

# Denby Dale Parish Council

## BUSINESS PLAN 2018-23



## CONTENTS

<b>Page 3</b>	<b>Business principles of the Denby Dale Parish Council</b>
<b>Page 4</b>	<b>Objectives of the Business Plan</b>
<b>Page 5</b>	<b>Parish Council administration</b>
<b>Page 6</b>	<b>Income</b>
<b>Page 7</b>	<b>Spending and disbursements procedures</b>
<b>Page 8</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>Page 9</b>	<b>Grant facilities</b>
<b>Page 10</b>	<b>Monetary Reserves</b>
<b>Page 11</b>	<b>Parish Council offices</b>
<b>Page 12</b>	<b>Personnel resources</b>
<b>Page 13</b>	<b>Health, recreational and educational facilities</b>
<b>Page 14</b>	<b>Environmental considerations</b>
<b>Page 15</b>	<b>Development and planning</b>
<b>Page 16</b>	<b>Communications</b>



## **Business principles of the Denby Dale Parish Council**

The business mission of the Denby Dale Parish Council is to utilise funds obtained through the parish precept and other income to add positively to the lives of parish constituents; supplementing services provided by the Principal Authority (Kirklees Metropolitan Council) and the national government of the day; as agreed by legal, democratic process of the elected parish council.

The council is, further, committed to continue in promotion of the Denby Dale parish as a business-friendly area; and to preserve and promote the heritage, history and environment of the area to attract income for the overall benefit of the constituency.

In carrying out these functions the actions of the council will be:

- Legal.
- Ethical.
- Responsibly economical
- With best consideration for the wishes of constituents.
- With respect for environmental and ecological considerations.
- Proactive insofar as such is practicable.
- Flexible.
- Transparent.



## Objectives of the Business Plan

The purpose of this Business Plan is to define the manner in which the Parish Council will carry out the above commitments during the five-year financial period 2018-2023. It is anticipated that the Plan will be reviewed annually, along with other policies.

In the pages that follow, this Business Plan considers its current business commitments and methodology under the following broad headings; and attempts to lay a business pathway to deal with future developments:-

- Scope of council responsibilities and processes – basic council formation and organisation, powers of competency.
- Financial – income, outlay, budget, reserves and decision processes, etc.
- Community – grants, services (libraries, heritage group, *et al*).
- Additional funding - facilitation, where appropriate and practicable, external funding for benefit of the community.
- Environmental – countryside officer, future developments.
- Personnel – current and projected manpower requirements, council responsibilities.
- Future outlook – Primary Authority pressures, legislative.
- Communications – internet activity, newsletter, local news outlets, etc.
- Promotion of the parish as a high quality area for businesses, residents and visitors.
- Development and planning scrutiny.

Throughout this Business Plan references to “the Council” or “Parish Council” should be deemed to refer to the Denby Dale Parish Council, unless specified otherwise.



## Parish Council administration

The civil parish of Denby Dale is the foundation level of elected local government for its area consisting, broadly, of the following communities:

- Birdsedge and High Flatts
- Upper and Lower Denby
- Denby Dale
- Upper Cumberworth
- Lower Cumberworth
- Skelmanthorpe
- Scissett
- Clayton West
- Emley and Emley Moor

The parish is a rural area within a mainly urban Principal Authority; and comprised an electorate of 13,141 voters in 2017. The Principal Authority is Kirklees Metropolitan Council, within whose boundaries the entire parish is contained.

There are twenty Parish Councillors, elected every four years by default. If any councillor resigns or leaves the council for any reason a replacement may be elected if a minimum number of constituents requests same or, more normally, a replacement will be co-opted from applicants after the position has been advertised according to statute, but the number of co-opted councillors could be significant.

In order that Power of Competence is maintained, in addition to minimum qualification requirements for the clerk to the parish council, a minimum of two-thirds of the council must be elected (as compared to councillors who have been co-opted); a consideration to be borne in mind as the four-year electoral period advances and there is a greater likelihood that the proportion of co-opted councillors could become higher. This does not stop the council decision processes, but there is a lesser degree of management flexibility if Power of Competence cannot be invoked.

