**NOTES FROM CRASTER PARISH COUNCIL FOLLOWING ON-LOCATION**

**FILMING IN THE VILLAGE OF CRASTER JUNE 2016.**

Those of you in the circulation area of the Northumberland Gazette may have seen the front page lead story last week about the difficulties faced by the proprietor of the catering van at the Quarry Car Park in Craster during the recent filming of Vera.  This is only one of the problems which have been brought to the attention of the Parish Council and there seem to be some key learning points we would need to address if there is a future proposal to use our village as a film location.  The Parish Council thought it would be helpful if these learning points were circulated to other Parish and Town Councils in Northumberland.

The intention of these learning points is to ensure that there is effective engagement with the location company rather than to try and stop location companies using our village.  The Parish Council understands that Northumberland benefits both financially and also in terms of raising the profile of the county when filming takes place and has no disagreement with the County Council policy to encourage the use of the county as a site for location shooting.  Our village has been used a location on previous occasions (e.g. Badger with Jerome Flynn, and then as the base for two series of Distant Shores with Peter Davison and Samantha Bond), has accepted this use and is not unaware of the likely problems.  That being said, our experience with the latest filming has raised far more issues than previous location shoots.

 For those of you who do not know the area, Craster is a small coastal village of about 150 houses surrounded by a rock outcrop.  Because of our location on the Coastal Path and adjacent to the tourist attraction of Dunstanburgh Castle the Parish Council believes that over a quarter of a million people pass through the village each year.  The only public off-road parking is in the Quarry Car Park at the entrance to the village with space for just over 100 cars.  Those Parish Councils in the areas of the county on the tourist trail will not be surprised to learn that parking is the biggest issue facing the Parish Council.

The starting point of our engagement with the location company was the delivery of a flier to most houses in the village a fortnight before the proposed date for the filming, followed by a second flier a week later amending the dates.  The fliers contained very little information.  The only note about any involvement with the parking arrangements in the village is given in the second flier where it states that "Essential technical vehicles  will  be  parking  in  the  public  car  park  just  outside  Craster  village".  There is no mention of total closure of the Car Park and the implication is that a few bays would be quarantined for use by the film company.  This flier was circulated over the weekend before the filming was due to start.  The County Council have confirmed to us that no agreement had been reached with the location company about the use of the Quarry Car Park at the time the flier was circulated.

The Parish Council were therefore most concerned when we were informed by the County Council on the afternoon of Monday 6th. June that it was proposed to close the Quarry Car Park to the public from the morning of Wednesday 8th. June until the close of play on Monday 13th. June.  The County Council have confirmed to us that they received the proposal to close the Quarry Car Park on the afternoon of Friday 4th. June and that it took until the close of play on that day to establish the details.  It should be recorded that the location company state that they made the request by e-mail some time earlier but that the original request was not progressed due to a member of the County Council staff going on holiday and not passing on the details.  The Parish Council has asked the location company for copies of the e-mail and any subsequent correspondence but this has not been forthcoming to date.

The Parish Council, the County Council and members of the local community managed to broker a deal between a local farmer and the location company to open a field normally used as an overflow car park for the duration of the closure but this was something that had not been any part of the planning by the location company.  This will have an impact on our community later in the year as the Planning Regulations only allow the field to be used as a car park for 28 days in the year.  The field uses its 28 day allocation each year to provide overflow parking on Bank Holidays and during the peak season so we have lost the use of the field for 6 days later in the year when it would normally have provided much needed overflow capacity.

At the same time, the Parish Council also informed local businesses in the village that the Quarry Car Park was to be closed.  None of the businesses were aware of the plan and were all extremely concerned as the bulk of their turnover is generated by visitors to the village. The opening of the overflow car park had not been agreed at that point so the intervention of the Parish Council was vital.  Those businesses that could not be contacted by e-mail were contacted by telephone on the Tuesday.

On the Tuesday (i.e. the day before the Car Park was to be closed) the Parish Council approached the proprietor of the catering van and the Tourist Information Centre, both situated at the entrance to the Car Park, to find out whether they had been made aware of the closure.  Neither had any knowledge of the plan.  It also became clear on the Tuesday that the location company had reached agreement about the opening of the overflow car park but had made no arrangements for signage advising that the Quarry Car Park was closed and that visitors should use the alternative Car Park.  The Parish Council had to follow through with this and it was only thanks to the County Council treating this as an emergency request that proper signage was produced and placed on site on the Wednesday morning.

There were two further problems arising from the closure of the Quarry Car Park which had not been addressed by the location company.  Two local businesses have storage premises inside the Car Park.  Neither business had been advised of the closure until they received word from the Parish Council on the Tuesday.  The Parish Council have been unable to establish whether the relevant department of the County Council were advised that the recycling bins in the Quarry Car Park would be unavailable to the public.

In summary, members of the Parish Council and other members of the community had to do a lot of work in the 36 hours between advice of the closure and the closure coming into operation just to ensure that the effects on the local community and businesses were minimised.  This has been recognised in e-mails from businesses in the village and from our County Councillor thanking the Parish Council for their prompt and effective intervention.

There were a number of issues during the filming which caused concern in the village and which raised issues the Parish Council had not seen when the village was previously used as a location.

