

DALSTON PARISH COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER JULY 2007



DALSTON PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007

The Chairman, Ronnie Auld reported that 2006 was a year of setting things in motion and planning for the future. The Parish Council, being mindful of the comments and ideas which came out of the Parish Plan, made a big effort to look hard at the needs of the Parish as a whole and tried to incorporate some of these proposals into a development plan stretching forward 10 or 15 years. This was done against the background of a potential upheaval in Cumbrian local government structure. There were changes afoot which could well alter the picture of local government in Carlisle District, and affect Parish Councils in the rural areas.

Quite early in the year the Parish Council carried out its annual review of the Parish Plan and how the Parish was doing in implementing some of the major recommendations. Without doubt the success of 2006 was the Dalston Festival. Having some sort of festival ranked very high in the 'wish list' emanating from the big questionnaire. This festival was a huge success with the festival climax of a parade of floats through the village and onto the show field, benefiting the Dalston Show and bringing people out onto the street in their droves. But, throughout the week of the festival, the various events were well attended and much enjoyed. The street party on the Friday night was fantastically well supported with residents coming from all parts of the Parish. The scarecrow competition brought visitors to the Parish and hopefully this benefited some of the local businesses. Inevitably lots of people were involved in the festival (not least the scarecrow makers), but specific mention must be made of Alan Dinning, John Kelsey, Judy Rickerby, Bryan Craig, Mary Walton, Bobby Nichol and Peter Kirby plus all of the other event organisers for 6 months of very hard work. Plans for the 2007 Dalston Festival are well under way, but without a lottery grant, this event can only happen with locally raised funds. One of the great results of the 2006 festival, and particularly the floats, has been the involvement of some new young people into the Dalston scene. It is always good to get new blood onto some of the organising committees. Whether or not the Parish can continue to organise and support an annual festival will depend on funding and people's involvement year on year.

At the annual budget meeting in November 2006, the Parish Council considered a list of potential projects, each one involving capital expenditure. It was notable that these projects were all Dalston Village centric, but no-one was able to bring forward any worthy projects from the hamlets or other parts of the Parish for consideration.

1. Station Entrance Improvement - In the planning phase for a couple of years this project should provide a safe walkway for pedestrians, together with tidying-up of the island and surfacing of part of the carriageway, hopefully to be adopted by Cumbria Highways. For all sorts of reasons, mainly due to title uncertainties and ridiculous bureaucracy, it has been extremely difficult to progress, but it is hoped that 2007 will see this improvement finally completed.
2. Car Parking - The parking issues have been creeping up on Dalston for some time and, over the next year or so they will become critical. We owe it to our Parishioners and visitors to keep them safe while walking around The Square and to our village based businesses to make it easy for customers to use them. The key to the problem might be the introduction of a 20mph speed limit running throughout the Square area allowing us to minimise the number of intrusive signs to control time limited car parking. The village remains indebted to the Victory Hall Committee for making available the land at Glave Hill as a community car park. This facility is heavily used, although not sufficiently by the long-term parkers, some of whom still use The Square. It was hoped to make a similar arrangement with the Dalston Agricultural Society to use the top-end of the show field for village parking. The proposal was for the Parish Council to fund the surfacing of this area, attend to the entrance and maintain the inevitable fencing. This might have cost the Parish as much as £100,000, but it would have enabled the Council to begin to address some regeneration in The Square. Unfortunately a satisfactory financial arrangement could not be made and so this plan is no longer under current consideration. The Parish Council is very anxious to address car parking in Dalston and so is now looking at other areas within its control such as on or adjacent to the Kingsway and these proposals will be put forward for community consultation.
3. Square Regeneration - This is totally bound-up with the solution to car parking and perhaps the introduction of a 20mph limit through the village. Nothing can be done until car parking is solved.
4. Riverbank Repairs - The Parish Council has a duty of care for the bits of riverbank adjacent to Parish land. This is a heavy responsibility, as riverbank maintenance is expensive and environmentally difficult. Some small signs will be placed along The Green part of the riverbank to draw people's attention to the dangers of the displaced rock armour and to satisfy risk management responsibilities.
5. New Community Building and/or Renovation of Forge Green - The Forge Green property is a major capital asset for the Parish Council. This building could be sold to specifically finance the provision of a new building, or some significant improvements and upgrading to modern standards need to be made to the existing fabric. The Parish Council has tried to market the property, but, for reasons mainly due to common land issues, failed to complete the sale. During the marketing phase the Parish Council examined a number of other properties around

