

Dunford Parish Council

Chair's Report to the Annual Assembly

Thursday 2 April 2009

Since the 2008 Annual Assembly, Dunford Parish Council has seen a period of transition and modernisation that was in part by design and in part by circumstances. Prior to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Council in May 2008, the Clerk to the Council, Joan Cooke, resigned her position, leaving the Council with a significant gap in its capacity to function. At the AGM, I was elected Chair and thus the Council year began without a Clerk and with a new Chair leaving the Council in a state of simply 'ticking over'. Cllr. Val Parkin was elected Vice-Chair and the administrative role of the Clerk was undertaken by Cllr. Allen Pestell until an appointment was made.

Soon after I took over as Chair, the Council was devastated by the loss of Cllr. Janette Whitehead who succumbed to her long illness in July 2008. A Trojan in her campaigning against intrusive wind turbines in the Parish, that planners are seemingly intent on approving, despite overwhelming opposition from local people, Jan is sorely missed by us all, as are her passionate contributions to Council debate.

Due process of recruiting a new Clerk to the Council took place and we were most fortunate to attract and appoint someone with the qualities, skills and knowledge required for such an important yet rare position. Elizabeth Barnard took office at the August Parish Council meeting and I am pleased to report that after a frustrating period of transition for both of us, the Council's administrative, financial and operational systems were returned to the control of the 'proper officer'. Elizabeth has begun a process of modernising the Council's operating systems with up-to-date computer packages to record, present and store the Council's finances and documentation.

Almost immediately Elizabeth had to deal with a bye-election situation, which she dealt with faultlessly. The bye-election resulted in Kath Mitchell being elected unopposed in November. Cllr. Kath Mitchell would have attended her first meeting in December but for it being cancelled due to the snow and we finally welcomed her to the Council in January 2009. We all wish her well and hope she finds her time as a Parish Councillor most rewarding.

The January meeting seemed to draw a line under what had been in many ways a trying period for the Council and I think we all came through it pretty well as in doing so we continued to undertake the important work of the Council in our stride.

The work of the Parish Council is multi-faceted in its statutory duties and in its representative role on behalf of the people of the Parish.

Dunford Parish Council is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the children's play area at Crow Edge. It was clear that a proper system was needed to ensure that the area was kept safe for the children and fit for purpose. To this end the Council contracted with BMBC to provide a programme of grass cutting and to provide the necessary safety inspections. Cllr. Lindsey Devons undertook and recorded visual inspections on a weekly basis.

Much of the Council's work has been of a campaigning nature and we have continued to oppose the proposed wind turbines in the locality. Representations have also been made to BT in an effort to preserve local public phone boxes and to the Post Office to preserve what remains of local services, albeit that our nearest post office is outside of the Parish Boundary at Millhouse Green.

Representations to the local authority to improve the winter gritting services have continued, including submissions to the Environmental Scrutiny Commission. The issue has had a high profile in the local press and we hope to see an improvement next year.

The Council's campaign with Stagecoach to improve the local bus service has too received a high profile involving local elected members, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and Mick Clapham MP, and we continue to monitor the situation. Public transport with an 81% reliability rate in a rural area simply isn't good enough. Compounded by the latest fares hike, it is the Parish Council's view that public transport should be returned to public control.

Residents of Dunford Bridge in particular will be well aware of National Grid's proposed work in replacing their cables that run through Woodhead Tunnel. Work began early 2008 but was postponed for a year and is now due to restart after Easter. National Grid have shown that they are keen to involve the Parish Council and to inform the local community of how the work will progress and joined with the Council in setting up a liaison group that includes local residents. NG held an on-site consultation event in October for residents to view the proposed control building that will replace the existing structures, having taken into account the points raised on the original design by the Dunford Parish Liaison Group. The programme of work will include some re-planting and improvements to the local landscape, a new Parish notice board and the possibility of a memorial to those who died during the construction of the three tunnels. We wish NG success in their work and look forward to continuing the work of the liaison group.

Dunford Parish Council continues its long established working relationship with the Dunford Parish Community Association (DPCA). DPCA manage the Parish Community Centre and organise community events and social functions. The Association is to be congratulated for a superb 2008 Parish Gala and we look forward to this year's event on Saturday 25 July. Cllr. Barbara Cockburn is now chair of the Association.

The Dunford Parish Youth Club goes from strength to strength and we welcome the support of the Safer Neighbourhood Team and the Penistone West Crime & Safety Sub-Group for providing disco nights for the Club at the Parish Centre. BMBC sports workers also provided summer activities on the Parish Centre field during the school summer holidays.

Cllr. Anne Kaye attends and is active on the Penistone West Crime & Safety Sub-Group and reports back to the Council; now a standing agenda item. Since the Penistone Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) and the sub-group were set up a couple of years ago there has been a significant reduction in the levels of crime in the area and the Council will continue to support its work.

Cllr. Kaye also regularly attends the Penistone East & West Area Forum, a local authority meeting held in public at which people can gain an insight into what is happening locally through presentations from various BMBC departments and other agencies. In November the Forum met at the Parish Community Centre and I was given the opportunity to give a presentation on behalf of the Parish Council, as was Doreen Rothery, then Chair of DPCA. Both presentations were well received. There is also a 30 minute question time at Area Forums for members of the public to ask questions of the panel that consists of all 6 local elected members and co-optees from the community. BMBC Cllr. Steve Webber regularly attends meetings of the Parish Council to support its work and is particularly helpful with issues we have with the local authority. I would like to use this opportunity to extend our thanks to Cllr. Webber, other elected members and co-optees of the Area Forum and to Nigel Bath, Area Forum Officer.

The Future

The Annual Assembly is an opportunity for the people of the Parish to reflect upon the work of its Parish Council on their behalf and to offer their priorities for the year ahead. In the future I would like to see more local people participating in the functions of the Parish Council and hope to provide more opportunities for people to get involved and to inform its priorities.

We plan to produce a more regular newsletter to every household in the Parish, not only to inform people of the Council's work but also to provide a medium for dialogue between local residents and the Council. Further consultation is also planned as we review and revise the Parish Plan.

Parish Councils are governing bodies closest to the people and they should respond to their needs. Dunford Parish Council has a duty to listen to the people; it is of paramount importance that the work of the Parish Council reflects the needs and aspirations of the people of the Parish.

Our governing document, *Standing Orders of the Dunford Parish Council*, was drawn up in 1938. I believe we need to adopt a constitution that is more relevant to the 21st Century as part of our modernisation process. The Clerk

to the Council and I will undertake to present a new constitution for Council to consider in due course.

We shall endeavour to make the most of external funding opportunities to compliment the precept and to achieve best value in undertaking the work of the Parish Council, addressing the people's priorities identified at this Annual Assembly and through a process of continuing consultation.



Cllr. Mick Drewry, Chair
Dunford Parish Council