

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 2 March 2020

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I try to give a comprehensive view of the decisions taken at Council meetings in each edition of 'The Villager'. Therefore in this report, while I am touching on some items you are familiar with from these reports over the year, it is an update following our discussions from the last 2 PC meetings.

Firstly, care of the cemetery: this is our biggest asset and important to everyone in the parish. Fortunately there has been little activity this year, but this is reflected in the low income. We have been warned that the cemetery wall is in a generally poor state which is not surprising since it is over 100 years old. The rebuilding of the fallen sections by Derek and Paul Hogg last spring has been so good that (touch wood) there have been no further collapses despite the high winds of this winter, but we have to consider our options for longterm protection. Councillors are actively investigating options for rebuilding the wall properly to safeguard it for another 100 years. The removal of some of the large leylandii trees seems to have helped but there are still some left which creak alarmingly in high wind. As you are aware tree removal is a considerable expense, and rebuilding of the wall would be a major drain on council finances. We are looking into grants, but Coupled with rising expenses and the expectation by the District Council that parish councils will finance more and more services, councillors have reluctantly acknowledged that we need to rebuild our reserves which have become depleted in recent years as we struggled to absorb the increased expenditure.

We are aware that the cemetery paths need attention and the grass cutting contract will start as usual in May. I must thank those who look after their family plots so well and Mike Schug for spraying the weeds for us when it becomes necessary. We are looking into re-gravelling the paths this year, and I would also like to thank Simon Hogg of Russell Hogg & Sons for his kind offer to provide the gravel. Councillors would appreciate any volunteers to help spread the gravel, and information will be posted on the noticeboards when a timetable has been agreed.

Secondly, Councillors at all levels of local government have had to formulate policies to safeguard both your privacy and the personal information of councillors in a way that has not been necessary in the past.

Passing on of information has become not only easier by using the Internet, but also more regulated which has in turn increased the workload of Parish clerks who must ensure full compliance with government regulations. In 2018-2019 councillors have spent much time discussing and implementing the GDPR regulations, but there is a greater requirement to comply with the Local Government Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities which came in in 2015. In everything that councillors discuss or decide to undertake, the Parish Council

must abide by these regulations. In theory this means that if you want to know why councillors have decided on a specific course of action and what it entails and are unable to attend our meetings, you should be able to go onto a parish website or the parish noticeboards and find out from the documents held or displayed there.

The Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities state we have to publish

- All items of expenditure over £100
- End of year accounts
- Annual Governance Statement
- Internal Audit Report
- List of Councillor responsibilities
- An Asset Register
- Agendas, Minutes and all papers relating to formal meetings.

As part of the Institute Lottery bid, a basic Murton website was set up which our PC Clerk, June, was able to use to publish agenda, minutes, policies and procedures to comply with both the Transparency Code and GDPR regulations.

Last summer we were informed that this website would stop working at the end of September 2019. It was clear that if the council wished to continue to comply, it would be necessary to commission properly designed Parish Council website. This involved a one-off charge of £875.00 with a small annual running cost to cover support and maintenance. Councillors decided to build in the ability for expansion if the Institute committee for example wanted to use it. You can find the website on www.murton.org.uk.

The website gives information and contact details for the councillors and the clerk as well as holding all the documents I have listed. It is an archive for past meetings and we agreed to hold all copies of the Villager so they are readily available to anyone who is interested.

At this point I shall hand over to June to explain a bit more. We have a small matter of business which will demonstrate what I mean.

Thank you June.

The Hilton Bridge project dominated the summer months and I think you will agree with me that the end result made the closure of the bridge and inconvenience to everyone worthwhile. The new stone looks very impressive and the wider bridge has made the crossing of large agricultural equipment, MoD vehicles and lorries/vans much easier. The

bridge has been rebuilt to cope with highest flow of water in Hilton Beck and has been given a really good test in recent weeks.

Councillors have continued to maintain a good working relationship with the Highways Dept at CCC, - sometimes we are lucky for example, the speedy repair to some potholes and the verge cleanup from Langton to Hilton Bridge last week which followed numerous complaints from roadusers. However there are still problem areas such as the cattle grids on Brackenber Moor, flooding on all the roads and a generally poor road surface on all roads which we are raising on a regular basis. I am told that maintenance of the cattle grids is scheduled for the next few months but we have to join the queue of councils looking for cleaning of the gullies and dykes. So thank you to those residents who have been clearing blocked drains to alleviate flooding from the recent storms. There is no information to date about when we shall have resurfacing work but we shall keep asking.

In the next few months, councillors are looking for volunteers to clean up the villages following the success of similar projects over the last 2 years. You may have seen the article in the Herald this weekend about a Cumbria Cleanup project. There will be a litter pick from Murton to the parish boundary with Appleby (weather permitting), probably Sunday 29th March so please check the website and noticeboards for details. If anyone is able to volunteer to help, please speak to Cllr McDarren or contact June or myself.

Our relationship with MoD personnel at Warcop has been a positive one and we continue to liaise with Maj Lynch, the Camp Commandant. Some councillors attend 2 liaison meetings per year at Warcop Camp, one with fellow council representatives to discuss access, matters relating to range use and safety, environmental things such as trees, grazing etc and the other to specifically discuss footpaths, bridlepaths and walkers' access to the range areas within restricted areas. Following the meetings in 2019, councillors agreed to allow the placement of a new fire safety sign at the entrance to the range at Scordale. In exchange for this, Landmarc were authorised by the MoD to improve the carpark at Town Head, Hilton. Following our last meeting, Maj Lynch has arranged with CCC personnel responsible for footpaths to have access to Scordale to repair the bridge which takes the footpath across Hilton Beck to Murton. He has also agreed to make repairs to the steps between the 2 footpaths on the edge of the Range at Scordale so that local residents can continue to enjoy the short walk which uses the steps during the firing times. As these are currently considered to be dangerous, they will be closed until the repairs can be made. Our next liaison meeting is scheduled for May, so if there are any concerns or points you would like us to raise with MoD personnel, please contact the clerk or speak to any of the councillors.

Cllr King is contacting the CCC footpath department to raise the poor state of the stiles and to ask for urgent repair. I suspect that although CCC have responsibility this may take some time and would like to ask individual landowners to make sure rights of way are kept open and safe in the meantime. This is a regular item on our agenda so we shall discuss any progress over the summer and will keep you advised as we get any information.

Finally, EDC are currently reviewing the arrangements for collection of waste throughout the district. We have been told that the Garden waste skips will continue for another season, and no mention has been made to change the current arrangements for recycling. However there may be some change to the arrangements for domestic waste collection. Any information we receive will be posted on the noticeboards, on our website or in the Villager.

Thank you for listening to me so patiently, and I shall open the meeting to you if you have any questions or comments you would like to raise.

Cllr Barbara Govan