



Mitford Parish Council
Chairman's Report
May 2016

It has been another year during which major projects have impacted our parish; construction of the flood retention dam was completed during the year, construction began on the Morpeth Northern Bypass, and we have an application by Mitford Estate for a significant mixed commercial and housing development on the land to the west of Lancaster Park. There have been further consultations on the Northumberland Core Strategy, and we have worked with Morpeth Town Council and the parishes of Hebron, Hepscoth and Pegswood to bring the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan to a successful conclusion. I will provide a brief update on each of these and will take questions at the end.

The flood retention dam on the Mitford Estate was completed in September 2015. The heavy goods traffic on the Mitford Steads and Molesden roads had damaged the carriageway and verges, but with the help of County Councillor Sanderson we worked to see this repaired. We are currently seeking clarification about the planned log catcher above Low Ford bridge; trees were cleared over 12 months ago for access but construction has not started.

Construction of the Northern Bypass started last year, the brokered road closure schedule on St Leonard's Lane has worked well, and damage to the road caused by construction traffic has been mitigated. During the project approval process, the Parish Council had argued that increased traffic arising from the bypass justified safety improvements at Spital Hill. We failed in our objective of linking the desired improvements to the bypass project, however subsequent discussions with NCC have been encouraging and we believe two of our issues will be addressed, namely the drainage at the top of the hill and sight lines at the Mitford Road junction. Mitford village has benefited from Carillion's Community Support Programme; the fencing at the entrance to Fontside has been replaced and varnishing of the exterior cladding on the village hall is planned.

There is yet further slippage to the timescale of the Northumberland Core Strategy which is now unlikely to be in place before 2017. Following the last round of consultation in December the plan was effectively withdrawn for another look at green belt boundaries and housing numbers. This has not delayed the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan which was passed by the independent examiner with minor amendments and was overwhelmingly supported in the referendum by 93% of the vote. With the neighbourhood plan expected to be adopted by the County Council this month, we will now conduct a review of the Parish Plan which will continue to be used as a framework for improving facilities in the Parish.

Two planning applications by Mitford Estate for a mixed commercial and housing development to the west of Lancaster Park were considered by the Parish Council, but we failed to reach a consensus due to the conflict with the housing policy in the neighbourhood plan vs the need for jobs and affordable housing in the parish. The vote was in favour of no objection. The Planning Committee rejected the first application, the second is expected to be heard at the June meeting.

During the year various landscaping and fencing initiatives have improved the environment in Mitford Village. We have extended the scope of work of our warden to include more verge maintenance, regular cutting of the village greens and clearance of fallen leaves; we worked with Mitford Estate to upgrade fencing on the eastern approach to the village and we worked with Carillion to replace fencing at the entrance to Fontside. Parking at the church has long been a problem, but with support from Councillor Sanderson's communities fund, the verge opposite the church has been dug out and gravelled. It is hoped to extend the parking area this year. Speeding vehicles continue to be a problem in Tranwell Woods; traffic calming measures have been agreed with NCC and implementation is expected in early summer.

I must mention our finances. Our bank balance at the end of the 2015/16 financial year was £6834; this is higher than the previous year due to an early payment of a £2000 capital funding contribution to the village hall. The 2016/17 budget is £8490 with precept income of £8000 and the balance from reserves. Given the healthy state of the finances, the Parish Council determined to keep the precept unchanged for 2016/17.

Finally, I would like to thank our Parish Councillors and our Clerk for the excellent work that has been done over the last year, and our County Councillor both for his support and for brokering meetings with decision makers at County Hall. I also thank PC Andrea Teasdale for her support and advice to the Parish Council during the year.

Dr MRG Sharp
3rd May 2016