

Chair's Report

At the beginning of this financial year, a proposal was put before the council to restructure the way that it works. The proposal was to create a number of sub-committees with a mind to enabling greater time for detailed debate around improvement opportunities and resolution of current issues. This was also expected to streamline the decision-making process, in order that more meaningful decisions could be made and then acted upon at pace.

At the Annual Meeting in May, the council voted in favour of the proposal and a series of sub-committees were formed and a calendar of meetings was agreed.

This new structure is due for review in May. We hope the community can see a more effective Council delivering change for our community. We believe the council has achieved a great deal on behalf of the parish in the last 12 months and continues to make strides forward in a number of areas.

Policy and Resource Committee

This committee is responsible for recommending policies, both new and amended, and for managing the resources of the council; including setting the precept.

The committee is made up of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council plus two other members. It met 4 times in the year, achieving a great deal; including two new policies for retention of documents and a Code of Conduct. It has set objectives for the Council, focusing the attention of members on what matters most in our community. (Please see objectives section).

A review of the Risk Assessment was carried out to ensure that all risks that the council are exposed to are minimised or mitigated. It also initiated a review of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and the Emergency Plan.

The committee devised a new policy for reviewing the performance of its staff, something which had not been formalised before. This policy will give a more structured and two-way approach to reviewing performance, allowing the member of staff to give their opinions and ask for any training that they may require.

The annual grant giving also went through this committee. The way that grants were dealt with was more robust and was linked with the budget monitoring process to avoid over-spending and linked with the council objectives.

Finally, the budget review and setting of the precept fell to this committee. The procedure for setting a budget was reviewed to ensure a more accurate and formal approach. This led to savings in some areas and the creation of new budget headers, allowing for more accurate accounting and reporting.

This committee will continue to review policies and procedures to ensure that the council is working in the most fair, transparent and correct way.

Amenities and Environment Committee

This committee has a sizeable remit, coupled with an opportunity to make significant visible change for our community. The committee is made up of the Chair or Vice-Chair of the council, the Clerk as Highways Liaison and three other members. It met 4 times in the year and has made inroads in to completing work that has been outstanding for some years.

The request for a fence around the play area came through this committee and after due scrutiny, public engagement and detailed planning and research, this was installed in January 2020. This fence will keep dogs off the play area and children in, making it a safer place to play.

A new grit bin was purchased to enable residents of Stonehouse hamlet to grit the lane servicing several properties. This lane did not meet Cumbria County Council's criteria for a grit bin, but the Parish Council saw it as an important provision.

A new bench has been installed at High Laning and other benches have been repaired by this committee. A new litter bin and new parking signs supporting the shop are also in place or soon to be erected.

A number of the footway lights were defective during the year and with the help of Philip Middleton and Ian Hutt these have been repaired.

The defibrillator at Cowgill was finally installed after discussions with Tony Playfoot to install on the side of his house. Our thanks to Tony for allowing this. A further defibrillator in the disused phone box at Greenwell is currently being considered.

On the roads, this committee has been involved with Verge Maintenance, carriageway repairs, protecting our bridges by working on new signage and road markings and has engaged with Cumbria County Council, on the faults and issues that the dale is currently coping with. It is fair to say this work is ongoing as we have higher aspirations for engagement and support with the council.

The committee also kept a very close eye on developments at Millthrop Bridge, keeping the council informed and up to date. We have asked that the temporary repairs to the bridge remain in situ for this season as we do not want residents, businesses or tourists inconvenienced further this spring / summer season when we have a "workable" bridge. (Update: With the stay at home policy in place, we are now in discussions to have the bridge works completed this summer whilst traffic is light....)

Car Park Committee

The car park committee is one that existed within the council before the new structure but had not met for a number of years and was all but defunct. Members of this committee are the Vice-Chair of the council, the Car Park Administrator and two other members of the council.

After the disappointment of not being able to purchase the car park last year, this committee has been instrumental in securing a new 10-year lease, which gives some security to the village in terms of free parking for residents and the income that is generated. It also negotiated a 10-year agreement for the Music and Beer Festival to take place on the site.

