

***DALTON-LE-DALE PARISH COUNCIL***

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2001/2002**

**PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING - 2nd MAY 2002**

Ladies & Gentlemen,

The pace of Parish Council life seems to increase almost with every passing week, and we are having to gear ourselves up to a new, more pro-active regime, if we are to keep step with Government plans for an extension to the role of the most basic, grassroots tier of local government.

Depending on one's outlook, the new Rural White Paper offers parish councils either a nightmare of bureaucracy or an exciting opportunity to play an increasingly active part in the life of their communities, and in Dalton-le-Dale, we are looking to grasp this opportunity with enthusiasm.

The new concept of "Quality" parish councils, while not mandatory, does offer a number of advantages to those who meet the criteria, not least in the possibility of extra financial resources and the loosening of the restrictions under which parishes have operated for so long.

Meanwhile, the daily task goes on, and a study of the Council Minutes for the past twelve months, emphasises just how much variety there is in the work of a parish councillor, and indeed a parish clerk. Members are not segregated into committees to concentrate on a few separate topics or functions; they become involved in every single aspect of community life, and while this is of necessity on a relatively small scale, it is no less important for that. That said, it has been thought necessary to set up two groups to consider any urgent items which may arise between meetings, so that the Council can be appraised of the situation as quickly as possible and offered recommendations for appropriate action. One group deals with Planning, Conservation, Regeneration and Health & Safety, while the other handles Maintenance, Publicity & Communications and General Purposes. Each group comprises four members, so that everyone has a part to play.

One single topic which has been ongoing, indeed it was started in 1999, is the Millennium Window for St. Andrew's Church. A number of delays have been experienced, not least in achieving agreement on the design, but I am pleased to report that matters are now progressing apace. Two designs have been considered by the Council, submitted by artists well experienced in working in the stained glass medium. The next step is to take the two submissions to the Vicar and the Parochial Church Council, when it is hoped that agreement can be reached, and the work of installation can begin.

Another matter in which delays have been experienced has been in the re-instatement of the hedgerows on the public footpath south of Dalton Bridge. It is hoped that grant aid can be obtained through the County Council, and accordingly, the relevant specification has been passed to a number of contractors for pricing, but surprisingly, there seems to be little interest in tendering for the work. The planting season has now passed, so we must wait until the next opportunity comes round.

During the year, the Parish Council funded a secondary programme of traffic calming measures in the village, to supplement those provided by the County Council. This was found to be necessary since many motorists felt the need to by-pass the humps on Dene Road and use the parallel service road, causing nuisance and danger to residents emerging from their drives. We also contributed towards the cost of widening the entrance road to Overdene Estate, to assist residents and other users, especially service and emergency vehicles.

The year has also seen the emergence of a newly constituted Community Association, and great strides have already been made towards the provision of a new community hall, which will provide a much needed facility for the whole of the parish. Although the Parish Council is not immediately involved in this project, it has given its wholehearted support in helping to achieve a focal point for community life, and a venue for what is hoped will prove to be a multitude of uses.

The Council is committed to protect and enhance the environment of the parish, and has recently attempted without success, to gain Conservation Area Status for the village itself. The claim was based on the history of the village, the age and architectural significance of St Andrew's Church, the old bridge - reputed to have been used by Oliver Cromwell, and Dalton-le-Dale's association with the ancestors of the Queen Mother. Failure to achieve this recognition has spurred us to greater efforts, and we are now planning an "environmental makeover" hopefully with the use of grant aid from the Countryside Agency.

We are also embarking on the resurfacing of the two footpaths which cross the St Andrew's recreation area, the re-instating of the steps leading to the road B1285 and the clearing of undergrowth in these areas. This too will be subject to grant through the County Council's Parish Paths Partnership. Once this is completed satisfactorily, attention will be given to the improvement of the "yellow brick road" footpath alongside the village stream.

Each of these areas has been provided with a dog waste bin, so that grass and footpaths can be kept free of this all-pervading problem, especially in areas where children play. The bins are serviced weekly by the District Council, so there is no excuse for any further nuisance of this nature. The bins have been a success, and farther provision will be considered in other areas as appropriate.

During the year, we became involved with the District Council's Economic Audit and Community Appraisal initiative. This was established in order to identify a number of community needs throughout the district, the intention being to address them as far as possible with the use of European funding. At the present time, the Government Office for the North East is equating the findings, and their decision is awaited.

In keeping with the onward march of technology, the Council has accepted the invitation to participate in a Web Site set up by a resident. At the present time, the monthly Minutes appear on this site, with the occasional item of information regarding Council activities. The address is [www.dalton-le-dale.com](http://www.dalton-le-dale.com) The Clerk has also been given Internet facilities, with an e-mail address of [johnabbot@daltonledalepc.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:johnabbot@daltonledalepc.fsnet.co.uk)

In accordance with the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000 which established a

new Ethical Framework for local government, the members of the Parish Council have now formally adopted a Code of Conduct, and have individually signed their acceptance of their undertaking to observe the Code. They have also supplied personal details which will form part of the newly required (for parish councils) Register of Members' Interests. Copies of this register will be held by the Standards Board for England, and by the Standards Officer of Easington District Council. Furthermore, although smaller parish councils are not legally bound by the Government's Best Value regime, they are strongly urged to observe best value principles, and Dalton-le-Dale Parish Council is happy to embrace this request. The Council is also bound by a strict financial audit regime, with both internal and external checks on the accounts and financial procedures.

As part of the criteria for the attainment of Quality Status, the Council is considering the establishing of a periodic parish newsletter, in order to inform residents of its work, and as part of this aim, two new notice boards have been provided, at the entrance to the Dalton Heights and Dalton Grange estates. These give details of how the Council might be contacted, carry an Agenda of each monthly meeting, and the Minutes of each meeting after approval by members. Meetings are held in the W.I.Hall in the village on the first Thursday of each month, with the exception of January and August, and are open to residents with the opportunity for representations to be put if applicable.

Throughout the year, the Parish Council consults regularly with both the District and County Councils, and my thanks are due to the members and officers of these authorities in this regard. Similarly, there is a Police presence at every meeting (operational requirements permitting), and this provides an excellent two-way opportunity to report on problems which might have arisen. This dialogue is most important and has proved invaluable on more than one occasion.

For some time, the Council has operated with one councillor less than its full complement of nine. At the present time, the northern part of the parish is not represented, despite repeated efforts to fill the vacancy, and I would appeal to any local government elector who might be interested in taking on this role, to come forward.

Finally, I have to pay a warm tribute to my fellow members, who have supported me so well during my term of office. I feel that it is one of the strengths of the Parish Council that it is entirely non-political. We all have the interests of the parish at heart, and I can assure everyone that we do acknowledge at every opportunity that the parish does not stop at the village itself. That is why we appeal for someone to come forward who can put to us the views of people in the "upper" part, who after all represent by far the greater part of our population.

Whoever succeeds me as Chairman will have my full support, and I wish him or her well during their term of office in what promises to be another exciting and hopefully fruitful year in the history of the Parish of Dalton-le-Dale, now 106 years old!

Thank you all.  
Councillor W. Hepplewhite  
Chairman

**N.B. The Clerk to the Council (John Abbot) can be contacted on 0191 528631**