



ESTABLISHED 1894

Evenwood and Barony Parish Council

# Annual Parish Meeting

Chairman's Annual Report

2024 -2025

Cllr. R. C. Bolden, FIAT, TMIQ

13th May 2025

**Note to editors: Embargo until release at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday 13th May 2025**

WELCOME to Evenwood and Barony Parish Council's Annual Report. Until you have been doing this job for a while, I do not think you realise the time it can take up and, as a result, the way it can impact on your free time. However, a lot of that difficulty can be overcome when you are working with such a good team. So, a huge 'thank you' to all the councillors who have, over the past twelve-months helped me out, offered advice, support, and listened to my problems as well as coming up with great solutions. It is always unwise in these situations to single out individuals, however, I would like to thank my Vice Chair – Councillor Rachael Spraggon, who has been a great support and proved extremely helpful when dealing with some pretty awkward problems. A parish council, not to mention its newly elected Chairman, cannot function without a good Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) and Evenwood and Barony Parish Council is extremely fortunate to have Keith as our current Clerk and RFO. He has, without doubt, guided me through some very tricky minefields over the last twelve-months, while all the time remaining steadfastly impartial. His wise counsel, expertise, and professionalism, while remaining calm under pressure, has been a great boon to the Council over the past year. I would also like to thank the Chairs of the Council's various working groups for all their hard work over the past twelve months. The Parish Council has 15 council 'seats'. Following this year's local elections, there are currently seven vacancies to fill by co-option: Evenwood ward [2]; Ramshaw ward [1]; Lands ward [2]; and Witton ward [2], to bring our council up to full strength.

The Parish Council has been very active during the past year. As well as our routine monthly meetings, we have had extra meetings for the working groups and separate meetings for the Randolph Social Welfare Centre's [Welfare Ground] Trustee Board. Various events have also been held which have allowed the Parish Council and the residents to work together. In June 2024, we held a celebration to commemorate the D-Day landings; in November we joined in services of remembrance; and in December we celebrated the Parish Council's 130th anniversary year. Last month, I attended the Evenwood Church of England Primary School to give a presentation outlining the work of the Parish Council, after which I was invited to attend a meeting of the school's Pupil Parliament to discuss the issues that concerned them. It was good to see the young people taking such a positive interest in their community. The Parish Council agreed to mark the VE-Day 80 Anniversary on Thursday 8th May 2025 by organising a shared moment of celebration of 80 years of peace since the end of World War II in Europe, an important event for the local community. We were pleased to instruct a specialist sign maker to correct a mis-spelt name on the war memorial in good time before the 80th anniversary event.

It would be remiss of me, if I failed to mention all the good work that is carried out in the parish every year by the various volunteer groups, including John Bogle, Manager at the Randolph Community Centre; their good works are much appreciated. Finally, a mention to

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the local press (Teesdale Mercury), who have diligently reported the Council's deliberations to the wider public. Even though the reports have not always been entirely helpful, they have in my opinion been extremely fair and honest

On being elected Chair a year ago, I did state that I was, by nature, a '*policies and procedures*' type of person and, to that end, I have attempted to bring a bit more structure to our method of operation. I therefore thank you all for bearing with me through some of the more tortuous aspects of these proceedings. At the same time, I identified three areas where I believe the Parish Council could improve the way it has previously operated, and these were (in no particular order):-

1. Management of the allotment sites.
2. Drawing a clear boundary between the operations of the Parish Council and the Randolph Social Welfare Centre's [Welfare Ground] Trustee Board.
3. Improving the communications with parishioners.

