

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021

STILLINGFLEET PARISH COUNCIL

As we all know, the last year has brought suffering and challenges to the whole world. As residents of Stillingfleet most of us have escaped lightly, but that is of little comfort to those who have lost friends and family to Coronavirus.

Your councillors are currently, Paul Elmhirst, Chairman, John Cook, Vice-Chairman, David Swinglehurst Village Hall Committee representative. The other councillors are James Atkinson, Lesley Collingridge, John Cook, Richard Daniel, and Juan Brooks. Terry Harrison has recently resigned owing to ill health and Sally Lewis has recently resigned as she will soon be leaving the village. We give them both our thanks for their work on behalf of the council and our best wishes for the future. Your clerk is Ruth Swales without whose input the council would not be able to function. Thank you Ruth for all your help and hard work over the past year.

What the Council does:

The Parish Council is the bottom rung in the ladder of local government administration. We normally have nine councillors. All our meetings are open to the public although Zoom meetings present their own challenges. We own and administer the village green (with the benefit of a Natural England Higher Level Stewardship Scheme for which we receive a grant). We maintain and pay for street lighting (except Dale's Court). We have a range of statutory powers including the right to raise a precept (our precept forms part of the council tax which is collected by Selby District Council) to pay for what we provide. It currently amounts to some £4,000 per annum.

Stillingfleet Mine Site

After years of delay and adjournment this planning application was suddenly scheduled for its final hearing before NYCC Planning Committee. Only a few days warning was given. There was unanimous opposition from local parishes as well as Selby District Council, but we were pleased that NYCC Planning Committee had grasped the importance of the historical and environmental reasons advanced by the many objections made by the PC and residents and voted against the application. The decision reinforces the belief that a significant number of objections can add up to a persuasive argument at committee level. It also suggests that local opinion can be mobilised to have an effect.

Selby District Council Local Plan.

This is a radical plan looking to the future of Selby District and particularly to its housing needs over the next 20 years. Among many proposals, it has put forward a plan to create a new town in the district. Three possible sites for 3000 units have been proposed. One at Burn Airfield, one at Church Fenton Aerodrome and one between Escrick and Stillingfleet. The Parish Council has filed its observations, but it will be some time before we hear which site will be favoured.

Mains Drainage.

The PC has been approached by Yorkshire Water suggesting it may have a duty to provide the village with a public sewer. A feasibility study into the possibility is underway and the matter is being considered by Yorkshire Water.

Local Government Reform.

This will be a fundamental change to local government. Instead of District Councils, North Yorkshire and York will become two Unitary Councils (with a mayor each). One scheme favoured by Selby, would see an east west divide. East would be Selby, York, Ryedale and Scarborough while west would be Craven, Harrogate, Richmondshire and Hambleton. The alternative would comprise York as one and North Yorkshire as the other Unitary Council.

The environment and global warming

The Council is looking into this matter at a practical level. Funds have been budgeted to speed up the conversion of inefficient old street lighting to LED lighting and to consider what hours of lighting are needed. Flooding is an ever present issue in the Vale of York, but we are fortunate that recent protection works have kept the village safe even though surrounding agricultural land has suffered.

The Village Green

Although the Village Green is the jewel in Stillingfleet's crown it is not without problems. It is protected under a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme as a wildflower meadow. In addition to wildflowers it provides a habitat for a variety of birds and mammals including herons, kingfishers, barn owls, sparrow hawks, kites, weasels, foxes, badgers and bats. (see the Selby Biodiversity Action Plan)

However, it also suffers from leaking drains, unauthorised parking, vehicular damage including deep rutting and the perennial problem of dog waste (including discarded dog waste bags). Dog waste in particular increases the cost of maintaining the green. The hay cannot be productively sold because it causes abortion in cattle. The Stewardship Scheme provides funds for mowing the green once a year, but the indefinite continuation of the scheme remains uncertain.

The Play Area

The desire for a suitable site for a play area within the village and the desire to maintain the green as a wildflower nature reserve have divided opinions in the village for some years. After much soul searching the Council has allocated an area of land in the south west corner of the green for a play area. The Council is now working with Play Stillingfleet (with Ross Powell and Sally Lewis) to create an unobtrusive environmentally friendly play area for young children.

Planning, The Conservation area and the Village Design Statement

Although the Parish Council is consulted by Selby District Council on village planning applications, the Council is only asked for its observations. Selby make the decisions. Some applicants seem unaware of the rules that apply to Conservation Areas (the central core of the village) and of our Village Design Statement, which is a Supplementary Planning Document drafted under the watchful eye of a Selby planning officer before being approved by Selby DC. Planning. Applications which take note of the recommendations of Conservation and VDS are more likely to be received positively.

Covid Community Response.

Finally I would like to thank Amy Sinclair and her fellow volunteers for running a fresh food stall under the NYCC Locality Funding Budget to reduce shopping trips. This local initiative was intended to supplement the National NHS Responder Scheme during lockdown. Surplus donations from villagers amounted to £120 which has been credited to the village charity fund.