**ARMTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13**

## Introduction

This report is prepared by Armthorpe Parish Council (the Council) in order to provide (amongst other things) details of its elected Members, its employees, the functions and activities it undertook during the financial year 2012/13 and a summary of its annual accounts.

## The Council and its Members

The Council is a local authority by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972. It comprises fifteen Members. All Members of the Council were elected in 2011 and will automatically retire from office in May 2015, when the next local council election is held.

Each Member of the Council has signed up to the Council’s Code of Conduct and registered his/her interests, which may be inspected by members of the public. The register of members’ interests is on deposit at Armthorpe Community Centre (the Community Centre) and may be inspected during the Centre’s opening hours. The registers may also be viewed on the Council’s website at www.armthorpeparishcouncil.co.uk.

The names and contact telephone numbers of all Members of the Council (in alphabetical order) are as follows:-

Councillor John R. Armstrong (01302) 832287

Councillor Anthony J. Brown (01302) 709699

Councillor Ann Brown (01302) 709699

Councillor Elsie Butler (01302) 832206

Councillor Tony Corden (01302) 831148

Councillor Lynda S. Dickman (01302) 709699

Councillor Michael J. Doran (01302) 835834

Councillor Vanda Doran (01302) 835834

Councillor Peter J. Farrell (01302) 831485

Councillor Patricia A. Hanson (01302) 831535

Councillor Christopher J. McGuinness (01302) 833094

Councillor Susan L. McGuinness (01302) 833094

Councillor Wendy L. Moore (01302) 835724

Councillor Scott A. Pickles (01302) 831192

Councillor Frank J. Tyas (01302) 831157

## Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council

The Council is required by law to appoint from its Members a Chairman and Vice‑Chairman. During the year of this report, the Chairman of the Council is Councillor Vanda Doran and the Vice-Chairman is Councillor Frank J. Tyas.

#### Employees

The Council has the statutory power to appoint whatever staff it deems fit, on

such reasonable terms and conditions it considers appropriate. It has a statutory duty to appoint a responsible financial officer (RFO).

Consequently, since its inception in the late nineteenth century the Council has appointed a part-time Clerk, who has responsibility for undertaking all the administrative duties of the Council, including servicing meetings, preparing Minutes, dealing with all correspondence. Additionally, he has overall responsibility for management of the Council’s employees, its allotments, burial ground, playing fields and its Community Centre. The Clerk has also been appointed as the Council’s RFO, with responsibility for all the financial functions of the Council. A part-time Administrative Assistant assists him with, amongst other things, the administrative tasks of the Council.

The Council has appointed other employees in various capacities. It has a full-time Sports and Recreation Officer. The part-time Administrative Assistant also assists him in undertaking his administrative duties. The Council has a full-time General Assistant, whose main function is day-to-day responsibility for managing the Armthorpe Community Centre. He is assisted at the Community Centre by a part time Assistant Site Manager and two Cleaners. There are two part-time Bar Managers who are jointly responsible for operating the Community Centre Bar and appointing part-time casual bar staff. The Council also employs gatekeepers, one for the Cow House Lane playing field and one for the burial ground at Rands Lane. The General Assistant undertakes the gatekeeping duties for the Briar Road playing field, deputises in the absence of the other two gatekeepers and also undertakes other miscellaneous duties. It also has a pool of employees who work part-time as and when required as bar staff at the Community Centre.

The names of the Council’s main full and part-time employees with contact telephone numbers, are as follows:-

Graham Shephard, Clerk to the Council - telephone 01302 709699

Julie E. Hardy, Administrative Assistant - telephone 01302 830543

John Hardy, General Assistant - telephone 01302 830543

Andrew Campbell, Relief Assistant Site Manager - telephone 01302 830543

Carl A. Hughes, Sports and Recreation Officer - 07526 791188

Sandra Clayton and Joyce Delves, Joint Bar Managers of the Community Centre - telephone 01302 830543

The Council also employs the services of an independent contractor and Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) to provide gardening services at the Rands Lane burial ground, the Community Centre and the playing fields at Briar Road, Cow House Lane and Mansfield Crescent.

## Functions

The Council owns and administers an allotment site, a burial ground, three playing fields and a Community Centre.

A number of events are also arranged or co-ordinated by the Council during each year, for example, the annual village fireworks display, annual Christmas tea and social for elderly residents, Remembrance Day Parade, Splash holiday club, etc. Further information is given about these matters later in this report and on the Council’s website at www.armthorpeparishcouncil.co.uk.

