

# 2015 / 2016

## ANNUAL REPORT

2015/16 was an extremely busy year for the Council. A summary of our year is shown below:

### Neighbourhood Partnership with Northumberland County Council

The work of the partnership is now firmly embedded within the workings of the Council. Working relationships between NCC and Seaton Valley are very good, and the standard of work provided is well regarded by most residents. Grass cutting is seen as particularly good whilst some problems with weed control were experienced in the early summer of 2015. Pruning, edging and hedge trimming were completed as normal during the winter months.

### Promoting Seaton Valley

Following feedback from the Village Planning process the Council is actively promoting the Valley. A number of posters are now in place at bus stops in each of our five villages highlighting aspects of Seaton Valley life and some of its locations. New Gateway signs have been developed and these will be appearing at each of the nine main road entrances to the villages.

The Council held a successful Photography Competition to encourage residents to take 'shots' of the Valley to promote 'sense of place' which had the added bonus of increasing our library of images of Seaton Valley.



### Working in Partnership

The Council recognises that its resources are limited, and hence works with other organisations to deliver community improvements wherever possible. Recent improvements to Hartley Square and Hallington Drive play parks are excellent examples of partnership working as was the installation of the new interpretation plinth and reflection bench at New Hartley Memorial Garden.

### Play Parks

The Council has begun the process of developing a replacement

and renewals fund for its eleven play parks located throughout the Valley. An ambitious funding package is being assembled and a major consultation exercise has been carried out with Seghill residents. The Council is confident that Seghill's play parks will see major improvements in the current year, and that the Valley's other play parks will see significant improvements in future years.

### Gardening Competition

The Council held its first gardening competition at the end of last summer and was delighted with the number of entries received. We expect the competition to get tougher each year as it becomes more well-known, and anticipate the number of entries to increase year on year too.



### Christmas Events

One of the highlights of the Council's year is the Christmas events held in each of its villages at the end of November. The events are always well attended and really do seem to signal the introduction of the Christmas period. We continue to run our Christmas Lights Design competition at each of our first schools, and last year we reintroduced carol singing as part of each event.

### Allotments

The Council ring fences the income it collects from allotment rents to spend on allotment repairs and improvements. During 2015/16 we carried out some major work at Dene Top allotments to reconnect its water supply, and also carried out quite a bit of perimeter fencing work at a number of sites. There was a significant problem with vandalism at our Seaton Delaval sites in January/February but this has stopped since the culprits were apprehended by the police. Following the flux of vandalism attacks we held a well-attended security conference for allotment holders hosted by our local neighbourhood police officers, where advice and guidance on security issues was given.

### Public Toilets

As part of the County Council's budget cuts it announced that it

was going to close West Terrace toilets completely and close Seaton Delaval toilets over the winter months. In the face of strong public pressure to keep the toilets open Seaton Valley Council was able to provide some funding to avoid these eventualities. We now need to look at this issue again to assess whether or not our support can continue into 2017 and beyond.

### 57A Evening Bus Services

Again as part of the County Council's budget cuts it removed the subsidy it paid to Arriva to operate evening services on the bus route between North Shields and Cramlington. On hearing this news Seaton Valley Council arranged an urgent public meeting to allow residents views to be heard.

Following the meeting the Council held discussions with Arriva and the County Council and with goodwill on all sides managed to persuade all parties to keep the evening services on the 57A going for a further year.

### Neighbourhood Plan

The controversial planning application to build 286 (later revised down to 285) houses on land east of New Hartley was ongoing during 2015/16 and partly in response to this, the Council agreed to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the Seaton Valley area. The area has now been designated to develop a Neighbourhood Plan and initial consultation meetings have been held in each of the villages to publicise the development of the plan, identify the main issues to be addressed and to seek volunteers to be involved in drawing up the plan.

### And a couple of things on the horizon for 2016/17



### Play Parks

In response to the recent consultation exercise on play park provision in Seghill the Council will further develop its proposals, consult again on the actual equipment to be installed and move forward towards implementing its proposals.

### Neighbourhood Planning

The Council sees 2016/17 as the main period during which its Neighbourhood Plan will be developed. We will be recruiting volunteers, developing both a steering group and individual village working groups, crunching the numbers, carrying out any necessary

research, and drafting any necessary policies to be part of a draft Neighbourhood Plan to be made available for public consultation.

### Art Stop

The Council is really excited about a project that is being developed with the Northumberland County Council Youth Service whereby young people in the Valley will work with professional artists and sound recordists to develop images and recordings related to Seaton Valley, past and present, for display on bus shelters in each of our five villages. This project is still subject to formal grant approval but we are very hopeful of success.



### Tall Ships – August Bank Holiday weekend

We will be working with voluntary and residents groups in Seaton Sluice to promote village activities that will be held in tandem with, and in support of the main Tall Ships festival. This promises to be a very busy weekend for Seaton Valley, and Seaton Sluice in particular.

### Where Does our Money Come From?

Approximately 82% of the Council's total income of £589,476 in 2015/16 came from its annual precept which it served on Northumberland County Council. The Council's precept was £485,170 which is collected via residents Council Tax bills. Seaton Valley Community Councils Band D equivalent Council Tax for 2015/16 was £110.77, which equates to approximately £2.13 per week.

The Council also received the following amounts in external grant support during 2015/16:

- > Hallington Drive Play Park - £39,900
- > New Hartley Memorial Garden - £2,500, and
- > Hartley Square Play park - £7,625

Additionally, the Council collects rent on both the two flats it owns above its offices and on the ten allotment sites it manages throughout the 'Valley'. In total this income amounted to £25,020 in 2015/16.

Miscellaneous income amounted to £4,761 and the Council received a refund of £24,500 from Northumberland County Council in respect of its (Seaton Valley Council's) 2014/15 Neighbourhood Partnership contribution.