

## North Lodge Parish Council

### Annual Report 2021-2022

This report covers the year from the Council meeting in May 2021 to the meeting in April 2022, a period when we made a steady return towards normal after the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the AGM in May 2021, Councillor Dennis Hall was elected as Chairman with Councillor Patrick Driscoll as Vice-Chair. Councillor Jackie Gregory was the outgoing Chairman and her two years in the Chair were marked by the unprecedented situations brought about by the pandemic but it is to her credit that the Parish Council has come through this as strong as ever.

During the year, we have welcomed three new Councillors, Councillor Suzanne Brown, Councillor Craig Martin (who is also our County Councillor) and Councillor Chris Veitch. All three have shown that there is a desire among residents in the Parish to get involved in the well-being and improvement of the Parish and all three have already contributed greatly to the work of the Council. There is still one seat available on the Council for someone who shares this enthusiasm.

In November, we were greatly saddened to learn of the death of our former Gardener and Environment Caretaker, Frank Leighton. Frank was well-known and liked in the Parish and had given the Council over eight years of excellent service. We have been liaising with his family to commemorate Frank by fixing a plaque to a bench seat, and there will shortly be a commemoration event to recognise his role in the community.

#### Crime and Community Safety

We continue to experience very low crime levels in our Parish. Over the entire year, there have been just a handful of instances of graffiti, anti-social behaviour and inconsiderate parking. Recently, there has been an abandoned car at Low Flatts. We receive regular reports from the Community Speed Watch Team who monitor the main roads in the Parish. These reports are added to our Facebook page and our website so that they are available to read by residents.

Portfolio Holder Councillor Jackie Gregory continues to provide an effective link between the Council, the Police and other agencies which greatly helps to maintain the low levels of crime in the Parish.

## Finance

Financial matters continue to be carefully planned, budgeted for and controlled by the Council and we again received a “clean” report from our auditors. The Precept for 2022/2023 remained at £31.53 per Band D equivalent house, last increased in 2018/2019. We hope that this provides some help for any household experiencing financial pressure in these times of rapidly rising costs. The Precept enables the Council to provide enhanced services, such as play facilities, flower beds and bus shelters, to those provided by Durham County Council (DCC) and also allows us to engage with organisations such as DCC on matters of importance to individual residents. Organisations receiving a donation from the Council included the Great North Air Ambulance Service, the Poppy Appeal, Park View Lower School and North Lodge Remembrance Group. We have installed a new noticeboard at Barley Gate for the benefit of residents of the new houses there. We are awaiting a replacement bus shelter for the worn out metal-framed one on the west side of Picktree Village. With our County Councillor and a resident, we continue to seek talks with Sustrans regarding the much needed re-painting of the bridge over North Road. We are presently seeking permission from the County Council to install a defibrillator in Picktree Village. A new laptop computer was purchased for the use of the Clerk and a bank debit card, also for the use of the Clerk, was approved and issued.

Councillor John Waugh is our Finance Portfolio Holder and he takes an active role in this central aspect of the Parish Council’s activities. The Parish Council always welcomes suggestions from Councillors and residents for project ideas which might provide lasting benefit to the Parish. We have grants available for community groups.

## Highways and Transport

As we do not at present have a Portfolio Holder, all Councillors monitor the roads and footpaths of the Parish for any problems needing attention. Matters reported to the relevant agencies included failing road surfaces, fading white lines and overhanging shrubs. The walls of two bus shelters were re-painted. We monitor the condition of our bus shelters by way of an informal monthly inspection and other highways matters are reported by Councillors or the public for action whenever they occur.

## Horticulture

The Parish Council takes pride in keeping North Lodge an attractive place to live and work. Horticulture is a key function of this as we enhance the work done here by DCC. There are nineteen flower beds planted up together with several flower barrels, all making the Parish a more attractive area. We have spoken at length with DCC regarding our contract with them to carry out all our horticultural work but, although this is agreed for the next year, we await the outcome of DCC’s service restructuring to see what they can offer us for

the future. We also await DCC carrying out for us the agreed renovation of two shrub beds at North Road and we continue to discuss with DCC the reinstatement of the beds at the entrance to Picktree Lodge. It is recognised, however, that the storms in the early part of 2022 have caused delays to the usual work of the County Council. We donated horticultural tools to Park View School. We have formed a horticultural sub-group to meet and bring forward recommendations to the full Council. As well as the long established Christmas Tree in North Road which carries lights each Christmas, we have again provided a locally grown tree with lights in Picktree Village. Thanks go to Councillor Maureen May as Portfolio Holder with assistance from Councillor Patrick Driscoll for this busy section of our work.

### Planning and Development

With new housing developments in the Parish together with the usual planning applications made by residents, we are grateful to Councillor John Waugh for overseeing this Portfolio. We have discussed several new planning applications and submitted comments to the DCC Planning Department. We also discussed the level of consultation offered by DCC on planning matters. Councillor John Waugh monitors all new planning applications in the Parish and advises these to all Councillors so that any opinions or comments can be gathered quickly.

### Play Areas

The two play areas in the Parish are extremely important for the welfare of residents. The Merlin Drive play area is owned by DCC whilst the Low Flatts play area is Parish Council owned. Portfolio Holder Councillor Margaret Caygill monitors both, and liaises with DCC on any issues that arise. Both play areas are in the early stages of being upgraded. The plans for Merlin Drive have been agreed following a DCC consultation with residents whilst the plans for Low Flatts are currently being considered. Both developments are expected to utilise some of the funds made available by the Vigo Lane housing developments. At Low Flatts, the goal posts have been repainted and a gap in the hedge filled.

