



Delivering Quality Services to  
Coxhoe & Quarrington Hill

# Coxhoe Parish Council Annual Report 2011/2012

## May 2012

### **Introduction**

The last year was my fifth year as Chairman of Coxhoe Parish Council and it has been another year of fresh challenges for us. Like all residents, local businesses and community groups we have had to cope with the ongoing impact of the recession and have had value for money at the forefront of our minds when we have strived to meet the evolving needs of the community by delivering your priorities. I feel that Coxhoe Parish Council has continued to make further progress during the year in delivering the Parish Councils first Parish Plan and during 2012/13 I look forward to the adoption by the Parish Councils of its new Parish Plan which will influence the work of the Parish Council over the next five years.

My last Annual Report underlined the importance of partnership working and that opportunities to access finance for initiatives was becoming more restricted meaning that our partners would have fewer resources to address issues. We continue to develop our working relationship with Durham County Council and continue to work well with all of our other key community partners to improve Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill. We know that we cannot work in isolation and that our community partners resources are stretched but we are an ambitious Parish Council and we are getting things done through partnership working. In the following paragraphs I would like to let you know what the Parish Council has achieved in the last year.

### **Improving Community Safety**

There have been some significant issues of anti-social behaviour, particularly by youths visiting Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill. The Police attend all main Parish Council meetings and provide a report on crime on a monthly basis, these crime statistics allow targeting of police resources. Reporting incidents is crucially important to the police and they have urged residents to let them know wherever and whenever issues arise. By understanding what is happening they can target activity, identify perpetrators, and take action to resolve problems. The Parish Council actively encourages residents to call the Police each and every time.

### **Improving Health Facilities**

The Parish Council, following on from the excellent work of the Coxhoe Community Partnership, has previously carried out extensive lobbying for a new Medical Practice to be developed in Coxhoe. However due to Central Government budget cuts and legislation changes a new Medical Practice is still some time away. While this is disappointing the Parish Council does not intend to give up and has welcomed the recent building works to improve the facilities of the existing Medical Practice.

### **Improving Highway Safety**

We have made significant progress over the years in terms of highway safety. The speed reduction signs installed in Quarrington Hill and in Coxhoe on a rota basis, in partnership with Durham County Council provide data to confirm the speeds traffic are travelling at and will inform the Council's future decisions as to the success or otherwise of the measure introduced. As a result, we continue to feel that highway safety has been improved within the villages.

Work is now complete on new lighting columns in the Front Street, Coxhoe as a result of our work with Durham County Council. The heritage design lights will provide better lighting and I hope you agree they have improved the appearance of the Front Street. The new lights have also allowed Christmas lights to be installed in Coxhoe for the second year and the living Christmas tree with lights introduced at Quarrington Hill was again a success this year.

### **Improving the Environment**

The Parish Council has continued to actively work with Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill Community Partnerships supporting environmental improvement in the villages.

Following the tireless work of Quarrington Hill Village Partnership to secure play facilities in Quarrington Hill, that will enhance the environment and create a safe area for children to play. A new play scheme is now in place, congratulations to Quarrington Hill Partnership in delivering this key element of the Parish Plan.

I am looking forward to a display of initial suggestions for the re development as a community space of Coxhoe lower and upper village greens in July 2012. This is a result of all the work in recent months of a working group established and supported by the Parish Council including representatives from the Parish Council, Coxhoe Banner Group, Coxhoe History Group and Coxhoe Community Partnership. Also proposals for new notice boards and directional signs are well advanced with funding opportunities being advanced.

### **Improvement of Churchyards, Grass Cutting, Hanging Baskets and Planters**

The Parish Council has continued to provide grass cutting services within parts of the Parish, including some footpaths and Coxhoe War Memorial Garden, and provided hanging baskets during the summer months. A new contract for the provision of hanging baskets and planters has been awarded for 2012 with a view to building on previous years floral displays.

## **Improving the right to be heard – Consultations with Durham County Council**

During the year we have contributed to a number of consultations carried out by Durham County Council, to ensure that any impact on the residents the Parish Council represents are taken in to account. One such consultation was about the future of community buildings across County Durham. This has now sadly resulted in the closure of 9 Browns Close in Coxhoe and The Hawthorns in Quarrington Hill. However the future of the community centre in Quarrington Hill is now more secure and the Parish Council will continue to work with the community centre to establish its future. Landsdowne House in Coxhoe will also now close unless the community takes ownership and looking further at this is an ongoing piece of work for the Parish Council. As with Quarrington Hill Community Centre the Parish Council is supporting Coxhoe village hall as it seeks to secure its financial future as previous long term funding becomes less certain.

We have made our views known on a significant number of planning applications during the year, as well as hearing the views of residents on certain applications before deciding on our representations. You can find out what applications we have commented on and the County Council's decisions on our website. To assist the planning process and try to get the best out of proposals we have also engaged in pre-application discussions with developers.

