



Annual Report

April 2024 – March 2025



Parish councils – what are they?

Parish and town councils are the level of local government closest to the needs of local people. Parish and town councils are created in law and are required to act within the laws by exercising the powers and functions which have been conferred on them by Acts of Parliament. However, these laws give the Parish and Town council a wide remit within which to improve the lives of their local community. The Council collects a precept each year (a sum collected with the council tax each year from the householders in the parish) specifically intended to maintain and improve facilities and services for local people.

Parish and town councils are the least bureaucratic and the cheapest form of local government in existence. All sums collected are invested in the needs of the parish itself. They are elected bodies and as such are responsible and responsive to their local electorate.

The Council

Cornforth Parish Council is made up of 15 councillors all of whom are volunteers. At the time of preparing this report there were three unfilled vacancies for parish councillors.

The period of office of a councillor is normally four years, but if they have been coopted or elected at a by-election, they will serve until the next normal election.

The council employs one part time (15 hours per week) member of the staff, the Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer. Usually, he is at Cornforth House between 1pm and 5pm on Monday and 9am to 12pm on Wednesday to deal with issues and be available for members of the public and councillors. If possible, it is best to contact the clerk and make an appointment, if it is of an urgent nature then please contact your parish councillor. Drop in is allowed but will be subject to the clerk being available at that time. It is advised to contact Cornforth House to check that the clerk is in attendance as other commitments may affect the days/time he is present.

Cornforth Parish Council is committed to assisting residents with local issues and the clerk aims to always help. We can deal immediately with many issues relating to the parish council's land or property or any of the council's services or functions.

Sometimes, however, the concern or complaint is not part of the parish council's remit or responsibility, and it may be that it relates to a function or responsibility of another local authority, for example Durham County Council or Livin Housing. We can provide contact details for you to report directly to that local authority or in certain circumstances we may be able to report your concerns online on your behalf. The easiest form of contact for Durham County Council is their website and Do It Online portal and/or contacting your county councillor.

Vision

Cornforth Parish Council's vision for the period 2021 to 2026 is to:

“Aspire to be a modern organisation that responds to and champions the needs of its own community and strives to be open to all. It aims to be transparent and responsive to help create a community where everyone feels part of a strong and prosperous place to live and work.” This vision will be achieved by the following:

Key Aims

1. Provide effective and accountable local government for the parish by managing the parish council's assets & finances effectively and efficiently to achieve best value and sustainability into the future.
2. Demonstrate openness, transparency, and accountability in all Parish Council activities.
3. Develop the Parish Council website and communication methods.
4. Where appropriate, support local business and economic activity in the area.
5. Ensure that community development is driven by the local community by listening to their views needs and aspirations and assist to bring these into fruition.
6. Respond to planning applications and other statutory consultations on time, ensuring that recommendations made to the County Council, or any other appropriate body reflect the interests of the community.
7. Work with partners and stakeholders to improve and enhance the local environment and provide support to the work of voluntary groups and organisations.
8. Maintain relationships with the community officers and through regular liaison with the local police continue to combat antisocial behaviour within the area
9. Be bold when faced with new opportunities and make decisions based on what is best for Cornforth.

"Welcome to the Annual Report of Cornforth Parish Council"

The People

This year the council co-opted two new members, Mark Cunningham and Susan Metcalfe, both of whom have become very involved with parish council business.

The Parish Clerk, Derek Snowball, retired in May 2024 and handed over to Richard Ormerod, who joined us from Framwellgate Moor Parish Council. Derek did a splendid job of handing over the reins, and still makes himself available to advise. Meanwhile, Richard is making good progress and has completed the clerks' qualification (CiLCA).

I would like to thank Derek for his excellent work over the years.

This year I took over as the Chair of the Parish Council for this first time. I am very grateful to my colleagues for giving me this opportunity. This village is a key part of my very being, and my pride for it boundless.

The Money

In this financial year the council has spent £97,518 (the financial year ends on March 31st).

The parish council has some funds in "reserves", some of which are planned for certain uses, the rest is for emergency. We have invested more of this money in a scheme which gives us a good return, so now we make around £750 per month in interest.

With this in mind, we set our budget for 2025-26 in December 2024 and found approximately £13,000 of savings. We did not increase our precept (the amount we ask residents for on the Council Tax bill). This is because we know prices are increasing all the time (shopping, heating etc) and it is a tough time for us all.

The Meetings

Cornforth Parish Council meetings are held in West Cornforth Community Centre at 7pm on the second Monday of the month, apart from the January meeting which is held on the third Monday of the month. All members of the public are welcome to attend these meetings and there is time set aside early in each meeting for public participation.

The Allotment Committee meetings are as scheduled in the planned meetings and the working group meetings are held as and when required. A copy of the planned meeting schedule is available from the council's website:

www.cornforthparishcouncil.org

The Noticeboards

The council has external noticeboards located at the Oval, Bill Wilson Memorial Park and the High Street, as well as one on the Allotment site in Station Road that is used specifically for the allotment site.

The parish council has also purchased a wall mounted noticeboard for the community centre that is located on the wall at the start of the access ramp and has access to this for council information as and when required.

Sadly, the noticeboard situated in the High Street has been vandalised and is awaiting repair. Minor damage has also been caused to the noticeboard located in the memorial park that is mostly cosmetic.

