

Chairman's Report 2015

The Committee of the Groomsport Village Association has been busy since our last AGM in September 2014 and we hope that Members will feel that we have tried to address at least some of the issues which they have raised. We have been successful in some but, regrettably, not in all. On the positive side, we have seen an increase in the number of social activities which have been organised and we hope have been enjoyed by many of you who are here this evening.

One of the major challenges which the Committee has had to deal with this year has been the change to funding arrangements for community groups such as ours. Any events or activities which are organised, such as the Christmas Lights event, are no longer automatically funded or provided by the local Council. As you know, we as an organisation do not have any membership fees or other streams of income. So, if we want to have an event then we have to apply for a grant. This can be a fairly rigorous process and certain criteria have to be met if we are to get funding. We may or may not always get funding and there is also, in many cases, a requirement that we have to generate some of the money ourselves to run the event or activity. Hence a charge may have to be made to those attending. This would usually be a very modest charge.

Much of our work has had as its basis the Groomsport Integrated Village Plan which was produced on behalf of North Down Borough Council and the Groomsport Village Association by the Paul Hogarth Company in March 2013. At the beginning of the year (October 2014) we carried out an audit to assess the progress so far and what elements of the Plan the Committee needed to follow up. It is pleasing to report that a number of issues have been addressed but others are still ongoing. Members will be aware of the considerable improvements in the vicinity of Cackle Row Cottages and in the area around the Boat House; of the interpretation/orientation signage; the additional seating ; the enclosure of the play area; the new steps to the beach at Cove Bay and, at long last, the Village Noticeboard. However, despite numerous attempts to have it addressed, one issue still gives considerable cause for concern and that is the Coastal Path between Groomsport and Portavo. This is a very valuable asset for both residents and visitors to enjoy but, in some places, the Path is almost impassable. We had hoped that following initial discussions with the owners of Lifestyle Homes at Seahaven, they would have taken the promised action to improve that stretch of the Path adjacent to them but this has not happened. We note and appreciate the work carried out by the National Trust and we also acknowledge that some work has been carried out by the Council but more needs to be done. We have had discussions with public representatives to request that they ensure that this important right of way is not only maintained along its full length but is made safe for the public to use. We will continue to press for this matter to be given greater attention by those who have responsibility for it on our behalf.

Members will be pleased to see that after numerous letters and meetings, access to the village along the B511 has improved not only for motorists but also for pedestrians using the footpath. There remain, however, a number of issues which Transport NI have been asked to address, among them the state of the low stone wall at Glenganagh and the absence of

road markings at Cove Hollow, but, since we have not even had acknowledgment of some of our communications, we have asked our public representatives to take these matters further on our behalf.

The Playground at Springwell Crescent is owned and maintained by the Council but concerns were brought to our attention that as the play area is not fenced there is considerable risk to the safety of children from vehicles using the adjacent car park. The response from the Council to our concerns was that the risk was low. We did not agree and informed the Council of this. We then arranged a site meeting with local Councillors on 31st March so that they could see the situation for themselves. We have been very disappointed that neither the Council nor the Housing Executive see fit to agree to pay for and maintain a fence. It is our opinion that if the Council maintain the playground then it is part of that responsibility to make sure that the facility is safe for those who use it.

We have continued to monitor planning applications bearing in mind the strongly held wishes of residents to maintain the character of the village. We have also monitored the quality of beach cleaning; the ongoing issue of dog fouling and the need for greater enforcement of the regulations as well as education; we have also followed up with Ulsterbus regarding the punctuality of buses and their occasional speed through the village and, like many others, we have expressed our desire not to see a reduction in the frequency and extent of the service provided.

