

Thirlwall Parish Council Chair's annual report 2019/20

The annual meeting will, we hope, take place in advance of our next scheduled Parish Council meeting on 8th July in the meantime here is my report for the year to the end of March – that is until the end of business as we knew it...

Keep well, stay safe, things will get better!

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People

In November of last year we said a heartfelt thanks to Susan Saunders who was our clerk for 18 months whilst Catherine Jarvis took a break to study. Susan, an experienced and efficient clerk, really sorted out our documents, policies and procedures and provided me and my fellow councillors with valued advice on the proper way of doing things. Catherine returned to a job which she said “is 80% different to the one I had been doing”. Welcome back, Catherine! We appreciate having a clerk who lives in the parish and understands the issues we are dealing with.

Thanks to volunteers:

- Sue Maughan who continues to carry out weekly checks on the playground.
- Jan & Chris Kippax in Longbyre and Andi Keen in Gilsland for routine checks on the defibrillators.

Also thanks to John Dixon who is contracted to cut grass in the Gilsland Play Park and at Longbyre. Both areas are well maintained for a very modest fee.

Actions – done and dusted

- We addressed parking issues at the village hall, Play Park and access to Riversdale with double yellow lines and improved signage.
- We were required to have an assessment of all the trees on our land – namely those in the Gilsland Play Park and Longbyre. This was done by Gavin Reichert, a parishioner and arborist and, where work was required, this has been completed.
- We refurbished the Gilsland noticeboard outside the village hall with perspex in the window rather than glass.
- Unfortunately we had to close the Play Park in March and, at the time of writing, it remains closed. We apologise for this, but really have no choice in the matter. However we were able to get the repainting and repairs done so, once it is safe to re-open, there should not be any more disruption to use. Thanks to Dave Berry for a great job.

On-going activities and things we facilitate

- **Keeping in touch & Covid-19**

The closure of the Gilsland School in March left the editors of the Gilsland Magazine with nowhere to print the April issue. Our clerk had recently purchased a new printer for the council and we were able to print the magazine so it went out 'as normal'. Since then we have supported, and will continue to support, the Longbyre and Gilsland Covid-19 Community Group. We can also help individuals to apply to the West Northumberland Hardship Fund.

- **Timber extraction.**

The timber movement arrangements, after a couple of initial hiccups, were generally

satisfactory last year. We called a public meeting in January to discuss ongoing arrangements for this year (and another three periods of extraction in the next ten years). However this season's plans have been scuppered by the pandemic, we await news from Tilhill as to when they next propose to move timber.

- **Longbyre dispute.**

We have an ongoing issue in Longbyre concerning trespass and encroachment on parish land. This has been discussed at length in recent meetings – and was the main topic of two extra meetings - but is now subject to legal proceedings and open discussion is therefore minimal. We have a duty to safeguard amenities for our residents but must also act responsibly when making financial decisions. We are looking at the parking issue in Longbyre and the possibility of creating parking spaces on the green at the top of the village.

- **Visit Gilsland Website.**

We are paying the maintenance and upkeep costs of the the village website. Our clerk puts up documents and news relating to the parish – this includes things like road closures as well as meeting agendas, policies, photos etc. Contact Nigel Jarvis nigel@fourwynnds.com with any updates to the site. He can be provided with business details and information for tourists (once they are welcome to return!) and any general news. Contact Alison Higgs alison.gilsland@gmail.com to update any info about local groups and voluntary activities. Nigel and Alison would welcome more submissions to keep the site up to date and fresh. Take a look: <https://visitgilsland.org.uk/>

- **Nature Group.**

The Gilsland Nature group have started their project by planting some fruit trees in a small area of the Play Park and have plans for a mural in the bus stop.

- **Campaign to Open Gilsland Station.**

I continue as a committee member of COGS but have little to report. It was felt that new projects were on hold whilst politicians were consumed with Brexit and then Covid-19 arrived... It will undoubtedly be a different world when things re-open. The campaign is not dead!

- **National Trail route**

In her most recent communication with us Lorna Lazzari, the National Trail Officer describes what is currently signed a 'diversion' through the village as an 'alternative'. Here is what she said *"No decision has been made on formally diverting the route - we had produced some new advisory signage advising of an 'alternative' route through the village, but with everything that has happened Gary hasn't been able to install."*

Money matters

We took the decision to increase the precept by 5% this year and to commit to two regular donations:

- maintenance of the 'outside' village hall toilet, provided primarily for the use of visitors to the play park and other tourists.
- maintenance of St Mary's churchyard – our parishioners may be buried in either St Cuthbert's at Greenhead or St Mary's depending on where in the parish they live. We already contribute a significant sum to the upkeep of St Cuthbert's via our membership of the Haltwhistle and District Joint Burial Board.

We continue to offer grants to village clubs and groups. The application form is on the website or a hard copy is available from the clerk. During the year we have given small sums to: Haltwhistle Golf Club, Gilsland Village Hall, Sport Tynedale, Great North Air Ambulance, Age UK (Northumberland). Some of the grant given to Jigsaw Nursery in the previous year has been returned to us as the nursery closed before purchasing all the items as listed in the

application.