

THORNTON LE DALE PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT JUNE 2022

The Annual Parish Meeting (for the Electorate) Chair's report – 21st June 2022 6.30 p.m.

As there was only a “virtual” Zoom Annual Parish Meeting last year (May 2021), my comments here relate to the two year period from 2020-2022.

Well a strange year or so. We have had the experience of holding our meetings virtually until June 2021 which worked better certainly than I had anticipated. I think we were glad, if a little apprehensive, to get back to face to face meetings though.

There have been some on-going niggles which I have to say became somewhat ridiculous at times. We took the opportunity to extend the range of our policies to include one for vexatious behaviour which after the initial bout of rather puzzling behaviour by a MOP, at least enabled us to deal with continued attempts to disrupt the workings of the Parish Council more rapidly than we had at first. I suspect one reason why it perhaps took us longer than it might was because we tended to expect individuals to behave reasonably. Probably the greatest puzzle was that we couldn't find out what the actual difficulty or difficulties was or were and, as it turned out, neither could the external auditor or the council's monitoring officer. Unfortunately because the MOP chose to broaden their scope to include what turned out to be completely baseless challenges to the AGAR statement with the external auditor, this meant that a significant proportion(10%) of the Parish precept was squandered by this one MOP. The external auditor is also now aware of the specious nature of the challenges made and the MOP's second attempt was dismissed more rapidly – within less than an hour. Unfortunately one of the councillors seemed to be guided by this MOP to attempt further disruption particularly to the work of the clerk. This is unreasonable behaviour and I hope it will not be continued this coming year. As we as a PC, and indeed the monitoring officer, are now better versed in what options we have available if this does happen, this should not be as disruptive a feature in this year.

The clerk has continued to work effectively for the Parish Council and has chosen to reduce her official hours as she has become more familiar with the processes. She remains prepared to put in extra hours at those times of year when there are particular demands. In fact many of her additional hours of late have only been necessary only because of the previously mentioned situation, it is to be hoped that this need also will be reduced this year. She has also had to deal with some tricky issues relating to the cemetery and I thank her for the attention she has paid to ensure that the council has been acting correctly as in some cases, it has proved difficult to establish the necessary facts.

We have a new caretaker now having had some fresh applicants for this year and Darren has made a good start and is becoming familiar with how he can best use his time in the interests of the Parish. I am confident that we will be able to develop the use of his time in positive ways. The demands are flexible as the perceived needs of the residents develop so it is encouraging that he has a flexible approach. The grass cutting is now with a different contractor and early reports are that this is being done in a very professional fashion.

Work in the churchyard and the cemetery has continued and quite a bit of tree trimming has taken place in this past year so the areas are now looking significantly tidier than they had become.

The Hub have continued with their activities and I thank them for their efforts to improve the village on behalf of the residents. The council have been pleased to help with some funds for their labours. It is good to see the improved look of the railings, even with the continued assaults they suffer from passing – or not – motorists of varying sizes.

We have also continued to support Manthorpe Park with grass cutting.

We have also given funding to the Christmas Lights Committee as they were unable to fundraise for the past two years and the lights are very much a feature of and for all the residents. This is envisaged as a one-off as they should be able to hold their customary event this year.

The allotments continue to be fully utilised and we have a significant waiting list. Now the area where compost and rubbish had accumulated over years has been cleared, it will be more straightforward and obviously less costly to manage the spoil as part of on-going maintenance. Some of the trees on the hedge line have been trimmed to reduce overshadowing or the excessive use of nutrients.

Consultations in preparation for the Jubilee seemed slow to start but gathered momentum and there are events arranged which should provide a range of enjoyable activities for residents. The PC have supplied funding to help with some of these activities.

We have now set up a provision for some grant funding of activities that may be felt to open up further activities for residents in the parish. Currently this is not in great demand but it is to be hoped that it will be called on more in this coming year. I would ask residents to be aware that we will have a certain amount of money available for small individual or group activities or events that residents can put in a bid for by application to the clerk. It is not possible to be specific about what these might be but any application will be considered and approved or not as the PC decides.

The upgrading of the streetlights has now been virtually completed and the PC now has assumed responsibility for their upkeep and repair.

We have continued to consider and comment on planning applications as they are notified to us.

As this has been an election year, unusually after only three years in consequence of the establishment of the unitary authority, there have been changes in the make up of the PC. I thank outgoing Cllrs Garbutt, Sanderson and Argument for their efforts and for their respective contributions throughout their terms of office and hope they will continue their commitment to the locality.

We have some new councillors this year and I hope they will feel able to take advantage of some of the courses available to understand the ways the council sometimes needs to work. I am also hopeful that a range of training offered in this year will be wider and encompass training opportunities relevant for all councillors in view of the increase in our responsibilities anticipated as a consequence of the establishment of the unitary authority; and of course that councillors are willing and able to take them up. We will not need to co-opt any members this year but there were only just enough nominations to fill the council seats. Although this saved the need for an election to be run I think this was a pity as there was not the opportunity for people to express a choice. I hope the current councillors take their role seriously and accept their role as being here to act in the best interests of the residents of the parish.

Covid19 has had a considerable effect on some activities in the village and surrounds but I hope as things increasingly become more settled that village activities, the contributions to the PC and in fact attendance at the meetings will return to what used to be the case which should make for a more harmonious method of operation.

So in the hope that we have better years and period of office in 2022- 2027, I thank residents and councillors for their continued efforts for the community.

Cllr Sandra Bell
Chair Thornton Dale Parish Council
21st June 2022