

Chairman's Report – 8th May 2025

I would like to begin by thanking all council members for their support over the past year, especially Debbie and Nigel, who have become valued and active members of the council. Nigel, in particular, has been instrumental in engaging with residents of Newcastle and has successfully initiated a traffic calming scheme for the village—exactly the kind of proactive work we need more of.

A special thanks goes to our Clerk, Les, for his ongoing dedication and hard work. His management of the council website deserves recognition—not only for its clear and useful content, but because it allows residents to stay informed with just a click, without needing to leave the comfort of their homes. It's an important step toward better communication within the Whitecastle community.

In January, we increased our precept following a special meeting. This decision has enabled us to provide financial support to local community groups and churches. It ensures all parishioners contribute to the sustainability of these important organisations that enrich our local life.

When I accepted the role of Chair, I didn't plan to serve for two years. In the past, it has been an honour to take on this responsibility. However, it has become increasingly frustrating. Those who undermined our rural communities prior to the last election continue to impose unnecessary rules, excessive regulations, and bureaucratic hurdles—from form-filling to financial red tape—all of which hinder progress and often make no practical sense.

We have been left feeling powerless, consistently ignored by the County Council, especially on planning issues. I have come to believe that potholes will never be fixed, drains will never be cleared, signs won't be replaced, and recently closed footpaths will remain shut. The very fabric of our parish is deteriorating.

Recruiting to fill our 11 councillor positions seems increasingly unlikely. Much of the content of our meetings no longer reflects the needs of our community. This must change. We must reclaim control of our community council.

There is a clear loss of community spirit and involvement. Too few are stepping forward to play a role in maintaining and improving the place we call home.

Cllr. C Lewis