








Shincliffe Parish Council  
Annual Report  
2017-18

## Your Parish Councillors

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Angela Lee	Andrzej Olechnowicz	David Stoker	John Wright
			

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## **Chairman Foreword**

Welcome to the Shincliffe Parish Council annual report.

The local council elections in April 2017 represented a fresh opportunity for the community to put forward and elect new Parish Councillors. Following on from the elections we welcomed David Stoker and John Wright onto the Parish Council. Both David and John have made big contributions during the year. Welcome aboard.

During the past year we said farewell to Jonathan Lovell who joined the Parish Council in 2013. On behalf of the Parish Council, many thanks for your efforts during this time, Jonathan. We also said farewell to Peter Ferries, but Peter is currently spearheading the Shincliffe Village Park regeneration campaign and presented the progress to the Parish Council in April 2018, which looks extremely positive. Peter clearly can't keep away from the Parish Council meetings and supporting the local community. Great to see.

As a Parish Council we are committed to working in a professional and transparent manner; supporting the community on important initiatives and aspiring to improve year on year. To do this requires dedication, hard work and time. Due to work and family commitments, in April 2018 I announced my intention to stand down as Chairman of Shincliffe Parish Council, so this will be my final annual report.

I'm proud of the progress we achieved during the past 3 years. The Parish Council more often deals with issues and 'things that have gone wrong', but I was reflecting on the past 3 years and some of the achievements and highlights. In 2015 we created and issued the first Parish Council survey in over a decade to understand the views of our community, and the feedback formed the basis for much of the activity during the following 3-year period. We also established the Shincliffe Parish Council Finance Committee to provide financial oversight and stability of parish finances.

All three notice boards have been replaced with weather proof units containing more space for communications, and we migrated from the old Parish Council website to a brand-new website with modern software and introduced a new communication channel within the feedback section.

In the past year, and following on from the road markings in 2016, 'wooden gates' have been erected at the side of the A177 road to give the appearance of the road narrowing to reduce the speed of traffic entering the 40mph zone. The flower beds at the High Shincliffe entrances have been enhanced and we have introduced regular community gardening days which continue to be well attended.

We are making good but steady progress along the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS). A full complement of LCAS accreditations demonstrates that a council is at the forefront of best practice, achieving excellence in governance, community leadership and council development. After achieving the Foundation award in 2017 we submitted the Quality award in early 2018 and are hopeful to receive confirmation that we have achieved this award in the summer. It should be noted that only 30 Parish or Town Councils have achieved a higher award. Work has already begun towards this award (Quality Gold) and I would anticipate that we will submit this application mid-2019.

With the support from Shincliffe School children and the Shincliffe community we have also been planting in Love Lane and the sustainable planting initiative has completed resulting in a year on year real terms reduction in horticulture costs without reducing the impact of the flower displays. The Beautiful Durham Awards 2018 recognised this with High Shincliffe and Shincliffe Village receiving awards for Best Village and Best Small Village and Sherburn Hospital winning in the Best Sheltered Accommodation category.

In the past few months we have installed 3 'state of the art' defibrillators in 3 locations within the Parish. We hope we never have call to use them, but they are available to all if required. We also added 4 new salt grit bins in December 2017 which were used during the extended 'cold snap'.

It really has been a positive and rewarding few years and we achieved this as a team. On that note, I would like to offer sincere thanks and gratitude to all Parish Councillors past and present, and County Councillor David Stoker who, over the past three years, invested their time into our community. Thanks to Angela Lee who made unprecedented progress as Horticulture Chair balancing multiple projects and initiatives and achieving awards for the community each year. Our Parish Clerk, Kate Cuthbert, continues to work tirelessly for the community and much of the above would just not be possible without her. On behalf of the Parish Council I'd like to thank Kate for her continued support. And special thanks to our 'Award winning' Parish Gardener, Marc Platts, who works 'come rain or shine' to keep the planting, flower beds and the general appearance of the parish looking fantastic.

Finally, in April 2018 Cllr Nia Cook resigned from the Parish Council due to personal circumstances. Nia was part of the Horticulture Committee and made significant contributions to the improvements throughout the year, including the sustainable planting, the community gardening days and the installation of the gates on the A177. Nia also took the lead to install the new salt bins, and, implement the new website. On behalf of the Parish Council, I'd like to thank Nia for her sterling work and achievements and wish her all the best for the future.

### **1. Defibrillators**

In November 2017 the Parish Council (with the support of County Cllr D Stoker) purchased three defibrillators that have been installed at 3 locations: Shincliffe Primary School, The Avenue pub and St Mary's Church Hall. They are situated on the external wall of each building; available 24/7.