Once the new lease had been signed, the committee were able to appoint a contractor for the toilet refurbishment. This work started in January and is very nearly complete, with just the disabled toilet to be finished. The new toilets are a huge improvement and with a new modern look should last for many years to come.

In order to comply with the terms of the new lease the committee has ordered the removal of all the advertising A-boards at the entrance to car park from 1st April. These will be replaced with a single board, probably mounted on the wall, advertising businesses and potentially with a map of the village. The committee is currently engaging with designers for this.

A noticeboard to replace the barn doors, which had been the font of all local knowledge for many years, has been ordered and will be erected on the bus shelter shortly.

The committee is also at the start of a project to make improvements to the recycling area, including resurfacing and potentially electric vehicle re-charging points which will hopefully encourage tourism and make the area more visually appealing.

The committee considered an increase to the charges but decided that they should remain the same for the coming year, including those for permits used by second home and motorhome owners.

Playing Field Committee

This is another committee that already existed within the council but again had been more or less defunct for a while.

It is made up of the Chair of the council, a member of the council, a representative from Sedbergh and Dent United FC and three co-opted members. The committee has responsibility for all matters to do with the Playing Field and its use.

One of the first matters to be dealt with by this committee was the pavilion. A condition report was ordered which showed that the pavilion was in a dangerous condition and the decision was taken to demolish it on health and safety grounds. Since the field and pavilion is used very little it was agreed that a new pavilion was not required at this time, but the committee continue to seek new ideas and uses for this community resource.

The committee has also been looking at what repairs are required to the field and its perimeter. There are numerous bits of wall that are in need of repair and quotes are being obtained for this work currently. The fence that runs along the edge of the field where it meets the river is to be renewed shortly and the gate has recently been repaired.

The council received almost £6000 in a grant from the Dentedale Show Committee to make repairs and maintain the field and much of the work required will be covered by this money.

The newly merged Sedbergh and Dent FC use the field for matches on a regular basis and were granted permission to erect a new match day sign by the gate.

Other matters

Peter Hunt continues to look after Dentedale.com on behalf of the council. The information that goes on the site relies on people informing Peter. If anyone has an event or information to share, please do get in touch with him at peterhunt260559@gmail.com

Scott Thornley has continued to serve the council as our valued clerk. We thank him for his commitment and organisation of our volunteer Councillors. Never an easy task, which requires much patience and tenacity!

We do still have a vacancy for Parish Councillor and would welcome a new face to join us. Please do contact either Scott or myself if you would like to get involved in supporting our community.

Objectives

At the start of the year the council set itself objectives based on the responses it received from the Parish Questionnaire. These were around:

Housing – Affordable housing for residents

The council has reviewed a number of planning applications over the year and has made meaningful, considered comments on most of them. The council made a policy not to support any applications for second homes in the dale as the number of them is already excessive and they remove opportunities for families to live in the dale, keeping the dale “alive”.

Promoting Tourism and The Dale –

The council has supported opportunities to improve the dale and promote tourism. The work recently completed on the public toilets is testament to this. In other areas the council has worked with the BBC on a walking programme to be aired in Autumn, allowing filming in Dent village and up to Cowgill.

Improve Health and Wellbeing and the Environment of the Dale –

The fence erected around the playground on the green is a great example of how the council has responded to requests from parishioners to provide safe and healthy places for children to play. There has been a push to stop dog-fouling in Dent village with dog bag dispensers being purchased and placed at key locations.

The council is currently heavily involved in the response to the Coronavirus outbreak, gathering volunteers and setting up a central helpline.
The removal of the pavilion on the playing field was necessary to ensure a safer environment for users of the field and for children.

Support our School and Pre-School –

By adopting it's planning policy on second homes the council is trying to stop the decline in pupil numbers at the school and pre-school. The council has provided a grant to the school to enable the purchase of software to enhance learning.

Juliet Hoggar

Chair – Dent with Cowgill Parish Council