

## Acomb Parish Council – District Councillor’s Annual Report 2006/7

The last year has been an eventful one, both personally and for Tynedale in general. I was re-elected chair of Tynedale’s Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has considered the potential of renewable energy, leading to the formation of a Renewable Energy Working Group.

Last summer we visited Kielder to find out about its shared biomass heating system, which provides heat and hot water to the Kielder Castle Visitor Centre, six new three-bedroom houses, the Rivermead Workshops (commercial units), Kielder Community First School and Kielder Youth Hostel. District heating systems are commonplace in Scandinavian countries, but this is one of the first of its kind in the UK. We also called at Falstone Tearooms, which uses a wood pellet boiler and photovoltaic panels to produce heat, and the new Stonehaugh Village Hall, still under construction, which takes advantage of several types of renewable energy, including a small wind turbine and solar panels. More recently, the working group has initiated the green and blue leaflet entitled “Save energy, money and the planet”, which all households received earlier this month with their council tax bills for 2007/8. There will also be an exhibition at the Northumberland County Show on May 28th, giving energy-saving advice and information on renewable energy sources.

June 8th 2006 was a very special day for Acomb School, as the children and staff were taking part in School Grounds Week. I was honoured to be asked to represent Acomb Parish Council at this event, as unfortunately our Chairman, Cllr. John Wilkinson was unable to attend. Several months previously, the Parish Council had decided to buy a tree for the school grounds, to celebrate the school’s new building and refurbishment. The then acting headteacher Ms. Bentley chose an amelanchier. With the help of several very enthusiastic children, we managed to plant this in a bed close to the school building, for everyone to enjoy

On the same day, County Councillor Tom Flaws came to open the new adventure play ground on the school field. This was purchased using funding of around £6,000 from the Northumberland County Council Small Grants Scheme, and the children showed their appreciation by the expressions of delight on their faces, and also by thanking Cllr. Flaws. He, in turn, spent a happy afternoon painting the nursery fence. By the time he left, his tie was considerably more multi-coloured than when he arrived!

In September Mr. Lee Madderson took over as headteacher. As chair of governors at the school, I’d like to thank Ms. Bentley for her hard work, dedication, professionalism and care for the whole school community while she was with us. The school numbers continue to grow, the atmosphere within the school is as happy and purposeful as ever, and Mr. Madderson’s enthusiasm, dedication and energy are infectious. The school works very closely with Little Oaks Nursery to create a seamless transition from pre-school to school.

In November Tynedale’s twin bin recycling scheme was extended to the more rural areas. After a few teething problems, the scheme seems to be working well and recycling rates are going up. For properties on private roads, the wheeled bins are usually collected from the kerbside, i.e. the point where the private road meets the public road. There are a surprising 47 properties in Acomb ward which are accessed along private roads.

You may know that under the Gambling Act 2005, responsibility for the licensing of gambling has passed to local authorities. As a member of Tynedale’s Licensing Committee I have been involved in the drawing up of a new policy, “The Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Licensing Policy”. It will cover many forms of gambling such as betting in bookmakers or at point-to-point and racecourses, bingo, fruit machines and casinos, although Tynedale does not have any immediate plans to bid for a super-casino at present.

The local government white paper “Strong and prosperous communities” caused controversy, however, by issuing an invitation to local authorities in “two-tier” areas i.e. where there are district and county councils, to put forward proposals for closer joint working or for the creation of unitary authorities. Two models have been put forward for Northumberland:

1. The 6 district councils are arguing for a two unitary authority model for Northumberland: a largely urban authority consisting of Blyth and Wansbeck, and a more rural council based on Tynedale, Castle Morpeth, Alnwick and Berwick.

2. Northumberland County Council proposes a single unitary, based on the existing county of Northumberland.

At the time of writing, the district's submission "One Northumberland, Two Councils" along with the County Council's submission for a single unitary have both been given permission to progress to the next stage of the assessment process. Whilst further details are awaited this is essentially an opportunity for further consultation with stakeholders prior to the Government making a final decision in the summer.

There has been widespread debate on the future of our post office network. Tynedale Council, in partnership with the other rural district councils in Northumberland and the CAB, wrote to rural postmasters/mistresses asking for their views, which unsurprisingly, argued very forcibly for the retention and strengthening of the current provision. In February I took part in a discussion at Wark on the future of rural post offices, organised by Age Concern Northumberland, with Peter Atkinson MP as the guest speaker. Four main issues were identified:

- Village post offices are the hub of local services, and provide a focus for communication and social interaction
- It is important to maintain traditional services such as mail and parcel-handling, but above all the provision of cash to residents in outlying areas
- With the onset of global warming it is particularly important to provide services close to where people live. In many rural areas public transport is sparse or non-existent, and some people are unable to drive, either for financial or health reasons
- Communities must be sustainable. Post offices provide valuable support to local, often very small businesses, and also provide goods and information to visitors to Tynedale, where tourism is becoming increasingly important.

Consultation closed on Thursday March 8th and we await the response with interest.

People often ask me about the types of issues local residents raise. They are very varied, but over the last year, people have contacted me about tenancy agreements and other housing matters, litter, planning applications, water quality, campers at Watersmeet, street lights and the condition of some local roads (these last 2 are the responsibility of the County Council).

I have been district councillor for Acomb for nearly 8 years now. I never cease to be impressed by the dedication of Tynedale Council employees, whether at a senior or more junior level. They work extremely hard, often under great pressure, and are always willing to listen and try new ideas. We are very fortunate to have them working for us in Tynedale.

Lastly, may I express my appreciation of all the members of Acomb Parish Council, particularly the Chairman Councillor John Wilkinson and the Clerk Bill Grigg, who work so hard for local residents. I'd also like to thank County Councillor Tom Flaws (Hexham Central and Acomb) for all his support and help.

If you would like to discuss any of these matters further or if you have suggestions or concerns, please contact me on 01434 681487, e-mail [jane.wrigley@tynedale.gov.uk](mailto:jane.wrigley@tynedale.gov.uk).

Jane Wrigley  
March 30th 2007