Thanks to Shincliffe School, The Avenue Pub and Shincliffe Church for being very accommodating and allowing the units to be fitted. We hope we never have call to use them, but they are available to all if required.

PLEASE NOTE: to use the defibrillators you will need to dial 999 to gain the access code. This has the advantage of letting the emergency services know your location and dispatch help in the event of an emergency.

### **2. Local Council Award Scheme**

The Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) provides a framework to enable all councils to meet their full potential. Shincliffe Parish Council achieved the first milestone of 'Foundation Award' in March 2017 – a notable achievement given that nationwide only 70 Parish or Town Councils had achieved a higher award status. After a great deal of hard work during the remainder of 2017, we made our submission for the 'Quality Award' early 2018.

As a Parish Council we are committed to working in a professional and transparent manner; supporting the community on important initiatives with a focus on continuous improvement. We are one step to the top award, 'Quality Gold', and creating a framework for excellence whereby your Parish Council can achieve the very best for our community. We have already made a start on some of the Quality Gold criteria and I would anticipate that we will submit for Quality Gold status in 2019.

### **3. Committee Reports**

#### Horticulture Committee

The Horticulture Committee are grateful to several Parish residents for contributing to our local environment, through the community gardening days, planting and maintaining beds around street signs and benches, daily litter-picking by two residents and alerting the Parish to any horticultural issues.

The Parish spring and summer front garden awards have continued to highlight some impressive gardens. The Beautiful Durham Awards also recognised the efforts of the residents, and our Parish Gardener, with each of our three Parish entries winning their category: High Shincliffe and Shincliffe Village receiving awards for Best Village and Best Small Village and Sherburn Hospital winning in the Best Sheltered Accommodation category.

Some of our wooden benches in the parish are showing their age. We are continuing to maintain benches wherever feasible and those beyond repair will in future be replaced with benches made from recycled materials. The first replacement bench has recently been installed at the top of Langton Lea, on the perimeter road.

By the summer of this year the Parish will have a total of 27 semi-dwarf fruit trees across five community mini orchards, including one to be planted by the school children in the school grounds. Sustainable planting continues around the traffic-calming gateways on the A177, with a wild flower area to be planted by the school children this year.

The Horticulture Committee membership is currently Angela Lee (Chair), Cllr Nia Cook, Cllr J Wright, Marc Platts (Parish Gardener) and Pat Matthews (community representative).

### Finance Committee

The purpose of the Finance Committee is to provide financial oversight and stability of parish finances. The Financial Committee membership is currently George Lee (Chair), Angela Lee (Vice Chair), John Wright and David Stoker.

#### Financial Summary (unaudited):

The total income of the Parish Council in this period was £27,671.41 and the total expenditure £25,672.76. On 31<sup>st</sup> March a reserves balance of £9,992.59 has been carried forward into 2018-19. The forecast expenditure for 2018/19 has increased and therefore in January 2018 it was resolved that the 2018-19 precept should be raised by c8 % to £18,900.

During the year, Steve Ragg (DCC) had circulated some guidance from Mazars (DCC external auditors) reference the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and the level of reserves they would assess as being a reasonable level to hold.

“The lower level of reserves should be 25% of your precept e.g. for a £10,000 precept, reserves could be no less than £2,500. The upper level of reserves should be 115% of your precept e.g. for a £10,000 precept, reserves could be no more than £11,500. These levels are considered acceptable levels. The figures above EXCLUDE any earmarked reserves that you have set aside for specific purposes.

They also said that to meet legal requirements all of your new Annual Governance and Accountability Returns must be available to your electors on a free, publicly available website.”

The Finance Committee noted that the Shincliffe PC reserves were at the lower level of reserves guidance (c25%). This guidance supports the Parish Council approach in recent years to propose above inflation precept increases. It was noted that the information from Mazars would help inform the FY19/20 precept.

### Requests for Financial Assistance

Created in 2015, the Grant Award policy looks to promote criteria for donations where community organisations can demonstrate a clear requirement for financial support, providing a product or service enhancing quality of life and promoting Shincliffe in a positive way.

In line with this policy, the Parish Council consider making donations in June and December. The following donations were made this financial year:

Butterwick House - £100  
Community Association (Shincliffe show) - £120  
Citizens Advice - £100  
South Durham Football Club - £100  
SCAN magazine - £250  
**Total: £670**

## **4. Conduct of the Council**

There were 11 monthly meetings of the Council – 10 in Shincliffe Primary School, High Shincliffe, and 1 in St. Mary’s Church Hall, Shincliffe Village – as well as the Annual Parish Meeting (May 2017) and regular meetings of the Horticultural Committee and Finance Committee.

Unfortunately, St Mary’s Hall is now used for other activities. Other venues have been explored in Shincliffe Village and Sherburn House without success. We continue to review this situation.

