

It has always been a privilege to be a member of Egremont Town Council and a further privilege to be chosen by my fellow Councillors to be Chairperson.

This is the first time we have recorded our annual report and it is our intention to upload it onto the Town Council website and I think it's important to spend some time explaining what we do as a Town Council.

Egremont Town Council is unique, unlike any other Parish or Town Council in Cumbria, we own a variety of assets but these are aging and becoming very costly to maintain. So what do we own? - we have the working Egremont cemetery (which includes being responsible for the two cemetery chapels and cemetery house), we own the Market Hall and we are responsible for the public Egremont Bowling Green which is well managed by the Egremont Bowling Club). In addition, we own two allotment sites – East Road and Bridgend.

It is important that the Council has a voice on organisations who are working or have plans for our town so we have two representatives sitting on the Borderlands Town Team who are looking to help regenerate the town, concentrating on the former Red Lion site, Florence Mine improvements, to help it become more sustainable and connectivity which is improving signage, introducing town trails, local walks and much more.

We have representatives on the Egremont Bowling Club, Florence Mine, Egremont Youth Partnership, Friends of Egremont Castle, Police Locality meetings as well as those you would expect us to have – cemetery, personnel, finance, website etc.

Let's not forget our Lengthsman Scheme whereby Egremont Town Council and St Bees parish council pay an annual subsidy to the scheme (according to the electorate) which enables the Lengthsman to carry out two days work per week within the parish, he is also on hand to cover emergency jobs. This could be fixing benches, grasscutting no-man's land, litter picking on right of way paths, weed-spraying to allow us all to walk safely along paths without fear of being stung by nettles etc – all those little things that are important to people, in reality, the demand for the service exceeds the time we have so many times, we have to decide what gets priority. In reality, it is a bit like having a handyman service that definitely fills the gaps that are being left. As well as this, Lord Egremont also pays a subsidy which pays for two days maintenance in Egremont Castle.

Egremont Town Council is also responsible for the Christmas Lights including the tree at Bigrigg and one at Moor Row which are always greatly admired. We are also fortunate to have three Town Councillors who also sit on the Amenity Committee, as well as the Town Clerk and they, along with the support of the Town Council, organise and run the annual Winter Wonderland event. Unfortunately, this was cancelled last Christmas due to the weather but we hope to be back again this year, bigger and better. Anyone who has ever organised such an event will know the time and effort that goes into it, but it is a spectacular day enjoyed by so many locals and visitors and the Amenity Committee intends to keep this event going for as long as the community wants it and funding allows.

In years gone by, Egremont British Legion was responsible for the annual Remembrance Parade but this was passed onto the Town Council to organise a few years ago. One of the changes we brought about was starting the parade from Egremont Market Hall and inviting all local schools and organisations. Also, recognising that it was difficult to hear the Clergy speaking was another factor that we have now resolved by providing a sound system so people could hear the service as well as who was laying a wreath. Feedback received has been very positive and appreciated and attendance figures continue to grow.

Egremont Town Council acknowledges and supports the local groups in our community by giving financial support where it can, included in those that have benefitted this year has been the Egremont Hub (a fantastic group of volunteers who organise a weekly get together to get people out and about & meeting up with other people), the Egremont Rangers under 16's Girl's Rugby Union team, Egremont Youth Partnership, The Guide Assoc, 4th Egremont Brownies, Great North Air Ambulance and we have donated 12 litter pickers to each of the 4 primary schools who were all keen to tidy up their own little bit of the community.

The Town Council has also made improvements to the Bowling Club – a fantastic facility to play a game of bowls or you are welcome to just sit and watch others play, the members are very welcoming so why not give it a go.

There are only ten Town Councillors and as you can imagine, being a Councillor is not coming to a meeting every month, having a chat then meeting the month after, it is hard work that we all commit to for free.

None of what we do can happen without our dedicated employees - Geraldine and Nicola in the office and Nelson and Kieran who manage the Cemetery and Market Hall. They go above and beyond for our Town and its residents and I want to put it on record how grateful Councillors are for everything you do for both the Council and the local community.

The past 12 months have at times been difficult, a lot of which goes unseen to the public, the cemetery chapels are deteriorating and yes, we have applied for grants but we are always met with the same response, sorry but you have been unsuccessful. The Chapels are Grade 2 listed buildings and we are told that they are not of regional or national significance and therefore our chapels are competing against Grade 1 listings like the Roman baths or Hadrian's Wall. This year we need to continue looking for funds but at some point, make a decision about their future if no funding is secured.