## Meetings and Business

The Council conducts its business at various meetings, which it holds throughout each year. These meetings are held at Armthorpe Community Centre and commence at 7pm. They are held during each month of the year except August, which is the recess. All meetings are open to the public, except those meetings or parts of the same where the public is excluded by resolution. It is very rare for the public to be excluded from meetings. During the current year, the public have only been excluded from a part of the three Finance Committee meetings, when the bar stocktake reports were being considered.

The full Council meets eleven times a year on the first Tuesday in each month and at other times when a special meeting is called. Its meetings deal with all matters that have not previously been delegated to its Community Centre and General Purposes Committee, its Finance Committee and its Staffing Committee.

The Community Centre and General Purposes Committee also meets eleven times a year on the third Tuesday in each month. The Council has delegated to this Committee all its statutory powers and duties relating to the provision of entertainments and operation of the Armthorpe Community Centre (except the power to levy a rate or borrow money). The Committee determines policies relating to the Community Centre (excluding the operation of the licensed bar), including arranging all forms of entertainment to be provided by the Council, such as the fireworks display, the Annual Christmas Tea and Social, etc. and it approves the activities of the Sports and Recreation Officer. The Committee has also been granted delegated authority to incur expenditure for the Christmas Tea and Social under the provisions of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. This Committee has thirteen Members.

The Finance Committee meets three times a year on the fourth Tuesday of the month. It is responsible for exercising budgetary control of the Council’s estimates throughout each financial year, supervision of the administration and other matters relating to the Council’s accounting records and procedures, including arranging from time to time of an internal audit of the same. Its findings are then reported to the Council with the Committee’s recommendations. In addition, the Committee has delegated authority to carry out all the powers and duties of the Council relating to the operation of the bar in the Community Centre, including setting the bar tariff and purchasing of necessary equipment and drinks. This Committee has thirteen Members.

The Staffing Committee holds meetings whenever it is deemed necessary by the Clerk (in consultation with the Chairman and/or Vice Chairman) of the Council. The Committee comprises the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council for the time being and three other Members of the Council. It has delegated authority to carry out all the powers and duties of the Council relating to the appointment of staff, hours of duty and rates of pay, determination of staff grievances and dismissal of staff. It does not, however, have the power to appoint the Clerk to the Council, as he/she is appointed by a meeting of all Members of the Council and casual bar staff are appointed by the Bar Managers of the Community Centre Bar. The Committee is also required from time to time to undertake a review of the ‘benchmark’ salary of the Clerk and accordingly to make any recommendations to the Finance Committee.

## Council Activities During the Past Year

### 1 Allotments

The Council has one allotment site at Mercel Avenue, containing thirty allotment gardens, which is leased from a local landowner. I reported last year that the freehold ownership of the allotment site had recently changed and the Parish Council had asked if it could purchase the freehold of the allotment site and a further parcel of adjoining land to accommodate those persons on the Council’s waiting list. The request was refused but the Council will continue to try and acquire additional land to increase the number of allotment gardens.

2 Burial Ground

The Council owns and manages a burial ground situate at Rands Lane. It is a lawn type cemetery for ease of maintenance. On average, it accommodates about thirty interments each year and approximately the same number of interments of cremated remains.

The Council purchased the land for this purpose in 1965. It is freehold and comprises approximately three acres.

As the costs of purchasing and maintaining the burial ground are paid mainly from funds collected through the precept from Council taxpayers of Armthorpe, the Council operates a policy of discouraging non-residents of the parish from utilising the burial ground facility. It does this by subsidising the fees of local residents and charging non-residents of Armthorpe a rate that is higher than the significantly higher charges imposed by DMBC for its cemeteries. Charging the latter rate is a clear disincentive to non-residents.

The Council has recently appointed a Casual Assistant, a Mr. John Farmer, to work as and when required. Amongst other things, his duties will entail working in the burial ground to keep it in a tidy condition.

3 Armthorpe Community Centre

The Council owns and operates Armthorpe Community Centre (the CC), which is situated in the Welfare Park, Church Street. It was purpose built by the Council from its own funds and a significant grant from the European Economic Community. It is currently valued for insurance purposes at £1,512,549.85. It is a valuable community resource providing a venue for a range of activities.

The CC is hired out to various individuals, groups and organisations for a variety of social, educational and recreational activities. A full list of these is displayed at the CC. It is also hired out for children’s parties, wedding receptions, engagement parties and other celebratory events.

