

Annual Parish Meeting May 2021

Chair's remarks

It should be said that the past two years have been slightly unusual in terms of the Parish Council. We appointed our new clerk just prior to the Parish Meeting in 2019. Much of her time in 2019 was occupied learning her way round the Parish and training in connection with her role, in addition to clarifying elements within the Parish Council found to be in an uncertain state, and dealing with an unresolved issue from a MOP.

The Covid19 pandemic has inevitably had a considerable impact throughout 2020 and the Parish Council Meetings were impacted significantly with April, May and June meetings being cancelled with planning consultations taking place predominantly by email. We engaged in a repeated planning appeal remotely and the decision there after so many refusals seemed contrary and one which we may find returns to us in some form if the guidelines set for the development are not scrupulously adhered to.

We then entered into the world of remote meetings from last July until this current month's meeting. These seem to have proceeded more easily than might have been anticipated with just occasional fade outs of the chair owing to Internet viability but the virtual nature has unfortunately impacted negatively on the level of public involvement we have seen. The June meeting is currently anticipated to be back in the real world but there will inevitably be additional Covid19 safeguards.

In this last year, there has been a repeat of the frequent additional demands on the time of the clerk by a series of communications from one MOP, resulting in us again taking measures to reduce the time spent in attempts to resolve what have appeared to be pointless and endless requests for information most of which had already been published on the website.

Whilst I welcome genuine concern from residents, the nature of these demands has really only resulted in unnecessary distraction for the clerk and some of the councillors, and resultant needless council expense in overtime for the clerk. We as a council ended up introducing a further ban for this MOP in response to what has been deemed vexatious behaviour in order to be able to use the clerk's time and the residents' precept for the benefit of other residents.

The idea of a neighbourhood plan was revisited but there was found to be little enthusiasm for progression on this at the present time. This may be something we return to at some point. The implications of the creation of a Unitary Authority have yet to be seen.

We have moved on with the street lighting updates and the last tranche has now been completed. We have updated or implemented various council policies e.g. cemetery management, grant applications, publication, code of conduct. We have continued to support the Hub financially with their activities and support their idea of a buddy bench although it has not been possible to agree a suitable site. We supplied a wreath for Remembrance Sunday but the customary public service was not possible due to Covid restrictions. We have reviewed pricing for the cemetery and the allotments. The Beck has been considered on several occasions and there has been some discussion on how we could address this in a more effective way for the village. The issue of antisocial behaviour linked with the car park was discussed and the insertion of a gate with regard to its position is itself provoking some comment.

The new village website went live in September 2020 and the Web File Manager on this now seems to be working effectively and is accessible by councillors for the relevant documentation. It currently seems to be avoiding the previous issues we were having of occasional 'drop out' of some documentation sent to councillors.

I hope the year ahead will be a little more normal in many respects and that we can enjoy increasing numbers of activities within the Parish.

Councillor Sandra Bell
Chair, Thornton le Dale Parish Council