

At a recent meeting here, someone complained that Parish Council meetings were boring. Unfortunately I don't have the talent for one-liners of my more famous comedian namesake, so I might be boring, but I'll try to be brief.

There have been some changes since the last Parish Meeting a year ago. Our clerk, Jackie Davidson, has moved away from the area. Jackie did an excellent job of keeping the council on track, and we are very fortunate to have found an able replacement in Jane Saunders, so I would like to record my thanks to both of them.

Our chairman, John Seddon, has also resigned, although he is remaining as a councillor. I know that he has put in a lot of work behind the scenes, and I would like to thank him for all his efforts.

I would also like to thank two councillors who are standing down at the end of this session: Susan Steer and Barny Sykes.

Finally, I would like to thank District Councillor Annie Rawlinson and County Councillor Jim Bland for their attendance and contributions to our meetings.

As you probably know, there will be local elections on 5<sup>th</sup> May. Nomination papers have been issued for anyone wishing to offer themselves to replace the two retiring Parish Councillors, and the closing date for nominations is 4.00 pm on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> April. If more than two nominations are submitted then the local election will include an election for Parish Councillors.

One of the things that the Parish Council embarked upon in the last year was the production of a Community Led Plan, and you may recall receiving questionnaires for this a few months ago. The aim of this is to produce an action plan to address local issues and community concerns. This work has been done by Steve Carman and a small team, and I would like to thank them for their efforts, which are nearing completion. Steve will be outlining the work done so far later in this meeting.

Last year it was finally confirmed that the National Park boundary would be extended to include part of this parish. This will become effective on 1<sup>st</sup> August this year, and a "Programme Board" is being set up to oversee the process. Helsington is the largest parish affected by the change and we have been asked to provide a nominee to represent all the parishes concerned. John Seddon has volunteered for this, and will no doubt report back in due course.

The last year has been somewhat marred by controversy over the possible formation of an IDB to take over the drainage of the valley, an issue which is still to be resolved.

It is an unfortunate characteristic of the human species that people tend to form themselves into mutually exclusive groups, defined by race, religion, political views, etc. This parish is no stranger to this. Over the past few years we have seen disagreements over the location of the new village hall, over the provision of additional housing, and latterly over the drainage issue. I would like to leave you with this thought: Whatever your views on this or any other issue, there will be those who, for what appear to them to be perfectly sound reasons, will have completely different views.

However, a more positive characteristic of the human species is its ability to act cooperatively, and I hope this will be the case here. At the end of the day, we all have to live with one another, and make the most of the fact that we live in such a beautiful area.

Thank you.