

Shincliffe Parish Council  
Annual Report  
2015-16

## Your Parish Council

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## **Chairman Foreword**

Welcome to the Shincliffe Parish Council annual report.

This year has been a year of development as Shincliffe Parish Council commenced the journey towards the 'Local Council Award Scheme' initiative aiming for 'Quality Gold'. Being the top award, this demonstrates that the council is at the forefront of best practice achieving excellence in governance, community leadership and council development. The purpose of working towards 'Quality Gold' is to create a framework for excellence whereby your Parish Council can be efficient, effective and transparent, acting on issues that impact our community and achieving the very best for our Community.

At the end of 2015 we commissioned a Parish Survey to help understand what is important to our community and the results were fantastic and referenced within this report. The Horticulture Committee continues to make great progress towards sustainable planting, endorsed by the community within the survey. The committee have also arranged community events such as planting wild flowers in Love Lane with children from Shincliffe School, in addition to the creation of new flower beds at the entrances to High Shincliffe. This has further benefits by creating the opportunity for further reductions to the horticulture budget in years to come.

During the year, it was with regret that I received and accepted resignation letters from Councillor Pat Hudson and Councillor John Lightley. Pat and John have devoted a significant amount of time and effort to the Shincliffe Community over a number of years and will be dearly missed. On behalf of the Parish Council, I would like to express sincere gratitude for their valuable contributions over many years, which includes valuable input into the Parish Council's continued development towards Quality Gold, and wish both Pat and John all the best for the future.

As a result, the Parish Council have two vacancies that will be filled by co-option and we expect to fill both vacancies in May.

In May 2015 the Parish Council resolved the creation of a Finance Committee and in July 2015 I chaired the first Finance Committee Meeting. The purpose of this committee is to provide financial oversight and ultimately to ensure the stability of parish finances. The precept this year was proposed by the Finance Committee to the Parish Council using a new and more efficient budget control that will save the clerk valuable time each month.

During the upcoming year the Parish Council will be looking to progress towards Quality Gold to provide the best possible service to the community; continue to increase community engagement and strive to provide the best value for money.

**Evidence of community engagement (horticulture, Traffic through Shincliffe Village), council activities (litter picks) and the promotion of democratic processes (Traffic through shincliffe village, acting on survey) in an annual report, online material and regular news bulletins**

## **1. Quality Gold**

The 'Local Council Award Scheme' provides a framework to enable all local councils to meet their full potential. Shincliffe Parish Council have set their sights high and are aiming for the top award, 'Quality Gold'. Councils that achieve Quality Gold status demonstrate that they are at the forefront of best practice achieving excellence in governance, community leadership and council development, whilst ensuring value for money as well as constantly seeking new innovations and opportunities to improve. As a Parish Council we are committed to achieving Quality Gold status. We made good progress last year and we're on target to submit our application during the coming year.

## **2. Shincliffe Parish Survey**

During November, the Parish Council distributed a survey to all residents in the parish. The purpose of the survey was to engage and communicate with you, the Shincliffe community, and to generate feedback on how the Parish Council can best serve the community. Thank you to everyone for taking the time to complete the survey. The volume of responses were extremely positive and the Parish Council welcome having this information to help inform future decisions and plans.

## **3. Committee Reports**

### **Horticulture Committee**

This past year has seen further development of our project-funded investment to increase environmentally friendly, sustainable planting and save plant costs in the long term. We continued our sustainable planting scheme with two further perennial beds at the entrance to Whitwell Acres and on High Street entrance to Heathways. A further reduction of bedding plants ordered this year (750 less plants than 3 years ago) has contributed both to the establishment of more sustainable beds and also to the new entrance beds at High Shincliffe. Results from the Parish Survey showed strong support for the sustainable developments, including some support for introducing sustainable planting in the entrance beds. We have responded to requests for introducing wild flower areas in the parish, to be maintained by residents, and agreed to introduce a mini orchard of five semi-dwarf fruit trees in the community.

An increasing number of residents are making a positive contribution to our local environment. Some residents have taken on the planting of flower tubs in their street, with excellent displays throughout all seasons. Since we agreed with Durham Council not to spray weed-killer around trees and street signs, residents have been busy planting spring bulbs and summer flowering plants in the bare patches around trees and street signs. This has made a huge difference to the previous unsightly patches of bare earth. Community responses from this year's Parish Survey showed an increase in the number of residents who are willing to give their support at community gardening sessions.

The Summer and Spring Front Garden Competitions highlighted some excellent displays, including two special awards for the excellent use of planted containers and for a group of residents who created some stunning displays on bare ground around trees and street signs.

The Beautiful Durham Awards took place in October, and once again High Shincliffe was awarded Best Village and Sherburn Hospital was awarded a Merit in the Best Sheltered Accommodation category. The £40 vouchers awarded for High Shincliffe are being used to continue to develop the sustainable beds and to plant up the bare patches around trees and street signs.

As part of this year's community engagement, working with the local school children to plant the Old Mine Site and Love Lane with wild flowers, we entered the Royal Horticultural Society's "It's Your Neighbourhood Awards. The project with the children was considered alongside our other community involvements, including the litter picks and community planting of public areas, together

with the general appearance of the Parish. We were pleased to be awarded Level 4 “Thriving”, just a few points from the top level of “Outstanding”.

### **Finance Committee**

Established in May 2015, the purpose of the committee is to provide financial oversight and ultimately to ensure the stability of parish finances. The total income of the Council in this period was £x, and the total expenditure £x. In March a balance of £9,267.36 has been carried forward into 2015-16. In January 2015 it was resolved that the 2016-17 precept should be raised by 6% to £16,300, reflecting additional costs to the Parish Council in relation to election expenses, bench maintenance and tree maintenance. Discussions this year were complicated and delayed by uncertainty about the cost of a possible

The Clerk has embraced a new budget control which will reduce the time spent on financial reconciliations and budget updates enabling the clerk to spend more time on issues that add value. Councillors also experimented with a system of criteria setting and prioritising of suggested spending as a tool for making the best possible use of scarce resources.