the village and is still looking at and willing to explore any potential sites as well as the on-going renovation possibilities for Forge Green. Parishioners were angry and distressed over the closure of the static library facility, which was used for much more than just book lending – it was a village community centre for people of all ages and it was starting to be useful by providing facilities to access the internet, email etc. The replacement mobile library has not proved to be very popular and user numbers are declining. Plans are well advanced for the provision of a new library facility in The Square and the Parish Council has recently agreed to act as the lead agency in this development, provided that Cumbria County Council is prepared to commit fully to the project by a letter of intent and a provisional agreement with the landlord. Thanks are due to Mrs Jackson for suggesting the use of the property and to Trevor Allison, Carlisle District Councillor, for doing all the early work in turning Mrs Jackson's idea into a workable project. In a recent survey amongst Dalstonians over 100 respondents were in favour of a new library facility in The Square and more than 20 gave their names as willing volunteers in order to extend the hours beyond the normal County Council staffing periods. The respondents also suggested more than a dozen additional roles for this proposed Parish community facility.

6. Village Presentation - This is an allocation, in the Parish Council budget, of a sum of money to be spent on improving the decorative aspects of the Parish. So far £200 has been given towards a new garden at St Michael's School and there are proposals to improve the outside appearance of the public toilets, as well as provide more plants for the Jubilee Garden. While this fund is not huge, any ideas from all around the Parish would be welcome.
7. More Grasscreting on The Green - There are many pros and cons about providing more hard standing on The Green and it *might* alleviate some of the parking pressure in The Square, but that is far from certain. Filling in the gap between the Victory Hall and the Methodist Church would certainly improve the appearance of The Green, especially during bad weather. However, it would also improve the amenity for the houses on that part of The Green. The Parish Council has to be careful not to attract criticism from other parts of the Parish and the public audit bodies if it was seen to be spending public money which was perceived to be for the benefit of the few.

In the last couple of years, realising that little can be done in the community without funds; the Parish Council has significantly raised the precept. If some of the issues listed are to be addressed, this trend is likely to continue, whilst still offering good value and with the addition of outside funding from grants and other sources. The Parish Council did consider and reject a project to install a modest CCTV scheme in and around the churchyard to try and help with the problems associated with vandalism to gravestones and the fabric of the church. Connected to this the Parish Council was unwilling to implement a Police proposal to remove many of the higher bushes from the cemetery and to erect a railing fence around the entire area.

Youth Provision - An idea was floated last year for the provision of a Youth Council. Some investigations have been made into how this could be achieved, but, so far, no progress has been possible. The difficulty is finding a person or people with the time, energy and interest to give to this type of youth activity. On the subject of youth activities in the Parish, thanks were expressed to all those who currently run activity groups of all types – the Recreation Association, the leaders of the Cubs, Brownies, Scouts, Guides, sports clubs etc., in fact anyone giving of their time to organise anything for the younger members of the Parish.

It should be noted that the face of local government in Cumbria is likely to change dramatically in the coming years. The Government, triggered by last year's Local Government White Paper, has received a proposal from Cumbria County Council to disband the present County Council and all of the District Councils, and establish a new unitary authority for the whole of Cumbria. The opportunity for this was grasped by the County Council, but unfortunately the District Councils failed to provide an alternative proposal within the Government's timescale. Whatever the outcome, it is vital that local councils, such as Dalston Parish Council, are able to exert greater influence over principle authority decision making. Several Parish/Town Councils in Cumbria are interested in taking on some of the service provision currently the function of a higher authority. Whether Dalston goes down this path will depend very much on finance provision and professional structuring. One thing that may come out of the unitary principle would be some form of clustering of adjacent Parish Councils in order to lead to greater efficiency.

Alan Jackson, a Parish Councillor for quite a few years, resigned recently, but hopefully his place on the Council is being filled by a resident from the Raughton Head area. Alan Jackson was the Councillor who proposed and then saw through the highly successful signpost project a few years ago and it is hoped that Alan will continue to pass an interested eye over our cast iron signposts and urge the Parish Council to keep them up to scratch. Thanks must go to Alan for this and his other valuable community work on the Parish Council. The Chairman expressed gratitude to all those on the Parish Council who put in so much of their valuable time, not just at meetings, but in planning and organising projects. Specifically mentioned were David Cowen and Gary Harrison for their help with the various building projects currently under consideration and past chair persons for their help throughout this first year in the chair. The most underestimated person in the Parish Council world was the Clerk who needed to possess a wide range of skills involved in Parish administration. Liz Auld was thanked for all the work that she did for Dalston Parish Council. Dalston WI members were thanked for providing refreshments following the Annual Parish Meeting.