## Income

The primary source of income for Denby Dale Parish Council is by means of a parish precept, supplementary to council tax, collected by the Principal Authority along with council tax and passed on to the parish. The level of precept can be impacted to some extent by central or local government legislation which can be either limiting or beneficial; and there is currently a Council Tax Reduction (CTR) grant input to the Parish Council from the Primary Authority, amounting to £17,610 for the year 2018-19.

The Parish Council precept is requested annually by the parish before the start of the financial year, after consideration and acceptance of a budget for the upcoming year by the council.

For year 2018-19 the precept is £37.70 for a band-D property raising a total (including CTR) of £233,746. The corresponding estimated parish budget for the same period is £244,007.

There are also peripheral incomes, for contractual and *ad-hoc* hire of surplus rooms within the council offices - the mechanics of this service are dealt with below. There is likelihood that this income will increase over time but the primary objective of space hire is as a service to the local community, with income set to defray costs rather than to generate profit.

Whenever possible and appropriate the Council will also seek to attract funding into our area, either by applying directly for grants or by supporting applications from other local bodies. The availability of assistance may evolve from a variety of sources, both internal and external. As examples from past years:-

- In 2017 the Council awarded the Friends of Skelmanthorpe Textile Heritage Centre a short-term interest-free loan which, in turn, enabled the Friends to secure a £92k grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- In 2009 the council facilitated the establishment of the Denby Dale Walkers are Welcome Group, with which our Countryside Officer & councillors have remained actively involved. Since then, this group has secured over £100k external funding to promote outdoor recreation in the area.
- The Parish Council was asked to support the inclusion of our area in the EPIP LEADER programme, jointly funded by DEFRA & the European Union, from 2009 onwards. This programme has brought hundreds of thousands of pounds into our area to the benefit of community groups & local businesses alike – funding only available because of the support of the Council and the willingness of councillors to be actively involved.
- The council's Heritage Working Party directly applied for LEADER European funding to develop our local history website [www.denbydalekirkburtonarchives.co.uk](http://www.denbydalekirkburtonarchives.co.uk)

The council will review such opportunities, and others, as and when they are available and appropriate; and maintain a proactive stance towards promoting the needs of the parish. In this respect the Council's powers of Competence may be of particular use.

## Spending and disbursements procedures

The opening section of this Business Plan lays down the basic tenets for the manner in which Denby Dale Parish Council will conduct its business.

The guidelines for achieving this; and the measures by which the quality of DDPC business dealing is judged; are multi-faceted. Some measures are subjective, being enshrined in good judgement and ethics, but most can be measured against solid yardsticks of written regulation such as:-

- The strictures of national legislation. Various local government acts, with amendments and appendages, form the foundations for everything that the Council undertakes, from the conduct of councillors to the manner in which financial transactions are conducted.
- Local government legislation also clearly defines the role of the Clerk to the Parish Council as a legal and advisory arm to the Council. Delineation between the clerk and the council is clearly defined: the clerk cannot lead or take part in debates *per se*, but there are also times when the clerk is required to offer guidance.
- Our own policies and guidelines state how we shall operate within legal strictures to deliver value to our constituents. Purchasing procedures and expressed qualifications for grant applications to be successful are two areas in which these written procedures are important, as tangible measures against which actual events can be judged.
- Denby Dale Parish Council has also adopted the General Powers of Competence under the Localism Act of 2011 which, in short, allows the Council to, “do anything that individuals generally may do”. This allows a degree of good judgement to be used in business decisions while remaining clearly within other written strictures, rather than choosing the “safe options” of convoluted procedure, or lowest price under all circumstances. For example, the Council is not compelled to take the lowest bid for any goods or services as a matter of course, if a somewhat higher bid provides better quality or value for money; or it may choose to utilise services of a local supplier within the parish rather than a national supplier, if the overall benefit is in favour of such a decision.
- Business relationships are important and the Council may opt to use a supplier of goods or services that has in the past delivered a good quality end-product for competitive price – especially but not necessarily solely in an emergency – without reference to a full tendering procedure. In such manner the Council is more able to build a reputation such that businesses will compete to provide services.
- Valid invoices are paid as soon as reasonably practicable after verification. Generally these are authorised at each meeting of the full council or the FGP Committee though cheques can be authorised and cut at shorter notice in case of need.
- It is a specific practice of Denby Dale Parish Council that invoices are never “held” for any minimum period before payment: once the goods or services have been delivered and verified, the provider is entitled to similar courtesy.