The Parish Council, in collaboration with County Councillor David Stoker, unanimously agreed to help fund the newsletter provided by the amalgamated St. Mary’s and SCAN to ensure that every communication avenue most valued are provided. David Stoker kindly donated the £500 required.

### **4. Requests for Financial Assistance**

The Parish Council created a Grants Award Policy in 2015 and in line with this policy makes two donations a year in June, and December. This policy looks to promote criteria for donations which are to community organisations which can demonstrate a clear need for financial support to provide benefits to Shincliffe Parish by:

- Providing a service
- Enhancing the quality of life
- Improving the environment
- Promoting Shincliffe in a positive way

The following donations were made during this period:

Shincliffe Show - £150.00  
Shincliffe Junior FC - £100.00  
High Shincliffe Avenue FC -£75.00  
Mayor’s Appeal - £100.00  
NEPACS - £161.60

### **5. Conduct of the Council**

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 engage with the Parish Council to discuss issues that are held important, and possibly commend good work in the community.

The Parish Council have benefitted immensely from the expertise and involvement of County Councillor David Stoker. We have several times also called on the expertise of Stephen Ragg of the Durham Association of Parish and Town Councils at County Hall.

There were eleven monthly meetings of the Council – 7 in Shincliffe Primary School, High Shincliffe, and 4 in St. Mary's Church Hall, Shincliffe Village – as well as the Annual Parish Meeting (May 2015) and regular meetings of the Horticultural Committee and Finance Committee.

## **6. Planning Applications**

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

## **7. Area Action Partnership (AAP)**

Councillor Stoker has regularly kept the Parish Council informed of the routine activities of the Durham APP.

## **8. Crime and Police Responsibilities**

In some months, no crimes were recorded; in others, reported crimes included minor assault, and break-ins into houses, garages and sheds. Periodically there have been parking problems up at the school at 'school run' times.

## **9. Community Projects and Other Activity**

### **Traffic Issues in Shincliffe Village and High Shincliffe**

A regular standing issue on the agenda throughout the year has been the Traffic through Shincliffe Village. Concerns have been expressed for many years that the volume of traffic in the village on weekday mornings 8am-9am is excessive that some drivers appear to be using the village as a 'Rat-Run' to avoid the queue of vehicles backed up from the traffic lights at the B1198 Shincliffe Lane junction.

The Parish Council have discussed at great length during the past year, including consulting with Durham County Council (DCC) who kindly provided a report as an output of their review, forwarding independent survey data to DCC, inviting members of DCC to come and talk at Parish Council meetings, arranging independent speed checks and arranging informal meetings to discuss the options available with the community including the analysis gained and suggested routes forward. Unfortunately, after great effort and discussion there was no viable solution available and this was discussed at the most recent informal meeting. I'd like to thank residents for their patience during this time.

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 as a result of driver actions.

We are continuing to work with the Police and have requested more regular Police presence during these times. Please could residents contact the Parish Council if you witness any of the traffic related issues above.

### **Speeding along the A177**

The Parish Council continues to closely follow progress on initiatives to reduce the speeding along the A177. Road markings were placed in advance of the 40mph sign and the results of a speed check

to review the effectiveness of the change are due shortly. We are hopeful that further initiatives will be deployed during the year.

### **Website and Notice Boards**

The current website and notice boards are both respectively coming to the end of their economic lives. Both were highlighted as important forms of communications within the Parish Survey, therefore we are looking to make an investment in both to ensure that the Parish Council provides residents with the best means of communication possible.

### **Paths, Grass Verges and Grass Cutting**

Feedback from the Parish Survey (and other communications from residents) highlighted a number of concerns where pathways, foliage and overhanging branches (impeding or blocking pathways) were a particular concern within the Parish. Issues of ownership and responsibility in the parish tend to be complex but investigation often reveals that the parish and/or county do not have a responsibility to maintain particular paths or particular stretches of paths. There is a budget this year to help improve these circumstances.

### **Street Lighting in Sherburn Hospital**

The Parish Council followed this with close interest as it was originally proposed that all street lighting outside SH would be removed due to council austerity, however it transpired that only some would be removed and did not present a safety issue.

### **Broadband**

Representative in the Parish Survey, Broadband issues have existed throughout the year, in particular, Shincliffe Village where the 'Fibre Optic' broadband (i.e fast broadband in excess of 10Mbps) was not available. I'm pleased to say that Fibre Optic broadband is now available in Shincliffe Village. Residents may need to 'sign-up' to this service which may come at a cost, but I'm sure this availability comes as a great relief to those within the village. Thanks extended to County Councillor David Stoker who has been a driving force behind this.

Reports of intermittent Broadband speed have been reported to the Parish Council and within the Survey. Residents have the best chance of 'good' broadband speeds when on 'Fibre Optic'.

### **Litter picks**

The Parish Council continues to organise two litter picks a year in Spring and Autumn. Both continue to be well attended with 20+ people within the community donation their time on a Saturday morning to help keep Shincliffe clean and tidy. In Autumn we collected x bags and Spring we collected x bags. Thanks to everyone involved, including The Avenue Pub who always invite those in attendance to enjoy some bacon sandwiches and refreshments.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Clerk, County Councillor Stoker, all fellow councillors, Committee Chairs, and especially the Shincliffe Community for their contributions throughout the year.

Councillor George Lee  
Chair  
May 2016