To this end, I believe the Council has made a very good start to completing these targets. To date we have:

- 1. Management of the Allotments:** An Allotments Working Group was set up with clear terms of reference in order to manage day-to-day issues and to compile and manage the waiting lists. I think it is fair to say that in the early days things did not get off to the best of starts, with various territorial disputes and disagreements over lettings policies taking place. However, that has now settled down and things seem to be progressing relatively well. The Council has introduced a cashless payment system for allotment rents, which is better suited to modern day cash management. Although we acknowledge that this new system may be difficult for some people, it is fundamental to ensuring the safe and efficient collection of rents. New allotment hire agreements have been issued in order to clarify exactly what we expect of our tenants and what they can expect of us. A documented strategy for the future management of the allotments is now in place, which will further enhance the management of our allotments.
- 2. Clear boundary between the Parish Council and the Randolph Social Welfare Centre's [Welfare Ground] Trustee Board:** The Parish Clerk had already identified this as an area for improvement. The issue of a joint bank account [for the two bodies] had also been identified by the external auditor as a potential problem. To ensure absolute transparency in the way the two bodies operate, the Parish Council decided to hold separate meetings – so that meetings of the Trustee Board are held on different dates from those of the Parish Council. These meetings are subject to separate agendas and minutes. The Trustee Board has its own set of accounts and it now (after long and tortuous negotiations with several banks) has a separate bank

account. Separate asset registers exist for both entities. All of this ensures that the full costs of running the Charity are absolutely clear, open, and above board.

3. **Improving communications with parishioners:** On the face of it, this should have been one of our easier tasks. All we had to do was start using the Parish Council's notice board again and revamp the website, both of which were looking a bit forlorn and neglected! The notice board was indeed a pretty easy win. New locks and keys were sourced and it was soon cleaned and back in use fairly quickly. Information displayed on the board is now regularly kept up-to-date. The same should have been true for the website. However, what works well in theory never goes quite that smoothly in practice. What should have been a quick call to our then web provider to get them to revive our current site turned into something far more labyrinthine. We were overtaken by the latest government edict which is tending push local councils down the route of a gov.uk web domain. Not only that, it also requires parish councillors to use specific email addresses, linked to the Council's website. Finding web providers that can do this and comply with all the red tape that goes with it was not easy and, needless to say, not cheap either. However, the Communications Working Group prevailed and after many months of hard toil we finally sourced a new and fully compliant web provider, which is currently building our new website. Of course, the challenge going forward will be to keep the site up-to-date and relevant.

In November, the Council met to set the budget for the following year (2025 - 2026). This is a significant task for councillors and not one to be taken lightly! My view is and has always been that: 'The Council does not have any money; it is the people's money that we spend on their behalf', and therefore it has to be spent with great care and due diligence. As a result, all proposed spending plans were extremely carefully scrutinised prior to being included in the current spending plans. This means we now have a robust and exceedingly tight budget for this financial year. Put simply, this means if it is not in the budget, we cannot spend it. From that budget, the Parish Council sets aside a modest sum of money each year to donate to good causes in the parish as either a grant or a donation. The money must be spent on purposes which "*will bring direct benefit to the area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants*".

The Parish Council has pressed for measures to urgently address concerns about road safety issues. We are pressing for further measures which need to be taken to tackle speeding issues. The Parish Council takes anti-social behaviour every bit as seriously as the public does, and we continue to devote significant time to address the problems described by local residents. Vandalism is a crime that has a big impact on residents' quality of life and costs local council tax payers thousands of pounds to repair.

The Parish Council lodged a formal objection to the planning application for Kays Hall Farm, The Green, Evenwood. The Council has received several representations from residents, and councillors firmly believe that more traffic in the area would cause damage to other un-adopted roads in the vicinity and concern has been expressed about the safety of any new access road, described by local residents as a "death trap". Most important of all, it would mean that a 'new' access road would be driven across the village green, thus destroying it as an amenity for use by village residents.

I conclude by thanking all parish councillors past and present for giving their time and expertise freely for the well-being of our village and those who did not stand for re-election for their service to the Parish Council and for their contribution to the community: Councillors Anne Lyons; Barbara Maude; Barbara Nicholson; Charlotte Roche; Darren Roche; and Rachel Webb.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Bob Bolden'.

**Councillor Robert (Bob) Bolden, FIAT, TMIQ**  
**Chairman - Evenwood and Barony Parish Council**  
**13th May 2025**

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