Summarising, budgetary restraint and cost control are important to the constituents of Denby Dale Parish, but these must be accompanied by sensible quality control.

## Budget

The budget, simply put, is a statement of cash outlay that the council projects as being required to carry on its business during the year. It is usually agreed around January each year for the following financial year so that an appropriate precept can be requested through the Primary Authority.

It is arrived at by taking all the known and likely outlays for the year to come. A degree of flexibility is built in for minor contingencies but line items are largely a matter of empirical experience and can be estimated fairly reasonably.

In all circumstances the Parish Council is committed, through specific concentration of effort from the Finance and General Purposes Committee and oversight from the full council, to ensuring that their spending supports the requirements and objectives of parish constituents; and that requested precepts will be responsibly estimated with these objectives as guidance.

However it has been somewhat difficult to set an accurate budget during recent years due to large projects being processed so there has been need for a level of conservatism in budgeting. Examples of such projects have been:

- Takeover of all responsibility for the Skelmanthorpe Council Offices from Kirklees. Initial projection of running costs was sometimes based on broad estimates since many aspects of upkeep had been handled as one small part of a departmental management function by Kirklees and movement into an outside commercial environment for everything from window-cleaning to lift certification was – and continues to be – a sometimes complex matter.
- Takeover and conversion for use of the Churchfield site as an area for allotments and recreation.
- Active financial and practical support for the Denby Dale Community Library, partly discontinued by the Principal Authority, which provides a variety of communications and information services on behalf of the community. This is managed by an independent trust but the Parish Council has been closely involved throughout the success of this new centre.
- Active support for continuation of library facilities in designated space within the Skelmanthorpe Council building which is granted rent-free. Actual financial support for this has been incidental to date but with ongoing spending reviews in process by the Principal Authority there is potential for this to change

There is scope for further uncertainty in future as the Principal Authority retrenches towards concentration on core, statutory functions in response to legislative requirements, but the budget is now significantly bigger than it was only a very few years ago which in itself gives a greater degree of flexibility.

The Council has also accumulated a sufficient reserve, now, to be able to approach estimates for the budget process more stringently, with concomitant possibilities for minor underestimation of some line items.



## Grant facilities

The Council offers different classes of grant assistance, briefly as follows:

- The Small Grants Scheme offers grants of up to £500 to formal community groups, clubs etc. Use is not specified and grants have historically covered a wide variety of activities: the emphasis is on benefit and involvement for the local community.
- An extension of the Small Grants Scheme is the School Grant Scheme, wherein each school in the Parish (numbering ten at the time of writing) is invited to apply for a grant of up to £500 for their own use, each year. Again, school and community involvement is emphasised; and grants are not given to extend services otherwise provided through statutory routes. This was not fully taken up during 2015/16 or 2016/17, but is looking close to or at full take-up for the year 2017/18.
- The Community Grant Scheme awards higher sums of money to qualifying causes which result in wider community benefit and is aimed primarily at assistance with capital costs. Such awards can be quite substantial, amounting to several thousand pounds, and can be supplementary to grants and/or bursaries obtained from other sources.
- Finally, there is the Community Grant Aid Scheme, specifically aimed at supporting local services that would otherwise be reduced - or eliminated - as a result of reorganisation at principal authority or central governmental level. This is purely *ad hoc* and is funded as required to meet objectives as agreed at Council.

In all of the above, guidelines are laid down for qualification but the Council has a wide degree of discretion so that worthwhile causes do not slip through the net. The Council takes a very positive view to this aspect of their remit, in line with commitment in other areas, to supporting self-help and community effort.

The Council would like to see full take-up of the annual £500 School Grant Scheme every year; and there may be other areas where a wider take-up might be beneficially encouraged. Sports' clubs and organisations such as the Guide and Scout movements are well-acquainted with the mechanics and availability of grant schemes, but there are a number of volunteer organisations, newly-forming, that may be able to make successful applications for the wider community benefit.



