

Chairman's Annual Report 2023/24

Welcome to Over Kellet Parish Council's May meeting and our Annual Meeting. My apologies for not being there with you. Our monthly meetings endeavour to stimulate an exchange of ideas and experience and ensure that all have a chance to express their views freely.

I am very pleased to report that we now have a full complement of Councillors with a range of ages and skills who help to keep Over Kellet in good order. The Parish Council provides a key role in supporting all residents and it is particularly pleasing to see that many new residents are keen to contribute to our community and get involved in village life.

From May 2023 the Boundary Commission decreed that Nether Kellet and Over Kellet should be combined with Halton to form a new City Council electoral Ward. None of the affected Parish Councils were consulted in advance of these changes. The new Ward of Halton with Aughton and Kellet is now represented by two Green Party City Councillors, James Sommerville and Sarah McGowan.

This new extended area of responsibility is undoubtedly a challenge to our new Councillors. We have been grateful for the attention and support they have provided so far and we will no doubt be seeking more assistance in the future.

As a Parish Council we have limited influence on planning applications and aim to make decisions that we feel are beneficial for the village as a whole. We receive a large number of applications throughout the year and comment on these after reading all the relevant documents. This is a time-consuming process and very frustrating when we have no direct response or further consultation from the Planning Department.

The Council continues to pressure the Royal Mail to re-open the Post Box on the Green and the new owners of the former shop have expressed that they are keen to have the box returned to its former state of Pillar Box Red and returned to active use. The weekly Post Office service in the Village Hall continues to be funded by the Parish Council and thanks go to the postmaster at Carnforth for providing the service. The Village Hall itself continues to be an important aspect of village life and hosts numerous events and activities.

Many topics for discussion recur during the year, particularly the condition of footpaths. Unfortunately our limited budget puts many repairs beyond our reach but, with the help of our Lengthsman, we do try and ensure that the local paths and pavements are kept in good order. Our County Councillor Phillippa Williamson does an excellent job of assisting us and liaising with the various departments at County level, particularly those concerned with our road network. Speeding traffic through the village continues to present a problem but strangely some of the fastest vehicles have been those leaving the village.

The past year has seen the installation of the new Ring of Bells in St Cuthbert's, a team of volunteers having assisted the professional tradesmen in their task. Donations were also received from residents and other interested parties. The Parish Council was happy to

support the project with a contribution from the Wind Turbine Community Benefit funding provided by Back Lane Renewables.

The two quarry companies, Aggregate Industries and Tarmac recently joined forces to give a presentation in the Village Hall to outline their plans to deepen the quarry in the coming years. The Parish Council carried out a survey to determine the perceived impact of the activity at the quarry and concerns about the proposal. The results of the survey can be found in a report on the Over Kellet Parish Council website and any further reports and plans issued by the Quarries will also be published online.

The Parish Council has recently applied to Lancaster City Council to have The Eagle's Head designated as an 'Asset of Community Value' thereby providing some protection of its ongoing operation as a public house. Unfortunately, we have just heard that the application has been rejected by the City Council, but it is heartening to see that the pub is now being refurbished and we look forward to it re-opening in the near future.

In a similar vein the Parish Council has entered into discussions with the City Council to have the Church Bank circle designated as a 'Local Green Space' and help safeguard its future as an open space. Thanks to a generous contribution by a resident, two picnic benches will shortly be installed on the circle. Similarly, a resident donation has been pledged to assist the School with the cost of refurbishing the playground, to which the Parish Council will also be contributing.

For the coming year the Parish Council will be reviewing the Parish Plan and aiming to identify achievable goals to sustain and improve village life.

Current and possible future projects include:

- Assisting the PCC in providing a 'safe space' for the ceremony on Remembrance Sunday now that road safety issues need to adhere to formal guidelines;
- Production and installation of a new interpretation board for the Dub;
- Purchase and installation of bat and swift boxes;
- General wilding of green spaces and development of a further wildflowering area within the parish.

And so to Christmas. Thanks to Aggregate Industries for once again donating a splendid tree and to Walling UK Ltd, the Lengthsman Mike Ashton and all those volunteers who help to put it up and decorate it.

There is much more that can be said about the work of the Parish Council and activities in the village but time is limited and, don't forget, in five weeks' time the nights will start drawing in.

Graham Agnew, Parish Chairman