DALSTON PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2006/07

Income for the year was £49,782.84, with expenditure of £46,450.44. Excess income over expenditure was £3,332.40. Grants had been gratefully received from Carlisle City and Cumbria County Councils towards capital projects, including the rebuilding of the Cemetery access lane wall, the Station access, Forge Green listed building repairs, Gaitsgill railings refurbishment, Primrose Hall painting and kitchen cupboards and the Parish Paths Initiative work. Parish Council support for local organisations totalled £5,370. An unspent grant sum of £3,175 on the signpost project had to be refunded to the Countryside Agency. £8,000 budgeted expenditure on the Station access had not been incurred prior to the year end. The precept for 2007/08 had been set at £32,000, an increase of £2,000.

UPDATE ON TRAFFIC AND CAR PARKING ISSUES

The Parish Council recognises that traffic and parking is becoming a major problem in and around Dalston Square. At its June meeting the Council spent over an hour discussing the options with members of the County Council and Carlisle City Council. As a result the Parish Council determined to address this issue with the utmost priority.

John Collier, Cumbria County Councillor advised the Parish Council that the Carlisle Area Committee had agreed that Dalston should be included in the speed limit review process this year, with the possibility of changes being made by winter/spring 2008 subject to the usual Statutory Processes. This could mean a 20mph zone in The Square and immediate vicinity, as well as alterations to the 30mph and 40mph restricted areas. Associated traffic calming measures would be required. In conjunction with Richard Hayward, Cumbria Highways Engineer it was agreed by Dalston Parish Council that a questionnaire on the various parking options in terms of location, time limitations, and additional provision in and around The Square should be distributed to all Parishioners for consideration in the near future. Following the public response to the consultation questionnaire it was proposed to hold an event later in the year with more details of the favoured options, once these had been identified and further work done on them. When you receive it please ensure that you return completed questionnaires in order that some progress can be made on these important issues for Dalston.

In the meantime, if you have any views and/or ideas about this issue, then please do not hesitate to write now to Liz Auld at the address below, or email her on liza@carlisle-city.gov.uk. Your ideas could be included in the consultation questionnaire.

RECYCLING AND FLY TIPPING

Mike Gardner, Carlisle City Council Waste Services Manager spoke at the Annual Parish Meeting about the new household waste collection services and the various teething problems with the scheme. However what was not envisaged was the huge increase in fly tipping at the recycling centre in Glave Hill car park. This is a disgrace and a real eyesore in the centre of Dalston. Those responsible should be made aware that heavy fines can be imposed for leaving waste in public places. At present there is no facility for the collection of plastics at the recycling centre. The Victory Hall Committee and Parish Council did consider the installation of a plastics container, but it was too large to accommodate and service. However there is now a smaller bin available, which might be a possibility. Meanwhile please take plastics to Rome Street or the supermarket facilities. In addition, if the recycling bins are full, do not dump excess waste in the car park for other people to clear away, but dispose of it in a proper manner.

CUMBRIA IN BLOOM AND TIDY VILLAGE COMPETITIONS

Judging this year will take place on Wednesday 18th July commencing at 10am. Marks are awarded not only for well kept, attractive private gardens, but also for business frontages, public areas and amenities (play equipment, seats, litterbins, notice boards) use of recycling facilities, care of the environment, community and sustainable planting. Your involvement is essential to ensure that Dalston is presented in the best possible way. Thank you to all the residents who helped with the planting out of the Church flower beds, the 'Lamp', Victory Hall tubs and for putting up the lamppost planters. The efforts of the Scouts in planting out nearly 400 wild flower plugs at Forge Green are also much appreciated. Any additional baskets, window boxes, troughs and tubs would help, either at private dwellings or outside retail and office premises. The greater the number of participants and community input, the better the chance of a win.

NEW PARISH COUNCILLOR

Following the resignation of Alan Jackson, Mrs Felicity Kaye-Krzeczkowski has been co-opted onto Dalston Parish Council. She is a resident in the Raughton Head area so if you have any issues specifically relevant to that part of the Parish, please contact her on 016974 76376. Michael Smillie has also decided to step down from office, so there is a further vacancy on the Parish Council. Notice of the vacancy will be advertised, so if you are interested in becoming a Member, please contact the Clerk or any of the current Parish Councillors.

Mrs E Auld, Clerk, Bannerdale, Unthank, Dalston, Carlisle, CA5 7BA