

Burton-in-Kendal Parish Council

Annual Report for the year 2009/10

Chairman's Statement given by Councillor Francis Mason-Hornby

2009/10 has been a year of change for the Parish Council

Following the routine business that always happen at the beginning of the new council year, action was taken to co-opt a new councillor following the resignation of Councillor Richard Lawson. Three candidates put their names forward and Michael Taylor was co-opted at the May meeting. In a predominately rural parish we were fortunate to be able to replace one farmer with another and I am grateful for all the hard work and good advice Councillor Lawson brought to our proceedings. I am also very grateful to the unsuccessful candidates and would hope that they would consider standing for election in 2012.

It was also decided at the May meeting to have a Parish Councillor present from 7.00pm on the evenings of our regular meetings to enable residents to come and offer suggestions and raise concerns without having to sit through the formal meeting. This initiative came as a direct result of a suggestion from a member of the public and forms part of the Parish Council's drive for greater involvement by residents.

I take this opportunity to urge those residents with access to email to register with the Clerk to get the monthly Agendas and Minutes sent direct to their inbox; they are also available online at www.burton-in-kendal-pc.gov.uk For those without internet access these documents are always available on the Parish Council notice board on the wall of the Memorial Hall

At the June meeting we had the opportunity to congratulate our District & County Councillor Roger Bingham on his elevation to Chairman of Cumbria County Council. Roger has been the South Lakeland District Councillor for Burton & Holme since 1984 and County Councillor for Lower Kentdale since 1997.

The popularity of the success story that is Burton Morewood School has involved the Parish Council more than usual this year, first we considered the planning application to extend the school buildings at the June meeting and then we had to try and deal with the perennial problem of congestion and parking on the school run at the November and December meetings. We are still seeking long term solutions but it is a problem that is at its worst in the dark days of winter when far fewer children walk to school. The Parish Council believes that a thriving and successful local school at the heart of the community is important for the village so some inconvenience caused at certain times of the day must be seen in perspective.

In July Charles Dale the Parish Clerk wrote to inform me of his decision to step down, following our October meeting, after 5 years in post. Whilst finding a new clerk seemed daunting at first, no one is irreplaceable, and we soon had interest in the position from several applicants. After a process of interviews Peter Smith of Clawthorpe was appointed. On behalf of all Parish Councillors I want to thank Charles Dale for his dedication, hard work, patience and good humour over the years and for ensuring a smooth handover to the new Clerk.

At the November meeting the Parish Council formally adopted the new play equipment on Burton Playing Ground, Boon Town and took the opportunity to praise and thank the Playground Fundraising Committee for achieving so much. It is a testament to the drive, ambition and sheer persistence of that committee and all their supporters that Burton-in-Kendal has a first class facility that is open to everyone.

The Parish Council is a consultee for many bodies and over the last year we have been asked to comment on various issues too numerous to name. The most relevant was the South Westmorland Local Area Partnership on which consultation is continuing and of which much was written in the quarterly Parish Council Newsletter and most of which is too dull to repeat here.

We have been promised a major review of speed limits, white lines and signage on the A6070 through the village as a response to the Parish Council's long term aim to lower the actual speed that vehicles travel through the village. Proposals have only just been published and any improvements that do happen will be in the 2010/11 financial year. In December a section of the A6070 to the north of the village between Clawthorpe and just beyond parish boundary has been completely resurfaced with the minimum of disruption to residents.

We are always keen to increase public involvement in parish council affairs and whilst everyone has a pet project or gripe many suggestions are not within the parish council's remit and others we are unable to fulfil due to lack of available funds; we do however listen and all councillors are keen to hear your views. Please give us your ideas which then have a chance of being formally included on the Parish Plan.

The Parish Plan was last revised in 2008/09 and since then we have had some successes in implementing ideas put forward by you, the residents; notably the bus shelters, dropped kerbs, signage, allotment provision and playing ground improvements. The items still pending are the repairs to Slape Lane, the road safety improvements and the village design statement. We have been unable to make progress with five suggestions, the provision of an old fashioned red telephone box for The Square, an additional post box for the village, pathways to Clawthorpe and to Heronsyke and a direct path from the school playing fields to the Burton Recreation Trust's sports facilities; these failures are the result of refusals by BT and The Post Office and the landowners whose property the paths would have to cross. These projects have now been dropped from the Parish Plan.

One major addition to the village infrastructure this year has been the bus shelter on Main Street at Green Dragon, opposite the junction with Dalton Lane which was paid for by Cumbria County Council by way of a grant. A lively debate took place and votes were taken to decide which way round it should go and what colour it should be. If any residents are unhappy with the Parish Council's choice this is a perfect example of democracy in action and whether or not you approve of our decision at least it will keep you sheltered from the weather.

2009/10 will be remembered as the year of severe weather; a miserable summer, floods in November and snow and ice in December and January but sometimes we "...protest too much, methinks" and our problems were comparatively minor when one considers the devastation caused by flooding in the west of the county and catastrophic natural disasters overseas. There is of course a valid argument that we were unprepared and the Parish Council now has its own backup supply of grit and a Parish Emergency Plan is being actively considered and worked on.

The Parish Council, on the advice of the Budget working party, took the decision to run down our financial reserves, which had built up over a number of years, to a level just under half of our annual precept (the precept is the Parish Council's share of your Council Tax) This was achieved by requesting a precept lower than our expenditure for the last couple of years.

This level has now been reached so for the coming year you will see a 31.4% rise in the Parish Council's spending plans as itemised on your 2010/11 Council Tax Bill. However despite this headline grabbing figure we have budgeted to spend less in 2010/11 than we did in 2008/09 or 2009/10. We feel that a reserve of any lower than the approximate £5000 that we have anticipated at the Year End would be inappropriate and could jeopardise the financial stability of the Parish Council.

Most minor complaints made to the Parish Council are dealt with by the Clerk who relentlessly chases up the relevant department of South Lakeland District Council or Cumbria County Council by 'phone or email but general maintenance is carried out by our hard working Parish Lengthsman, David Holmes.

We are fortunate to have the regular attendance of County and District Councillor Roger Bingham, District Councillor Brian Cooper, and Police Community Support Officer Rachel Thomas at our meetings and I am grateful for their support over the year.

Thanks must go to all who take the time to attend our meetings and in particular the members of the press and their stand-ins whose reports I always look forward to.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their commitment during the year; they give generously of their free time to serve the people of this parish; they also represent us at various other organisations whose activities have an impact on our village.

All that remains is to thank Peter our Parish Clerk for all his hard work and advice and without whom none of what we agree would happen.