

Chairman's Report for the year 2016-17

It has been a challenging year for Monk Hesleden Parish Council but one that the Councillors and the Parish staff have dealt with successfully. I am continually impressed year on year with the work that is undertaken in this Parish by our staff and how the partnership working continues to develop.

One of the most successful schemes over the last year was the planting of wildflowers at the entrances to the Villages. This had received much praise from residents. The scheme was brought to the Parish Council by John Peace, Head Groundsman. John worked incredibly hard to secure for us this "secret" mix of seeds, which is the envy of many other Councils in the area. So I would like to thank John and his team for their hard work.

2016 saw High Hesleden take part in and win the best village in the East Durham Scarecrow Festival, with 18 entries from the village and the coveted overall winning scarecrow being awarded to the Postman Pat scarecrow in High Hesleden.

In June last year the Parish Council received a request from Blackhall Ladies Bowls Club to have the Bowls Pavilion refurbished. During the winter months the Parish Council's staff undertook the refurbishment which involved removing a partition wall, installing new windows and decoration. All the teams that use the Pavilion were pleased at the transformation. I was delighted to be invited to cut the ribbon at the official opening of the newly refurbished pavilion in April 2017.

The Blackhall Memorial Open Pairs Tournament was held in July 2016 at Blackhall Welfare Park. This event is well attended by bowlers from the East Durham area and I was honoured to be invited to present the Prizes. It was a fabulous day and it was lovely to hear the compliments about the high standard of the bowling greens in our Park.

The Parish Council was able to work with parents and volunteers who wanted to set up a youth football team in the Parish. The team was successful in securing funding from the County Durham Foundation, the Parish Council and County Councillors Rob Crute and Lynn Pounder. The teams train at Blackhall Welfare Park and it is hoped in the future that a youth team may be able to play at the Welfare Park football field. A huge well done to the Club Chairman Sian Fallow and all those involved in the Club.

Blackhall Community Youth Group was set up in autumn last year and is part of the Parish Council's ongoing plan to engage with young people. The Group consists of 11 to 13 year olds from the Blackhall area. They have provided support at community events held in the Welfare Park and are looking at schemes to improve the village. It is hoped that I will be able to attend the local schools in the area to encourage children to take part in this Group.

The Remembrance Day Services at both Blackhall and Hesleden were well attended again this year. We were lucky to secure the services of Methodist Deacon Annabel Graham to oversee the service at Blackhall Welfare Park with readings undertaken by Mr Settrey, representing St Andrews Church and Brooke Dawson representing St Joseph's RC Primary School. Blackhall Community Youth Group also attended at the service to hand out the orders of service. A special thanks go to Ian Harris for playing the Last Post and Reveille. The Service at Hesleden was presided over by Rev Susan Richardson with Christopher McDonald for the 10th year playing the "Last Post". Thank you to all those who helped make these important events run so smoothly.

Blackhalls Local History Group has been working in partnership with the Parish Council and County Councillors Rob Crute and Lynn Pounder to install a memorial in Hesleden. Consultation events took place over the last year, a site was identified and the construction of the Memorial will be undertaken by the Parish Council's workforce hopefully before this year's remembrance day. Funding of £4,800 was secured from County Councillors Crute and Pounder with additional funding of £2,000 granted by the Parish Council.

The Parish Council's Administrative Assistant Libby Fortune retired last year after working for the Parish Council for 8 years. Following Libby's retirement Katherine Alderson was appointed as the Parish Council's new Admin Assistant. Katherine has already made a positive impact in the role particularly with the Parish Council's Facebook Page and Easter Event.

This year saw an improved Easter event in the Welfare Park which included a decorative paste egg competition, arts and craft workshop, storytelling and an Easter Egg hunt. This Parish Council funded event saw a large number of children taking part in the activities. Over 70 children took part in the egg hunt and were rewarded with a chocolate egg. Thanks go to Creative Youth Opportunities, the Parish Council Staff and particularly Katy Moore and Emma Crute from the Community Youth Group.

The last major event of the year was held last Friday 19th May in the Welfare Park's Cricket field. This was to celebrate the 6th Birthday of Bradley Lowery. The Parish Council was delighted that Gemma and Carl choose our Park to host his party. I had the honour of attending the party and was truly humbled by the work and effort that had been put into this event, all the people who donated their time and services for free and was pleased that the Parish Council had been able to support this evening. The work done by people living in our community, such as Lynn Murphy and her team, to produce this event was amazing but not as amazing as Bradley, Gemma, Carl and their families. I cannot express sufficiently how proud I was of our community. This will certainly be an evening that will be remembered for a very long time.

I would like to thank my fellow parish Councillors for their continued support over the last 12 months and special thanks go to Parish Clerk, Lynda Wardle. Every year Lynda continues to work hard, often behind the scenes, to help with many events, schemes and groups within our Parish to enable Monk Hesleden Parish Council to continue to be one of the most successful parish councils in Durham.

Gaynor Crute

Chairman