

Stocksfield Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report May 2019 – April 2020

Looking back over the year since May 2019 from the current restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is difficult to remember that for the majority of that time it has been business as usual for the Parish Council. We have made preparations for some major developments in the village, continued our focus on securing a safe and pleasant environment for residents, maintained and improved local facilities, and made every effort to deal with any problems that have arisen, often by working in partnership with local, neighbouring and County-wide organisations such as Stocksfield Community Association, Town and Parish Councils, Northumberland County Council and Northumbria Police.

Inspired by the enthusiasm and hard work of Lucy Booth, one of our residents, we decided to draw up a plan to develop an effective network of public access defibrillators throughout the built-up areas of the Parish and in the main settlements of Broomley and Hindley. Lucy had already made a start on this by successfully fundraising on the Painshawfield Estate with a view to installing defibrillators there. Our Clerk, Nick Spencer, was asked to investigate how far defibrillator coverage could realistically be extended and what the likely costs would be for installation and maintenance, and his report was presented to the Parish Council in February 2020. At this meeting, the Council gave outline approval for the installation of eight new defibrillators and cabinets, and asked the Clerk to provide definitive costs for the project for approval at a future meeting. Although an enormous amount of work has been carried out in preparation for this initiative, it is currently on hold pending the lifting of emergency restrictions.

In this, the Cricket Club's centenary year, we have been actively exploring the potential of making significant improvements to the sports fields, including the option of a full size artificial pitch which could increase the range of sports available and reduce the likelihood of games being postponed due to the weather. We are currently waiting for confirmation of the costs for the next stage of the design,



although progress has been stalled for the time being. Due to the damp autumn and winter, part of the surface of the overspill car park which opened last year became waterlogged. Remedial work on this has now been completed, and we hope that the problem has been solved.

The Remembrance Service in November, conducted by Philippa Harpin, took place for the first time without passing vehicles, following a Parish Council decision to close the road on safety grounds. The absence of traffic meant that the procession of soldiers from L (Néry) Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery, followed by young people from the local Scouts and Guides groups, was able to march down the road from Stocksfield station to the War



Memorial, and the service itself was conducted in peace in the autumn sunshine. Following Daphne Threadgold-Reay's generous donation of a World War I commemorative bench in 2018, the Parish Council agreed to purchase a similar bench in memory of World War 2, and the two benches together next to the War Memorial make a fitting tribute to those who fought in both conflicts. My sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this special multi-generational community event.

During the year, the Parish Council has given grants and donations worth around £7,000 to a number of local and County-wide groups, including 1st Stocksfield Scouts, Stocksfield Community Association, Broomley First School Parent Teacher Association, Tyne Rivers Trust and Tynedale Hospice. The funding supports specific projects which benefit members of our community, such as the building of the new Scout Hut and the development of a local community transport scheme. The Council also makes an annual financial contribution to the Parochial Church Council's Burial Board which looks after the cemetery at St Margaret's Church in Hindley, and in addition this year we purchased and installed a litter bin at the cemetery to ensure a tidy and pleasant environment for visitors.



The day-to-day work of the Parish Council can sometimes be taken for granted, but it makes a key contribution to the safe, clean and beautiful place where we live. Our Groundsman, Martin Stewart, undertakes a wide range of tasks throughout the Parish with commendable attention to detail and real commitment. During the year, as well as arranging the usual annual inspection of play equipment by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Council has instigated inspection of all trees on the sports fields and in

the play areas, and inspection of the footbridge over Stocksfield burn. Recommended remedial work will be carried out in order of priority as soon as this is possible.



The Parish Council's Advisory Groups also play an important part in the work by carefully considering and making recommendations for action to the full Council on matters such as planning applications, governance issues and spending. The Rights of Way and Environment Advisory Group, chaired by a Parish Councillor but largely made up of local residents, includes representatives of the group of Tyne Rivers Trust (TRT) volunteers who carry out monthly monitoring and testing of the Stocksfield burn as part of TRT's My Tyne: Adopt a Stream project. The Advisory Group also reviews our footpaths and rights of way. We are very grateful for the contribution that these volunteers make to our local environment.

Business as usual for the Parish Council was seriously disrupted by the Government's introduction of emergency measures on 23 March 2020. The play areas and Multi-Use Games Area at the sports fields have been closed since then,

but the Clerk is continuing to work from home, and the Groundsman is carrying out those tasks which can be done safely and while maintaining social distancing. The last full Parish Council meeting took place on 2 March 2020, but legislation has now been introduced to allow us to carry out virtual meetings. The Clerk and our Vice Chair, Paul Vickers, have put in place the necessary arrangements, and we expect to organise the first of these in the near future. We will continue to monitor emerging Government advice, and will, of course, resume our work in full as soon as this is possible.

In conclusion, I would like to pass on my very sincere thanks to Nick Spencer, the Parish Clerk, for his professionalism and valued support; to Martin Stewart, the Groundsman, for his enthusiasm and commitment; to fellow Parish Councillors for their advice and encouragement; and to our residents for the community spirit they have exemplified at this challenging time.

Maggi Hunt

April 2020