

Beloved Pigeons Get George's Full Time Attention

MORE than 200 prize pigeons are fluttering their wings with delight following the news that their devoted owner George Wanless has retired from politics after more than a quarter of a century in public life.

George's retirement as a councillor and as Hetton Town Council's Leader means the prize winning birds will have the undivided attention of their owner and hopefully reward him with even more accolades in the pigeon fanciers' world – although that will be difficult given George's ongoing domination of the Up North Combine and other similar pigeon fraternities.

George (74) served 26 years on Hetton Council, the last 15 of them as Leader. He retired in May and received numerous accolades for his ceaseless work on behalf of the area. Among them was a letter from Tony Blair and a personalised scroll setting out his achievements – a gift from fellow councillors.

Whilst Leader and councillor George fitted in his duties with an arduous

schedule of caring for his beloved birds which saw three trips a day to his pigeon loft – sharing the task with his son George Junior.

In his 26 years as a councillor George only missed one council meeting and even fitted in four hip replacements around his busy diary. "I used to come out of hospital on the Friday ready for the council meetings on Mondays. I loved my work as a councillor but there comes a time when you know it is right to retire and I thought long and hard about my decision."

During his time as a councillor George, an ex-chairman of Eppleton Colliery Miners' Lodge, oversaw a number of key changes for the council including its move from Hetton House to the Hetton Centre, the appointment of a full time clerk and the latest decision to replace its Chairman with that of a Mayor.



George Wanless (centre) receives his retirement gifts from Town Mayor Tony Wilkinson and Deputy Town Mayor Juliana Heron.

He notched up a number of significant achievements for the area, too. Among the most recent was his determination to see a new use for the Hetton branch library when it became vacant, following the opening of the Hetton Centre.

Thanks to George the former library is now home for a flourishing boxing club and fitness centre regularly used by 140 young people and adults alike.

George is succeeded as leader by Coun. Keith Hepple who represents Hetton Downs ward on the council.

Keith takes Hetton's helm

KEITH Hepple has been a member of Hetton Town Council for several years.

"I served my apprenticeship at Eppleton Colliery as an electrician, after 11 years I moved into the Electrical Contracting Industry, moving on to Group 4 Total Security in 1969. I left Group 4 in 1997 as Area Alarms Manager to start my own business, from which I recently retired."

Keith is very keen to develop and build relationships and beneficial partnerships with other organisations such as Sunderland City Council and Hetton Trust.

"I am keen to ensure that the people of Hetton get value for money from their own

Town Council, which this year will hopefully gain Quality Status (a charter mark of recognised good practice) and to try and encourage additional exterior funding for projects in the district."

Keith is a long standing Houghton Magistrate and is Chairman of the Adult Court and Licensing Panel.

In his spare time Keith enjoys walking his black labrador in the local countryside.

Keith said, "I am very excited to be leading the Town Council at this time of great change and development, it is important that everything we do must be for the total benefit of the residents of Hetton and District."