## Monetary Reserves

A budget is drawn up every year that attempts to cater responsibly for anticipated outgoings during the following year; and this forms the basis for the council precept (the amount of money taken from ratepayers). As in any responsible business, reserves need to be retained from income, above and beyond anticipated budget requirements for the period in question, to cater for a “rainy day”. That is, unforeseeable circumstances that can draw heavily and/or unexpectedly upon the council exchequer.

By their very nature these are unforeseen and cannot be catered for, but might include:

- Cover for long-term illness – short illnesses of a few days can be handled, but in case of long-term absences that qualify for paid leave it is necessary to employ cover; and temporary staffing costs can be substantially more expensive than permanent staff.
- Building repairs – we have ownership and responsibility for the council building (which also houses the library) and though some repairs are catered for in the budget there are, from time to time, emergencies that result in immediate, costly or complex attention.
- Liability issues – in an increasingly litigious society we would be remiss not to consider the impact on having to meet some costs in response to legal suits or similar. Pending changes in legislation such as, for example, new Data Protection rules, can only add to the complexities of such.
- Short-term support – if appropriate within the objectives of the Council – for ongoing local services or projects, support for which may be, in the longer term, considered and itemised as part of future budgets for more orderly support.

Taking the above factors into account, among others, DDPC has formally agreed that a reserve at or close to £400,000 is prudent. It is expected that this figure should be maintained within reason as a working figure, taking account of circumstances prevailing in January 2018; but it is not an absolute. In a real-world environment it is to be expected that some movement above or below this figure would be considered normal.

However if significant increase (or decrease) is envisaged it is anticipated that a further vote in council would be taken.

## Parish Council offices

Historically, these offices were owned by the old urban district council but passed into Kirklees ownership when the larger Principal Authorities (including Kirklees) were created.

The building has now passed back to the Parish Council as the Principal Authority divested itself of some capital assets and it is now the responsibility of Denby Dale Parish Council to run and maintain. In addition to council meeting facilities and direct employee spaces, the building also includes a space dedicated to the local library facility and a number of smaller office spaces that were mostly vacant on takeover.

The Parish Council accepted charge of the building only after consideration of alternatives for providing administrative and meeting spaces. The direct costs of maintaining the building are probably more than it would have cost to rent a simple shop-front, but this last would not have provided space for future expansion of the Council; and the fate of the library would have been very much in doubt if the Principal Authority had, instead, sold the building on the open market. Inevitably, also, the asset value of the building had to be taken into account.

Management of the building involved some steep learning curves for all involved parties, as accurate empirical data for maintenance costs were not readily available. Some repairs were seen to be needed at handover and were attended for remedial attention by the Principal Authority, but it is in a condition that one would expect in a building that is most of a century old and maintained by a body that had many conflicting priorities to attend.

The Council formed a Building Working Group of five councillors which considers building-related issues as they arise and makes considered recommendations to full council for implementation.

The building has already been upgraded in some areas – windows, for example, were completely replaced – but it appears likely that significant outlay will be required in due course for roof and building maintenance. An initial provision of circa £30,000*pa* was set aside for building upkeep, administration and maintenance. As with any building, cost variations from one year to the next can vary quite significantly; but the initial provision does appear to be reasonable.

There is also a small but increasing income, accruing from hire of spare room space within the building. *Ad hoc* room hire for single, one-off purposes is becoming more recognised locally; and one office has been let on a one-year agreement to a new-start local business. These will never be game-changing revenue earners – charges are quite low because they are intended much more of a local service than a serious revenue line – but such activities do, certainly, increase the viability of owning the building instead of taking out rented space in both monetary and public-service terms.

The outlook for the period of this report is that the building will probably need at least one period of more expensive maintenance – catered for in the overall budget – but, by and large, costs will become better-known as an empirical database develops, thus allowing a more predictable budget. This should lead to a gradually tighter control of costs and a more even cost/benefit pattern.

The long-term picture is a development of the current trend towards making use of the building as a community resource, while allowing space for potential increase in Council workload as it takes on an increasing share of services to the Parish.



