



## Colton Parish Council

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### **Chairman's Annual Report for 2015/2016**

Parish Councils are going through a lean time at present. Following the recent elections, seven of the nine parishes in the South Distinctive Area are short of Councillors, some disastrously so. Recent meetings and forums have had poor parish representation. It is therefore with some relief that I can report that Colton Parish Council continues to operate effectively and busily although, inevitably, there may be fresh challenges ahead.

#### ***Changes to the Council***

Following Cllr Robinson's resignation last year, we were very pleased to recruit her near-neighbour, Kate Lodge-Brown, to represent the Central Ward in October 2015.

#### ***Activities of the Council***

Much of the business of the Council remains depressingly familiar, including our battles with the principle authorities to achieve some progress (especially in regard to aspects of the highways). However, the year has also included some significant successes. In particular, we have finally published our Community Plan and we know that it is being used, and has influenced for example, the LDNPA. On the back of the associated action plan, we have introduced the concept of 'portfolio-holders' to our ways of working, with councillors sharing out responsibility for getting things done.

This year we have started the process of nominating 'Assets of Community Value' (ACVs), and have successfully registered Rusland Reading Rooms so far. ACVs may include buildings, such as village halls, and land, such as publicly-used woodlands, which the community may wish to purchase should the opportunity arise. Finally, thanks in large part to Mike Postle, the much-lauded Superfast Broadband has crept into the corners of our parish; let's hope everyone will benefit in due course.

Our local celebrity lengthsman, Archie Workman, continues to clear drains and cut back vegetation, with some very positive feedback from local residents (and not a little jealousy from surrounding parishes).

#### ***Challenges ahead***

Our number one issue remains with the County Highways department. While some long-standing issues have been attended to in relation to drainage, thanks to one diligent Highways officer, there is still a long list of work that needs to be addressed, including the renewal of various road markings and road signs, requested and promised over two years ago. The Clerk goes to great lengths to maintain a database of maintenance requests, but Highways no longer refer to these lists, nor do they consult parishes on scheduled improvement works such as re-surfacing. Resources are cited as the reason, which is fully appreciated, but meetings between Cumbria County Council and South Lakeland parish representatives have identified lack of communication and poor systems management as the major problem. The winter storms created bigger issues because basic maintenance had not been carried out. Green lanes remain unaddressed and will surely fall into total disrepair.

#### ***Liaison and consultation***

We continue to be a well-connected and interactive council, sometimes to an overwhelming degree (our Clerk has brought a total of 429 items of correspondence to our attention - up 12% on last year). The Council received 12 formal consultations this year covering topics ranging from the Windermere Waterbird Project to the LDNPA Statement of Community Involvement for the forthcoming Local Plan review. It responded to those which had relevance to our Parish.

The Council has produced two editions of its own newsletter this year, hand-delivered to every member of the community. We have also contributed to the three local newsletters every month, and maintain a parish council website. It is proposed that more use is made of our newsletter to promote the actions coming from the new Community-led Plan.

We were represented at 20 external meetings during the year, eight of these attended by the Clerk. Although Councillors shared these responsibilities more equitably than last year, there is still room for improvement. We continue to run seven Working Groups and we are represented on ten outside bodies.

### ***Planning***

This year the Council reviewed 24 planning applications. We raised objections to two of these, both of which were subsequently granted, and supported nine. In April 2015, we revised the way we responded to planning applications to clarify what was meant by 'no objection'. The Council now submits one of the following: 'Support' if the Council has no objection or positively supports the application, 'Neutral' if the Council has no particular view and defers to the LDNPA, or 'Object' (with 'material' reasons) if councillors felt the application would harm the local area or was at odds with policy.

### ***Meetings***

The Council held nine scheduled meetings during the year and one additional meeting to consider and approve the Community Plan Action Plan. Member attendance averaged 77% which, regrettably, is lower than in previous years.

