

CLERK'S REPORT FOR THE PERIOD UP TO 5th MARCH 2021

Parish Council Vacancies

There are still 6 vacancies in Downton Ward and 1 vacancy in Charlton All Saints Ward. The Clerk has received a number of queries by phone and one by email regarding interest in joining the Council at the May elections.

Amenities

Update on future scheduled work to be completed within the parish:-

- Tree work at Moot Lane Recreation Ground and Memorial Gardens completed on 1st & 2nd March 2021 to complete highest priority work from the recent tree report.
- Parish Steward next due in March. List of tasks collated for him – he did not come to the parish in February as on other tasks for WC.
- Await new road nameplates (5 in total) – anticipated by WC for supply and installation in March.
- Bollards ordered by WC and installation anticipated for June/July 2021 (supply delayed by Covid & Brexit).
- Iron Bridge to be repainted by WC contractor – timescales currently being discussed – April onwards.
- Play Equipment – latest inspection reports completed in February. Wick Lane and Memorial Gardens – low risk, Moot Lane Recreation Ground and Charlton All Saints – moderate risk. Reports currently being analysed in detail to identify potential actions for next Amenities Committee meeting.

Current issues reported:-

- Broken picnic table at Charlton All Saints play area
- Broken cradle seat on swings at Moot Lane Recreation Ground
- Wooden noticeboard on Moot Lane blown over – new replacement required.
- Small piece of equipment missing on chain for one of swing seats in Memorial Gardens.

Memorial Gardens: Following discussions with the primary school more matting will be provided by Cuckoo Fair to cover the entrances school entrances within the playground ahead of official school return on 8th March.

Bowling Club: The committee of Downton Bowling Club has commented on the proposed terms of its potential lease with BWSCA. The Council's new solicitor (following the previously solicitor's retirement) has been instructed to work with the BWSCA's solicitor on the new Head Lease.

Police Meeting: The Clerk is still working Richard Clewer's PA to set up a meeting with neighbouring parishes and County Councils, New Forest District Council etc to address anti-social and other key policing issues.

Elections:

Wiltshire Council has set up a webpage for parish and town council elections from which members of the public can download nomination forms and a timetable – all nomination forms need to have been submitted by 4 pm on Thursday 8th April 2021:

<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/elections-town-parish>

Future Meetings:

The regulations which allow local authorities to hold meetings remotely comes to an end on 6th May 2021. This means that, without any further action from the government, all local authorities including local councils must return to face to face meetings from 7th May.

Of course this contrary to the current timetable for the relaxation of Covid lockdown restrictions, as meetings of up to six people indoors can only take place from 17th May which does not allow all members of the Parish Council to meet face to face together.

NALC is working with a number of national bodies to press the government to extend these regulations beyond this date and will continue to stress the urgency and importance of this issue. However, at this time government has no plans to extend these regulations and so NALC suggests that councils should start preparing for the real possibility of face to face meetings from May.

NALC's position remains that all local councils should continue to meet remotely while the regulations are in force. The guidance below has been written to help local councils prepare for the scenario that remote council meetings cannot lawfully take place from 7th May 2021. There is still much uncertainty around how legislation or COVID-19 risks may change over the coming weeks and months. NALC will update this guidance as the situation evolves. Each council will have to decide which course of action will best fit their needs and manage risks.

To help local councils prepare for this possibility some advice and suggestions are below:

- Consider what council business can be conducted before May so that the council can dedicate time to those issues in remote meetings. The more discussion and decisions you can conduct in remote meetings means the council can aim to hold fewer and shorter face to face meetings after May.
- This may require more meeting time than is currently planned, so the council should look at the meeting schedule in the run-up to May and see if more time or more meetings are required. Where possible, consider holding the annual council meeting and the parish meeting while the current Regulations permit for them to be held. (this won't be possible in Wiltshire because of the elections)
- Consider when the council does need to meet face to face, and whether meetings can be delayed to later in the year when the potential COVID-19 risk may be further reduced.
- The council might consider holding a remote meeting as late as possible in April so that councillors who are unable to attend face-to-face meetings will have as much time as possible before disqualification by virtue of s.85 of the Local Government Act 1972 becomes an issue.
- It may help the council's business continuity to implement (or review) a scheme of delegation. This would allow the clerk to make certain decisions for the council, which would be especially important if the council were unable to hold meetings due to COVID-19 risks. In reviewing/adopting a scheme of delegation the council should ensure there is clarity around which decisions are delegated and which are not, for how long the scheme of delegation is in place, and when the scheme of the delegation will end or be reviewed.

From May 2021, as face-to-face council meetings resume there will still be the risk to attendees of COVID-19 exposure. The Council will need to conduct a risk assessment in advance of a face to face meeting which should give consideration to what the council can do to reduce risk to councillors, staff and members of the public.

Bev Cornish 5th March 2021