

WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

April 2023 – March 2024

The Parish Council has had a busy and productive 2023/2024 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 2023/2024 was set at £130,279.

The Parish Council's 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 2023/24 Wheatley Hill Parish Council received an increased Council Tax Support Scheme grant of £9,321.

The Parish Council required £130,279 for the 2023/2024 financial year. It used £3,792 of reserves to provide a precept of £126,487 which together with a grant of £9,321 gave a total of £126,487 that was requested from Durham County Council.

2. Finance

The Council remains in a healthy financial position. The main areas of expenditure during 2023/24 included the Cemetery, youth provision, grounds maintenance and floral arrangements.

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 has worked closely with tenants, the Police and Neighbourhood Wardens to tackle issues such as fly tipping, anti-social behaviour and criminal activity at the site.

The Parish Council is committed to investing and improving 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 2023/24 the Parish Council was consulted on 10 planning applications within the parish area. In response to the applications received the Parish Council submitted 1 letter of objection. The application subsequently went to the Central Area Planning Committee which was attended by the Chair of the Parish Council.

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

During the 2023/24 financial year the Parish Council financially assisted the Greenhills centre.

The Parish Council contributed £1,800 towards a new oven, paid £6,000 towards the gas and electricity at the centre and contributed £500 to a Christmas event. The Parish Council also donated 2 Christmas Trees to the centre.

9. Youth Project

The Parish Council provides funding for 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 is a priority, and the Parish Council has been working in partnership with neighbouring Parish Councils to investigate the possibility of funding a permanent youth worker to cover a larger area.

10. Section 137 Donations

During 2023/24 the Parish Council provided grants and donations, amounting to £2,770, to local groups and charitable organisations. Listed below are the groups and organisations who received financial assistance during 2023/24 in line with the budgeted allocation.

Wheatley House Senior Citizens Club	100.00
2nd Wheatley Hill Scout Group	120.00
Wheatley Hill Banner Group	600.00
Wheatley Hill Primary School	200.00
All Saints Church	50.00
Wheatley Hill Disabled Club	200.00
Wheatley Hill Workmen's Monday Club	100.00
Wheatley Hill History Club	500.00
All Saints Church	100.00
Great North Air Ambulance	100.00
Wheatley Hill Community Nursery	100.00
Wheatley Hill Community Association	500.00
Wheatley House Moving Forward	200.00

11. Remembrance Sunday

The Parish Council erected over 100 lamppost poppies between All Saints Church and the Cemetery for the annual Remembrance Sunday service which was held on 12 November 2023 in Wheatley Hill Cemetery.

12. 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.wheatleyhillparish.co.uk

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