## **Improving Leisure Facilities**

As you may know Durham County Council had earmarked Coxhoe Leisure Centre for closure by the end of October 2011, as part of its budget cuts. In response Future Leisure in Coxhoe "FLiC" a brand new community group set up by volunteers to prevent this successfully convinced Durham County Council that it had the capacity and credibility to continue to run the facility. This was only possible with the financial support of the Parish Council which resulted in an increase in the Parish precept for 2012/13, however without this the centre would have closed. Any increase in the precept being the sum charged through the council tax to local residents is a difficult decision, but I feel in this case a necessary one to save this facility for future generations.

FLiC have been successfully running the facility, renamed "Future Leisure @ Coxhoe" now for a number of months supporting and improving the health, fitness and leisure needs of the people of the area.

## **Improving community engagement - Working with you**

The Parish Council has now approved a draft Parish Plan 2 for final consultation which will commence in June 2012 for a six week period, following this period I look forward to the Parish Council considering comments and adopting Parish Plan 2 in the autumn. This new Parish Plan which will influence our work for the next five years. This is a key final stage and reflects all the hard work over the previous year supported by Coxhoe Community Partnership, to ensure we have a plan that reflects the priorities of the residents and influences the work of the Parish Council and community partners in the coming months and years.

## **Improving Parish Council Administration and Meetings**

In May 2011 the Parish Council appointed a new Parish Clerk, David Vasey, who took up his duties in June following the resignation of our previous Clerk. We have continued to build on the work of past years in what has been an extremely busy year for the Parish Council and for the Clerk. Support from Ian Foster in maintaining the Parish Council web site and in taking forward the closing stages of completing Parish Plan 2 has been invaluable. We have held a Finance Committee to discuss and agree our budget for next year, together with starting the process of developing a medium term financial plan for the Parish Council. In addition we have held an Environment Committee to discuss and advance the scheme to provide new notice boards and directional signs in the villages, together with developing initial proposals for the redevelopment as community space of the upper and lower village greens in Coxhoe.

We are committed to promoting the well being of residents and businesses in our village and most of our work is aimed at improvement. Most of our meetings have been attended by the public and we were delighted by the attendance of a number of young people at a recent meeting. Residents have the opportunity to come along and raise issues at the beginning of each Council meeting. The meeting agenda is placed on the Parish Notice Boards in both villages in advance of the meeting and minutes of meetings are also published there once they have been approved. Meetings are generally held on the first Wednesday of the month commencing at 7.00 p.m. All meeting dates are displayed on the Parish Notice Boards.

Since June 2009, all Parish Council meetings are held at Lansdowne House, 64 Lansdowne Road, Coxhoe (just down from the Doctor's Surgery) where the Parish Council offices are based. The offices are open to visiting members of the public on a Wednesday between 9.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m.

It is nearly a year since the launch of the Parish Councils exciting new website. The site has been developed on a community based one stop shop approach and is full of up to date community information about our communities, the Parish Council, and our partners. We also launched a facebook page with an ever increasing number of friends.

We continue to be fully committed to achieving 'Quality Council' Status for the Parish Council. The Parish Clerk has undertaken training which is a key part of achieving the standards required.

## **Financial performance 2011/12**

During the year the Council received positive reports from its external and internal auditors in relation to 2010/11, with the internal auditor also conducted a mid-year audit towards the end of 2011 on the 2011/12 accounts and Parish Council practices and reached similar conclusions. Residents can be assured that we are conducting our business well.

The Parish Council's detailed accounts are available on request.

## **Conclusion**

Public spending pressures will continue to mean that opportunities to finance initiatives will become more restricted and our partners will have fewer resources to address issues. We feel that we have prudently managed our budgets this year to leave us in a position to address future projects whilst making clear progress on the priorities in the Parish Plan. We have now commenced on the process of developing a medium term financial plan to ensure we look at ways of achieving the most economic, cost effective and efficient means of doing things.

Partnership working will continue to bring about real changes within the community and the work of the two village partnerships is to be commended. These partnerships continue to work tirelessly in a volunteer capacity to drive and achieve improvement. I thank them very much for the work they do and reassure them that the Parish Council fully supports them and what they are trying to do.

Dennis Morgan and Maria Plews, our County Councillors, continue to support the Parish Council in our endeavours for which we are truly grateful.

I would sincerely like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors, all of whom give up their time freely and energetically, together with welcoming Carole Parkes as a new Quarrington Hill Parish Councillor co-opted to the Parish Council in October 2011. It is always worth remembering that none of the Councillors receive payment for their efforts.

In particular, my thanks go to the Vice-Chair of the Parish Council, Stuart Dunn, who has deputised for me on a good number of occasions, due to my ever demanding work commitments. Stuart continues to help so much to move the Parish Council forward.

**Paul Dodsworth**  
**Chair of Coxhoe Parish Council**

### **Parish Councillors and Parish Clerk:**

**Councillor Paul Dodsworth (Chair)**  
**Councillor Stuart Dunn (Vice-Chair)**  
**Councillor Ron Mayo**  
**Councillor Barbara Hepplewhite**  
**Councillor Tony Rowe**  
**Councillor Colin Thirlaway**  
**Councillor Jimmy Taylor**  
**Councillor Dennis Smith**  
**Councillor Keith Pounder**  
**Councillor Carole Parkes**  
**Councillor George Shotton**

**David Vasey (Parish Clerk)**