#

# Chairmans Report 2023-24

## Introduction

My year in office commenced with the local Council elections in May 2023 when three Councillors decided to stand down from the Parish Council. My thanks go to David Keetley, the former Chair, Clive Allen (Vice-Chair) and Katie Hauser for their services to the Parish Council and the community. The election process resulted in six applicants (prior councillors and two new applicants) against the seven vacancies so all were appointed unopposed.

A number of extra Council meetings were then held at shorter than normal intervals to help understand the current position and any short and medium-term actions which needed to be picked up. These are highlighted in the report below.

## Parish Council Procedures

Parish Councils generally work in accordance with the National Association of Local Council (NALC) procedures (known in local council speak as ‘Standing Orders’). NALC have produced a model set which local councils of all sizes can pick up and adapt to their own needs. It was decided to take these as a basis and tailor to make more intelligible and relevant to a small Parish Council such as ourselves. These were approved and issued in September.

Alongside the Standing orders, a number of Policies have been produced outlining the Parish Council’s approach to Health and Safety, Biodiversity, Risk Management, Data Protection and Data Breach, Freedom of Information and Grants. These were approved and issued in October.

The Council Financial Rules, again based on the NALC model set, have been drafted for approval and adoption.

## Parish Council Assets

In parallel with creating the Standing orders, the Parish Council’s Assets were collated into a Fixed Asset Register for the Parish. This has helped us understand what assets we own and are responsible for in terms of maintenance and upkeep. Whilst some of these may have nominal £1 value, they are nevertheless important to the Parish and require investment and preservation to maintain. The new Fixed Asset Register was approved and issued in June.

## Website

At the start of the year, the Parish Council shared a website with the Parish Hall. Following a review of the shared website, it became apparent that it did not meet the requirements for a local government organisation and the decision was taken to look for a replacement, leaving the ‘old’ website for the sole use of the Parish Hall. Advice was taken from the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC – the local arm of NALC), and a provider who services a number of Parish Councils was selected. The website follows a template format and uses an interface which enables us to modify at will with a one-off setup cost and an ongoing annual domain and support charge. Following a slight delay caused by Parish Council personnel changes, this has been developed and populated over the course of the last 6 months thanks principally to Councillor McDowall and is now a useful source of information for the Parish and Parish Council.

## Cemetery

Warcop Parish Council owns and operates the Cemetery on Castlehill Road in Warcop. For some time, maintenance of the Cemetery has been minimal with little more than some running repairs to walls and strimming and grass-cutting by volunteers in the summer. This year we have enjoyed the services of a local resident who is a former landscape gardener and has carried out the strimming and grass cutting at a very reasonable cost and high standard and he has agreed to continue and expand his scope for 2024.

A full survey of the Cemetery was carried out in 2023 and a number of areas requiring attention identified. The most pressing of these was the condition of the retaining wall alongside Castlehill Road towards the car parking area and main entrance to the Cemetery. Following close inspection and the advice of arboreal specialists, the cause of the damage to the wall was determined to be the root growth from the (now large) trees above the wall. The specialists recommended that the trees be removed to halt the root growth and allow the wall to be repaired and/or rebuilt. A contract was placed for felling of the trees which was duly completed in March 2024. Advice is now being sought as to the best course of action with the retaining wall to preserve its integrity into the future.

Some recent works in the Cemetery include the painting of the wrought-iron gates at the three entrances, and the repair and painting of the Cemetery store doors and roof.

## Councillor Recruitment

Having started the ‘council year’ with six Councillors and one vacancy, the two new members of the Council elected to leave the council in September and November leaving four remaining Councillors. Advertisements were then placed for replacements and a long-standing supporter of the Parish Council agreed to join in March 2024. Advertisements remain on the notice boards and website for anyone interested in joining the Parish Council.

## Parish Improvements

As a year of consolidation, there have been no major parish projects completed during the year however opportunity has been taken to make small repairs and improvements as needed principally using the services of willing and able volunteers. We are very grateful Councillor Clee who has been particularly industrious in this respect and other volunteers.

Of particular note are the new gates that have been erected at both ends of the Sandford river footpath allowing the less mobile members of the Parish to continue to enjoy the river walk as well as a full refurbishment of the Sandford paths information board. Additionally, a replacement Warcop village sign has been made and erected following the earlier ‘disappearance’ of the original sign and some public footpath signposts have received some tlc to bring them back up to standard.

## Parish Finances and Precept

Parish Council spends this year have roughly corresponded with income aided by the one interment during the year. Contributions were made to the Parish Hall, in support of a new projector, and to Rushbearing. An emergency reserve of £4000 has been maintained during the year and is carried forward into 2024-25.

Having raised the Precept last year under the previous Chairman, we have again elected to increase Precept funding for the forthcoming year, principally to establish the funds to enable works to improve the condition of the Cemetery and enact some improvements therein.

## And Last but not Least ….

The Parish Council cannot function without its willing volunteers, particularly my fellow Councillors, the support of whom has been invaluable throughout the year. I would like to record my heartfelt thanks to my Parish Council colleagues along with the other residents of the parish who regularly engage in grass cutting, litter picking, painting of benches etc. and general tidying of our environment for the benefit of all.

**Andrew Parkinson
Chairman, Warcop Parish Council**