### Policy and Governance

Councillor Dennis Hall, as Portfolio Holder, has kept the Council informed on many matters affecting our sector of Local Government and this enabled discussions on such matters as a National Association of Local Councils report on Climate Change, and a Local Government Association report on Working in Partnership. During the year, we have also held a discussion on voting on proposals, have updated our Standing Orders (begun by the outgoing Chairman Councillor Jackie Gregory), agreed a new Code of Conduct for Members, submitted a response to DCC on its consultation on the Economic Strategy for the County and held a review of Portfolios to be

implemented from May 2022. The Clerk's working hours were increased. Several proposals from the Chair are included in the section below "Engaging with the Community".

### Publicity

Portfolio Holder Councillor Elsie Forrester continues to provide regular and important information from the Area Action Partnership and from the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC). Councillor Forrester attends numerous meetings on behalf of the Council and her feedback ensures that all Councillors are kept up-to-date on matters affecting local government and people in Chester-le-Street and the County. She is a member of both the AAP and the local CDALC group so is very well placed to bring forward views and proposals. The Parish Council's annual Newsletter was again well received in 2021, following its omission in 2020 due to Covid-19 enforced restrictions. The Newsletter, collated by Councillor Maureen May with our grateful thanks, is delivered by Councillors to each household in the Parish. The Parish Council thanks all who contribute to its production and distribution. The Newsletter can also be accessed via the Council's website.

### Website

The website continues to be up-dated at regular intervals by the Clerk. Council Minutes, Agendas, dates of meetings, financial information and items of interest and information are contained on the site.

### Meetings and Events Attended

During the year, Councillors have represented the Council at many external meetings, workshops and events, some of which have been virtual ones. These include meetings of the CDALC Chester-le-Street and District Sub-Committee, CDALC Smaller Councils Forum, the DCC Area Action Partnership, several training events, meetings with representatives of Park View School and meetings with officers of DCC. At the Remembrance Day Service, the Chairman accompanied by Councillor Forrester laid a wreath on behalf of the Council. At the greatly appreciated North Lodge Remembrance Group event on 11<sup>th</sup> November at North Road, several Councillors including the Chairman were in attendance. The Parish Council thanks all those Councillors who have represented the Council in these many and various matters. This is a function that is of great importance in establishing and presenting the views of our residents.

### Engaging with the Community

The Chairman, Councillor Dennis Hall, has received support from the Council for several policies and proposals designed to enhance the relevance of the Council in the Community. These include -

Improving Representation

Improving Community Engagement

Using Social Media

Co-option to the Council

Establishing a Community Fund

Establishing a Civic Arts Awards Scheme

From these initiatives, we have delivered leaflets to each household, seeking new Councillors through the Co-option policy which now provides a clear and concise path for residents who are interested in joining the Council (one seat still available at the time of writing), established grant funding (£12K available during 2022/2023 for local groups via the Community Fund) and established with Park View Lower School the Civic Arts Awards Scheme to encourage students to produce artwork to be displayed around the Parish.

### The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

To celebrate this significant event, we are arranging for our flower barrels to be planted with a red, white and blue scheme, for the flower beds to contain crown designs and flags, and for the students of Park View Lower School to be presented with Platinum Jubilee badges. The themes for the entries for this year's Civic Arts Awards Scheme also include the Platinum Jubilee and local history.

### North Lodge Remembrance Group

As previously reported, Councillors attended a very moving ceremony on Remembrance Day. We will support the Group for the 2022 event as well but have also offered our support for a permanent memorial in the Parish.

### Other Community Matters

During the year, Councillor Driscoll kindly carried out an audit of public seating in the Parish. From this, we were able to dispose of four old seats and install three new ones. We provided a donation to Park View School to support the provision of a Community Room at the Lombard Drive site. We received a helpful and informative presentation by the DCC Neighbourhood Wardens on their work and we have been contacted by residents on many matters including helping to resolve a Council Tax anomaly in Picktree Village, overgrowing hedges and planning matters. We expect to deal with all such contacts in the speediest and most effective way possible. Residents

can contact the Council by using the contact link on the website <https://www.northlodgeparishcouncil.gov.uk/> or by telephoning 0191 3892516 or in writing to 21 Lyndhurst Avenue Chester-le-Street DH3 4AR or by contacting any Councillor directly. Our noticeboards are situated at North Road (near the Lambton Worm pub), at the entrance to Lombard Drive from North Road, at Merlin Drive play area, at Picktree Village alongside the stone-built bus shelter, at Picktree Lodge estate (between numbers 28 and 30) and on Vigo Lane at the west entrance to Barley Gate.

#### Working with the County Councillor

The Parish Council considers it extremely important and beneficial to have a good working relationship with the County Councillor and such a relationship is well established. Councillor Craig Martin was returned in May 2021 as our County Councillor and we welcomed his re-election. The Parish Council will continue to seek a strong and positive relationship to provide the best service to our residents.

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the Chairman (Councillor Dennis Hall), Vice-Chairman (Councillor Patrick Driscoll) and all Councillors who have contributed so much time and effort to the achievements of the Council. Thanks are also due to County Councillor Craig Martin for his close involvement and interest in the Parish. The Parish Council values its relationships with the County Council, our MP, the Police and Park View School, all of whom show that they share our aim of improving North Lodge for the benefit of our residents and for the benefit of those who work here.

Finally, there is one seat available on the Parish Council for any resident interested in serving the community. Please contact the Clerk or any Councillor if you would like more information. Also, please contact the Clerk for information on grants from the Community Fund. We always welcome the involvement of residents and local businesses in Parish matters and we will continue to strive for the improvement of North Lodge Parish.

David Murrell  
Clerk, North Lodge Parish Council

2nd May 2022