

The annual meeting of the Parish of Heapey was held on Tuesday 6th May 2003.

Present: Councillor J Geddes – Chairman
Councillors M Agnew, D Berry and E Riding
Also present: Borough Councillor M E Gray
Mr G Edwards

1. Chairman's report

The year started with the local elections the result of which was that the Council lost, through his own choosing it has to be said, a valued and respected member, George. The parish is indebted to him for his many years of service. On a brighter note, the remaining members welcomed a new member, Margot.

The start of the year brought another change. Because of the Council's adoption of the Model Code of Conduct, it was necessary for individual members to make a formal Declaration of Interests. Although not entirely welcome by some Parish Councils, the positive aspect of this development is that their inclusion does indicate that the role of Parish Councils in local government is being taken seriously.

The year also brought several challenges to the Council mainly as a result of new legislation or the implementation of existing legislation. Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, Parish Councils have a duty to consider the impact of all their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area. The act gives councils the ability to pay for crime and disorder reduction by using their precept, which is worth bearing in mind in relation to the Borough Council's Neighbourhood Warden Scheme.

The introduction of the concept of a Parish Plan gives Parish Councils a real chance to review the services and facilities within their area, discover the views of the residents and try to address any shortcomings. The Council registered its intent to produce a Parish Plan and this will be a considerable challenge in the coming year.

Although not a new challenge, the creation of Quality Parish Councils is still a subject on which the Council has still to make a decision. The benefits of becoming a Quality Parish Council are still a little vague and, as yet, achieving this status is voluntary. However, there is a possibility that it will become compulsory in the next few years. The Council will need to take a decision, preferably sooner than later since the process will take some time and a large part of the responsibility rest on the Clerk's shoulders.

This year, Lancashire County Council have introduced the concept of a partnership with the parishes to deal with highway, traffic and road safety issues. Whilst the County Council's motives in doing this are probably not totally altruistic, it does give the parishes some say in the issues that they wish to see addressed and, if managed properly, could work to their advantage.

During the year, the establishment of a joint web site with Wheelton PC and the Village Hall has been progressing and will be completed in the near future.

As well as these new areas of interest, the council has dealt with the usual subjects for discussion and decision. The Sand Quarry has again been the subject of much debate and some progress has been made towards the compulsory purchase of the land.

The question of the employment of a lengthsman has been discussed and a decision deferred pending the outcome of the Parish Plan. The County Council's Winter Maintenance Policy was again deplored to no effect and many planning applications have been considered – by now it seems like every house on Heapey Chase must have a conservatory.

In the coming year, I feel certain that the Council will rise to the challenges it has been set this year. I feel also that the Council should take positive steps to encourage more active participation in this tier of local government by local people and particularly the young.

2. Financial report

A copy of the statement of accounts for 2002/03 had been circulated with the minutes. After discussion this was accepted by the meeting.

3. Questions from public

As there were no members of the public the meeting closed.