

Downton Parish Council Chairman's Report 2016

I am pleased to report on Downton Parish Council's activities over the last year. This report will also be available on the Downton Parish Council web site at www.downtonparishcouncil.gov.uk.

New Housing Developments

The Parish Council's workload has continued to be very heavily dominated by developers' plans for new housing and by the need to resolve some key infrastructure issues, in particular drainage problems and the shortage of Primary School places.

To address the issue of sewerage drains overflowing in some parts of Downton, Wessex Water now has on standby each winter a seasonal pumped overflow into the River Avon. You may also have noticed that they have been conducting a programme of works to address the root cause of the problem, this being ground water infiltration into the sewerage system.

With regard to the Primary School's planning application, the Parish Council received numerous representations from the many interested parties. Unfortunately there is no perfect solution which gives everybody what they want. We therefore endeavoured to strike a balance between the many competing points of view and, as far as possible, those recorded at the Public Consultation we held in 2013. This resulted in the planning application being amended, at the request of the Parish Council, by reducing the height of the new classroom block and removing the requirement for public access to the extended playground. The application was finally approved by Wiltshire Council in October. We are currently liaising with the school and Wiltshire Council to improve the final plans and agree the terms of the lease.

The Parish Council has progressed its plans to extend the Memorial Hall in order to provide expanded accommodation for Downton Community Pre-School. The proximity of the Memorial Hall to The Bunny and the flood defences was an important factor in the time taken to finalise these plans. However, I am pleased to report that the planning application has now been approved by Wiltshire Council and the Parish Council, through its appointed architect, is moving forward to address the various planning conditions and to produce detailed plans and costings.

The Charles Church planning application for 99 new homes was effectively given the go-ahead in October but work cannot start until the lease for the land for the playground extension is agreed. An outline planning application for 17 new homes, to be built on the site of Scotts House in Salisbury Road, was also approved by Wiltshire Council in February. With these two approvals Wiltshire Council's target, of delivering 190 new homes for Downton by 2026, has been met. This fact, along with the Neighbourhood Plan's research, that had demonstrated our community does not want any more than the 190 new homes, were the key factors in the Parish Council objecting to the Foreman Homes' application for 36 homes on the land off Breamore Road, opposite The Trafalgar School.

Neighbourhood Planning

As we have just heard from Mrs. Nikki Wilson, the Neighbourhood Plan was formally submitted to Wiltshire Council and, after an initial consultation period, is about to be scrutinised by an independent examiner. On behalf of the Parish Council I would like to publicly thank the team of volunteers, and especially Mrs. Nikki Wilson and Councillor Jane Brentor, for all of their

determination and many hours of effort that has resulted in the Neighbourhood Plan successfully arriving at this very advanced stage.

Amenities

With the reduction, or complete removal, of a number of useful services by Wiltshire Council the Parish Council decided to take on the responsibility for keeping these services going in our parish:

1. As planned in the previous year, the Parish Council is cleaning the bus shelters.
2. With the reduction in street cleaning services provided by Wiltshire Council the Parish Council increased, by 16 hours per month, the number of street cleaning hours done by its two litter picking staff.
3. Wiltshire Council's decision to stop funding public conveniences meant, for Downton, that the toilets in the Memorial Gardens would have closed at the end of March this year. After assessing the significant cost implications and then seeking residents' views, the Parish Council decided to take on the responsibility for these toilets. Ownership of the building has now passed to the Parish Council and, following an Invitation to Tender exercise, a local business has been appointed to maintain the facility as from the beginning of April.

Following representations received from parents concerning the play equipment in the Moot Lane recreation ground, the Parish Council installed a new piece of equipment designed specifically for younger children. The feedback we have received indicates that the Pirate Ship is a hit.

The Parish Council has continued to maintain the Memorial Hall by replacing locks and porch lights and making repairs to the guttering, drains and roof. In addition, the cemetery has benefited from a program of repairs and repainting that will continue into the coming year. I am also pleased to report that the long awaited replacement bench for outside the Co-op is going to be installed shortly.

The Parish Council replaced its somewhat dilapidated noticeboard at the Memorial Hall by a cabinet which better presents the Parish Council's various notices and newsletters. I would also like to publicly thank the Downton Society for the splendid village noticeboard that they made and installed next to the Memorial Hall.

As we have just heard from Mr. Ian Campbell, his team's investigation, into having a new, traffic-free route between the Moot Lane area, and the schools and other amenities at the other end of the village, has just completed an important milestone. I would like to publicly thank him and his team of volunteers for all the useful work that they have been doing, and are continuing to do, on this project.

At last year's annual meeting I reported that the Parish Council had yet to find appropriate uses for, or organisations to run, the Moot Lane Pavilion that would justify the level of expenditure, of potentially several £10,000's, needed to restore this building to a reasonable standard. I am pleased to report that councillor Gareth Watts and former councillor Hamish Ross have recently approached the Parish Council with outline proposals for re-opening the facility, backed by an offer of volunteer work and some funding. They have been encouraged to develop their proposals in more detail,

particularly around the organisation and finances, so that the Parish Council can then make an informed decision.

Innovations

The Parish Council decided to make permanent the revised governance arrangements that it had been piloting during the previous year. Similarly, after having some modest success with its monthly surgeries, the Parish Council has recently decided to continue with these for at least the next twelve months. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to encourage residents to make use of the surgeries to informally raise and discuss with a councillor any matters of concern in the Parish. In recent months the Parish Council has, for the very first time, gone beyond producing its usual one year plan and budget to also creating a three year strategic plan. The content of this plan has been heavily influenced by the Neighbourhood Plan. It endeavours to set a clear direction for the council and to give residents the opportunity to understand and comment on that direction. After this meeting you are invited to inspect the plan, which has been put on display here, and to give comments or ask questions about it.

Following the lead from Alderbury Parish Council, and in partnership with the Southern Wiltshire Area Board, the Parish Council recently held a Dementia Information and Training Event to raise awareness of dementia with the aim of improving inclusion and the quality of life for people with dementia and their carers in our community.

During the year the hosting company for the Parish Council's website terminated its service at very short notice. In moving to another hosting company the opportunity was taken to build a new website with an easier to use layout based on a more modern technology platform. I would like to publicly thank the Clerk and Mr. Paul Cornish for their considerable efforts that enabled this transformation to take place in good time.

Business as Usual

On behalf of the local community the Parish Council commented on 53 planning applications in the last year and responded to 6 public consultations conducted by Wiltshire Council, and other bodies.

Thanks

During the year Mr Hamish Ross and Mrs Sally Lacey left the Parish Council. I would like to publicly thank them for their service to the community. I would like to express my thanks to my fellow councillors for their hard work over the last year and the Parish Council's thanks to our Unitary Councillor, Julian Johnson, for his efforts on our behalf. I would also like to thank our street cleaners, James Howells, Rachael Saxby and Tom Price, for continuing to keep our streets and recreation areas so tidy, Mr. Bob Tanner who voluntarily collects litter around The Borough area and to Mrs Sally Hall and Mrs Katie Freer for their weekly voluntary, but mandatory, inspections of the village's two defibrillators. My thanks also go to the many volunteers who, together with members of the Parish Council, recently tidied up our locality on the Clean for the Queen event and, last year, cleaned the Moulds and Iron Bridges.

Finally I would like to thank our Parish Clerk, Mrs. Bev Cornish, for all her hard work and dedication this last year. The workload generated by the new housing developments, and by the Primary School's planning application in particular, has been intense. It is a testament to her strong work ethic, and of her commitment to our community, that she has managed to do it all.

Dave Mace
Chairman, Downton Parish Council
25th April 2016