

Scotforth Parish Council

Report of Chairperson for year ending 31st March 2026

Parish Councillors and Clerk and Wards

I am grateful to Derek Whiteway, our Parish Clerk, for all of his support and guidance, in particular for his work updating key policy documents, the website and administration of the neighbourhood plan consultation process.

The five parish councillors have all played their part in promoting the interests of the residents. Sue Aspinall and Andy Compton have championed engagement with County Highways regarding the state of roads, gritting and traffic calming, whilst Lauren van Wijk has continued to represent the students at Bailrigg Student Living on the A6 and kept our Facebook page refreshed. Mike Hardy, our longest standing councillor, has provided wise council on our engagement with the City Council's Local Plan Review. My own focus has been upon planning applications and the Neighbourhood Plan.

All parish council meetings are open to the general public to observe and have an opportunity to speak. Invitations are also extended to our district and county councillors, with Erica Lewis and then Hamish Mills (county councillors) attending and subsequently they made representations on our behalf with County council officers.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Parish Council concluded its own formal public consultation (Regulation 14) on 31st March 2025, after which the Steering Group fully considered and addressed all comments and made improvements to the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan (SRNP). The revised Plan was submitted to Lancaster City Council, as the Local Planning Authority (LPA), in August 2025 who then conducted their own consultation (Regulation 16) between 29 September and 17 November 2025. This consultation's feedback generally followed the same pattern as the Regulation 14 consultation, with overwhelming majority of responses supported the SRNP, whilst developers expressed concerns that the neighbourhood plan would restrict their own building plans. The LPA then submitted the SRNP, complete with all its supporting documents and consultee comments, to an independent Examiner, who has a duty to ensure the SRNP is in conformity with the prevailing Local Plan and national planning guidelines and regulations. The Examiner completed their review in April 2026 and recommended that the SRNP goes to a public referendum provided certain policy wordings were amended and the quality of some maps improved. It is anticipated that these amendments will be completed by 20th May Annual Parish Meeting, after which the LPA will arrange the referendum later in 2026.

The creation of the neighbourhood plan has been a mammoth task since 2022, undertaken by the members of the Steering Group with support from planning consultants from Kirkwells, AECOM and EPD and city council planning officers. The Steering Group was led by councillor Andy Compton and was comprised of councillor Sue Aspinall, councillor Lauren van Wijk, councillor Paul Holland, Peter Chesman, Jonathan Passmore and district councillor Paul Tynan.

I believe that the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan will serve the Parish well and commend everyone to vote YES in the referendum.

Local Plan

Lancaster City Council (LCC) Local Plan is being revised following the cancellation of the highway project to reconfigure junction 33 and other roads to enable access to the garden village. The Parish Council has submitted comments in the previous year, and our principal request has been that the SRNP is respected and treated as the basis for planning in our area. We are aware that the NHS and a consortium of housing developers aspire to build a hospital and extensive new housing in the parish, but we maintain that this cannot come forward without adequate infrastructure and must also respect and not harm the rural landscape and character of the area. The existence of the Neighbourhood Plan strengthens our position. We have been active participants in the Parish Council Forum with the LCC Local Plan team and expect quite a lot of activity in the coming year.

Planning Applications

As a statutory consultee, we have commented on all planning applications. The Lancaster City Planning department can only assess applications against planning regulations, policy, the Local Plan and, when approved, the Neighbourhood Plan and therefore we only object or propose conditions where we believe the planning framework is not being adhered to or where we think there is a better solution within the scope of the framework. Therefore, in the majority of cases our response is classified as an Objection because we have raised issues, concerns or proposed better solutions or conditions; If these are adequately addressed then we withdraw our objection. During the year we reviewed and commented upon 9 planning applications, as well as a consultation from County Fire and Rescue Service.

Benches, Bins, Footpaths and Roads

As a rural parish we have very little assets – a few benches, litter bins, notice-boards, and trees on Birksey Brow and Langthwaite Road – but we have kept them in good order. A new litter bin and noticeboard beside the bench on Little Fell Road was installed in June 2025.

Lobbying of County Highways, particularly by councillors Aspinall and Compton, has resulted in small improvements and works. The Neighbourhood Plan sets out our long term aspirations for footpaths, cycleways and traffic calming which has been shared with County Highways and will form the basis of future engagement.

Website and Communications

We are required to have a website, scotforthparishcouncil.org.uk, so that it can be used to share progress on the Neighbourhood Plan as well as provide copies of agendas, minutes, accounts and correspondence regarding the Local Plan and planning applications. All feedback regarding the website is most welcome.

Paul Holland, Chairperson.
Beckside Cottage, Bailrigg