

Downton Parish Council Chairman's Report 2019

I am pleased to report on Downton Parish Council's activities over the last year.

Memorial Hall Extension

The Parish Council's workload over the last year was dominated again by the Memorial Hall Extension Project. After working intensely on this project for almost six years it came as a welcome relief when the building was finally completed in November last year.

The project started as a bright idea around ten years ago after Wiltshire Council published its housing plans for Downton. It was recognised back then that the Primary School and Pre-School wouldn't have room to cope with the influx of new families. A potential solution was envisaged by the Parish Council and this was to:

- build new classrooms on the school's existing playground;
- provide a new school playground on part of the Memorial Gardens;
- extend the Memorial Hall site to provide a new Pre-School building on the ground floor and new meeting rooms on the first floor.

About six years ago, the Parish Council started to run a series of public consultations for residents and these all showed a high level of support in the community for the proposed solution. Since that time the Parish Council has worked tirelessly to turn those ideas into reality. It is very pleasing to see all the elements of the solution fully implemented now: the new classrooms; the new school playground and, during this last year, the new extension to the Memorial Hall.

In recent months the community has been able to make good of the new and refreshed facilities, these being:

- the purpose designed accommodation for the Downton Community Pre-School;
- the two new and well-equipped meeting rooms;
- the fire alarm system for the existing building as well as for the new extension;

- the new stage, now with disabled access and improved foundations;
- the new boundary wall around the site (replacing the previous wall which was very old and failing); and
- the newly resurfaced roadway and playground;

None of this would have happened without the efforts of those who have been very actively involved in the project. I'd like to give special thanks to Bev Cornish the Parish Council's Clerk, Cllrs. Keith Sutcliffe, Roger Yeates, Jane Brentor and Christine Pearce and to former councillor Peter Quarmby for all their skill and hard work on the project.

I'd also like to put on record my thanks to the providers of the funds for the new building: Charles Church; Wiltshire Council; Cleaning Services Group; The Downton Cuckoo Fair and the Downton rate payers for supporting an increase in the local rates to cover the remaining funding that was required.

Last, but not least, my sincere and grateful thanks go to the new team of Memorial Hall trustees who started in May last year, for all their very positive and active support for the project and for working hard to ready themselves for running the new Memorial Centre.

Memorial Hall

The old part of the Memorial Hall has also been a focus of attention in recent months. The Parish Council funded a complete renovation of the Memorial Hall's roof, which had been deteriorating in recent years, with all new slates, redecorated soffits and fascia, and repairs to the flashings.

Furthermore, the Memorial Hall's engraved stone, which is embedded in the pediment above the portico, has also been cleaned and refurbished and one of the portico columns will soon be re-aligned; I would like to thank the committee of The Downton Queen's Diamond Jubilee Fund for generously providing the funds to do this work to the front of the hall.

Amenities

Over the last year the Parish Council has continued to maintain the cemetery, recreational spaces, public toilets and playground equipment in the parish. This has included, for example:

- installing four picnic tables in the Moot Lane recreation ground, with the help of volunteers;
- demolishing the dilapidated pavilion in the Moot Lane recreation ground;
- refurbishing and replacing benches throughout the parish;
- restoring and repainting the seats and noticeboard at the cemetery;
- assisting with repairs to the Leisure Centre roof;
- marking out a parking space in front of The Borough Cafe for people with disabilities;
- with the help of volunteers, installing kissing gates, repairing stiles and clearing footpaths;

In addition, the shelter in the Memorial Gardens has recently been repaired and repainted. I would like to put on record my thanks to The Downton Society for both proposing this project and for generously sharing the costs with the Parish Council.

Bridge Project

The bridge project, which is backed by the local community in the referendum for the Neighbourhood plan, has moved forward during the year. A civil engineering firm has now been appointed to advise on the design and cost options for a foot bridge over the River Avon to the south of Downton's Iron Bridge. This will take the Parish Council a good step closer to fully understanding the feasibility of the project.

Business as Usual

During the last year the Parish Council, on behalf of the local community, gave its views on 49 local planning applications and responded to 4 public consultations conducted by Wiltshire Council and Government departments.

The Parish Council also made, and is continuing to make, extensive representations on behalf of the community on local matters of concern e.g.

- the erosion of the village greens by traffic at the western end of The Borough;
- the replacement and repair of the bus shelters;
- a speed indicator device to help drivers to keep within the 30 mph speed limits;
- making the A338 cycle route usable again;
- replacing and protecting the ground lights at the village cross.

Roger Yeates

In January we received the sad news of the death Cllr. Roger Yeates following a short illness. Roger had been a member of the Parish Council since July 2005, had been a great role model for new councillors and had played a very active role, serving as Vice-Chair of the Council for many years and Chair of the Planning Committee. Roger was one of the people who originally came up with the idea of extending the Memorial Hall and, over the last six years was one of the councillors who worked to turn that idea into reality. He will be remembered with much respect and affection.

End of Term

Now that the Memorial Hall Extension Project has been completed, I will be stepping down as Chairman in May after having had the honour of being in the role for some six years. At the start of those six years I, like most of my fellow councillors, had several concerns:

1. the impending issues that would result from the proposed large housing development by Charles Church and the pressing need to ensure that additional infrastructure would be put in place in time e.g. schools, drains, etc.
2. with so much change being imposed on Downton the urgent need to find out what mattered most to residents;
3. the importance of starting the process of creating a Neighbourhood Plan, based on open and effective engagement with residents, so that future developments could be more strongly influenced by the local community.

Looking back over the last six years it is very pleasing to note that, through the intensive efforts of the Parish Council and with the active support of volunteers, all those concerns

have been addressed. It is perhaps fortunate that, throughout this time of enormous change for the parish, we have had within the Parish Council the skills and experience needed to effectively represent the interests of the community, including:

- negotiating with developers and planning authorities;
- understanding the needs of our local schools and businesses;
- planning and making things happen.

Thanks

I would like to end my report by thanking our street cleaners, Nick Saxby and Tom Matthewman, for keeping our streets and recreation areas so tidy and to Mr. Bob Moody for the maintenance work which he has promptly carried out and to a very high standard throughout the year. I'd also like to thank 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, to Mr. Paul Cornish for maintaining the Parish Council's website and IT equipment and to the many volunteers who worked on the footpaths, stiles, kissing gates and picnic tables.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Vice Chairman, Cllr. Keith Sutcliffe, the Chair of Amenities, Cllr Jane Brentor, my fellow councillors and to the Parish Clerk, Mrs. Bev Cornish, for all their support, hard work and dedication over the last six years (and without which my role as Chairman would have been so much harder).

Thank-you.

Dave Mace

Chairman, Downton Parish Council

23rd April 2019