

Gressingham Parish Council

Report on the work of Gressingham Parish Council for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.

Parish Council meetings and membership

- The PC met on 8 occasions in 2022/23: seven regular, bi-monthly meetings plus one extraordinary meeting held on 4th May 2022 to approve the co-option of Sally Riley to the PC following the resignation of Penny Foulds on 18th March 2022. The PC followed the legally required procedures for filling the vacancy through the City Council's Elections Office. As no request was made for a formal election, the PC was asked by the Elections Office to fill the vacancy by co-option. The PC also recorded its thanks to Penny Foulds for her service on the Council.
- 2022/23 PC membership: Martin Brooks (Chair), Michele Luxon (Vice-chair), Penny Foulds (to 18th March 2022), Grant Parker, Neil Read, Sally Riley (from 4th May 2022). Lesley Wareing was Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer. All the foregoing councillors stood for re-election in the May 2023 local government elections on 4th May 2023 and were re-elected for a four-year term until May 2027. Lesley Wareing is continuing as Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.
- All meeting agendas and minutes were published on the Parish Council website together with accounts, audit reports and other relevant items.

www.gressinghampc.org.uk

Finance and Governance

- The Precept for 2022/23 was set at £2400. The PC was still in the process of building up to recommended levels its severely depleted reserves. It also decided to maintain sufficient funds to:
 - maintain a contingency fund of £500 for emergencies or other unforeseen events (such as election expenses or failed equipment)
 - cover recurrent annual expenditure (such as the insurance premium, the donation to the GVT for the Old School Room to cover hire costs for village events, Clerk's remuneration, equipment maintenance and planned replacement)
 - allow discretionary spending on items or projects which benefit the whole community.
- At its meeting in January 2023 the PC decided to set the 2023/24 Precept at £3400 after a long discussion on the PC's financial position and rising costs. The following considerations were taken into account.
 - The need for the Precept to be sufficient to cover reasonable costs and the provision of services for which the Parish Council carries responsibility. Precepts set by other PCs of a similar population size (Gressingham pop 161) in the Lancaster City Council area have historically been much higher than that set by Gressingham PC. (Melling (pop 305) set a Precept of £13.3k for 2023-24, Arkholme (pop 363) £3.5k for 2023/24 and Wennington (pop 120) set a Precept of £7.1k in 2022/23. Gressingham has been working to increase its Precept to achieve a more comparative and realistic level of funding.

- The need to maintain reserves at the recommended level – i.e. ~ £2500 and the prudence of keeping a contingency fund of £500 for unforeseen events or needs. NB A contested election would cost the PC between £2.5 and £3k.
- The need to be in a position to pay the Clerk/RFO on nationally recommended pay scales. For a Parish Council like Gressingham which meets every two months and provides minimal services, the Clerk is expected to work for a minimum of 17.5 hours per month, i.e. 210 hours per year. The minimum pay point on the nationally agreed pay scale is £10.04 per hour. This would equate to an annual salary of £2108. In comparison Hornby pays its Clerk £2400pa. Gressingham PC currently pays its Clerk at the rate of £400 per annum which equates to £1.90 per hour. The current Clerk is content to receive this lower amount but the PC must be in a position to offer a proper level of remuneration should the need arise in future.
- The fact that the PC is now responsible for more equipment than has been the case in former years: currently two road traffic mirrors, one defibrillator and two SpIDs. Both Gressingham SpIDs are second hand. Gressingham has been able to make use of second hand devices because it has been able to draw on the expertise of a qualified electrical engineer who donates his services free of charge. One of the SpIDs failed in the early spring of 2023 but the PC was fortunately able to obtain replacement parts at no cost. A brand new SpID would have cost £2800-3000. The new traffic mirror at the top of Church Brow cost £500 and the batteries for the defibrillator – needed every three to four years cost £375 plus defibrillator pads costing £65 are needed every two years.

Gressingham and Eskrigge Community Emergency Plan (CEP)

The Community Emergency Plan was reviewed and updated during the year, the main revision being a list of resources, expertise and tools available in the village. Fortunately, there was no reason to activate the plan during the year.

