

Wylam Parish Council

Chair's Annual Report to the Annual Village Meeting

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to our Annual Village Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what we, as your Parish Council, has been doing over the past 12 months, and to give you the opportunity to put questions to councillors about local matters of interest and concern. We welcome Richard McKenzie from Northumberland County Council's Highways department. Road safety is the most frequently reported area of concern for Wylam residents and I'm sure Richard will be glad to take your questions and listen to your views on this important topic later in the meeting.

It has been an honour to serve as Chair of Wylam Parish Council during the past year and to be re-elected by my colleagues to serve for a further year.

The Parish Council

The Parish Council currently has five members out of a possible eight. We welcomed Councillor Lizzie Barker in October 2023 and are delighted with the new ideas she is bringing to the Council. Councillor John Hanley resigned in May to pursue other interests and we are grateful for the contributions he made to the work of the Council. Martyn Jones, our current Globe editor, will leave us sometime in the near future for his new home in County Durham, where I believe he has already researched the activities and foibles of the local parish council. A new Councillor is to join us in July. All this means that we will still be short of our full complement of 8 councillors. As you will see from the Annual Report, Wylam Parish Council has a full programme of significant projects, so it is important that we are up to full strength. If you know of anyone who would be interested in joining the Parish Council, please encourage them to get in touch with Tracey, our Parish Clerk.

Delivering Village Services

The Parish Council precept of £54,000 enables us to deliver core services in the village. Partnership, collaborating with outside organisations, is an essential component of our work to make sure that Wylam Parish is well cared for, clean, neat and an attractive place to live in:

- During the past year, we have worked closely with Northumberland County Council Highways Department and their Trees and Woodlands Officer.
- Work with the Environment Agency has resulted in a Community Flood Plan and a keen group of 9 volunteer Flood Wardens.
- Our Clerk meets monthly with Wylam's Community Police Officer to discuss issues of concern to Wylam residents.
- We are currently in discussions with Northumbrian Water about funding the refurbishment of the bus stop at Charlie's Corner.
- We have worked with the National Trust to establish a monthly guided walking tour of the village 'Walk the Line'. The tour is designed to showcase Wylam's pioneering railway engineers and includes a visit to George Stephenson's Birthplace and Wylam Railway Museum. 9 walks took place last year, and the 2024 series began last

weekend. Thanks are due to Councillor Colin Percy for liaising with the National Trust to make these walks a success.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Parish Council's most significant venture, a Neighbourhood Plan for Wylam, was launched last September, when Wylam Parish was officially designated a Neighbourhood Plan Area. The Steering Group, which so far consists of the members of Wylam Parish Council, has held several meetings with Mark Harrison, the Planning Officer assigned to Wylam, to identify policy areas relevant to Wylam and to hear about the specialist technical and financial help that is available. Members of the Parish Council are currently engaged in preparing lists of Non-Designated Heritage assets, Local Green Spaces and Community Facilities, which are likely to be important policy areas.

Engagement with Wylam residents and interest groups is key to every stage of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. It is important to capture what makes Wylam Parish special and to identify local issues. The first stage of this engagement, a Parish Survey Questionnaire, should be ready for circulation in June. For ease of data collection and analysis, we hope that most responses will be made through the online version of the questionnaire, but paper copies will also be made available. We intend to test the questionnaire with some residents' groups prior to full circulation.

Other activities during the year

In addition to the activities mentioned above, the Parish Council has:

- Continued to curate Wylam Railway Museum.
- Managed The Haughs Local Nature Reserve.
- Commented on planning applications.
- Organised an annual Litter Pick.
- Hosted a village picnic to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.
- Managed local green spaces, especially their trees.
- Paid for floral displays from Wylam Nurseries around the village.
- Produced 3 issues of The Wylam Globe.
- Activated a new website.
- Co-ordinated the Remembrance Sunday Parade and service.
- Supported local organisations through grant funding, especially Wylam Institute Community Association and Wylam Community Playing Fields Association.
- Acted as host Council for the Ovingham Joint Burial Committee.

Training

Both Councillors and staff have undertaken training essential to their roles. Councillor training is available from the Northumberland Association of Local Councils. Councillors and the Clerk attended both Town and Parish Council Conferences organised by NALC and Northumberland County Council and made many useful contacts at County Hall. Our Village

Handyman, Matthew Hadden is currently undertaking two online courses, Health and Safety and Manual Handling, which will help him to do his job safely.

Special mention goes to our Clerk, Tracey, who has recently successfully completed two sector-specific training courses: the Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA) and the Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration (FILCA). She now moves on to the next level qualification, the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA), which will take a further year to complete. We very much look forward to having an officially 'Qualified Clerk' as this will enable us to work towards several Quality Parish Council awards. Thanks are due to Tracey for her commitment to excellence and for giving up her own time to study for these qualifications.

Thanks

In conclusion, I would like to thank my colleagues on the Parish Council for their hard work and support during the past year. Thank you also to our volunteer Village Tree Warden, Liz Bray, who leads the Nature Reserve's Management Group and advises on matters to do with green spaces, nature recovery and trees throughout the Parish. I would also like to thank our Village Handyman, Matthew Hadden who works hard to keep Wylam looking neat and tidy, picking up litter and clearing weeds from pavements. Last, but not least, thank you to Tracey, our Clerk for her diligent support with Parish Council administration and finance, as well as for her suggestions and recommendations on new approaches to the work of the Parish Council.

We look forward to continuing to serve the people of Wylam Parish in 2024/25.

