cost of the highways responsibilities borne by the council – and the budgetary restraints imposed upon them. We, however, were anxious to communicate an accumulation of highways issues which we want the council to look into/resolve on our behalf. It was quite a shopping list and Peter left in no doubt that we had not lost sight of any, even if W&F Council had failed to acknowledge or deal with them: the eroding riverbank on the Mint opposite Mealbank, flooding/drains on A6 at Garth Row, a 20mph limit at Dodding Holme, the Kiln Croft pedestrian/cyclist link to Kiln Croft and a possible 40mph extension on A6 to Low Groves junction. Happily, it can be reported that the Gillthwaiterigg footbridge was repaired within a couple of months of the meeting. So, one down and several more to go!

Since the re-routing of Gurnal Bridge Lane after Storm Desmond there have been some quite significant changes to the riverbank access which the council has held on licence from the Stephenson Trust. The Trust have acquired an additional parcel of land which they have planted with some trees and at the same time realigned the permissive footpath in the interests of safety (and minimising their potential liability) to avoid the eroding river bank. They have also requested that the council extend the remit of the existing licence to

embrace the new planting. Although at first reluctant to extend our responsibilities we have been encouraged to do so by an undertaking from Kendal Conservation Volunteers to tackle any physical jobs on our behalf. A draft Licence is currently being considered by the Agents for the Trust. At the same time we have been successful in obtaining a grant of £3,430 from W&F Council for a tree-planting initiative to plant as many trees as there are residents in the parish, part of a larger locality-wide scheme the council is promoting. Once the paperwork is complete this should be ready to go ahead in the autumn. The land came to the Trust from the estate of the late Judith Helling of Hollin Root with a proviso that it be planted with trees. Judith's brother has welcomed a proposal that it should in future be known as Judith's Wood. Augmentation by over 300 new trees should make for a worthy legacy.

In the Parish Woodland thinning has begun as previewed in my last report and negotiations are underway with Selside School to use the woodland as an open-air classroom – a welcome return, but this time under the supervision of their own teachers and volunteers rather than as guests of the council's. This continues the theme in the management plan of value to the community. By the time this report is published a new gate will have been installed and full access restored.

Other matters which came before the council were a visit from Bekki Winter, representing the Cof E and other local housing associations to make the case for local housing provision. Note was taken and the council will, of course, emphasise the need, if and whenever development opportunities arise and applications are made. Regarding the re-development of Holme House farm a curious impasse was reported with W&F's street-naming policy whereby 'Holme House' has been disallowed because of another such elsewhere. As this has been the name time out of mind the ruling seemed somewhat officious and we resolved to support the residents. It seems, however, that

official policy will prevail, though it is to be hoped that the original name will not entirely be lost to maps of the area.

We drafted a response to the Boundary Commission's consultation on ward boundaries voicing our concern at the paucity of representation we now suffer by having only one councillor at the W&F level.

Unsurprisingly our representations came to nothing due to the sparseness of our population and the need to be combined with neighbouring parishes in order to construct a ward of sufficient numbers to satisfy the Commission's criteria.

The council is ever conscious of the fact that local people value their surroundings highly. One response is the annual litter-sweep of local highways which last took place in October. Although the number of bags collected has declined over time, observation suggests the need has not gone away. The call for volunteers to donate a morning will go out again in the autumn.

I hope that the foregoing has given some idea of the range of matters dealt with by your local councillors. I pay tribute to them for their continued commitment to local affairs and to their support as also to the dedication of Ron Anderson, our clerk, who serves us well.

John Chapman, Chair.