

## **Chairman's Report 2016/17**

A slightly less frustrating year than previously with a steady flow of planning applications to keep us busy, and resolutions to some of our long running complaints about the dangerous condition of our roads. We look forward to working with our re-elected County Councillor, Colin Horncastle to continue improving our situation.

### Planning Issues

There were at least 11 planning applications to deal with during the year, some of which we had objections to which were upheld by the Planning Department at NCC. However we had some serious concerns about how 2 were handled.

We were not informed by Northumberland of a contentious application to construct a barn at Ravenside on the border of our Parish. This was partly to blame for considerable acrimony and a formal complaint against us concerning our comments on the plans by the applicant when it was rejected by Gateshead Council. There has also been a long running objection to plans by a village resident who has been granted permission retrospectively to operate a business which was the subject of an earlier enforcement order, and who is encroaching on Green Belt land against NCC policy.

Yet another year has gone by without the extreme concern of imminent opencast coal operations on our doorstep. However the coal reserves are still there, and whilst we hope that the current aversion to coal continues to make it economically non viable to pursue those reserves we have been made aware that interest in obtaining the coal may have come back.

### Parish Upkeep and Services

It has been necessary to raise our Parish precept from £4500 to £5000 to keep the village in good repair, and pay our administrative costs. Our major expenditure is still grass cutting at £3000, and this continues to be very successful in keeping the village looking tidy despite the relatively high cost.

Following a meeting with Kris Westerby from County Highways there have been repairs to the deep ruts on the West Hill, the drainage gulleys on the road to High Mickley have been cleared, and adhesive cats eyes installed on the road to Currock Hill.

The library van which had become quite popular in the village was a victim of flooding following Storm Desmond, and the service has never resumed. We believe that our library service has been abandoned which is very much regretted.

The village has finally been connected to a high speed broadband feed, more or less on the timescale predicted a year ago. Residents wishing to use the service can contact their service provider and ask to be upgraded to a 'fibre package' to receive speeds of up to 50 Mbit.

During the year, the Parish Council started a campaign to promote a resurgence in the community spirit in the village which had been very strong a few years ago.

Following a positive response to a flyer seeking views on how this could be achieved, and a village meeting, a working party from the village was established to conduct a feasibility study to inform a decision on how to proceed which is expected to report within the next few weeks.

As in previous years, we conducted a successful litter pick from the roadside verges in the Parish in April and noted again a drop in the amount of rubbish to be picked. Our thanks to those people from the village who participated, although the turnout was disappointing this year.

Finally, we note that the Parish records from 1933 to the end of last financial year have been transferred to the County Archive at Woodhorn.

**Dr. R. J. Penny**  
**Chairman**

5<sup>th</sup> May 2017