Egremont Market Hall, (the home of many memorable evenings) is also struggling and we are competing against other facilities in the town, some of which come with free car parking. The roof is in need of repair and being located in a conservation area does increase the repairs/replacement costs. Again, we need to consider the long-term future of the hall, it's historic unique offer has competition but views will be sought and all options considered.

Compared to the many millions secured by Cleator Moor and Millom (and no, we do not have the answer as to why Egremont was not put forward having never had an explanation from the then Copeland Borough Council and now there is no Copeland Borough Council to ask) but we do potentially have £3 million through the Borderland scheme and although this sounds a lot, when it comes to regenerating the town, it is nowhere near enough but with the assistance of the Egremont Town Team, we will maximise this and try to secure additional funding then make a start. The Red Lion site is a target site and further consultation will be carried out later this year on viable options.

Let's also not forget the Aldi development welcomed by the town. Planning applications for large developments always move slowly and negotiations are still taking place between Cumberland and Aldi but we would hope to see the development start this year.

We will also expect to have the Dent Fell solar farm application later this year. As Councillors, we have read the comments about why the Town Council has not yet said anything, the simple answer is we can't as we have not received any official planning application and if we did air our opinions beforehand, we can be accused of predetermination i.e. making our decision without all the facts. This would then bring a serious implication, in that the Town Council could be stopped from formally responding when the application arrives and Egremont's voice of representation would be silenced. We as a town cannot afford for that to happen, the town will need the Town Council to have a strong voice and we will, but at the right time.

Sad to say, but we are experiencing an increase in anti-social behaviour from racist attacks on businesses in the town to destroying the grounds of Egremont Castle and let's not kid ourselves, it is residents of our own town who are the likely culprits. There is no excuse to ruin the fabric of our history nor not be welcoming to people who want to invest in our town. The Police make it very clear that they use statistics to decide where patrols go or additional support is required, therefore to get the support that we need, we need people to report everything so it is logged, you can either ring 111 or report it online, the more statistics that show to the police the true reflection about what is happening in our parish, the better chance we have of getting the extra help we need.

It would be wrong to not touch on the Egremont precept within your council tax bill. Comments are always made when the council tax falls through the door, I do it myself, but in reality, you pay on average of £6.60 per month to Egremont Town Council (less than a cup of coffee a week) and for that, we provide much needed services, events and everything else highlighted. For example, we would not have the cemetery, we would not have the Market Hall, there would be no flowers along Egremont Main Street, there would be no Lengthsman Scheme that keeps our Castle grounds and parish neat and tidy. We would have no Christmas lights or no benches to sit on. The Bowling Green would be at risk of closing if they could not afford any repairs etc and there would be no allotment sites for people to grow their own produce.

There is so much more that we do including people knocking on the door every day seeking advice from our staff, coming to us with a variety of issues including how to

contact Home Group, reporting that their bin has not been collected, reporting a broken light, asking for directions etc.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank the Councillors themselves for all their hard work, commitment and time spent in doing everything that they do for the town. The next 12 months will bring more challenges than this Council's had to face in a long time and it may mean having to make difficult decisions which could be unpopular but we will face them head on and endeavour to continue to fight and do our best to try and secure additional funding for the Market Hall and cemetery chapels

It would be wrong also to not mention internal changes that have occurred throughout my term of office, we have lost two caretakers and now we are taking the time to look at the job before re-advertising to make the description as clear as it can be both for us as employers and the employee.

We also lost a much-respected Town Councillor in Mike McVeigh who served on this Town Council for many years then took retirement at the grand old age of 80 so he served his community very well and we all wish him the very best in his retirement.

We also welcomed new Councillors – Patrick McMahon, Robbie Tear and more recently Chris Colley and I am sure that they will work as hard and in collaboration with us all to do what we need to do for the good of our community.

I started off by saying that it is a privilege to be an Egremont Town Councillor and it's an honour to be chosen as Chair, sometimes being the face of the Council brings its own challenges but I've always felt supported by yourselves and I ask that we all continue in the same vein both Councillors and employees doing their best for the town and residents of Egremont alike.