

Whaley Bridge Town Council

Annual Report 2013/14

Introduction

THE PARISH of WHALEY BRIDGE covers four wards: Fernilee, Taxal, Yeadsley and Furness Vale. There are three councillors representing each ward and the council meets in the Mechanics Institute on the second Thursday of each month (except August) at 7.30pm. Meetings are open to the press and public and local people are invited to address councillors during the agenda item "Open Forum" about any issues of concern.

Your council is officially recognised as a "Quality Town Council" and has achieved the General Power of Competence, (October 2012,) which means that it has the power to do anything that it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its Parish.

TOWN CLERK

The Town Clerk is Mrs Stephanie Raybould. The Clerk's Office is within the Mechanics Institute and is open to the public between 9.00am and 12.30pm each weekday morning to provide information, advice and to deal with queries. Tel: 01663 733068.

CHAIR and VICE CHAIR

On 9th May 2013, Cllr Martin Thomas was elected as Chair and Cllr John Pritchard was elected as Vice-Chair of Whaley Bridge Town Council for 2013/2014.

COUNCILLORS' EXPENSES

Members of Whaley Bridge Town Council do not claim any expenses although they are permitted to claim "out-of-pocket" expenses in accordance with statutory regulations. They carry out their roles as town councillors voluntarily, giving up time and effort for the benefit of the community. Councillors must also declare a Disclosable Pecuniary or Other interest in items on the agenda, in which they could influence decisions directly affecting themselves.

The Chair received an allowance of £300 which he used to support additional activities at Whaley Bridge Youth Club and a thank-you event for allotment project volunteers

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

All planning applications for the parish are considered by the councillors at their monthly meetings and relevant comments and recommendations are made to the Planning Department at High Peak Borough Council. Members of the public are also able to view all applications in the Clerk's Office, on weekday mornings, and can come to council meetings and make comments.

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PRECEPT, INCOME and EXPENDITURE

The precept for 2013/14 was £73,961 and there has been an increase of 2.15% for 2013/14.

A copy of the receipts and payments account for the year ending 31st March 2014 is attached.

Main Initiatives of the Council

Neighbourhood Plan

An Area Consultation was conducted by High Peak Borough Council and the Peak District National Park Authority and no objections were noted to designating the parish of Whaley Bridge to be the area for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Two sub-groups were formed: the Regeneration & Housing Group and the Countryside & Wildlife Group. Around 20 volunteers have participated in the work of these groups. These groups met frequently in 2013 and a comprehensive definition of scope was achieved. The next step is a public consultation.

Due to the considerable controversy caused by the Local Plan consultation, and the re-inclusion of the C9 site adjoining Macclesfield Road, work was temporarily suspended.

At recent meetings the scope of immediate work has been narrowed to avoid areas which are left uncertain by the risks surrounding the Local Plan. These are the areas are:

- Design criteria
- Wildlife corridors
- Areas of land needing protection for amenity
- Walkways to amenity sites
- Heritage sites
- Car parking
- Green spaces
- Bingswood masterplan

Should a Neighbourhood Plan be adopted by Whaley Bridge, the Town Council will automatically receive 25% of any future Community Infrastructure Levy, should this be put in place by High Peak Borough Council. This could be used to fund Council initiatives such as, for illustration, an additional car park or leisure facility.

Regeneration Projects

Whaley4wards is a community forum which seeks to advance minor regeneration initiatives across the four wards of the parish of Whaley Bridge.

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The main initiatives during 2013/14 included:

- Improvements to the bottom right hand corner of the station car park and the installation of a restored Gilbert Scott telephone box to form a Community Information Point. Artwork designed by local artist Andrea Joseph has been affixed to the wall at the back to draw the attention of visitors. A bench seat is shortly to be installed here.
- Restoration of heritage waste bins
- An interpretation Board has been produced for Whaley Incline designed by Mary Nother. This should be installed shortly.
- Agreement has been reached with High Peak Borough Council for a 'K barrier' (as at Shallcross Incline) to be fitted to the bottom of Whaley Incline.
- The design of a 'Welcome to Whaley Bridge' sign incorporating art by Rosemary Wignall. These will advertise upcoming events in the town. The siting of these is under current discussion with Highways officers.

Other regeneration initiatives include the publication of a new town guide, grants for the Rose Queen Festival, Whaley Water Weekend, Furness Field Day and the Fireworks, as well as flower displays across the town in hanging baskets and flower tubs.

Allotments Restoration

The dedicated hard work of Cllr John Swift and a team of volunteer councillors and members of the community have cleared the formerly water-logged and unused area of the allotment site of saplings, weeds, and refuse (including a TV screen which was blocking the culvert). In liaison with the Tree Conservation officer some over-hanging trees were felled both on the allotment site and the adjoining area managed by Borough.

A number of drainage soughs and springs have been piped and will be used to provide a supply of water to the site.

This has resulted in a complete transformation and new allotments sites should be available later this year.

Mechanics Institute

Significant work took place in summer 2013 to install double glazing, relocate the Clerk's office to create a meeting area for her use and the redecoration of the ground floor.

A full survey of the building was carried out which showed it to be in general good repair, however the need for a number of structural repairs was identified and problems with drainage at the rear of the building are required. These will be carried out shortly. In preparation for this vegetation to rear has been cleared.