The Parish Council continues to promote community engagement. The item 'Issues Raised by Members of the Public' maintains its position at the start of the agenda (previously at the end). Public attendance has been minimal, but I would welcome more attendance to discuss important issues and aspirations, and possibly commend the good work within the community.

#### **5. Planning Applications**

The Parish Council tend to receive one or two planning applications each month, and in most cases, there are no objections.

#### **6. Crime and Police Responsibilities**

In some months, no crimes were recorded; in others, reported crimes included theft and minor damage.

#### **7. High Shincliffe School – Driving behaviour**

The volume of traffic and actions of some drivers at High Shincliffe School 'drop off' and 'pick up' times continues to present safety concerns. Reports of dangerous driving, speeding and inconsiderate parking continue to be raised to the Parish Council who are increasingly concerned that residents or children will suffer injury because of driver actions. Near misses have been reported.

Some police presence appears to have improved the situation and we are also considering permissible parking. Please could residents contact the Parish Council if you witness any of the traffic related issues above.

#### **8. Speeding along the A177**

Following on from the road markings added on the A177 at the southern entrance to High Shincliffe in advance of the 40mph sign in 2016, two gates were erected at either side of the A177 also at the southern entrance to give the impression of the road narrowing. The Horticulture Committee have added some planting close to enhance the appearance and to ensure the gates are sympathetic to the parish.

The Parish Council will continue to monitor the speed issues along the A177 and consider further initiatives.

#### **9. Cyclists on the black path**

Reports of cyclists using this path (behind Hillcrest) riding at speed were submitted to the Parish Council. One instance involved a motorbike. At the beginning of 2018, three staggered gates were added to the black path which creates a narrow gap to prevent cyclists travelling at speed, but large enough for pushchairs to pass. Early signs are that this initiative has been effective. We will continue to monitor the situation, but please could I ask you to report any further instances to the Parish Council including the date, time, description or names of the cyclists would be helpful.

#### **10. Dog fouling**

Most dog owners are responsible owners, but it's disappointing to see that a small minority are inconsiderate and irresponsible. Dog fouling around the village has increased, often on paths and trails where residents enjoy a stroll, and where children play. Dog fouling spoils the environment, upsets residents, can cause serious health risks, particularly to children, and incurs a fine of up to £1,000.

The Parish Council take these incidents seriously. If residents witness an incident of dog fouling, please report this to the Parish Council with details of the dog, and the owner. The Parish Council will forward these details to the authorities. Alternatively, you can also contact Durham County Council directly.

The Parish Council are also exploring some new technology whereby locations and times of dog fouling can be registered to isolate the irresponsible owners. More to follow in due course.

### **11. High Shincliffe Park**

Dog fouling can present a serious risk to children. Signage has been added around High Shincliffe park to clarify the policy on dog walking. Dogs are not allowed in the park apart from along the footpath at the top of the park, when on a lead. Please can I ask dog owners to respect this policy.

### **12. Grit bins**

In December 2017 the Parish Council added 4 extra salt bins. These are green in colour and will be maintained by the Parish Council. The salt is for use on the roads and footpaths, but not for private use.

During the colder weather at the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018 it was pleasing to see that they were in use and improved the road conditions.

### **13. Litter picks**

The Parish Council continues to organise two litter picks per year in Spring and Autumn. Both continue to be well attended with 20 residents and Councillors donating an hour of their time on a Saturday morning to help keep Shincliffe clean and tidy. Both the Autumn and Spring litter picks were productive with over 20 bags of rubbish collected on each occasion, so thanks to everyone who attended the litter pick for sparing your valuable time. Thanks also to Alan and Nicola (The Avenue Pub) who always invite those in attendance to enjoy some bacon sandwiches and refreshments.

### **14. Footpaths**

The Parish Council have invested some funds into clearing the footpath between the two entrances to High Shincliffe. I would like to thank Mark Turnbull at DCC for an excellent job.

A resident has commented that some footpaths around the Parish were muddy due to people cleaning their boots on paths following walks. A polite request to be considerate when cleaning boots and to help leave the footpaths clean and tidy.

The Parish Survey highlighted pathways as an issue with foliage and overhanging branches impeding or blocking pathways. If you spot anything of this nature, please contact the Parish Council.

### **15. Community Engagement**

As a Parish Council we are committed to maintaining a high standard of communication. Please look at our new website and new notice boards for upcoming events, news and some of the recent awards the Parish have achieved.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Clerk, all fellow Councillors, Committee Chairs, our Parish Gardener Marc Platts, County Councillor Stoker and especially the Shincliffe Community for their contributions throughout the year.

Councillor George Lee  
Chair

April 2018