

DALTON-LE-DALE PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2002/2003

PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 8th MAY 2003

Ladies & Gentlemen,

The year 2002/2003 must surely have been one of the busiest and most fulfilling in the Parish Council's history, and it has been a pleasure and a privilege to serve as Chairman during this exciting period.

The activities started early, with a Golden Jubilee visit by Her Majesty the Queen to the Easington District on 8th May, when I was delighted to receive an invitation, along with my wife, to be a guest at the official ceremony. Despite the disappointing weather, the visit passed off perfectly, and Dalton-le-Dale was further represented by a wonderful joint visual display by the members of the Women's Institute, the Parochial Church Council and the Community Association.

Monday 3rd June was another memorable day in the Parish, when we held our Golden Jubilee celebrations in and around the W.I.Hall. Perfect weather ensured a capacity attendance for the afternoon side shows and "fun of the fair" events and the children's disco and party, while the evening was given over to a buffet supper and karaoke for the adults, during which a surprising number of talented voices made their debut! The weekend also included a very well contested 5 a-side football tournament, organised very ably by three of the village youngsters, totally on their own initiative. The whole event was a triumph for community involvement, and we hope that these activities will become more and more the norm when the new community hall is completed.

The Parish Council's Garden Competition was re-vamped during the year, with some valuable advice and practical assistance by Keith Henson of Seaham Town Council's Parks Department, who also acted as Judge. Under the new banner of "Dalton-le-Dale in Bloom" the competition attracted some first class entries, and we hope that in 2003, we will have more people taking part. Entry is free and application forms will be available shortly.

On an international theme, Dalton-le-Dale was also involved in welcoming members of a party of children from the ill-fated Russian town of Chernobyl. Three families very kindly agreed to host 6 of the children, who thoroughly enjoyed their visit to the north east, and the Parish Council was pleased to be able to give some financial support for this very worthwhile venture.

For the past three or four years, the Chairman's report has included a mention of the planned new stained glass window for St. Andrew's Church. It was in fact intended to be a Millennium feature, but in the event, a long list of delays and prevarications has meant that the window is not yet in place, despite our best efforts. However, I am pleased to report that we are now in the final straight, awaiting the grant of a faculty from the Diocese of Durham, which is in effect an ecclesiastical planning approval, and as soon as this is received, the manufacture of the window can begin.

During the year, the Council is pleased to have been able to re-instate a well-loved and used feature of the parish – the hedgerow running south from Cromwell’s bridge to the boundary with Hawthorn Parish. Over the years, large unsightly gaps have appeared in the hedge as a result of agricultural operations, but thanks in large measure to the kind co-operation of the farmer, and a grant from Durham County Council, the gaps have been filled, and over time, the new saplings will knit together to form a continuous length.

In keeping with the current fashion, the Council is currently involved in replacing the parish nameplate signs with the new, attractive signage of gold lettering on a blue background. In partnership with the County Council, new signs will be placed on the Graham Way and at the parish boundary on Stockton Road near the petrol filling station, as well as at the Murton boundary.

Also with the assistance of a County Council grant, the two public footpaths which cross the St. Andrew’s recreation area, have been cleared of undergrowth and re-surfaced, and the steps leading to the A19 near the pumping station have been made safer for pedestrians.

Two more dog waste bins have been provided, one in the vicinity of Waring Terrace and Watson Close, and one in Weymouth Drive at Dalton Grange. Hopefully they will be put to good use!

Environmental matters generally continue to exercise the mind of the Parish Council, and it will shortly open discussions and negotiations with the Countryside Agency, the “Doorstep Greens” organisation and the District and County Councils to have a cosmetic “makeover” of the areas surrounding the village green and Cromwell’s bridge. This will be part of an effort to secure Conservation status for that part of the village, which has been put forward as a possibility in past Local Plans adopted by the District of Easington.

In recent times, concern has been growing over the condition of the old horse chestnut tree in the Churchyard, which is assuming more of a lean, and some of whose branches are in danger of splitting and falling into the footpath and roadway. The situation is exacerbated in the conker season, when whole families attempt by one means or another to collect as much of the fruit as they can, and in the process they cause nuisance to nearby residents, more damage to the tree, and a collection of rubbish in the Churchyard. A solution to the problem has been identified, and remedial work will commence shortly.

The Council remains vigilant over planning applications, and plays a full part in the consultation process, in order to safeguard the interests both of the environment and the comfort and convenience of residents.

For the first time in its history, the Parish has been divided into two electoral wards – Dalton Village Ward, comprising the village itself and Overdene, and which will remain in Murton East Ward, and Dalton Urban Ward covering the remainder of the Parish, and which will move into Deneside Ward. The two wards will have 4 and 5 seats respectively on the Parish Council. At the recent Local Government election, only four nominations were received for each ward and consequently the nominees were declared elected without contest. As a result a vacancy immediately occurs in the

Dalton Urban ward, which will have to be filled by co-option, and we hope that interested persons will come forward to offer their services as a Parish Councillor. The Council is conscious of the fact that the northern part of the Parish has been grossly under-represented for some time, and totally mistakenly, there is a presumption that it places a disproportionate importance on the village. Here is the opportunity to challenge this belief.

During the year, we welcomed Councillor Leslie Keegan of Dalton Heights as a co-opted member - our only member resident in that part of the Parish. Sadly we were sorry to learn that Councillor Eddie Armstrong did not seek nomination for re-election, and I would like to pay tribute to Eddie for his service to the Council over many years, some of them as Chairman.

Your Council intends to use new Government legislation to seek "Quality Status" which will become available in the relatively near future, success in which will emphasise its stated aim of serving the whole of the Parish in a prudent and professional manner. We already satisfy the majority of the criteria for the granting of the status, including the publication and distribution of a periodical newsletter, the first issue of which was delivered to every home in the parish in January, and we are quietly confident that we will succeed. Time will tell. The Parish web site continues to expand, and is updated regularly with community news and Council matters, including the Minutes of every meeting.

We feel that our record over the years bears close examination, and that financially, our affairs are handled in a proper manner. Our accounts are open to inspection by any local government elector for the parish, and are examined annually by an independent internal auditor, and by professional auditors appointed recently to succeed the previous method of audit performed by the Audit Commission. Additionally, two Councillors who are expressly excluded from signing cheques for the payment of accounts, carry out a quarterly inspection of the accounts and bank balances. All of these processes are in line with Government requirements.

We have once more approved an unchanged Precept of £11,000 which we receive in half-yearly instalments from the District Council, which in turn recovers this from Council Tax payers as an additional item to their annual Council Tax bill.

Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk are available at any time to answer residents' queries and bring to Council any of their concerns, and I pay tribute to the work which they do over the year, and the support which they give to me as Chairman. I am confident that whoever might succeed me as Chairman for the new civic year will receive the same level of support.

I would also like to thank the members and officers of the District and County Council on whom we rely for information and the provision of many of the services which we enjoy, and to the local Police officers who attend our meetings whenever operational duties allow, and give valuable expert advice and assistance.

Thank you all.

Councillor W.Hepplewhite

Chairman

N.B. The Clerk to the Council (John Abbot) can be contacted on 0191 528 6314

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