

Chairs Report Stokesley Town Council April 2021

Welcome to the Annual Town Meeting.

Due to the current restrictions imposed by the Pandemic we are having to hold this meeting via Zoom, and I thank you all for attending. Hopefully, next year we will be in a position to welcome you back to a face-to-face meeting.

The Council has worked hard again this year and we have achieved a great deal despite the lockdown's and restrictions caused by COVID 19. Although this is the report of the Town Council, I would point out that all Councillors are Trustees of both the Town Hall and the Manorial Lands and responsibilities do overlap.

In May, the Council agreed its Strategic Objectives for the year they were: Cobbles, Parking, River Leven Project, Developing Stokesley as a gateway to the 'National Park' and Electrical Vehicle Charging Points.

Cobbles – Stokesley Town Council are keen to have the cobbles that are currently leased to Hambleton District Council (HDC) returned to the ownership of the Town Council on behalf of the Manorial Lands. For this to happen we first want to ensure that they are fully repaired or that such repair is fully funded, and we continue to work with HDC to progress this. One key requirement to enable this to take place is the creation of a new Traffic Regulation Order in the name of Stokesley Town Council and during lockdown this work has progressed, and we are now in the final stages of formalising this before publication of the draft order for public comment. Thanks to Cllr Canavan for taking the lead and progressing this.

Parking – Following the re-marking of College Square and other areas across the Town we are now looking to introduce Traffic Regulation Orders to give us the power to enforce people parking outside of designated bays, again this is now in the final stages.

River Leven Project – Thanks to ECB Design who have worked with us to develop the River Leven Project designs funded by the Manorial Lands Trust, following public consultation and consultation with Conservation Officers some revisions to the scheme have been made. We are due to submit the final planning application in the coming weeks. We will then progress securing grants to carry out the work and have already received confirmation from four contractors that they would be interested in tendering for the work. Thank you, Cllr Oxley, for leading and developing this project.

Developing Stokesley as a gateway to the 'National Park' – a new Working Group has been set up to look at this who will bring forward ideas over the coming year.

Electrical Vehicle Charging Points – Stokesley Town Council are keen to introduce electrical vehicle charging points on the High Street and are seeking further advice from HDC and other agencies on how best to do this and secure grants.

In addition, this year saw the introduction of the 'Stokesley Bounce Back' Working Group which was set up to support businesses along the High Street with re-opening during the pandemic. This started with the delivery of a letter to every business asking for their thoughts and what would help them going forward. This resulted in several new initiatives, the Town Map which details all the businesses along the High Street was re-vamped, and a large copy is now displayed in the Town Hall notice board and a new notice board installed in the bus stop. Additional notice boards are also due to be installed adjacent to College Square and in the Showfield Car Park. New finger signposts are to be purchased and installed and this along with the map and notice boards have all benefited from either grant support from HDC or used funding from the £10,000 Government grant. The Bounce Back group also identified that a lot of the signs across the Town were unreadable as they were so dirty and so a team of Councillors undertook cleaning them one weekend and received a lot of support for this initiative. The Town Council have supported businesses with their proposals for outdoor seating areas where possible and have offered advice and if necessary, licences to utilise areas of Manorial Land. As it is clear we are going to live with restrictions for quite some time it is important that we balance the loss of parking spaces against ensuring we do not end up with a High Street full of empty premises.

The Town Council installed a CCTV camera in the Play Park which will be monitored by Hambleton District Council and was paid for through CIL funds. The play park signs have been renewed and repairs and re-painting has taken place. A programme of independent quarterly inspections has been implemented.

Our refurbished public toilets have received a lot of positive comments and the Town Council were thanked, especially by delivery drivers, for keeping them open during the pandemic.

Stokesley Town Council attended the Remembrance Day service this year which took place around the Cenotaph due to the restrictions in place. This has prompted us to look at the War Memorial and its surrounding area and we concluded that we should have the war memorial cleaned and improve the paving around it to make it safe and arrange for the fence to be repaired and re-painted. We are pleased to have successfully secured a grant from the HDC 'Making a Difference' Fund towards this and work will be taking place in the near future.

Following a full risk assessment, our Friday Markets have continued to take place often with only essential items stalls but when and where possible with all our stalls, social distancing, hand sanitising and face covering guidance was introduced and adhered to. The Farmers market have continued to run throughout as outdoor shopping is seen as the safest option during this time. Additional markets took place during February, March and April and we are pleased to now confirm that the Farmers Markets will run on the 1st and 3rd Saturday every month.

The Town Hall has unfortunately had its doors closed for most of the year, with a significant loss of income to the charitable trust, offset in part by Government grant of £10,000. However, following a full risk assessment and the introduction of appropriate safety measures we have opened when possible. We are looking forward to welcoming people back over the coming weeks and months.

The Manorial Lands Trust has also suffered a significant loss of income from fewer stalls at the markets and the cancellation of Stokesley Fair. These losses were also offset in part by Government grant of £10,000, but did result in a draw-down of funds from reserves

The Council continues to produce a quarterly newsletter that can now be found in the 'Market Place' magazine as well as online. Thanks to the Market Place for providing this facility and to Cllr Canavan for leading on this. Unfortunately, the Town Council has not been able to host monthly surgeries, but we are always happy to take any questions in writing or via email.

Stokesley Town Council would once again like to say thank you to the following groups:

SPIOTA for their continued hard work in making the Town look beautiful by planting flower tubs and baskets and keeping public areas clean and tidy and in particular this year for the beautiful garden they have developed adjacent to the Stokesley Motors roundabout which offers a lovely sitting point and is a dramatic improvement to this area of waste land.

Friends of the Town Hall who raise funds for the Town Hall and support various events and activities in the Town Hall;

The Globe volunteers who have worked hard during the pandemic to keep a library service available which has proven invaluable whilst people have been in lockdown.

The many individuals who litter pick around the Town and the team of volunteers who carried out a litter pick across Stokesley and the entrances and gathered bags full of rubbish.

And this year more than ever Stokesley has been very lucky to have numerous volunteers who carry out all sorts of tasks and we have seen many more people get involved in supporting the local community. Stokesley Town Council thank all those who have supported people who were in isolation by shopping or dropping off prescriptions etc, those who have taken the time to pick up the phone and call someone who is on their own. All the volunteers who have stepped up when the Government put out the call to help the NHS and work at the test and trace and vaccine centres. Community Care who has offered support to our elderly, everyone who made a donation to the food banks and most importantly for everyone biding by the rules and maintaining social distance and wearing face coverings.

And finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to all our staff. The Town Hall Stewards, who make the Town Hall a friendly and welcoming place to come into, Kevin Coupland who tidies the Play Park and cleans the toilets and our two Clerks who work hard to support not only the Town Council but also the two Trusts. We would also like to take this opportunity to remember Peter Dobson who served as a Caretaker for several years who sadly died at the end of last year following a short illness.

I would also like to thank all my fellow Councillors, past and present, who volunteer to serve the Town and have all worked hard, and we have all learnt a few new skills this year - in particular how to use 'Zoom'.

Thanks also go to all the residents of Stokesley for working together and following the guidelines set by the Government which will eventually mean we can get back to normal life.

Any Questions or Comments