Dog waste bags

The council continues to provide these free of charge and they are available from the reception at Cornforth House, 68-70 High Street, DL17 9HS.

As with many communities, the parish is blighted by lazy owners not picking up after their dogs.

Durham County Council is the responsible body for policing this and they employ dog wardens with enforcement powers for irresponsible dog owners. Their contact details are on the Durham County Council website and issues can be reported to your parish and county councillors as well as by attending the Police and Communities Together meeting (PACT) to report your concerns. These meetings are held in Cornforth House with full details available from reception.

The areas we look after

The parish council owns and looks after several areas of the village so that they can be used and enjoyed by residents and visitors. These are maintained by a private grounds maintenance specialist, the contract for which was recently renewed.

The council recently commissioned a tree survey from a specialist company, which showed that nearly all the trees on council land are in good health.

Bill Wilson Memorial Park

A new cherry tree has been planted, mostly paid for with outside funding and planted by volunteers.

The council is looking into expanding provision in the “toddler” part of the playground with some extra equipment.

The Village Green

The parish council looks after the Green and is responsible for repairs, maintenance and some of the lighting (sensor controlled).

Allotment site

The parish council looks after the allotments adjacent to Coxhoe Beck and lets them out to parish residents at very reasonable rates.

Plans are afoot to improve the drainage and the road surface at the entrance to the allotment site, and we are also looking into replacing the footbridges.

The unlet plots are being assessed and a works programme will be developed to bring all of these back into use.

66 High Street (Currently leased to Cornforth Partnership)

The lease on this property is due for renewal and will shortly be signed by both the council and the Cornforth Partnership.

It is planned to have a building condition survey completed and an up-to-date insurance valuation to ensure that this building is adequately insured, and a planned maintenance schedule is developed for the building.

Planning

The council received few notifications of significant planning applications this year. The parish council is consulted on all planning applications and sometimes makes comments on them.

These comments are passed to Durham County Council which is the Planning Authority. The County Council makes the final decision but we hope that they take the parish council's view into account.

Community engagement

The parish council website, www.cornforthparishcouncil.org holds a huge amount of information including agendas and minutes.

This year the council undertook a major survey of residents to identify local issues and priorities, which has been a very worthwhile exercise. Many thanks to everyone who responded. A copy of the survey outcomes is available on our website and we will continue to update residents on the action we are taking.

This year the council has introduced a newsletter that is in its early stage of conception and delivery. The newsletters are delivered door-to-door when needed throughout the year. If you have any relevant items for inclusion (or if you can help deliver them!) please contact the Parish Clerk.

Events

The council supports the annual Village Show that is usually held on the first Sunday in September, the remembrance celebration events in November and junior discos and the Christmas Pantomime that are held in the community centre.

Grants awarded 2024-25

This year the parish council gave grants to local organisations totalling £17,890. These are detailed below. A contribution of £500 was also given to support the vital work of the Great North Air Ambulance.

Organisation	Purpose
Cornforth Primary School	Outdoor play equipment
Cornforth Village Show	Annual Show
Thrislington Banner Group	Durham Miners' Gala
Cornforth Library	Activities
Cornforth Partnership	Hot meal service, Cornforth Hub and amenity bills
Cornforth FC	Equipment and fees
West Cornforth Miners under 14 and under 18 Football Club	Equipment
West Cornforth and District Community Association	Christmas party

Governance

The parish council is committed to meeting the highest standards of governance in all its activities and to ensuring that everyone who acts in the name of the council - councillors, employees and volunteers meet the highest standards of conduct and probity.

The parish council has adopted Standing Orders and a Code of Conduct and conducts an annual review to support continuous improvement.

The council's 2023/2024 AGAR (The Annual Governance and Accountability Return) received favourable responses from the internal and external auditors.

Risk Management

The parish council has overall responsibility for ensuring that there is an appropriate system of controls, financial and otherwise across the council to provide reasonable assurance that relevant laws and regulations are complied with, that assets are safeguarded against unauthorised use or disposal and that proper records are maintained, and information is reliable.

Representation on outside bodies

The parish council is represented on several outside bodies including the Area Action Partnership (Cllr Janet Snowball), Police & Communities Together (PACT) (Cllr Nick Coombs) and the Board of Sedgefield Charities (Cllr Jo Beetham-Yelland).

This ensures that the voice and views of our area are heard by organisations that cover a wider area.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this report, and trust you find it useful. The council has an open-door approach and encourages residents to share their concerns and ideas.

Do get involved! Parish councils work best when lots of residents take part.

With very best wishes,

P. Metcalfe

Councillor Paul Metcalfe

Chairman of Cornforth Parish Council

Your Parish Councillors (up to May 2025)

Mr Paul Metcalfe (Chairman – front second left)

Ms Janet Snowball (Vice Chair – back centre)

Mrs Joanne Beetham–Yelland (back third right)

Mr Nick Coombs (front second right)

Mr Mark Cunningham (front left)

Mrs Pat Drew (back second right)

Dr Stephen Drew (back right seated)

Mr Paul Mayhew (not pictured)

Mrs Susan Metcalfe (back left)

Mrs Victoria Parnaby (front right)

Mr Jake Ratcliffe (back second left)

Mr Rasheed Vaughan (back third left)

Mrs Marie Walker (not pictured)

Parish Clerk: Mr Richard Ormerod clerk@cornforthparishcouncil.org

