

CHAIRMANS REPORT –MAY 2015.

It has been a challenging year over the past 12 months for your Parish Council where we seem to have been in “ continual dispute” with Durham County Planning Authority over Planning applications and associated issues.

- The housing development South of the Close was officially opened in January this year, however the naming as Birkett Close resulted in your council formerly lodging a complaint to Durham CC over the naming process as neither the descendants of the Birkett family nor the Parish Council were consulted on the name selection and its suitability to this new development. It was hardly surprising that Durham CC upheld their decision on the naming as it followed all their procedures and clearly highlighted that local consultation with the community is a low Priority in their ways of working.
- The planning application for a housing development behind Marwood Terrace was successfully contested with a significant number of objections being lodged. The application was refused by Durham South West Planning Committee even though it was recommended for approval by the Durham Planning Authority. However the applicant has gone to appeal over the decision, even against the back drop of the County Strategic Plan being “slated ” by the Independent Planning Inspector. We still await the outcome of this planning appeal.
- The application for the Barn development behind Poplar Cottage again was met with significant local resident and Parish Council objections due to its encroachment in the village conservation area. However in this instance Durham Planning Authority have approved the application and a full report on the reasons why it was approved is available on the Planning Authority’s Website.
- Your Parish Council applied for a tree felling order on the two “Xmas Trees ” at the entrance to Hagg House due to their size and close proximity to the property, in response Durham Planning Authority slapped a tree preservation order on them as they lie within the conservation area. Your Parish Council has subsequently commissioned a detailed inspection report on the condition of the trees (a Noble Fir and Norway Spruce) and will be resubmitting an application to carry out remedial works to the crowns of the trees.
- As a consequence of the Planning issues around housing development within the village and surrounding Parish a Neighbourhood Planning group has been set up to develop a document to be used by Durham Planning Authority for future Planning applications. Detailed information on the background to Neighbourhood Planning and the Localism Act of 2012 has been explained in a series of newsletters to all parishioners. The Parish has been formally granted Neighbourhood Planning Status and the next stages will involve public consultation / engagement events and questionnaires to ascertain the detail of what’s important to everyone around development within the village and surrounding Parish.

Other areas of interest that have been covered by your Parish Council over the past year are

- A Parish Council Website has now been developed in conjunction with Neighbourhood Planning initiative , this website provides a host of information about the Parish,its

history, location and general information on your Parish Council and its governance and Financial information. We hope to bring you monthly snapshots of what is happening in the village and surrounding Parish under the News and Events Section. I wish to express my thanks to Mark Armstrong for the setting up of the website and to Peter and Joyce wood and Paul Gregory for all the great Photographs incorporated within the website.

- High Speed Broadband , BT have currently got approx. half the Village connected onto the new high speed fibre system with the remaining residents being connected shortly. The only downside to this development is our new " green box" on the middle green which unfortunately is something we will have to live with, I'm sure it will blend in with time.
- The village precept was reviewed at our November meeting and agreed to be held at our 2014 level.
- The Xmas tree lights again were a credit to the Village with numerous compliments on the display. Thanks to all involved in putting up and taking down of the trees and lights, special thanks to Mark and Bev Martin for the donation of the tree for the Close.
- A very special thanks to our ground maintenance team of Gerry , Barry, Alan and David for all their hard work in keeping the village greens and cemetery in such pristine condition, a credit to the Village.
- And finally I would like to thank all my fellow Parish Councillors for all their hard work over the past 12 months in what has been a very challenging year, special thanks to Brenda our hard working clerk for all her help and support to the Parish Council, however on a sad note this is her final year as she has decided to retire from the Clerk's position and allow "a younger person " to take over, so on behalf of myself and all the Parish Councillors and I'm sure all the Parish residents I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Brenda for all the hard work she has put in over the past 18 years and wish her well for the future.

Thank you.

Richard W Hunter

Chair

Cotherstone Parish Council.