

Downton Parish Council Chairman's Report 2017

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.

Neighbourhood Plan

At long last, after 3 years of hard work, the Neighbourhood Plan was completed and resoundingly endorsed by the community in a referendum. This well researched document will inform the priorities and decision making of the Parish Council for years to come. On behalf of the Parish Council I would like to again publicly thank the team of volunteers, and especially Mrs. Nikki Wilson and Councillor Jane Brentor, for achieving such an excellent result.

New Housing Developments

The Parish Council's workload over the last year has been dominated by developers' plans for new housing, the expansion of the Primary School and the Memorial Hall extension.

As determined by the community at the Public Consultation held in 2013, part of the Memorial Gardens is going to be used for a new school playground. The terms of the lease for this strip of land were finalised and signed in December 2016 and construction of the new school extension began in February this year. Part of the arrangement for agreeing a lease is that patrons of the Memorial Hall will be able to use the school's car park outside of school hours.

The Public Consultation held in 2013, and research conducted for the Downton Neighbourhood Plan, showed strong support for an extension to the Memorial Hall to provide sufficient pre-school places and more extensive community facilities. After producing detailed, costed plans, obtaining planning permission and securing most of the funding required for this extension, the Parish Council held a Public Exhibition and Consultation last month to assess the community support for a loan to bridge the remaining funding gap. The council is pleased with the positive result, which showed 91% of respondents to be in support of the proposals. We are therefore now applying for a public works loan to press ahead with the project. The plans for the Memorial Hall extension are on display this evening and can also be viewed on the Parish Council's web site.

Over the last year Foreman Homes amended and resubmitted its plans for 36 homes on land off Breamore Road. Although the Parish Council maintained its objections and Wiltshire Council rejected the planning application Foreman Homes appealed against the decision. The Parish Council robustly defended its position at the Hearing held in February. This Planning Appeal is the first test of the Neighbourhood Plan's policies and we await with

keen interest the Planning Inspector's conclusions which are expected sometime in the next few weeks.

Amenities

Over the last year the Parish Council has continued to maintain the Memorial Hall, cemetery, recreational spaces and playground equipment in the parish. Additional litter bins were mounted outside the Co-op and Pharmacy and inside the Memorial Gardens and Moot Lane recreation ground and a replacement bench was installed outside the Co-op.

Last year I reported on Wiltshire Council's decision to stop funding the public conveniences in the Memorial Gardens and the Parish Council's subsequent decision, with the support of the community after another consultation, to take on the responsibility for these toilets. I am very pleased to report of the success of this change with the toilets being cleaned and maintained to a higher standard than before.

During the year a proposal was sent to Longford Estates, as the landowner, regarding a new, traffic-free route between the Moot Lane area and the schools and other amenities at the other end of the village which would include a new footbridge over the River Avon. I am pleased to report that Longford Estates have given their agreement in principle to the outline plan. We have since been considering the practicalities in more detail and this is set to continue over the coming months. More information of our investigations is provided on the display boards.

A working group, consisting of councillors and other local volunteers, reviewed the parking issues in Downton and ideas for how to solve them. The review demonstrated that some issues are simply not open to solutions. However, it was established that the parking problems are mainly experienced around school drop off and pickup times. We are therefore working with the school and the pre-school to consider options for drop off facilities and better management of the available parking spaces.

At each of the last two 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 also mentioned last year that the Parish Council had received an approach to re-open the facility, backed by an offer of volunteer work and some funding. However, I am disappointed to now report that the group behind this offer subsequently concluded that a viable business plan could not be presented to the Parish Council. After further considerations the council took the decision to demolish this now derelict building; this work will be completed over the coming few months.

After many years of helpful management of the Downton Allotments and Leisure Gardens Association on behalf of the Parish Council, it was agreed at an extraordinary meeting held this year that the committee would stand down in favour of a new committee. I would like to thank Mr John Elliott for his commitment over those years and to offer the new committee the continued support of the Parish Council in their ongoing efforts to improve the allotments.

Innovations

In partnership with the Southern Wiltshire Area Board, the Parish Council has progressed its Vulnerable Peoples Project to develop Downton as a dementia friendly community and with the aim of improving inclusion and the quality of life for residents with dementia and for other people who might need support. A group of professionals, local agencies and willing residents are working together to progress this aim. More information of our activities in this area is provided on the display boards.

Business as Usual

During the last year the Parish Council, on behalf of the local community, gave its views on 62 local planning applications and responded to 7 public consultations conducted by Wiltshire Council and other bodies.

We also made extensive representations on behalf of the community on local matters of concern e.g. repairs to the Iron Bridge; replacing the post box in the High Street; adjusting the 3663 lighting; reinstallation of the defibrillator; sorting out various issues relating to the Charles Church construction site. Whilst some of these matters were resolved others remain and so will continue to be pressed by the Parish Council.

Thanks

I would like to thank our street cleaners, Rachael and Nick Saxby, Tom Price and Billy Johnson, for keeping our streets and recreation areas so tidy, Mr. Bob Tanner who voluntarily collects litter around The Borough area and to Mrs Katie Freer for her 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 recently tidied up our locality and cleaned the Moulds and Iron Bridges and also to the Downton Society Footpath Group for taking on the job of promoting the use of the parish footpaths and the identification of issues requiring maintenance or repair. I would also like to put on record the Parish Council's thanks to our Unitary Councillor, Julian Johnson, who is standing down at the upcoming election, for all his efforts on our behalf over the last 24 years and to Cllr. Michael Chandler who is standing

down after having enthusiastically and steadfastly represented and been a great servant to Charlton All Saints for over 20 years. Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my fellow councillors, several of whom are standing down this time, and to our Parish Clerk, Mrs. Bev Cornish, for all their hard work and dedication during the term of the parish council over the last four years.

Dave Mace

Chairman, Downton Parish Council

3rd April 2017