

Beetham Parish Assembly

ANNUAL PARISH REVIEW 2020/2021

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of the Annual Parish Review is to review the main activities and issues which have concerned the Parish Council over the past year. Because of the variations in population density within the parish, the parish area is divided into two Wards - East Ward represented by 4 councillors and West Ward represented by 5 councillors.

We have all been affected by the terrible coronavirus pandemic and its devastating consequences. Life has changed beyond all recognition, but due to the successful vaccination campaign, the end may now be in sight. Thankfully, Beetham Parish seems to have escaped the worst incidence of cases but everyone's daily routine will have been hard-hit. This is the second Parish Annual Assembly to be affected by the pandemic, thus we meet again via a Zoom videoconference. Our routine monthly parish council meetings were similarly affected. Initially, members exchanged views via email so that urgent matters could be progressed, with minutes of decisions taken being published. However, this procedure was ruled not to comply with central government guidelines and was replaced by 'virtual' online meetings using the Zoom software. Despite unfamiliarity with the new procedure, members are to be commended on their determination to make this work and these virtual meetings have been the norm since June 2020. One disadvantage has been the absence of members of the public; although a few took advantage of live PC meetings to express their views. If you wish to do this by joining the online meetings, please contact the Clerk for details of the procedure.

2. EAST WARD ISSUES

2.1 BEETHAM

The potential for flooding in Beetham has again been a major concern during the past year. In particular, residents of Parsonage Fold live under constant threat of a recurrence of the dreadful consequences of Storm Desmond in 2015, with other areas in Beetham and the wider parish apprehensive of their ability to withstand a recurrence of such and even less extreme conditions.

Another flooding issue in Beetham is frequent surface water flowing across Leighton Beck Road, in the area of the double bend about 400m west of the junction with Stanley Street, particularly in the winter when it can, and does, freeze. The flow is almost constant at certain times of year, emanating from springs on private land to the north (and higher) side of Leighton Beck Road and making its way across the road into what was known as the school's sports field. The longstanding water-surface problem in Leighton Beck Road is now actively being investigated by Cumbria CC Highways experts, although there is no simple solution.

The Beetham Flood Resilience Group is now up and running, led by Mrs Linda Dean, a Beetham resident. Useful contacts have been made with similar neighbouring groups, including Kendal, and Beetham PC has promised funding assistance when this came to be needed. Unfortunately, but as we already knew, the Environment Agency hold out no hope of being able to undertake any major works for the foreseeable future, so efforts must be concentrated on precautions which can be implemented by local residents.

2.2 SLACKHEAD

Signage is often a problem – either too little or too much. The attraction of Fairy Steps to the general public is one such example. The provision of an incorrect postcode in the Google Maps software led to drivers seeking access to Fairy Steps from a location where there is no Public Right of Way, resulting in walkers seeking the delights of this very special place trying to gain unauthorised and unwelcome entry via private property. After extended discussion and considering all aspects of this problem. the Parish Council & AONB jointly succeeded in getting Google Maps to change the incorrect post-code. In addition, improved signage to the Fairy Steps has been installed to direct walkers to the appropriate public footpaths. An additional problem is that many walkers wish to park their cars within reasonable distance of their objective, which highlights the notable absence of suitable parking spaces in the area.

The problem of leachate from the now defunct Slackhead refuse tip is a problem that has existed for some time now and has been regularly reported to us by parishioners and other local walkers. After heavy rain , the site is frequently flooded leading to potentially hazardous materials being leached from the waste previously placed in the tip and spread over nearby land. Such leachate could represent a serious hazard to local residents and visitors walking in the vicinity of the site on public footpaths, a popular local activity in this area. Quite apart from such actual hazard, there is the consequence of more widespread damage to the local environment and the unsightly, possibly hazardous, red powder that remains when the flooding subsides. The parish council is currently in contact with environmental personnel in Cumbria CC and SLDC to identify possible ways to resolve this issue.

3. WEST WARD ISSUES

3.1 CARR BANK

The Parish Council continued to work at resolving day-to-day issues to keep the parish an attractive place to live. As was done with the underused BT phone kiosk in Stanley Street, Beetham, the similarly underused Carr Bank Road BT phone kiosk has now been taken over by the Parish Council and a defibrillator purchased and installed. Thanks to Sue Cox (First Responders) for her determination and practical advice in bringing this about.

3.2 STORTH

The new convex mirror at the B5282/Storth Road junction has been repositioned to provide better sight lines. The badly damaged seat on Sandside promenade has been replaced by a new outdoor seat. However, the problem of inconsiderate recreational anglers along the promenade remains, with pedestrians at times being forced to walk in the road in order to bypass fishing tackle blocking the footway. Signs on the footway, pointing out the right of unimpeded access for pedestrians, have been suggested and agreed in principle. These should appear in 2021.

Resurfacing work on Guard Hill Lane, Keasdale Road and Storth Road has now been completed. Parish council noticeboards are looking good after refurbishment. The volunteer-run community shop in Storth Square is once more back in business after extensive improvement work to the interior and continues to provide a brilliant facility for the village. More volunteers are always needed – please contact anyone at the shop if you think you could help.

4. SPEEDING

Excessive traffic speeds on the A6 through Beetham and along the B5282 have long been a serious hazard. After a recent petition to CCC by Beetham residents and a presentation by the head teacher of Beetham School, there seems to be hope of a future reduction in the official speed limit from 50mph to 40mph along the critical section of the A6. The parish council supports this move and is involved in keeping the speeding problem in the mind of the responsible authorities by the use of Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) at strategic points on both the A6 and the B5282, to deter speeding motorists and record traffic speeds. Hopefully, and with the financial support of local businesses, a parish council-owned SID could soon be acquired to back up the borrowed SID currently in use.

Speeding along the B5282 at Carr Bank is of particular concern as regards the safety of school pupils waiting at the bus shelter for transport into Milnthorpe. This was the scene of a serious accident a few years ago and a similar accident could easily recur. Despite bringing this to the attention of the school, the bus company and the responsible local authority no reasonable practical solution has yet been found.

5. PROPOSED CHANGES TO LOCAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURE

Finally, an issue which concerns us all is the proposal to create a single unitary authority for Cumbria, to replace the various existing smaller authorities such as South Lakeland District Council (SLDC). An alternative proposal, to create a new local authority comprising SLDC, Barrow Town Council and Lancaster City Council, is to be considered by the Secretary of State. Either alternative would include increased devolution of decision making from central to local government, which is known to be a current central government policy.