Cllr David Fletcher, our County and District Councillor, managed to come to three meetings and sent a report to another; he has provided the parish with some useful support. Despite warnings about cutbacks affecting attendance, Cumbria Police has attended four of our meetings and sent reports to three others. In general, crime was perceived as at a low level in the area, with a focus on wildlife offences, illegal off-roading and farm thefts. Our thanks go in particular to PCSOs Paul Harris and Emma Forrester for their continuing commitment.

We received presentations from representatives of the LDNPA (twice), the Forestry Commission, Sportive Lakes, the Green Lanes Association (GLASS) and Longbow Forestry.

### ***Budget for the coming year***

Our Finance Working Group has continued to oversee our formal budgeting procedures and has recommended a precept increase of 3% which the full Council has approved. This increase will allow us to carry out our activities during the coming year and maintain a reasonable reserve should unexpected eventualities arise. Funds for the modest precept increase will be allocated to projects that are emerging from our Community Plan Action Plan. A summary of the accounts is attached.

### ***Chairman's thanks***

This year, special thanks must go to John Osborne for all his hard work over several years chairing the Bouth Village Green and Playground Committee; John is retiring from that role and we look forward to working with the new Chairman, David Hamer.

I would like to thank Alan Lovegrove for his continuing and unheralded monthly inspections of Bouth Village Green and Playground, Mike Postle for his excellent work on Broadband, and Bobbie Dobson for carrying out the internal audit. I would also like to thank my fellow Councillors for their help and support over the last year. I know there are changes in the offing but I am confident that we will remain a strong and reliable council.

Finally, I am sure Councillors will join me in thanking our Clerk, Mandy Lane, who battles on with tremendous professionalism and fortitude.

Cllr Colin Barr  
May 2016

### **Officers of the Council 2015-2016**

**West Ward:** Cllr Colin Barr (Chair); Cllr Katherine Patterson; Cllr John Milburn

**East Ward:** Cllr Chris Potts; Cllr Vanessa Champion (Vice-chair); Cllr David Hoyle

**Central Ward:** Cllr Lodge-Brown (from Oct 2015); Cllr John Watson; Cllr Ken Dean

**Clerk:** Ms Mandy Lane: Lilac Cottage, Oxen Park, Ulverston. LA12 8HG

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### Summary of Accounts 2015/2016

Balance brought forward	8352
<b>RECEIPTS</b>	
Annual Precept via SLDC	12080
Council Tax Grant	319
Rusland Horizons grant 2 from LDNPA	1500
Community Plan Grant	248
VAT return for FY 14/15	259
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>14406</b>
<b>PAYMENTS - summary</b>	
Annual Fees for services: CALC Subscription	214
Council Administration Costs:	
Audit fee	120
Information Commissioner fee (Data Protection)	35
Clerk's office supplies and postage	200
Clerk's standard home office allowance	150
Web hosting annual fee	43
Insurance	431
Room Hire	170
Clerk's Travel	141
Councillors' Travel	90
Training course and Council qualification fees (LCAS Registration)	80
Bouth Village Green & Playground RoSPA H&S Annual Inspection	78
Clerk's salary	5621
PAYE services	48
New notice-board for Oxen Park	279
Lengthsman services	2920
Drain rod attachments for Lengthsman work	28
Re-installation of postbox in wall at Low Nibthwaite	50
Finsthwaite Clock Maintenance	174
Charitable donations (Rusland Horizons project)	100
Community Plan Plan design and production	717
Community Plan launch event refreshments	288
Rusland Horizons grant 2 payment (see LDNPA grant above)	1500
<b>Total Payments</b>	<b>13477</b>
<b>BALANCE</b>	
Brought forward	8352
+ Total income	14406
- Total payments	13477
<b>Balance carried forward</b>	<b><u>9281</u></b>

*Note: The balance to carry forward of £9281 is larger than the 10% contingency normally planned for and the projected year-end balance of £5603. The apparent under-spend of £3678 is due to a number of factors, principally: i) Community Plan projects not yet started (£2000). ii) Lengthsman under-spend of £600 due to limited time, iii) Un-presented cheques totalling £210. iv) Notice-board costs less than expected and under-spent by £748.*