

WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

April 2022 – March 2023

The Parish Council has had a busy and productive 2022/23 and continues to work to meet the needs of the community by listening and responding to local issues. The Parish Council has continued to work closely with the Police, Neighbourhood Wardens, Durham County Council, County Councillors, community groups and local organisations on matters which affect the parish area.

I would like to thank all Members of the Parish Council for their continued support during my year as Chair of the Parish Council. I would also like to thank County Councillors Lucy Hovvels and Chris Varty for their support during the last year.

J Miller
Chair to Wheatley Hill Parish Council

The Parish Council has had an active and productive year. The annual report gives a small indication of some of the Parish Council's activities over the past year.

1. Precept

The Council's budget for 2022/2023 was set at £132,391.

The Parish Councils budget is financed by a Precept which is part of the Council Tax that is collected from local electors via their Council Tax payment. The Parish Council is also reliant upon Central Government grant support. The grant called the Council Tax Support Scheme is paid direct to Durham County Council who then redistribute the grant to parish and town councils. The County Council is under no obligation to do this and since its introduction the grant the Parish receives has reduced each year. Wherever possible the Parish Council uses reserves to keep the precept as low as possible for residents.

For the financial year 2022/23 Wheatley Hill Parish Council received a Council Tax Support Scheme grant of £8,432.

The Parish Council required £132,391 for the 2022/2023 financial year. It used £7,048 of reserves to provide a precept of £116,911 which together with a grant of £8,432 gave a total of £124,172 that was requested from Durham County Council.

2. Finance

The Council remains in a healthy financial position. The main areas of expenditure during 2022/23 included the Cemetery, grounds maintenance and floral arrangements, allotments, youth provision, football changing rooms and financially supporting Wheatley Hill Community Association at the Greenhills Centre.

3. Cemetery

The Cemetery continues to be a significant focus for the Council. The Cemetery is home to the Heritage Centre Building which houses a permanent exhibition of an East Durham Colliery Home as well as many artefacts and photographs which have been donated by local people, and friends and families now living away from the village. The Centre is staffed by a small team of dedicated volunteers and continues to thrive.

The Cemetery is home to the grave of miners' leader, Peter Lee which is the only listed monument in the East Durham area. Also located in the Cemetery is the Thomas Kenny VC memorial stone and "The Last Shift" a miner memorial sculpture by local artist Ray Lonsdale.

4. Allotments

The Council owns and manages an allotment site at Quilstyle Road.

The Parish Council is committed to investing and improving the site and a programme of improvements has resulted in the creation of additional plots. During 2022/23 the site has grown from 23 plots to 29.

The Parish Council has worked closely with tenants, the Police and Neighbourhood Wardens to tackle issues such as fly tipping and criminal activity at the site.

The Parish Council will continue to invest in the site and the programme of improvements will continue.

5. Planning

The Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications submitted to Durham County Council. This allows the Parish Council the opportunity to comment, object or support any application submitted from within the village. During 2022/23 the Parish Council was consulted on 18 planning applications within the parish area and 1 appeal. In response to the applications received the Parish Council submitted 3 letters of support and 1 letter of concern.

6. Front Street

The Parish Council continues to work with the Police, Neighbourhood Wardens, and Durham County Council to tackle problems on the Front Street and in the vicinity which includes anti-social behaviour, absentee landlords and empty and boarded up properties, criminal damage and crime.

7. Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is still an issue particularly around the Front Street area. The Parish Council will continue to work closely with the Police, Durham County Council, and the local Neighbourhood Wardens to tackle the problem.

8. The Greenhills Centre

The Parish Council wants to provide activities and events for children and residents in the village. However, with no staff to deliver on a large scale it works in partnership with Wheatley Hill Community Association at the Greenhills Centre.

The Parish Council provides funding for a wide range of activities and events which are delivered by the Greenhills Centre. During the 2022/2023 financial year the Parish Council funded a programme of activities to the value of £10,000.

9. Durham City Youth Project

The Parish Council had previously funded Durham City Youth Project (DCYP) to deliver weekly youth sessions in Wheatley Hill. One session for juniors, aged 8-11 years and an outreach session for seniors, aged 13-19 years.

Youth provision was a priority, and the Parish Council was working in partnership with neighbouring Parish Councils Wingate and Trimdon Foundry to investigate the possibility of funding a permanent youth worker to cover all 3 villages. Initially DCYP had undertaken a youth consultation in the 3 villages to fully understand what the youth wanted.

10. New Play Park at the Greenhills Centre

Wheatley Hill Community Association (WHCA) officially opened its new play park at the Greenhills Centre on 1 June 2022.

The cost of the new play park was £102,000. WHCA had successfully applied to Durham County Council for £65,000 Section 106 funding. They received £5,000 each from County Councillors L Hovvels and C Varty and £10,000 from County Councillor Jake Miller. The Parish Council contributed £10,000 leaving £7,000 to be funded by WHCA.

The new play park was named “The Morris Nicholls Community Play Park” in memory of the late Councillor Morris Nicholls. The park was officially opened by Mrs M Nicholls and K Nicholls.

11. Queens Platinum Jubilee

To celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee the Parish Council held a community event which culminated in the lighting of a Platinum Jubilee beacon. The event was a huge success and brought all the community together to celebrate this unique event.

12 Section 137 Donations

During 2022/23 the Parish Council provided grants and donations to local groups and charitable organisations. All requests for assistance are made in writing to the Council. Listed below are the groups and organisations who received financial assistance during the 2022/23 financial year in line with the budgeted allocation.

Wheatley Hill Workmen’s Social Club	100.00
Wheatley Hill Disabled Club	220.00
Wheatley House Senior Citizens Club	100.00
Great North Air Ambulance	100.00
2nd Wheatley Hill Scout Group	500.00
North East Ambulance Trust Fund	100.00
All Saints Church	100.00
Stars Community Learning CIC	350.00
Wheatley Hill Community Nursery	100.00
Wheatley Hill Community Association	250.00
All Saints Church	100.00
TOTAL	2,020.00

13. Community Defibrillators

During 2022/23 the Parish Council provided a further 2 community defibrillators for the village. An internal defibrillator is located at the football changing rooms and an external defibrillator is installed in a locked cabinet on the outside wall of All Saints Church.

An awareness training session on using the defibrillators was provided by the North East Ambulance Service. The session was open to Councillors, community organisations/groups, local businesses, and residents.

14. Community Action Team Project

During 2022/23 a Community Action Team (CAT) project was undertaken in the village. The CAT brought together residents and a range of organisations to tackle housing and environmental issues in a specific area by identifying local priorities and making the best use of resources.

The CAT project lasted 11 weeks and ran from 10 October to 24 December 2022.

15. Remembrance Sunday

The Parish Council purchased 100 lamppost poppies from the Royal British Legion. The poppies were displayed on lampposts between All Saints Church and the Cemetery on Remembrance Sunday

16. Dog Fouling

As in previous years the Parish Council provided free Poop bags to all residents living in Wheatley Hill. To combat dog fouling and encourage responsible dog ownership it is proposed that the provision of free bags, for residents living in Wheatley Hill, will continue for the foreseeable future. Dog bags are available from the Heritage Centre, Wheatley House and the Greenhills Centre.

For further details please visit our website www.wheatleyhill.parish.durham.gov.uk

Email: clerk.whpc@btinternet.com

Tel: 01915279027