Police and local crime reports

There was no interaction with the police during the year. There were reports of farm-related thefts in the local area. The Gressingham and Eskrigge Neighbourhood Watch Scheme continued.

Planning Applications

The PC received ~15 planning applications for comment during the year and sent responses to the City Council in all cases. The PC's main focus continued to be the long-running application (lodged in October 2018) for 76 single and two-storey homes plus a one-and-a-half storey medical centre on land at the north end of Hornby at the Priory Farm site on Fleet Lane. The PC, with Sally Riley taking the lead, continued to monitor progress, to communicate its objections and to make appropriate responses to every significant new development. This involved a great deal of work. The application finally went before the Lancaster City Council Planning Regulatory Committee for decision on 30th January 2023. Sally Riley attended to make representations on behalf of Gressingham PC. She was accompanied by Martin Brooks, Neil Read and other residents. The application was unanimously rejected by the Committee. Story Homes has until the end of June 2023 to lodge and appeal. A full report is available on the PC website: www.gressinghampc.org.uk

Road safety and traffic issues:

- **Speed Indicator Devices (SpIDs)**

- The PC with Neil Read taking the lead, continued to maintain two illuminated SpIDs on Fall Kirk in Gressingham: the one located at the west end of the village, powered from the mains supply at Hilltop (courtesy of Stuart & Josephine Piner).
- A request for a pole for a third SpID on Rabbit Lane made during 2021/22 was turned down by the County Council.
- The SpID at the east end of the village failed completely early in 2023 and the PC thought a new one would have to be purchased. However Neil Read

managed to replace, free of charge, the entire internal working mechanism. He has also obtained - again free of charge – a second-hand SpID from a neighbouring village. This means that Gressingham now has a spare device.

- A new mirror was purchased and installed in the garden of Relph Cottage (courtesy of Heather Bell) opposite the junction of Church Bank with Fall Kirk.
- **Road signs and safety**
 - Unfortunately, the promised new “hi-viz” speed limit sign plus a “Please Drive Carefully” sign for Rabbit Lane have not yet been installed. Nor has the damaged 30mph sign at the east end of the restricted speed area been repaired. The PC is chasing up the County Council about all these issues.
 - In response to a PC request, a new “Unsuitable for Wide Vehicles” sign was put at the bottom end of Eskrigge Lane near the junction with Sandbeds Lane.
 - The introduction of a 20 mph limit throughout Gressingham and Eskrigge is still being explored with the County Council, following the parish council’s on-line consultation which showed that residents overwhelmingly supported the proposal.
- **Road Maintenance**
 - The PC continued to monitor and report instances of damage to the roads in and around the village. Faults can be reported on the County Council website (which is available for anyone to use), and individual issues are chased up with the Highways Dept by the PC when necessary. Sadly, the new “fault reporting website introduced by the County Council is not as easy to use as the previous one and makes monitoring progress more difficult..
 - As a result of frost and heavy rain, there are some really dreadful potholes in Gressingham and Eskrigge which are a danger to road users and vehicles. The PC has written to the County Council about these but although they promised to take action nothing has yet been done.

Amenities and Facilities

- **White Bridges**
 - The PC contacted the County Council about the state of the bridges over the two becks and the parapet railings. A team was sent out to take a look and repairs to the structure have been promised though not yet done. Importantly though, the County Council has acknowledged in writing that they are responsible for the bridges and the thoroughfare.
- **Footpath Maintenance**
 - The PC applied for, and received, County Council grants: £500 for public footpath maintenance work and a £300 biodiversity grant were obtained from the County Council. However, due to a backlog of work at the County Council, the grants weren’t paid until late March and have been rolled over to 2023/24 when work will be undertaken.
- A **Litter Pick**, organised by David Wiper, was held in March 2023 and was well supported by residents.
- The **Defibrillator** has not had to be used during the year thankfully. The PC has taken on sole responsibility for maintenance and costs. The device is regularly checked by Sally Riley and Martin Brooks and the PC. pays for new batteries and pads.

Martin Brooks (Chair)
Lesley Wareing (Clerk)
May 2023