

Colton Parish Council (CPC) Chair's report 2024-2025

Introduction

2024-2025 has been a year of rebuilding the Parish Council (PC). In May 2024, 4 of the previous Councillors resigned and six new Councillors joined. In August 2024 the clerk resigned, and we were unable to recruit a replacement until January 2025, when a locum clerk, who had 6 month's availability, came forward. We have recently appointed a new, permanent Clerk.

CPC Governance

Councillors

Thanks are due to all the Councillors who have contributed to CPC over the year. In particular, Walter Oats, who as an experienced Councillor, generously stepped forward to ensure the PC remained quorate during a period of change, and to Ian Wharton who joined the PC for the year.

At the end of the PC year 2024-2025 the current Cllrs are:-

- West ward: Lynda Dickinson, Gail Dudson (Vice Chair), Abigail Bennett (Chair)
- Central ward: Kevin Whiley, Archie Workman, Ian Wharton
- East ward: 3 vacancies

Clerk

We extend our thanks to Julie Hendry who stepped down as Clerk in August 2024. From August to December the Chair and Vice Chair shared clerking responsibilities as far as possible. We are very grateful to Beth Workman, a very experienced clerk, who has supported us since January 2025. Her guidance, support and knowledge of Governance has ensured the smooth running of the PC. Beth has also supported us to recruit a new permanent clerk. There will be c 2 months of overlap to enable an induction programme to begin and a smooth handover.

Finance

- We have set up online banking with monitoring controls in place.
- We have considered carefully our budget requirement and requested a precept for 2025-2026 of £21,235 to meet that.
- We have established a Finance & Staffing Working Group
- We have agreed reserves policy in line with NALC guidance
- We have appointed an internal auditor for 2024-2025

Other

- We contributed to Westmorland & Furness Council's consultation re the representation of PC's and the boundaries for Wards
- We continued with CALC Membership
- New Cllrs undertook induction training. We have signed up for other training but this has yet to take place

Public Participation

This has declined significantly in the year 2024 - 2025. (In 2023-2025 we reported 18 public attendances. This year the minutes record only 3).

Despite on going attempts we have not been able to recruit any Cllrs for the East ward.

PC meetings

We have held 10 PC meetings in Village Halls around the Parish

We have restructured our regular agenda so that items are considered within the framework of the relevant section of the Community Plan 2024.

Reporting on Priorities for 2024/2025

The PC's priorities are based on the 4 themes for the Community Plan launched in 2024. See

<https://coltonparishcouncil.org.uk/colton-community-plan/>

- Communities, Wellbeing and Resilience
- Climate emergency and the Environment
- Highways
- Housing and planning

Communities, Wellbeing and Resilience

- In response to a report of racism experienced by a visitor to the area, we reviewed our approach to Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and published a new policy
- We set aside £3000 for the allocation of Community Grants. We awarded the following:
 - Coniston & Crake Parish Magazine £350
 - Green Spark £250 towards River Crake Interpretation Board
 - Tottlebank Church exterior noticeboard £216
- Bouth Village Green and Playground: We have worked with the BVG&P Committee to ensure a robust arrangement for safety monitoring and reporting is in place. The Lengthsman has repainted the park benches
- We have proactively shared information using our communication networks i.e. Colton Link, Coniston & Crake Parish Magazine, Rusland & Satterthwaite Newsletter, Community Noticeboards and CPC Website. This Includes promoting local Foodbank Appeals the Priority Services Register, Westmorland & Furness Council (WFC) winter readiness campaign, handy person scheme, and cost of living support
- We ran a stand at Rusland Show
- We supported 2 locally organised Foodbank appeals
- Partnership working and using our influence to benefit our communities
 - We have worked with Cllr Suzanne Pender WFC Coniston & Hawkshead Ward and the group of 9 PCs within the ward on issues that affect Colton and surrounding Parishes inc:-
 - The impact of winter storms
 - Addressing issues about the resilience of power and communication networks and participating in Ward based meetings with Electricity North West Limited (ENWL)
 - impacts of road closures
 - Impacts of large public events,
 - Ward boundary changes
 - Provision and sustainability of local bus services
 - We have participated in the LDNPA convened meeting of South area PCs to share local views on