As in previous years, the Council organised and presented several events at the Community Centre, including a St. George’s Day Concert, Yorkshire Day Concert, Family Day and Family Disco to celebrate the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, Halloween Fancy Dress Disco and the Annual Christmas Tea and Social for elderly residents of the village.

The Council has authorised free user of the Community Centre for charitable and other fund raising purposes, including concerts arranged by the Armthorpe Elmfield Band. Free user has also been granted to Age Concern Doncaster, the St. John’s Ambulance Brigade, the Brownies and a group of volunteers who operate a Tea and Coffee Shop, which opens Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

4 Remembrance Day

The Council, in conjunction with the Royal British Legion, the local clergy and various other local organisations, once again organised and co-ordinated the annual Remembrance Day Parade and Service. It also paid for the services of the Armthorpe Elmfield Band to provide music during the Parade, the Church Service and playing of the last post at the Act of Remembrance. The Council also provided refreshments at the Community Centre after the event for those taking part in the same.

5 Annual Firework Display

The Council provided a musical Firework Display on 5 November, on the Briar Road Playing Field. It also arranged for a funfair and other events to take place on the site, such as a disco, dance mats, bouncy castle, to provide further enjoyment for spectators. The whole event was well attended and apart from a blip with the firework electronics, was once again very successful.

6 Christmas Activities

The Annual Christmas Tea and Social for the elderly residents of the village was again held on 15th December 2012. This was the 61st annual event organised by the Council, who reverted to providing a cold meat and salad buffet tea. Entertainment was provided firstly by a choir from Stephanie’s School of Dance, led by the choir mistress Rachel Bradley and secondly, by the Armthorpe Elmfield Bands. Everyone enjoyed the meal and the entertainment and the event was a huge success.

Forty-four elderly residents won a raffle prize of a day trip to the seaside at the Annual Christmas Dinner in 2011. As a result, these residents enjoyed a trip to Bridlington on 6th July 2012. On their return to Armthorpe, they were all provided with a two course roast dinner with tea and coffee at the Horse & Groom public house. They were then taken home by taxi. The costs of this trip, the meals and the taxis were funded with the help of proceeds from a concert, which the Armthorpe Elmfield Junior and Senior Bands held earlier in the year at the CC. The Parish Council is extremely grateful to Mr. Griffiths and all members of the two bands for their services in undertaking this concert and donating all the proceeds towards the costs of funding this trip.

Another 44 elderly residents will be attending a similar trip to Bridlington this year. The Armthorpe Elmfield Bands were due to hold a concert on 23rd March 2013 to help fund this trip but it had to be cancelled because of snow, which is unusual at this time of year. Hopefully, another date in the foreseeable future will be set for this concert. Once again, it must be said that the village is very fortunate to have such kind and caring people who willingly and unstintingly give their precious time to support worthwhile causes.

For the sixth year in a row, the Council provided a number of Christmas festive lights on street lighting columns in the village. More lights were provided than in the previous year and the Council received many favourable comments about them.

The Council, as in previous years, also arranged and paid for 41 Christmas Trees to be sited on the outside of shop/business premises in Church Street and Doncaster Road. The Council is committed to increasing the Christmas feel good factor during the festive season and intends to increase the number of lighted Christmas Trees in the village year on year.

7 Sports and Recreation

As previously stated, the Council (in 2008) appointed a Sports and Recreation Officer, to deliver sporting programmes based on the development of fundamental sport skills across age groups from 2-19 year olds. The Council has recently reviewed the job description of this post and deleted this age group so as to include all residents of Armthorpe. Consequently, the officer has responsibility for raising the profile of physical activity and sport, encouraging healthy lifestyles for all local residents. Shortly, he will be introducing senior health and fitness classes, walking for health, etc. The officer currently provides a host of activities for young people in the community and one of the biggest successes is the continuation of the school holiday Splash programme, which provides a variety of recreational activities for 8 – 13 year olds, including swimming at the Armthorpe Sports Centre. He has also developed and introduced a number of new community recreational initiatives, including dance mat sessions, beauty therapy treatments, art and craft classes, etc. He also spends a considerable part of his time engaging youngsters in organised activities at the multi-use games area off Wickett Hern Road.

8 Planning

Some residents may recall that the planning application to develop agricultural land situate between Mercel Avenue and the West Moor Link Road for residential (600+ dwellings) and employment uses, was refused by DMBC on policy grounds. The applicant appealed against the refusal of its application and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government did not allow the appeal.

