

Acomb Parish Council – District Councillor’s Annual Report 2007/8

This last year has certainly been very busy and eventful.

After the 2007 District Council elections, I became Chair of Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The activities of this committee relate to the work of the council's central support services including Finance, Legal, Personnel, Audit and IT. The scope of the committee includes the Council's budget, the management of its budget, capital, revenue, borrowing and all its assets, resources and support services including audit arrangements. In light of the government's decision to back a single unitary council for Northumberland, the work of this committee has become increasingly taxing over the last year, with particular emphasis on finance and staffing issues.

I have continued to represent Tynedale Council on the Hexham and Tynedale Community Trust, the organisation which runs Hexham Community Centre and which I chair.

At the end of the summer term I was invited to take part in a “Question Time” session with Year 10 students (14/15 year olds) at Queen Elizabeth High School. Representatives from the three main parties and the Green Party faced three groups of students, who asked very searching questions on a variety of topics including the environment, Egger, British foreign policy and drugs. Several of the questioners chosen came from Acomb. I was extremely impressed by the maturity of the questions and by the ensuing audience discussions. Much of the media coverage on young people is very negative, but this occasion showed a whole year group in a positive light.

On July 25th the Department of Communities and Local Government announced that the county bid had been successful for Northumberland to become a single unitary authority from May 2009. The district-backed bid for two unitaries for Northumberland would not be taken forward. Elections to a “shadow” unitary council would take place in May 2008; this would run in parallel with the existing district/county structure until April 2009, when the new unitary would take over the functions of both the County and the District Councils.

A special Full Council meeting of Tynedale Council was held on October 16th to consider changing Tynedale's governance arrangements. Previously, the council was run on a “streamlined committee” system, with a single policy committee, the Corporate Policy and Management Board, which was multi-party. On October 16th, following a public consultation, it was agreed to move to a leader and cabinet model, where all but one of the Cabinet members belong to the ruling Conservative group. From May 2008, all Cabinet members have been Conservatives.

On November 20th, employees and elected members from Tynedale Council visited Egger to see first-hand the new plant. I was very impressed, both by the design and cleanliness of the new plant, and by the company's willingness to engage with the local population and to respond to residents' concerns. They have around 460 members of staff, including quite a few from Acomb, and emphasise that the main strength of the Hexham operation is the high calibre and motivation of their employees. Interestingly, they aim to use 45% recycled wood in their chipboard, with the remainder being virgin timber coming from Kielder Forest.

Recycling remains high on the agenda in Acomb, with the offer of a brown garden waste wheelie bin to suitable properties in the village. In order to achieve Tynedale's current statutory recycling target of 30% by March 31st 2010, the garden waste recycling scheme was extended to the rest of the Tyne Valley along the A69 corridor and north and south of the Tyne to include Bellingham, Wall, Wark, Acomb and Allendale. Fortnightly collections started in April 2008 from those of the 8,000 suitable properties who chose to take up the service.

Continuing the recycling theme, in March I spent a day finding out what happens to some of Tynedale's recyclable waste. In the morning, Tynedale Council arranged a visit to the SITA North Tyneside Materials Reclamation Facility. After recyclable material is collected from your black wheelie bin, it is taken to first to the Hexham Waste Transfer Station and then to SITA; it is sorted, partly by hand and partly mechanically, and then dispatched for recycling.

In the afternoon we were much closer to home, at DJ and SJ Recycling at Codlaw Hill, which processes garden waste collected from Tynedale Council's brown wheelie bins and Hexham Waste Transfer Station. This garden waste is shredded and composted to produce a soil conditioner. The product is available to buy on site, through local garden centres and a national DIY chain. Can I remind the Parish Council that the Enderbys would welcome a visit from us, hopefully once the weather has warmed up!

This spring there has been much discussion about a possible site for additional affordable housing in the village, using land owned by Milecastle Housing and currently occupied by garages between Millersfield and Chapel Close. There are strong feelings on both sides, but the fact remains that Tynedale Council's Housing Department has identified a need for an additional 28 affordable homes in Acomb over the next five years. In August 2007, there were 53 households in housing need with a local connection to Acomb. I have checked with the council again, and this situation has not changed. Obviously, I hope that the issue can be resolved to the satisfaction of as many local residents as possible.

Like many others, I was very sad to hear in November of the death of Cllr. Barry Pickering. As County Councillor for Hexham Central with Acomb, he worked hard for local residents and always had a kind word for everyone. Although we had our political differences, he was keen to work closely with me for the good of the community and conscientiously followed up every County Council issue I referred to him. He certainly was a character and we shall all miss him.

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, and to wish him well for the future. Congratulations to Cllr. Terry Robson, our newly-elected councillor for Hexham Central with Acomb on the new unitary council for Northumberland. I hope that we can all work together in the future for the benefit of all Acomb residents.

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.

Jane Wrigley
May 16th 2008



Northumberland

Ready, Steady, Volunteer!

Have you ever thought of volunteering? Age Concern Northumberland's mission is to promote the well being of people over the age of 50 in and around the County of Northumberland, helping to make life enjoyable and fulfilling. Without the help and support of our local volunteers, the services we provide would not exist. Although we have just over 500 volunteers throughout the county, we still need additional help!

The Rural Access Project currently is looking for further male and female volunteers in the Acomb area. Its aim is to tackle rural and social isolation amongst older people living in North and West Northumberland and provide access to a variety of regular full or half day outings to a wide range of destinations. These include shopping, educational, cultural and sight seeing venues. To help the Rural Access Project continue to offer such valuable opportunities to older people in isolated areas, we need additional volunteers – so if are interested in helping or would like to become a driver we would like to hear from you! All training costs are covered by Age Concern Northumberland and any travel expenses will be reimbursed. Such training opportunities include: First Aid and Moving & Handling.

To find out more about this volunteering opportunities or volunteering in general with Age Concern Northumberland, then contact Hazel Webb on 0845 140 0088. Alternatively, email info@ageconcernnorthumberland.org.uk. Further information is available from Age Concern's website on: www.ageconcernnorthumberland.org.uk

You can also have an informal chat with Karen Moses, the Rural Access Project Co-ordinator, on 01661 836011 or 07710702340 if you would like to find out more. We look forward to hearing from you!

RAP April 08