Negotiations with Robinson's reached the point of a draft lease, however the building survey identified a number of defects in the stable / garage area under the building, and these require remedy before the Town Council can proceed.

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Brookfield Pond

The council arranged for the hedge to be cut-back and restored. A new perimeter fence to the Whaley Hall boundary is to be installed.

Footpaths and Rights of Way

Further work took place in conjunction with Derbyshire County Council to improve the footpath between Reservoir Road and Start Lane.

3G Multi-Use Games Area

The 3G facility is managed by the Town Council through the Sports Executive. Considerable thanks go to Cllr Goldfinch for sustaining this through its second full year of operation.

Website: Whaleybridge.com

Dozens of articles were contributed by James Middleton covering the main activities in the town, and the recent campaign over site C9.

This has resulted in traffic increasing by 48%, and hits of 43865 in the year. My thanks go to James for this work.

Additional contributors will be welcomed to build on this record, particularly as James has now notified us he wishes to step back.

Joint Initiatives with other bodies

Work in conjunction with other bodies included:

- A series public meeting, workshops and an exhibition to highlight Flash Flood Risk in Whaley Bridge were carried out with the Environment Agency.
- There have been a number of major catastrophes in the River Goyt catchment area over the last 200 years, the latest of which was in 1989 resulting in loss of life to one local resident.
- It is hoped that local areas of interest can be established around the localities most at risk to enable the elderly and vulnerable to be assisted in any emergency.
- Subscription to the Environment Agency flood alert system can give warning of increased risk of flood.
- Discussions and investigations in conjunction with the Canal and River Trust have been taking place with regard to the community use of the Whaley Bridge Transshipment Warehouse on the Peak Forest Canal. Illustrative designs are at present being shown to conservation officers by CRT in-house architects.

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Major Consultations in which the Council has engaged

- Local Plan Consultation, fully documented on whaleybridge.com
 - Several Rounds of Consultation
 - A Public Meeting attended by Planning Officers
 - Meeting with Housing Minister Nick Boles
- Fire Stations
- Cycle Routes
- Southwest Peaks

Liaison with Borough & County Council

The Council has recorded the frustrations of the community at the delays and slow progress in restoring the Memorial Park.

Despite a campaign by Cllr John Swift and the Royal British Legion it proved impossible to get access to the War Memorial in Memorial Park to hold the annual service of commemoration of the fallen of past conflicts. A suitable alternative venue was used at the station car park. The Town Council is indebted to the RBL officers for organising this event, and were pleased to attend the recent rededication of the memorial following its restoration.

A multi-agency meeting was organised by Councillors, Whaley Bridge Community Trust and Derbyshire County Council to discuss the future and provision of Youth Services in Whaley Bridge. This meeting recorded the continuance of current provision for the time being. However, the task of putting this on a sustainable basis in the face of the future reduction in government support grants has to be faced.

Main Community Events and Chair's Engagements

The Chair and Vice-Chair had the privilege of representing the town at a number of events during 2013/14 including:

- The Dambusters' Commemoration and Lancaster Bomber Flypast in Chapel-en-le-Frith
- Furness Vale QE2 Field (COGS)
- Derbyshire Open Arts Exhibition
- Whaley Water Weekend coincided with a weekend of glorious sunshine. The event brought upward of 5000 people to the town and canal basin and was widely appreciated by residents and visitors alike. The music events at both the Mechanics Institute and basin provided a focus for continuing the footfall well into the evening.
- Whaley Bridge Station 150th Anniversary of Opening of Buxton Extension
- Visit of Michael Jodrell and Family: Centenary of 161st Manchester Scouts ("Jodrell's Own")

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Main Community Events and Chair's Engagements (continued)

- Rose Queen Festival, Children's Disco & Presentation of Cheques. The Chair would like to thank Queen Annabel, her retinue, Tony Mackey, John Barnes and Tim Mourne for their wonderful hospitality during the Rose Queen Festival. The children's disco was the absolute highlight of the year, and hugely appreciated by the young people who participated.
- Village Games
- Welldressing
- Garden Show
- Lantern Show and Fireworks – a huge success despite the inclement weather
- Annual festival of remembrance
- Christmas-tree Light Switch-On & Santa's Grotto
- Christmas Tree Festival
- Chapel-en-le-Frith Women's Choir: 40 Years of Song

Things We Have Not Been Able to Resolve

- Car Parking remains chronic in the town with frequent damage being recorded to vehicles and side-mirrors
- Connection of Whaley Incline to the Linear Park – it turned out the former bridge was removed some years ago
- Provision of Dog Fouling Bins along the Peak Forest Canal
- Improved Access to Bingswood Industrial Estate
- Restoration of Minor Play-Areas

Matters Frequently Raised with us which we cannot resolve

The maintenance of unadopted roads is the liability of property holders, however the problem remains of vulnerable members of the community being left at considerable risk in accessing their properties. In the 21st Century this is simply not acceptable and a solution has to be found.

Long Term Objectives of the Council

- Disabled Access to the Mechanics
- Improved Access to Bingswood Industrial Estate

Upcoming Events

This next weekend, 24-26 May, Derbyshire Open Arts Exhibition takes place across the county with exhibitions both here and throughout the area. Details are available from Peartree Café, the Library, the Mechanics Institute and whaleybridge.com.