

Chairman's Annual Report

This is the full text of the Annual Report from the Chairman of Garsdale Parish Council for the year ending May 2011.

As you are aware the local council elections in May 2010 resulted in significant changes to the parish council and we welcomed Pat Thynne and Tony Roberts onto the council. Despite a number of parishioners showing interest in becoming a councillor, bureaucracy got the upper hand and we were left with two vacant positions for councillors which I am pleased to say have been filled by Caroline Cattermole and David Labatte. I am also pleased to report that Kate Metcalfe agreed to take up the position of Parish Clerk and I would like to thank Kate for her enthusiasm in the position.

The May elections also brought about a new government which is supporting an initiative to develop greater accessibility to broadband services in the rural community. As Cumbria is the largest and least populated county in England there has been a focus on Cumbria providing locations for suitable trials. Working alongside Dent Parish Council, a steering group has been formed to pioneer the proposal for the trial to be conducted in the two dales. The steering group has been fronted by Anne Fleck of Dent, with support from Tony Roberts (Garsdale), David Pilgrim (Dent), Stefan Kosciuszko (Garsdale), Andrew Fleck (Dent), John Colton (Garsdale) and Jock Cairns (Dent). In order to provide a vehicle with which to drive the proposal forward, a company has been set up called Fibre GarDen. While in its infancy, this allows us to put together a strong argument to show fund holding bodies that Garsdale and Dent have commitment to provide all the necessary support to make the trial work.

Many thanks must go to Tony Roberts, who has put a great deal of time and effort into putting together all the paperwork and documentation required to allow Fibre GarDen to be in the position it is at the moment, and allows us to be ahead of other competitors for funding. We hope that in the coming months we will be able to announce more details of the scheme and how it would operate.

In September we had a very informative talk by Jacqui Foot on red squirrels in the dale and adjoining areas. The outcome is that a lot of work is being carried out by a number of groups, in order to reduce the influx of grey squirrels into the area, by creating a protected zone. The grey squirrels are then trapped in the natural corridors that exist into the Sedbergh area. I would greatly encourage residents of the dale to report sightings of both red and grey squirrels to representative of the Northern Red Squirrel Group who can then coordinate the appropriate actions.

The highways have continued to be our most prominent problem. While a large stretch of the A684 was resurfaced last year, we have had continued problems with blocked and collapsed culverts and the hard winter has resulted in numerous new potholes. We have continued to badger Cumbria County Council and have been successful in some regards, but the state of the road is still far from satisfactory.

At present there is a consultation on which roads should be used for timber transport in Cumbria. The consultation document has suggested that the A684 in Garsdale could be used as an agreed timber haulage route, but as you are all aware, it is not really suitable for these vehicles or any other HGV's. We have written a response to the council with the aim of making Garsdale a section of road which can only be used by prior consultation between the council and the timber hauliers. This means that restrictions could be put in place on the size of vehicle

and the time of day or year that the wagons are allowed to use the road. This should deter timber wagons from Yorkshire using the dale as a short cut to the M6. Dialogue with the Council has indicated that they are sympathetic to our concerns and they are also interested in investigating the possibility of transporting the timber by rail. At present the Carlisle to Settle railway is used to transport timber from Ribbleshead and it is possible that timber from forests adjacent to the Coal Road could be transported in the same way. I would like to thank Tony and Claire for their input into this document.

Council meetings were held monthly, sometimes bi-monthly in 2010-11, usually on a Monday. In addition to the parish council meetings representatives of the council have also attended:

- Local Area Partnership meetings
- Neighbourhood Forum meetings
- Sedbergh and District Community Office meetings
- Sedbergh Health Centre Patients' Forum

My thanks go to Pauline for regularly attending the Sedbergh Health Centre Patients' Forum and to Pauline and Tony for attending the Neighbourhood Forum meetings.

Council Finance

Despite the current poor economic situation we felt that the council had no option but to increase the precept for the coming year. As with everything else, the council are facing increases in insurance and other operational costs. If we are to maintain an independent parish council in Garsdale, funding needs to be found and Garsdale Parish Council, unlike neighbouring Dent and Sedbergh, have no other means of generating income.

With this money, we will be able to fund the Parish Clerk and also assist the Village Hall in some desperately needed repairs. The council has managed to secure a small grant towards repairing the waste water system and our thanks go to the Sedbergh and District Community Fund for this donation.

In regards any future capital maintenance of the Village Hall it would make more financial sense for the Parish Council to apply for funds for larger projects as we will be able to claim the VAT back whereas the Village Hall cannot.

The Parish Council has also continued with its annual donation to the NW Air Ambulance

The end-of-year finances are on the attached sheet

Future

As I reported last year the Parish Council still faces a number of challenges I still feel that the council needs to have more interaction with the residents of Garsdale whom we represent. Hopefully we will be able to publish a newsletter in the coming weeks which will update the people on developments within the dale.

As a community I feel that it is to our detriment that younger members of the community are being forced to move out of the dale to find affordable accommodation. This is exasperated by Yorkshire Dales National Park who seem to consider that making lower cost housing available in Sedbergh will some how benefit the Garsdale community. I think that in the year to come we should make it clear to YDNP that this is not acceptable and that they should support the few development opportunities we have in the dale for lower cost local occupancy housing.

We need to continue working with the Highways Department to ensure that the A684 and adjoining roads receive the necessary maintenance. The new highways steward scheme which was supposed to come into force this year appears to have been put on hold. This is because resources have been re-deployed to undertake urgent repairs following the harsh winter we experienced last year.

With the present consultation on the future of rural libraries, the mobile library and the loss of some bus services from Sedbergh, I am concerned that Cumbria County Council will try and further reduce services to rural communities. It is something we must be very wary of and we must be proactive in trying to save these services.

Another issue that concerns some residents is that the car park permit scheme in Sedbergh is unfair, with local people who want to occasionally pop in for a pint of milk having to pay the same as someone who parks there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I am sure there is a fairer system that Sedbergh could operate but pressure would need to be placed on Sedbergh Parish Council to look at alternatives.