

## **CAISTER PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2020 –2021**

Caister Parish Council continues to hold Council meetings on the first Monday of every month except when a bank holiday falls on that day, then the meeting is automatically postponed until the following Monday. All meetings are open to the public and time is put aside for parishioners to ask questions of both NCC, Borough and Parish Councillors. If there are items of particular interest to the public, the allotted time of 15 minutes for public questions may be extended by the Chairman.

The past twelve months have been exceedingly difficult for the village with lockdowns and confinement and the Parish Council has also been hit where it hurts most by not being able to provide the community with its regular entertainment in the form of carnivals, cinema, Christmas films and all the things we took for granted before the virus struck. The provision of entertainment and facilities for the people of Caister is one of the things that lay in the heart of the Council and when that ability is removed it leaves a hole which is a challenge for Councillors to try and fill.

Parish Council meetings have been held virtually, which has been like watching a football match without the fans. The lack of face-to-face contact reduced the meetings to a screen full of faces without any real chance of dialogue or the usual verbal jousting which takes place in the Council chamber. As this report is written it is very pleasing to be able to report that our next meeting, the Annual Parish Meeting, and the Annual Parish Council Meeting will be held back in the Council Hall. I am sure the Council will be pleased to get back to debate face-to-face at long last. There is also the possibility of the public being able to attend, although numbers will be severely restricted due to Covid-19 regulations. Most of the time during the lockdowns was spent updating some of the Council owned properties, including a new floor in the Council Hall, renewing paintwork, and carrying out checks on electrical and heating equipment where required.

As we move slowly and cautiously out of lockdown, there are still many ways we as a village can help those who have been affected by the virus, in a personal way or financially. Those residents who have suffered most during the pandemic still need the support of friends and neighbours, just as we were doing at the start of the first lockdown, by keeping an eye on the vulnerable and especially the elderly and those who live alone. Financial help can be given in many ways ranging from supporting local shops to providing information for those in need to local authorities or organisations who have the means to contact the many locally based charities and support organisations.

As we approach the Annual Parish Meeting, it is pleasing to report that after many months of working with a shortage of Councillors, we now have a full Council of 16 Councillors and will be welcoming our new colleagues to our next meeting in the Council Hall this month. Hopefully, the Council will have no need to make any further use of virtual meetings in the future.

Finally, the Council would like to say a big thankyou to all the people of Caister for their support and forbearance during what has been a very trying year, and to the many local shops and businesses who have helped us all to maintain a sort of normality during the early days of the pandemic and more recently. You have set the standard for coping with the virus, following the rules and ensuring that we will, hopefully, come out of this dark period of our lives, stronger and more resilient than ever before. A country can only recover if villages, towns and cities up and down the country follow the example set by this wonderful village of ours.