

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER



Watching the spectacular change of seasons in Darras Hall reminds us of how privileged we are to live in this leafy, picturesque setting.

We are also reminded that we were motivated to become Joint chairmen in order to help preserve this environment not just for ourselves, current owners and their families, but also to preserve the legacy for future owners and their kin.

We have already diarised the Committee's activities for the first six months of our tenure in a recent Pont News & Views article so here, we will summarise the work of the Committee and activities since our appointment in April 2014.

Improving communications between the Committee and owners is one of our principal pledges and there is good news regarding the website which will be pivotal in achieving this goal. This new website is now in-build and the home page can be accessed at www.darras-hall.net/2015. The financial commitment from local businesses already tops £2,000 and so the website will be self-financing. A part of its *modus operandi* is to collect email addresses as apparently 98% of Darras Hall residents have one, which means that in future thousands of pounds will be saved on the annual postage bill. The sooner we start building this database the better, so please go to the new web page and follow the link to submit your personal email address and other details.

Reading correspondence in local media it is apparent that there is still a minority of residents unaware of the seismic change in the Committee's composition which took place following the last Annual General Meeting. This change saw seven new Committee members elected. The previous Chairman and Vice-Chairman have both stepped down with new Joint Chairmen appointed – Andrew Mate and David Gambles.

As you may already know, a large proportion of the work of the Committee relates to planning applications so we have included an analysis for your information.

Not only should this help you understand the work we do but it will also be of interest with regard to following development of the housing market-place, as we also conduct searches for the majority of house sales. Figures for the last five years as follows:-

	Searches	Planning Applications
2009	51	131
2010	90	122
2011	67	128
2012	73	126
2013	95	133
2014 (7 months)	92	118

As you can see there has been considerable increase in activity this year.

Additionally, there are planning amendments and deferrals which amount to approximately one third of the original applications. It is well worth asking advice at the Estate Office if you have plans to make changes which relate to the exterior of your property. We are there to advise and are very happy to point you in the right direction to avoid unnecessary time, expense and anguish that can result from making uninformed decisions.

Work on the Bridlepath is ongoing and as intimated in the Pont News & Views article. Further to that we are now replacing a number of the dog and waste bins with a newer more hygienic and fire-proof design. These are dual purpose bins.

It is interesting how we take things for granted – We have only just discovered that a number of residents deserve commendation for their sterling efforts at helping keep our environment so pristine. Two who have recently come to our attention are Graham Armstrong and Geoff Heslop. Geoff has diligently performed the task of litter picking for over 60 years, collecting, we are informed, 500 shopping bags of litter per annum. The Committee has requested litter picking grabs from the County Council so anyone else who feels inspired by these gentlemen's efforts can call in and collect one from the Estate Office. We are interested to hear stories of similar heroics to feature on our website.

It has recently come to our notice via Facebook that one of our owners had the traumatic experience of witnessing their much loved pet cat mown down by a speeding driver in a quiet cul-de-sac on the Estate. This type of thoughtless behaviour provides ammunition for the blanket 20 miles per hour speed limit lobby. The Committee would rather we could convert the thoughtless drivers, than have to campaign for a lower legal limit, though this remains an option. Please watch your speed!

The vast majority of owners pay the princely sum of £30 per annum for Darras Hall rent promptly every year. However, there are a few dissenters. It is the duty of the Committee for the sake of the 98% who do pay on time to pursue the rest. Currently, we have to inform you that 296 rents are outstanding and seven are already in the hands of the court. We take this opportunity to remind you that the annual rent charge is legally enforceable.

Recently, conversations have taken place with our Auditor and Solicitor with a view to strengthening the legal position of the Trust Deed and Committee so that we are less vulnerable to the increasingly aggressive threat of litigation which pertains in modern day life. More news of this will be forthcoming.

Interestingly, whatever status we adopt for the Trust Deed, it will never ever be a quango which as most of you will know, is an arms-length extension of a government department and funded by the same.

We have also had meetings with local business people in relation to financing the website and the Trustees and owners, particularly those with issues unresolved by correspondence. We are happy to discuss with any owner our roles in the Committee and its work going forward should that be necessary.

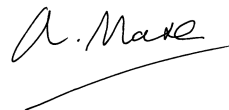
Recently we voiced your concerns at a Northumberland County Council planning meeting regarding the Lugano advertising hoarding on Runnymede Road. Councillor Richard Dodd also supported the criticisms against the hoarding but in spite of this the Planning Committee deigned only to change the design of the hoarding in a minor way.

Annual General Meeting minutes are now available in hard copy from the Estate Office. These will be published on the website in due course.

There are currently three vacancies on the Committee. Anyone interested should contact the Estate Office with a view to being co-opted. This requires a written request from the proposer and a letter of support from another owner. We look forward to receiving your applications.

As winter looms, the change of season will not only bring fresh vistas, but also new challenges which we look forward to meeting on your behalf.

Indeed, given the timing of this Newsletter, please accept the season's best wishes on behalf of the Committee to you and your families.



Andrew Mate
Joint Chairman



David Gambles
Joint Chairman

November 2014

New Estate Office Opening Hours:-

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 10:00 to 13:00 and 14:00 to 16:00.

Friday 09:00 - 13:00.