

Downton Parish Council Chairman's Report 2018

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

Memorial Hall Extension

Much of the Parish Council's workload over the last year has been driven by the Memorial Hall Extension Project. At the outset of this project, some five or so years ago, the Parish Council consulted the then trustees of the Memorial Hall and the Downton Community Pre-school who each gave their enthusiastic support for going ahead with the project. At the subsequent public exhibitions and consultations the local residents have also shown that they are overwhelmingly in favour of the project. The building is now well on track to being finished in just four months from now and so the community should soon be in a position to enjoy the benefits of the project, which include:

- two new, accessible rooms for hire that are well lit by natural light (from large windows with attractive views across the Memorial Gardens) and which will be fully equipped with tables, chairs, air conditioning, Wi-Fi and audio visual equipment;
- a purpose designed facility for pre-school children which can be leased to the Downton Community Pre-School;
- a new roof on the hall (replacing the existing roof which is very old, leaking and expensive to maintain);
- a fire alarm system for the existing building as well as for the new extension;
- a new stage - now with disabled access and improved foundations;
- a new boundary wall (replacing the previous wall which was very old and failing);
- a newly resurfaced roadway and playground;
- the removal of an old, dilapidated building from the grounds (the "Parish Room");
- the removal of a dilapidated flat roof extension with disused toilets and a leaking roof surrounded by unsightly barbed wire;

The Parish Council wishes to put on record its thanks to the trustees of the Memorial Hall for their on-going acceptance of the project without which it would not have been possible for the extension to have reached this very advanced stage. It also wishes to thank all of the regular users of the Memorial Hall for their forbearance of the inevitable inconveniences caused by the building works and for continuing to show their support by hiring the hall in spite of the disruptions.

Open Days for the project are being held at the Memorial Hall this coming Friday and Saturday to show what has been achieved on the project and to outline the full potential of the new facilities. So, please come along and find out more about how it is all going.

Neighbourhood Plan

At the last Annual Meeting I explained that the Parish Council had robustly defended its objections at a planning appeal regarding a planning application for 36 new homes on land off Breamore Road. I am very pleased to report this time that the planning inspector dismissed the appeal and cited the contents of Downton's Neighbourhood Plan in his reasoning. I would therefore like to thank again the many people who worked so hard on the Neighbourhood Plan, and in particular Mrs. Nikki Wilson and Cllr. Jane Brentor, for providing our community with such an effective tool.

Amenities

Over the last year the Parish Council has continued to maintain the Memorial Hall, cemetery, recreational spaces and playground equipment in the parish. This has included:

- a dog bin for Charlton All Saints and 'no dogs' and 'clean it up' signs on playground gates in the parish and in areas where there has been a high level of dog fouling;
- in response to a request put forward by members of the public to provide equipment for younger children in the Memorial Gardens a piece of pirate themed playground equipment was installed, in place of the roundabout, and this has proved to be very popular amongst the under-fives;
- the relocation of the defibrillator to the wall outside the entrance to the Memorial Hall.

The bridge project has also progressed during the year and is now at the point where an expert assessment is needed, by a civil engineer, to advise us on the feasibility of the project and the design and cost options for the bridge. An application is being made for a grant to fund the feasibility study.

Finally under amenities, it is disappointing to report this year that the Parish Council has had to put right damage that has repeatedly been caused by vandalism:

- tiles and lead removed from the Memorial Hall roof and the toilets
- damage to the inside of both the ladies and gents toilets
- repeated appearances of graffiti at numerous locations around Downton

Downton Caring Community Project

Last year I reported on a new initiative, the Vulnerable Peoples Project, since renamed the Downton Caring Community project, to develop Downton as a dementia friendly community. This Parish Council led project, working in partnership with the Southern Wiltshire Area Board, has championed the spread of information about the many groups and services available locally to support people who may feel lonely or isolated. Cards containing basic contact information for such services were kindly funded by the Downton Society and distributed to specific areas of the Parish and an event was held last September to bring together information about services for all age groups, from scouts and guides to older people. The Parish Council also worked with Trafalgar School and Age UK in running an intergenerational project to help older people gain computer skills.

Business as Usual

During the last year the Parish Council, on behalf of the local community, gave its views on 61 local planning applications and responded to 6 public consultations conducted by Wiltshire Council and other public bodies.

We also made and are continuing to make extensive representations on behalf of the community on local matters of concern e.g.

- the sequencing of the traffic lights at the junction of The Headlands and The Borough;
- the ramps in Wick Lane and Greenacres;
- the commissioning of the puffin crossing in The Headlands
- the erosion of the village greens by traffic at the western end of The Borough

Thanks

I would like to thank our street cleaners, Nick Saxby, Billy Johnson and Tom Matthewman for keeping our streets and recreation areas so tidy, Mr. Bob Tanner who voluntarily collects litter around The Borough area, Mr. Rick Ladds for his weekly voluntary, but mandatory, inspections of the defibrillator in the centre of Downton and to Mr. Paul Cornish for maintaining the Parish Council's website and IT equipment. My thanks also go to the many volunteers who cleaned the bridges in Downton during the year and to Jenny Saxby, who stood down as a parish councillor this year, for her service to our community. Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my fellow councillors, and to our Parish Clerk, Mrs. Bev Cornish, for all their hard work and dedication over the last year.

Dave Mace

Chairman, Downton Parish Council

16th April 2018