On a more positive note, the Committee planned and organised a number of events throughout the year starting on 29th November with the switching on of the Christmas Lights by the Mayor and a visit from Santa; a Magical Afternoon for children took place on 1st February with arts and crafts and a magic show; a Wine Tasting Night was held at Neill Wines on 7th February; on 1st March we hosted a celebration of Clubs and Associations within the village with live music and refreshments; to celebrate EU Day of Solidarity between Generations we held a Games Night on 29th April with card games, a beetle drive and bingo. Young and not so young joined together to enjoy the evening. The youngest resident was 5 years old while some of the more mature were 80 years plus ! A Healthy Eating cookery demonstration was held on 6th May with those attending getting to sample some delicious fare. We also took part in "the big lunch" on 7th June. This was part of the Eden Project for people throughout the UK to join together with families, friends and neighbours and to bring a picnic lunch and relax and enjoy each others company. In July, residents had the opportunity to become part of a Creative Writing Group. Funded by Big Lottery via "Culture for All", the workshops provided a focus on writing and community, which aims to bring people together to enjoy writing, specifically on the theme of place. On 11th August, around 40 residents worked with Ulster Wildlife at Ballymacormick Point to identify the marine life around our local area. This was part of The Shore Thing project which aims to build a picture of the rocky shores and measure change around Britain. Sunday 27th September saw a great influx of people into the village for the Ireman Triathlon. With some 180 competitors from all over Ireland taking part, we were able to assist with the smooth running of this prestigious event by providing 20 marshals and helpers.

Creating greater awareness of our environment and the need for us to help look after it has featured highly on our agendas this year. This took on a very practical approach when, with the help of Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, we organised the Groomsport Big Spring Clean on 23rd May to rid our local area of unsightly litter. Volunteers were encouraged to get involved and this aspect became even more important when, after an informal meeting of residents in May, the decision was made to enter the Translink Ulster in Bloom competition. While the village is automatically entered for the competition by the Council, input from the local community was a key element as far as the judges were concerned. A sub-committee of volunteers under the enthusiastic leadership of Roy Mawhinney, set about getting some work done to tidy up the village in the short time before the judges were to arrive. Working parties undertook weeding in areas needing attention; helpful advice and support came from Ian Beeney (the Council's Grounds Manager) while Groomsport and District Gardening Club and Groomsport Nurseries also provided practical support. The outcome was that Groomsport took 2nd place in the Large Village category. This was a great achievement and went a long way to show just what can be done when people are prepared to give just a little of their time to help make the place we live in that bit better for us all. I also believe that all who took part in this, and the other events during the year, enjoyed the experience and, for this reason too, I would invite and urge Members to get involved. It need not be a regular commitment. It may only be an hour or two now and again, whatever you can manage. Not only is it a great way to meet people in your community but it is also good for our own wellbeing.

Already there are arrangements being put in place for various village events The Christmas Tree Lights Switch-On; a Groomsport Talent Show; Health and Welfare Workshops and, of course, we would like to hope that we might improve on 2nd place in next year's Ulster in Bloom ! You are needed. Please offer even just a little of your time.

We do our best to keep in touch with Members in a number of ways. In addition to the long-awaited Notice-board at the top of Harbour Road, three Newsletters have been published and delivered to households since January. There is also the Groomsport Village website and the new addition of Facebook. We need, rely upon and value positive input from Members.

Finally, I would like to thank those who have assisted us in so many different ways during the year including our public representatives, the various Officers of the Council, North Down Community Network, members of local businesses, voluntary organisations and numerous individuals. It would not be possible for me here to thank everyone individually for the contribution which they have made to the work of the Association during the past year but I would like to say a very big 'Thank You' to the members of the Committee..... John Crockard for all his work on the website; Brian McBride who has not only acted as Treasurer but has also been Editor of the Village Newsletter; Sharon Cummings who is a wizard at grant application forms and at organising social events; Eric Brown whose local knowledge is invaluable; he also has hidden talents as a poet; Roy McWhinney who can spur us all to get weeding; David Martin whose good sense and professional knowledge help keep our feet on the ground; Victor Crawford who knows a thing or two about roads and who, like Mandy Ritchie is always there to lend a hand and last, but by no means

least, Miriam Gibson our splendid Secretary who has given so generously of her skills and time. Each and every one of you has made such a positive contribution. It has been a privilege to work alongside you. Thank you.