## **Personnel resources**

At the end of the 2017-18 year, the Council has three employees: countryside officer, cleaner and clerk to the parish council. The cleaner's workload and duties are clearly defined and unlikely to change significantly during the period under consideration.

However those of the clerk and the countryside officer are less straightforward to foresee in a rapidly-changing environment.

The Clerk is currently managing the mandatory duties of the Clerk to the Parish Council as laid down in various local government legislation; plus the various manifold tasks that also arise and are normal in the position. The Clerk also meets requirements as the Financially Responsible Officer and has handled building administration tasks as these have arisen, after the Council took over ownership and responsibility for the council building.

These various briefs may expand as times progress which may require more hours to process. There is also a pending requirement for the Council to fill the role of Data Protection Officer during 2018-19: the scope of this brief was still being clarified at both national and local level in early 2018.

The Countryside Officer also has a wide-ranging brief. He is a very public part of the Parish Council and does a great deal of work in the community coordinating voluntary efforts in fields of environmental and ecological activity, in addition to his support for other countryside activities. This financial and personnel commitment will not reduce and may increase if circumstances require and permit: the Council is highly supportive of any efforts to promote and improve our rural surroundings and encourage population engagement in local outdoor activities.



## Health, recreational and educational facilities

A central function of the Parish Council is to enhance and improve life for its constituents through physical and intellectual involvement; and a primary means of achieving this is through support for recreational and educational facilities.

There are a number of means by which this is currently achieved, as examples:-

- Active financial and logistical support for library services in Denby Dale and Skelmanthorpe. The Denby Dale Community Library received £40,000 in financial support towards rebuilding and setting up; and the Skelmanthorpe library facility is housed, *gratis*, in the Council Building.
- Each year, each of ten schools in the area is encouraged to apply for a small grant of up to £500 towards any qualifying project that involves its pupils in bettering themselves or getting them involved in community activity. Schools may also apply for further or larger grants for qualifying projects or improvements which may not be obtainable from local or central government.
- The Council actively supports physical activities for all age and cultural groups, as means of supporting better mental and physical health. This, again, arises primarily (though not solely) through various small and larger grant schemes run by the Council and impacts a very wide variety of activities such as:
  - Scout and Guide groups.
  - Bowling, cricket and football clubs.
  - Youth groups.
  - The Men's Shed scheme.
- Allotments provide multi-faceted opportunity for productive outdoor physical activity that also has significant educational benefits for a generation that is increasingly isolated from practical knowledge of where food comes from. The allotment complex at Churchfield in Denby Dale has been highly successful with input from a local Friends' group.

Denby Dale Parish Council will continue with active involvement in any qualifying scheme or project that involves its constituents in such activities as those exemplified above; and any others that may arise in future. Firm financial commitment will continue to be granted where considered applicable.

Each opportunity will be viewed discretely on its merits.



## **Environmental considerations**

Denby Dale is a rural parish and constituents have made clear on numerous occasions and through various forums that they value their countryside surroundings. The council therefore views environmental and ecological issues as important in any decision process where such is a factor.

Considerable resources are already invested in maintaining our environment in a manner that adds to quality of life for current residents and preserves it as much as is practicable for future generations. We employ a Countryside Officer with a flexible and peripatetic brief to maintain areas not covered by other agencies and to give significant support to volunteer groups and environmental projects in our area.

This effort will continue to be a high priority during the period under consideration and, as other agencies and/or the Principal Authority divest themselves of functions that are considered extra-curricular to their core activities, the resources we devote to these activities may well increase.

Such functions (not as policy objectives, but as possible examples only) might extend to maintenance of open areas or public rights of way; allotment capacity and maintenance of current allotments; or natural habitat management for rare or locally important fauna and flora. Such commitments can only add to workload costs and could involve increase of our financial commitment on behalf of the parish. The Denby Dale Parish Council also contributes annually to the Parish Environment Trust.

## Development and planning

There is probably no area of local authority administration that evokes comment of constituents more than those changes in their immediate environment that can be brought about by building works, either industrial or residential. Significant governmental and demographic pressures are brought upon principal authorities to build more homes and, in a rural district such as the Denby Dale Parish, these pressures are often vehemently resisted by local residents.