Since that time, however, with the Localism Act coming into effect, the Parish Council has taken the opportunity to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan. If such a Plan is approved, it will form part of the Borough Council’s Local Development Framework and all applications for planning permission to undertake development in Armthorpe will have to comply with the provisions of the Plan. A Steering Group established by the Parish Council is in the process of preparing a draft Plan for approval by the Parish Council, which has to include provision for the erection of between 646 and 923 houses between 2016 and 2028. Amongst other things, the Neighbourhood Development Plan will allocate the sites where these houses will be built. Preparation of a draft Plan is in its early stages at the moment but by this time next year we should all know the sites that have been proposed. The Plan itself eventually has to be approved in a local referendum.

9. Miscellaneous Activities

In addition to the above, the Council has responsibility for the playing fields at Briar Road, Cow House Lane and Mansfield Crescent. Council taxpayers money has, of course, been spent on maintaining these community assets. Residents will recall that the Council commissioned an ecological survey and management plan for the Mansfield Crescent play area, with a view to creating a nature reserve. Work on complying with parts of the plan will commence this Spring. The Council still has plans to re-develop the Briar Road playing field in the next few years by erecting a sports hall and providing various other sporting facilities. Little progress has been made in this matter, mainly due to the costs of the proposal but the Council has commissioned some sketch drawings of the building. These will be viewed by the Council within the next few weeks. Aside from this, it is anticipated that within the next couple of months, DMBC will be entering into a contract to erect a multi use games area on this field for which planning permission has been granted.

The Council, as always, has made numerous representations to DMBC and other organisations on a variety of matters including highways, planning, environmental services, bus services, etc. Many of these have been productive and improved local services and the quality of life for some Armthorpe residents. Some of these have not proved productive, much to the chagrin of the Parish Council.

The Council will continue to lobby outside agencies to secure whatever improvements it can for the local community.

## Council Finances and Accounts

The Council’s income is derived mainly from the annual precept and Community Centre letting charges. It also receives some income from allotment rents and burial fees. It may from time to time obtain grants for specific purposes. The Council uses its income to pay for its functions and activities, including payment of employees’ remuneration.

The precept is a formal demand made to the billing authority (DMBC) to pay a specified sum. DMBC collect the amount due from the Council taxpayers of Armthorpe and pass it on to the Parish Council. The Council tax is fundamentally a property tax and dependent on eight valuation bands lettered A to H. Precepts are based on the total equivalent band D properties in the Council’s area. This is known as the Tax Base. At the time the precept was set by the Council for the current financial year, the Tax Base for Armthorpe was estimated by DMBC to be 4,088, which was 11 less than the previous year. Consequently, after determining its budgetary requirements, the Council precepted the sum of £208,488. This worked out at a cost of £51 per Band D property for the cost of the Parish Council’s service, which is the same amount charged in the previous year. Occupiers of lower banded properties obviously paid less than this amount. Being mindful of the severe economic constraints affecting families in the village, for the next financial year (2013-14) the Parish Council has maintained the same £51 Band D property charge for the third year running.

The Council’s finances and accounts are governed by its formal financial regulations. They are also subjected to annual scrutiny and examination by a system of independent internal and external audit in accordance with statutory requirements. The Council endeavours to comply with all the recommendations and requirements of the auditors.

A summary of the Council’s Accounts for the financial year commencing 1st April 2012 and ending 31st March 2013 will, when completed, be attached as an Appendix to this report.

## Chairman’s Overview

It will be seen from the above, although it is not an exhaustive list, that the Council has once again had a very eventful twelve months.

For my part, it has been a privilege to serve as Chairman of the Council for another busy year. Every Member has made a valuable contribution to the work of the Council, some (inevitably) less than others owing to employment and other personal issues. Nevertheless, the commitment to serving our community continues and I wish to commend and thank each of my colleagues in this respect.

At this point, I would mention former Councillor Val Jennings, who resigned from the Office of Councillor during the year. Val was a valued Member of the Council for a number of years. As a result, I wish to record my best wishes to her for the future. I would also mention Councillor Wendy Moore, who was elected during the current municipal year following the vacancy created by Val. As an experienced former Councillor of many years standing, Wendy is a welcome addition to complete the full complement of Councillors. My colleagues and I look forward to working with Wendy for the remainder of our four-year term of office.

Finally, I would record the thanks of my colleagues and I, to all Council employees for their loyal services.

If local residents have any suggestions for improving our community, please contact any one of my colleagues or myself and we will be pleased to consider them.

Vanda Doran

Chairman of Armthorpe Parish Council

25.3.2013