

This is the second annual report that I am giving as your Mayor. It has been another busy year for the Town Council and I would particularly like to draw attention to the following matters.

Firstly, your Council convened two Town meetings to discuss topics where we felt that residents' views should be aired. The first was in respect of a planning application for a housing development on land behind St Alkelda's Road where a brief presentation was followed by a question and answer session to the developer and the District Council's senior planning manager. This was a very well-attended meeting where a lot of very good questions were asked. As you may recall, outline planning consent was subsequently submitted although there is no further progress to report at the current time.

The second meeting received a presentation by senior managers from the South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust about the difficulties providing services at the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton, again including questions from the floor and a good attendance. The theme of the evening was 'Building a Sustainable Future for the Friarage' and explained some of the key challenges, principally the difficulty of attracting medical staff. Councillors share residents' concerns that, despite assurances that the Friarage will stay open, it might not be able to provide the services our community needs, particularly when the alternative provision at James Cook is even further from here.

Your Council feels it is important that key issues are publicised and will continue to call such public meetings where they may serve a valuable purpose in creating awareness and providing answers to local concerns.

There has been a recent change in your Council's composition. Professor Shorrocks has served as a councillor on three separate occasions and recently resigned to concentrate upon editing a scientific journal and we wish him well. I would like to thank Bryan for his contribution to the Council. On other occasions when a casual vacancy has arisen, Council has occasionally needed to twist arms to persuade individuals to stand but this time no fewer than three very competent candidates came forward. From this number, Dominic Slay was selected. I would like to thank the two unsuccessful candidates and look forward to working with Dominic.

There may be some of you who not really know what the Town Council does. Our monthly Council meetings, usually held on the last Wednesday of each month, are open to the public and include a 15 minute session at the beginning to ask questions. Although these meetings may not be as inviting as an evening in one of Middleham's pubs or watching your favourite soap opera, there is usually a small but loyal, group of residents who are clearly riveted by the proceedings!. Everyone is welcome to attend, you will have an opportunity to see what we, the bottom rung of local government, do. If you do not wish to attend, there are copies of next week's agenda on the display boards which should give you a flavour of what goes on and the varied matters we deal with. Our minutes are published on the Council's website and summarised in the Darlington & Stockton Times.

One of the successes of the year was your Council's representation to the Boundary Commission that their initial recommendation that Middleham be placed in a combined ward with Leyburn was inappropriate as the two communities had little in common. The Boundary Review had been

commissioned by Richmondshire District Council to save costs through a reduction in the number of Wards and Councillors. Your Council, alongside local businesses and residents, some of who were prompted by us, lobbied successfully and as a consequence Middleham shall remain as a separate District Council ward, with its own councillor and include all of Coverdale, West Witton and East Witton.

The Council acts as trustee to the Charity for Benefit of Inhabitant Householders of Middleham, which is quite possibly the longest name of any registered charity! As a result of advice received, the Council meetings are now followed by a separate meeting of the charity which also has its own bank account. Income from the gallops and other landholdings may be used for the benefit of residents in Middleham as a whole and in recent years this has paid for the costs of grounds maintenance. Last year we appointed Barry Robertson to cut our grass and hedges and spray weeds on the cobbles. We are very pleased with the standard of work that Barry has provided.

In response to residents' suggestions we have installed cycle racks outside Central Stores. We have also erected a bus stop sign near the top cross.

Some work has been carried out on creation of the new civic burial ground. The clerk has been on a training course for burial ground managers and a planning application is being drafted. There has been slower progress than hoped for as there were several technical and practical matters to deal with but this will be a priority the coming year.

That is all that I have to say. I would be very pleased to take any questions.

Thank you.