**ARMTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12**

## 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 2011/12 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 during the current year 2011/12 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 Valerie Jennings (01302) 709699

Councillor Christopher J. McGuinness. (01302) 833094

Councillor Susan L. McGuinness (01302) 833094

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 Relief Assistant Site Manager and a Cleaner. 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 Andrew Pearson, Joint Bar Managers of the Community Centre - telephone 01302 830543

Teresa Williams, Gatekeeper at the Rands Lane Burial Ground - telephone 01302 709699

Elizabeth Cameron, Gatekeeper at the Cow House Lane Playing Field - telephone 01302 709699

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. The freehold ownership of the allotment site has recently changed and the new owner has submitted a planning application to develop the adjoining land for employment and residential purposes. Consequently, the Council requested the owner to sell it the freehold of the allotment land and a further parcel of adjoining land to accommodate those persons on the Council’s waiting list. It has not received a response to this request.

As a result of a spate of break-ins at the allotment during the previous twelve months by thieves cutting through the chain link fencing, the Council had this fencing replaced with a galvanised steel palisade fence. The cost of the replacement fence was £9,198 plus VAT.

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.

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 £1,468,495. 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, 40’s Night Concert, 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 Festival of Remembrance

Residents will recall that for the first time in 2010, the Council, in conjunction with the Armthorpe Elmfield Band, held a Festival of Remembrance at the CC on the Saturday evening before Remembrance Sunday. The proceeds from admission receipts were donated to the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. The event proved to be very moving and was enjoyed by all who attended. The Festival was very successful and the Parish Council hoped to repeat it in 2011. Unfortunately, however, for various reasons this was not to be and the Festival was held at the Doncaster Minster, where it is understood it did not meet the expectations of everyone who had attended the Armthorpe event the previous year.

5 Remembrance Day

In conjunction with the Royal British Legion, the local clergy and various other local organisations, the Council 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 CC after the event for those taking part in the same.

6 Annual Firework Display

The Council provided a musical Firework Display on 5 November, on the Briar Road Playing Field. The Armthorpe Elmfield Band provided entertainment at the event and the Council also arranged for a funfair to be present on site to provide further enjoyment for spectators. Additionally, the Council arranged for other events to take place, such as a disco, dance mats, bouncy castle, etc. The whole event was well attended and once again very successful.

7 Christmas Activities

The Annual Christmas Tea and Social for the elderly residents of the village was again held on 10th December 2011. As this was the 60th annual event organised by the Council, a hot dinner was provided instead of the usual cold salad tea. All elderly residents who attended appreciated this meal change. The Junior and Senior members of the Armthorpe Elmfield Band provided entertainment. Once again, their services ensured the event was a huge success.

Following a suggestion made in 2003 by Mr. Haydn Griffiths, MBE, the Council provided at the event additional raffle prizes to 44 elderly residents of a day trip to the seaside. As a result, these residents enjoyed a trip to Bridlington on 8th July 2011. For lunch, they were all provided with a hot meal at a restaurant in Bridlington and on their return to Armthorpe they were entertained with scones and cream tea at the Community Centre. They were then taken home by taxi. The costs of this trip, the meals and the taxis were funded mainly from two concerts, 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 sterling services in this matter.

Another 44 elderly residents will be attending a similar trip to Bridlington this year and the Armthorpe Elmfield Bands have already held a concert to help fund this trip. 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 fifth 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 a Christmas Tree to be sited and lit on top of the Parish Church and 41 others 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.

8 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 officer has responsibility for raising the profile of physical activity and sport, encouraging healthy lifestyles whilst building children’s self-esteem, teamwork and leadership skills.  The current post holder is Carl Hughes. He is an all round sportsman but has a passion for the sport of Rugby League, which he has played from the age of 8 years. He is a professional player currently playing for Doncaster Dons in the Rugby League Co-operative Championship Division. He and his predecessors have done an excellent job in the short time since the post was created. A host of activities are provided 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. Since his appointment, however, Carl has developed and introduced a number of new community recreational initiatives, including dance mat sessions, beauty therapy treatments, art and craft classes, etc.

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. Mansfield Crescent playing field is currently unused for playing field purposes, as it has been blighted with a number of problems over the past few years. Consequently, the Council commissioned an ecological survey and management plan, with a view to turning the playing field into a nature reserve. It has also had a hedgerow planted on the boundary of the site. Furthermore, it 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. Aside from this, DMBC has recently been granted planning permission to erect a multi use games area on this field and the Parish Council is liaising with DMBC regarding use and control of the area, including maintenance of the same.

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.

With regard to current planning matters, some residents may recall that the Council was consulted on a major planning application to develop agricultural land situate between Mercel Avenue and the West Moor Link Road for residential (600+ dwellings) and employment uses. The Council was awaiting the applicant to arrange a public meeting to discuss this application but this did not materialise, so the Parish Council submitted objections to the same. The application was eventually refused by DMBC on policy grounds and the applicant has now appealed against the refusal. In addition to this, it also submitted a further revised application for planning permission on that land. Two other applications for major residential development are expected shortly – one on Westfield Farm, Nutwell Lane and the other on Grange Farm, which is situate at the rear of Shaw Wood. Until the land allocations policy is approved as part of the LDF, the Parish Council will oppose these applications, as they are all contrary to the current DMBC development plan, which incorporates all the planning policies for the whole of the Borough.

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

10 Multi-agency Group

At the request of the head teacher of a local primary school, the Council has resurrected the multi agency group. This group comprises representatives from the Council and the local community. These include the schools, police and the healthcare sector to name just a few. These group meetings will be held on a quarterly basis but at the moment the group is considering arrangements for the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the Olympic Torch passing through the village, so it is meeting monthly.

11 New Planning Regulations

The coalition government has revised the whole planning system and with effect from 1st April 2012 new planning regulations will be introduced that give local communities more say in the planning system. In this respect, the Parish Council will be applying to DMBC, in its capacity as local planning authority, to designate the parish as a Neighbourhood Area. If this application is successful it will entitle the Parish Council to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. The preparation of such a Plan gives the Parish Council the opportunity to influence future planning of the village and applications for planning permission relating to the same. The Plan will build on the current Armthorpe Village Master Plan, which was prepared by the Parish Council and adopted in 2010.More detail on this matter will appear in next year’s annual report.

## 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 4,099. Consequently, after determining its budgetary requirements, the Council precepted the sum of £209,049. This worked out at a cost of £51 per Band D property for the cost of the Parish Council’s service. 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 (2012-13) the Parish Council has maintained the same £51 Band D property charge.

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 2011 and ending 31st March 2012 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 busy year. As previously stated, the term of office of all current Members of the Council commenced in May 2011. Eight members of the Labour Party were elected to the office of Councillor, together with seven previously serving Independent Members. Despite our political differences, these have been put to one side, as we all recognise that we are here to serve the needs and aspirations of our community.

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.

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

26.3.12