

ACTING CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF MIDDLEHAM FOR 2022-23

WEDNESDAY 17TH MAY 2023

Owing to the very recent resignations of Councillor Sue Fairhurst and of our Town Clerk, David Keep, this Annual Town Meeting will seek to provide the reports covering their period of tenure from May 2022 to April 2023 to the community of Middleham. The Financial Report is, necessarily, brief but will be followed by publication of the Council's audited accounts once the current annual audit is complete.

Firstly, 2022 proved to be a busy year in terms of national and community events in Middleham.

At the beginning of June, Middleham celebrated the late Queen Elizabeths Platinum Jubilee. The Town was decked out with bunting and flags. On the Saturday, we held a Street Party on the Market Square which was very well attended and was also visited by our local MP, Rishi Sunak, who spent a significant amount of time here chatting with residents and having innumerable photo's taken. Then on the Sunday we held a Community Jubilee Lunch, which was also a "sell out" event. Catered by a redoubtable team, led by Sue Fairhurst, an excellent lunch and celebration was thoroughly enjoyed. Those attending also joined in the spirit of the event with hot competition for the Best Crown Award! Truly a regal gathering!

In July our annual Seniors Outing took place. With funding support from the Council and organised by Sue Fairhurst, a coach load of our residents set off for a day out in Whitby and, by all accounts, had a super time. Much testing of fish and chip shops and tea and cake venues took place and the verdict was that it was a successful day. Which will take place again this July!

In August there was the Middleham Park Run and Family Dog Show held on the Sports Field, which was well attended and blessed by good weather too.

In early September, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II died. Like so many communities, Middleham mourned her passing. The Union Jack flew at half-mast atop Middleham Castle. A prayer service and, later, a civic service were held in the church of St Mary and St Alkelda to mark her passing prior to the State Funeral. As a racing town, her absence and her support for the sport of Kings – and Queens – is sorely missed.

At the start of October our various hostelries joined together to hold a one-day Saturday Oktoberfest. This proved very popular with residents and visitors alike and will, we hope, become an annual event that supports our hospitality and accommodation businesses.

Middleham is twinned with Azincourt in northern France. Following covid and all it's restrictions, it is good to see the Town Twinners Association revitalised. With the aid of grant funding from the Two Rivers Foundation, they have held a number of events, including a Fizz and Cake afternoon, Childrens Games afternoon and have enabled online connection with those of their members unable to come along. They are working hard to bring more local families into the twinning partnership. These events have also been connected live on the day with the community of Azincourt – modern technology at its best! The Twinners will resume with a visit to Azincourt this coming weekend (18th – 20th May 2023) and we hope these international links will continue and thrive.

Numerous other local organisations have continued to meet, socialise and have outings, including the Women in Middleham, the Community Garden Group and the Leek Society, each of whom are part of the fabric of this active and busy community. Our newly relaunched Middleham Football Club has been a spectacular success under Arwel Carter's determined and enthusiastic leadership. To

achieve promotion in your first season is an amazing achievement. The grounds staff have done a terrific job of maintaining and improving the condition of the pitch, which looks really good and is an improving asset for us all to enjoy. These same grounds maintenance volunteers are also helping out with grass cutting in the Community Garden, which is both generous and much appreciated.

On 10th December we held our annual Christmas Party for the children of Middleham. This event is funded by the Town Council and was organised by Sue Fairhurst supported by Beccy Lappin. It was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon with an exciting visit by Father Christmas with some amazing presents! Numerous spies and scientists were seen around the town using their binoculars and microscopes for the rest of the weekend!

April saw a very well attended and successful Good Friday Open Day on 7th April. The weather was kind, those yards that opened looked smart and welcoming. We welcomed over 3,200 visitors to Middleham, which was a great boost for our hospitality businesses and our trainers with existing and potential new owners and syndicate members coming to look behind the scenes. The event raised funds for Racing Welfare and also for local charities, for which we are most grateful.

Amongst the routine work that the Council undertakes and funds is the care and maintenance of the public areas, trees, play parks and the Town Wastes – mainly the cobbled areas within the town, although some specific areas are privately owned. Our first priority is, of course, safety. But we also seek to keep the town looking smart, welcoming and inviting. We have increased our budget for the maintenance and repair of the cobbled areas as it is clear that, after 25 years or more since the major re-cobbling works were undertaken, more in-depth maintenance is becoming necessary. We are developing a planned maintenance cycle to manage this. We use various specialist contractors to do these works and we check up on what they are doing and how well. We welcome feedback from residents on this too, please. Councillors cannot be everywhere at all times so your help as eyes and ears is most helpful to us. Compliments are equally welcome and we do pass any praise on to our contractors.

Throughout the past year, your Councillors have been working to review, assess and identify a sustainable future for the Middleham Key Centre. At the outset last Easter, 2022, we consulted with the community both directly, through the Middleham Herald that is hand delivered to every household by Councillors and through organisations and the Middleham Facebook page. We have looked into all the suggestions that have been made to us as well as those we have thought of. This is a necessarily detailed and thorough process that has to look at every possible future use of the building. This process is also dependent on working with other organisations so the timescale is not entirely within the Council's control. We are now nearing the point where we can present our findings and the future options to the community and consult with you all before any decision is made. As soon as we are in a position to do this, we will let you know.

April saw the resignation of our Town Clerk, David Keep. David has been a conscientious clerk throughout his 7 years in the post and we wish him well in his future endeavours.

Our longest serving Councillor, Sue Fairhurst, has served as a Town Councillor, our Mayor and as our District Councillor for quite a number of years now. Sue has always had the interests of Middleham and its people at heart and has never been afraid to put Middleham's case and interests before her personal or political considerations and has done us proud in so many ways. This whilst also running and catering the Seniors Luncheon Club, the Seniors Outing, the Childrens Christmas Party and numerous other community activities. Sue was also a mainstay to many people throughout the

restrictions, lock downs and isolation caused by Covid. We are so grateful for all her work for us and will miss her contribution and service greatly.

Finally, in May this year, we held a Big Picnic on the Sports Field to celebrate the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles 111. Once again, the sun shone, the castles bounced and a good time was had by all who attended. We saw generations of residents and friends enjoying each other's company with a lovely atmosphere. We know how to enjoy ourselves in Middleham!

Let's look forward to more of the same in the coming year.

Honor Byford

Councillor

Acting Chair of Middleham Town Council

Wednesday 17th May 2023