

Parish Council

A brief summary of the council's activities during the last 12 months:

- We retain our full complement of 5 councillors.
- No change was made to the precept so no change to the Casterton element of our council tax.
- Expenditure for the year was a little above budget, but easily covered by the Council's reserves.
- The Council's CIL reserve was used to provide £1800 to the village Hall Committee to purchase and install new cooking equipment, to replace that which had failed. There is still money available from the fund, and applications from residents are still sought.
- The principal activity during the year was nurturing the Parish Plan process and providing initial start up costs. This culminated in a public meeting in September when the results of the questionnaire and the initial project ideas were presented. Individual councillors are involved as members of various project teams within the village Plan. A number of initiatives have started and an update will be given at the end of this meeting.
- We reviewed about a dozen planning applications and objected to only 2. Both were PIPs for new houses on North Heads Lane. One was for 2 new houses on the east side of the lane, and the other for up to 9 new houses on the west side of the lane. The latter attracted more than 30 letters of objection, including one from Highways, and both PIPs were subsequently refused by the authority. An appeal has been launched by the applicant for the smaller development. 2 applications that the parish council supported were subsequently rejected by YDNPA planners.
- Ownership and maintenance of the street lights in the village has been passed over to WFC.
- Several complaints were made by residents to the Information Commissioner in relation to FOI requests. The matter has been dealt with and the Commissioner

had ruled that 'on the balance of probabilities' some of the information requested no longer existed and therefore the case was closed and the Parish Council exonerated. This had taken more than 12 months and added considerably to the Clerk's workload. The clerk's hours were increased during the year.

- Four complaints from residents were submitted to the Monitoring Officer at Westmorland & Furness Council relating to the postponement of the Annual Parish Meeting in March 2025. These had been investigated and found in the Council's favour with the officer concluding that the Council's statutory Code of Conduct had not been breached.
- The police initiative to have regular Zoom events with parish councils has stalled after the first one. We have little contact with the police.
- Concerns were raised on several occasions regarding road safety at the Gate-Heads Brow/Wandales Lane cross roads. This will be reported as part of the Parish Plan update.
- The Casterton Community Hub Project (Save the Pheasant) has been dissolved following the purchase of the Inn as a going concern. A big thank you to the small team which so professionally put in place mechanisms, modestly funded by the Council, which could have led to a community purchase. The Inn appears to have a new lease of life under the new owners.
- A number of new policy documents and standing orders have been written and adopted during the year, including document retention and disposal, planning matters between council meetings, and a procedure for cooption. These reflect the increasing complexity of working even at the modest level of a PC.
- A part of this complexity is Assertion 10. This is a new requirement in the 2025.
- /6 Annual Governance and Accountability Return focussing on digital and data compliance. Amongst other things we are required to confirm that we use dedicated [.gov.uk](mailto:info@westmorland-furness.gov.uk) email addresses, maintain an accessible website, have an IT policy and comply with UK GDPR regulations. Thanks to excellent work by our webmaster we believe that we are nearing compliance.

- The Village website continues to be a model of excellence and relevance, with a steady stream of news items, information about the village, and occasional Parish Council policies and other documents. We are indebted to the webmaster for ongoing prompt and professional postings, and for professional guidance on the increasing bureaucracy surrounding the council's digital obligations.
- Finally a big thank you not only to those working on the Village Plan, but to all those others who maintain the defibrillators, pick litter in the lanes, and all the myriad small things which make Casterton what it is.