

## **Mayor's Report to Annual Town Meeting 6 May 2021**

Although I have been your Mayor for five years now, this will be my fourth annual report as we could not hold an annual meeting last year due to Covid. Despite the difficulties during lockdown, it has been another busy and, I feel, successful year for the Town Council. I would particularly like to draw attention to the following matters.

Last year, Liz Stocker stood down as Councillor and I would like to thank Liz for her contribution to Council's work over a number of years. This gave rise to a casual vacancy and we were very fortunate that four excellent candidates came forward from which Lorna Skelton was appointed.

Your current Councillors are, apart from myself and Lorna, Honor Byford, Martin Cade, Nigel Hopper, Simon Wheeler and Greg Fortune.

When we first entered lockdown, we were unable to hold our monthly meetings until the government changed the Law so that virtual council meetings could be held. Our monthly Council meetings, held on the last Wednesday of each month, resumed in May after a 3 month break. At first, it took a bit of getting used to but I think we all adjusted and have probably carried out as much business as if we had been in the same room. The regulations allowing us to meet on Zoom will end soon, but not before we can safely resume meeting in the Key Centre, so there will be another gap without meeting between 28 April and 23 June.

If you wish to follow what we do, all our minutes are published on the Council's website and summarised in the Darlington & Stockton Times. You can of course attend any of our meetings, currently by phone or on the online, and during a 15-minute session at the beginning, you may ask questions.

During this time, Councillors have kept in touch by email and phone and the Clerk has been able to carry out almost all his normal duties from home. Despite the unusual circumstances, I feel that your Council has had the following successes:

- With the Joint Rectors and others, Council has worked with a group of volunteers to help shop and generally support residents deal with the Covid restrictions. Demand for their services has been limited but it is a credit to our community that volunteers have come forward.
- We expect construction to start soon on the burial ground, building a new stone wall and a paved path. We expect that the burial ground shall open later this year.
- Council opened a new website, which is easier to navigate than before with increased number of pages which we hope residents and visitors will find useful.
- 2 Honesty boxes are now installed and have already covered the cost of purchase. These should bring in an additional £1000 per year to be spent in the community.
- We are discussing a Moor management plan with the trainers who lease the Gallops from us. This will not only set out the maintenance requirements but shall agree how everyone can get the best from this wonderful area on our doorstep. We have discussed recent vehicle damage to the grass by trainers and are also reviewing information signs that will set out what visitors can safely do on the Moors.
- Following representations to RDC, a new dog waste bin has been installed along Park Lane. Council has also installed three dispensers for free dog bags. I do encourage everyone to pick up after their dog, there appears to be more than usual uncollected waste at the moment.

- There have been occasional problems with vehicles driving the wrong way from the Springs to St Alkelda's Road. Council successfully requested that NYCC instal new signs at the top end and when the better weather is here will paint wording on the road surface as well.
- Spring clean. This was actually held at in September last year but we shall be running it again in May. We hope that a good band of volunteers will come forward, details will be posted on our website and noticeboards.
- We kept the annual precept the same last year and in 2021-22 - £12,000. Councillors are responsible for setting a budget and whilst our planned activity is very much on a 'business as usual' basis with prudent assumptions for both income and expenditure.; we were faced with a general increase in costs.
- Middleham Herald. I would like to thank Cllr Honor Byford for editing a more frequent Herald during lockdown. Councillors have continued to deliver door to door in the town.

That is all that I have to say. I would be very pleased to take any questions.

Thank you.

Mayor Cllr Sue Fairhurst