- The impact of second homes and short term lets
- Improving understanding of Planning and Enforcement.
- In Feb 2025 LDNPA circulated a letter proposing a new, proactive approach to local PCs that we welcomed.
- Invited The Chief Executive of LDNPA to attend the Parish Open Meeting 17/5/25
- We have supported the South Windermere Sailing Club over their concerns about the sale and proposed redevelopment of the YMCA North Camp and consequent loss of community access and services to children and young people.
- We have contributed to the Government's recent consultation on the proposed Planning and Infrastructure Bill
- In February we surveyed residents to monitor the impact of winter storms with a view to developing a CPC emergency plan and/or supporting local communities to develop emergency plans
- We have earmarked £3000 for replacement notice boards
- We have nominated a Councillor to be the representative for Cumbria Constabulary Neighbourhood Policing Group.
- We have purchased a pay as you go mobile phone for emergency use when internet is not available and to enable those without internet access/unable to use email to contact the Council

Climate emergency and the Environment

- We have supported community litter picking activities by publicising the availability of our litter picking equipment and lending it out as requested It is stored at F&L VH
- We have Considered the impact on biodiversity, the local landscape and natural environment in every planning application that we have been consulted about and where appropriate recorded our concerns.
- We have engaged with LDNPA to increase knowledge and understanding of the Rusland Mosses 5-year restoration plan in partnership with Natural England
- We have engaged with the Rusland Rainforest project to increase knowledge and understanding about the local and national significance of this work
- We have continued to support Green Sparks (local community network focussing on Sustainability, the impact of climate change and nature recovery)
- Through the Green Spark's network Disseminated information about renewable energy initiatives, local nature-based projects and available public grants to support actions that tackle climate change and promote sustainability.
- We have supported local highways and policing initiatives focussed on reducing illegal off-road driving and biking that damages the environment

Highways

- We have continued to engage the services of the Lengthsman, Archie Workman, who's work includes clearing drains, managing verges, cleaning signs etc to maintain minor lanes around the Parish.

- Through Archie we have proactively engaged with and built relationships with Westmorland & Furness Highways team to provide local input and expertise on works required on A and B class roads including
 - work undertaken between Tottlebank and the A590
 - improvements to reduce flooding from St Cuthbert's Well Lane, Colton
- We have Continued to promote the use of the HIAMS online reporting system so that local problems on the roads can be brought to the attention of the Highways Team
- On behalf of the community, we have monitored and reported on local grit bins and grit piles
- We worked with ENMO PC to support an application for 20mph through Spark Bridge. This is due to be considered in the second round of 20mph applications expected to be.
- We worked with CPO Paul Harris to support Lakeside residents re gathering data to make the case for 20mph through Lakeside and to monitor the effectiveness of the voluntary 20mph through Bouth and Finsthwaite
- We have continued to raise local concerns about the impact of parking on the lane opposite the Swan Hotel, Newby Bridge.

Housing and planning

- We have been consulted on 19 planning applications within the CPC area.
- We have used our responses to planning applications to voice our concerns about the impact on our local environment, biodiversity and water quality
- We have proactively engaged with LDNPA and WFC opportunities to raise the housing and planning issues facing our communities as recorded above.

Priorities 2025/2026

CPC identified priorities

- Continued delivery against the community plan, including the development of an emergency plan
- Increased public participation
- Cllr recruitment

Contacts

Councillors can be contacted by email. All Cllr email addresses follow the pattern of firstname.lastname@coltonparishcouncil.org.uk

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Abigail Bennett 11/5/25 Chair Colton Parish Council