Planning applications are made to the Principal Authority. In turn they are required, where practicable, to seek comment from the Parish Council on applications within the Parish. The Plans Scrutiny Committee meets monthly to consider and comment upon these, but the Parish Council does not have any power of veto on applications and has no statutory powers to impact such.

Nonetheless, there is an opportunity to pass comment which may be taken into account and there is also opportunity to request consideration for limitations or conditions on developments to neutralise negative impact on constituents, or suggest positive steps with regard to infrastructure.

With larger developments, the developer is required to provide a contribution – negotiated with the Principle Authority – towards supporting infrastructure costs if the development is deemed to impact negatively on current facilities, most commonly referred to as ‘Section 106’ funds or, more recently, ‘Community Infrastructure Levy’ (CIL). However, there are drawbacks to this system from a parochial standpoint, in that such money is not required to be spent in the area impacted by the development that generated the need: indeed, many councils have significant surpluses of CIL money that has not been spent at all.

These factors are set against a constantly-changing backdrop of central government directives that impact the detail of CIL distribution. The current legislative position is fluid and still being finalised, but it appears that pending changes in the law will require partial localisation of these funds, whereby a proportion of CIL payments will be passed direct to the district in which the levy was generated, for discretionary use in improvement to local infrastructure, through such bodies as Denby Dale Parish Council.

This is an area which, dependent upon the precise requirements and allowances of final legislation, would allow Denby Dale Parish Council to address some of the issues that arise from large scale developments and substantially improve the daily life of its constituents. It is a potentially impactful change that may offer substantial opportunity to react, at street level, to the concerns of relatively small sectors of the community that are affected by such developments.

It is intended that the Council will take advantage of such opportunities if and as they exist.

There is also a possibility that this new legislation may allot a greater proportion of CIL to local councils that have prepared a Neighbourhood Plan. The Council has considered such in the past and concluded that there is little community benefit to justify the cost in money and resources; but this may be reconsidered if new arguments surface for consideration.

## Communications

The primary purpose of Denby Dale Parish Council is as a parochial arm of local government, representing the people of Denby Dale Parish. However much of the work undertaken by the Council is in the areas of services and facilities, which would be of little value if constituents were not aware of the existence of such.

It is therefore considered very important that outward communication should continue to be an innate part of council systems and decision processes, to react to the needs of the community in as efficacious a manner as possible in an era of instant and more complex communications. The Council will seek continuous improvement in the bridge between themselves and the constituents it serves. Examples of means by which outward communication currently takes place are:

- The Parish 'Newsletter' is a quarterly publication, distributed to addresses throughout the parish as a free news organ and also archived on the DDPC website. There is also future scope for electronic circulation.
- The council website is an increasingly important means of outward communication and a first stop for finding local Parish Councillors' contact details. Policies are a matter of public record through this medium; as are archived minutes, accounts records, annual reports and other assorted documents.
- The website also carries links to Council-funded heritage and visitor information sites, amongst others; information about local events; and facilities including community and library services.
- There is scope for enlargement and improvement of the website, probably in ways as yet unimagined, and this is likely to grow as a cost item. As the population at large becomes increasingly dependent upon the internet as a source of information, it will become the case that information that is not on the internet is less likely to filter through to the people most impacted by the policies of the Council.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is equally important that constituents are able to make known their thoughts, ideas and concerns to the Council. The council office is the centre of the council wheel and most communications will, at some stage, pass through the Clerk to the Parish Council on their way to or from councillors. Everyone involved with the Council, either as paid employees or on a voluntary basis, is a mode of public communication to and from the Council, whose importance cannot be overstated.

This public face of the Council, though not necessarily showing up on specific budgetary lines, is a vital part of what Denby Dale Parish Council does. The opening sections of this Business Plan refer to integrity and transparency; and the most effective business tool at our disposal for meeting these obligations is by personal demeanour and demonstration.

Denby Dale Parish Council can run the most business-efficient operation, but it will be without value if the people who the Council serves are not taking benefit from that efficiency!