Prior to the start of the filming, the Parish Council were advised that a small number of large vehicles might need to be parked on the road.  If any large vehicles were parked in positions where it would be difficult for conflicting flows of traffic to pass them safely, this would be policed by a member of the location crew with a Stop/Go board to regulate the traffic past the obstruction.  The actuality was the parking of numbers of large vehicles for long periods of time indiscriminately around the village and on double yellow lines and blind crests with no safety measures like the Stop/Go boards.  The County Council sent enforcement officers but the stock response was that the vehicles were loading or unloading.  Chauffeurs of cars used to transport the key cast members were also instructed by members of the location crew to park in private parking bays and spaces without any contact with owners of those bays.

During the filming, there was at least one occasion when a shot was set up on private property without notice or offer of recompense to the owner of the land.  When the owner required access to storage sheds on the land during the filming they were refused by the film crew as they were in the middle of a shoot.

Some location shooting took place late at night in the harbour at Craster.  This was advised by the location company in the first of their fliers.  It was always understood that this may cause some disruption and was accepted by those whose houses overlook the harbour.  The reality was far in excess of anything advised by the location company.  Dunstanburgh Road is a dead-end road which faces over the harbour with houses only on the landward side.  Most of the road consists of terraced houses with the front doors opening directly onto the street.  At about 15:30 on Monday 6th. June (the day when the night shooting was to take place) 2 large vehicles were reversed along Dunstanburgh Road to park in front of the houses at the North end of the road.  These houses are set back from the road and have small gardens in front of them.  They were followed by a "cherry-picker" vehicle which parked directly outside the front door and windows of one of the terraced houses and also blocked the access road to a terrace of houses behind Dunstanburgh Road and the access to the off-street parking and garages of all of the terraced houses on Dunstanburgh Road.  The cherry-picker then extended its outriggers, occupying the full width of the road.  The driver of the cherry-picker advised that he would be parked there until 01:00 on the Tuesday morning.  The manager on site for the location company claimed that everyone affected had been advised and that everyone had said that it would  be no problem.  Those at the North end of the road who wished to use their cars later in the day had already been advised to park their cars further along Dunstanburgh Road so they could use them as required,  At that point, the Parish Council contacted Northumbria Police to ask for advice about the legality of closing the road and blocking access without warning or notice.  A Police Officer attended.  After consultation with his superior officer he stated that the force were aware that there may be road closures during the filming; as the location manager had confirmed that the road would be re-opened for emergency vehicles so there was no permanent obstruction, it was not a police matter.  The cherry picker was then used to mount a bank of floodlights bright enough to illuminate the whole harbour and which was set up no more than 10 feet from the bedroom window of the house where it was parked.

This raises a number of issues.  The first is the matter of communication.  Despite the contention of the location manager that all those affected had been contacted, the understanding is that only those at the North end of the road where the large vehicles were parked had been advised.  None of the residents in the terraced part of the road or in the separate terrace behind Dunstanburgh Road were contacted (including the residents who had the bank of floodlights outside their bedroom window) although all lost access to part or all of their properties.  The second is the issue of the effective closure of the road.  The formal process to close a public highway in Northumberland requires 6 weeks notice to the Highways Department of the County Council and the payment of a £1200 fee to allow for the publication of advertisements and local notices advising of the closure.  The County Council have confirmed that no such request was received.  This raises the question of how Northumbria Police were aware of possible road closures and even whether they should have taken action against the vehicles blocking the road because of the obstruction they were causing.  The third is the matter of the advice given by the location manager on site to those people he seems to have assumed were the only people affected to park further along the road in some bays that the film company had reserved.  As previously stated, the biggest single issue facing the Parish Council is parking.  The location manager clearly did not consider the impact of this advice on the parking for those residents further along the road, particularly as their access to their off-road parking had been blocked.

That all looks as if Craster had a terrible time during the filming and that the community would not want to see it happen again.  That is not the full story and not the point of this communication.  The location crew on the ground did their best to be helpful and to work with the community.  The location company is making donations to the Craster Community Trust and the Church Roof Appeal for which both bodies are grateful.  However, there are learning points for the Parish Council to take on board the next time we become a film set.

* From the first advice that filming may be taking place, the Parish Council needs to be involved.  The Parish Council should be proactive in contacting the location company to make sure that proper channels of communication are set up.
* The Parish Council needs to get as much detail from the location company as possible about their plans.  The location company may have been economical with the facts in their first communications.  It is up to the Parish Council to test these facts in order to get a clear understanding of what is going to happen.
* The Parish Council need to make sure that local residents and businesses are aware not only of what the location company has told them but also the back story.
* The Parish Council should try and be aware of the problems caused to individual residents and businesses so that it can have an over-arching view of the situation and can make representations if there is a generic problem which is affecting a number of people whose voices individually would not be heard, or if there is an issue where the official standing of the Parish Council could assist.
* Where there are matters beyond the Parish Council's sphere of responsibility (such as the closure of a road), it should make sure that the relevant bodies are alerted to try and avoid this happening with other communities in the future.

The key point of it all is communication.  The location company have a job to do which is to deliver a film set where the director and cast can get on and do their work.  There is always the temptation in front of the location management to view local problems with the community as collateral damage which will not be their concern in a week's time when they have moved on to their next location.  If the Parish Council can maintain effective communication with the location management then some of that collateral damage can possibly be avoided.