

Chairperson's Annual report 2022

Presented by Cllr Brentor to the 11th April 2022 Annual meeting

I am pleased to present the annual report for Downton Parish Council. As Chair of the Council, I would like to thank Cllr Dave Mace, who is vice Chair of the Council for the support he has provided throughout the year.

This has again been an unusual year.

Last year I said that the 20/21 year had been a strange and difficult year for all and, although better in many ways, I feel I can say the same thing again about the year just completed. Covid has continued to have an impact on our community and the activities that can be achieved by the Parish Council. Again, on behalf of the Council, I would like to express our sympathies to all those in the Parish who have been impacted by the virus.

Our first meeting of the year included a minute's silence to recognise the death of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. At that time, we were continuing to meet virtually using Zoom. However, we returned to face to face on the 24th May after government decided not to extend the provision for electronic meetings after 6th May. Although there have been some continued restrictions and speaking through masks (with steamed up glasses!) has not been easy, it was good to go back to seeing people.

In May we welcomed two new councillors – Cllrs Jalland and Jones to the Council and in August we welcomed a further new councillor – Cllr Hudson-Baillie.

Sadly, I have to report that the village has experienced a high level of incidences of criminal behaviour causing distress, physical damage and even injury. The repair of damage to property either owned or managed by the Parish Council has had significant financial impact on public funds as well as causing the loss of a picnic bench. Perhaps because of this behaviour, we have had improved liaison with the Police and Councillors took part in a number of public consultation meetings with the Police. The Parish Council has supported calling for a Public Space Protection Order which is now progressing. The damage and graffiti has meant that the Council has funded repairs, and replaced panels that are now smash resistant and graffiti resistant as well as undertaken extensive cleaning of the bus shelters.

Achievements during the Year

A milestone was achieved in the summer of last year. The contract for the Memorial Centre extension was signed off, with all the snagging issues resolved and a successful completion of this award winning project,

In September the Council held an open meeting in front of the Goat pub to consult on our 3 year plan and to gain early indications regarding the playground project. This was made easier with the purchase of a gazebo to allow all weather presentation. It was encouraging to see so many people expressing an interest and our gazebo will enable us to repeat information provision and consultation again in the future.

The Council continues to undertake its duty to comment on planning applications and, as part of this duty, we have liaised with developers to gain information and to challenge proposals

In Autumn last year, the Council requested that Wiltshire Council's Rural Needs team undertake a housing needs survey of our Parish. This took place throughout October and the report was received earlier this year but had a disappointingly low level of local involvement.

Work on progressing the outsourcing of the PC website and IT has continued. This has been comprehensive and I would like to thank Cllr Mace and Mr Paul Cornish for their intensive work and Mr Cornish for continuing to support the existing IT and website during this time.

The Council has advertised widely for people to provide Handypersons services but without success but has been very satisfied with the service provided under contract by Mr Leigh Bush

Our Clerk and Administrative Officer have maintained good working relationships with teams at Wiltshire Council and have liaised about the painting of the Iron Bridge and Tannery Bridge, the painting of roadside bollards and the installation of a replacement bus shelter at the northern end of the village as well as the ongoing liaison with the Parish Steward about matters that require maintenance or cleaning in the Parish. Pot hole reporting has also bought positive responses.

Safe maintenance of the play equipment has been managed with monthly visual inspections by Cllrs Jalland, Mace and Hall who have benefitted from playground inspection training jointly arranged with Redlynch. Some necessary repair work is in progress prior to the commissioning of replacement play equipment.

There has been continuing work to improve the Cemetery with new fencing, tree work, repaired access to water and the repair of the front steps. More work is planned in the coming year including a refurbishment of the cremation remembrance wall.

Bollards have been installed to prevent vehicle access to the area around the Borough Cross and the lighting around the Cross has been replaced. Due to Covid and availability of contract workers, this has been a long time in planning but has improved and maintained a key part of the centre of our village.

A new noticeboard made of recycled rubber has been installed in Moot Lane to replace one that was broken by wind damage.

All broken litter bins have been replaced and some new ones placed in areas of high demand. In addition more dog litter bins have been installed. Mundane as this may sound, it greatly improves the appearance and cleanliness of the Parish.

The contract for grass cutting and hedge cutting of all the grounds for which the Parish takes responsibility has been re-let this year and the first cut of the year took place last week.

Thanks to Cllr Hall for coordinating and working on refurbishment and repainting of road name plates which will improve the visibility of local roads and will continue into the coming year. In some cases, new road signs have been installed where these were missing or damaged beyond repair. Our Administrative Officer is also liaising with a resident to fit signs along alleyways and lanes in the village where informal names have developed locally over the years.

A pop in café and chat provision has started on the last Friday of the month in the Memorial Hall and thanks go to Cllr Jalland for setting this up and for taking over much of the liaison on behalf of the Parish with Wiltshire's Community Engagement manager.

Moot Corner is now looking much tidier with some unsightly trees removed and the ground cleared which, together with the re-emergence of daffodils planted by the Downton Society, makes a welcoming entrance to the village from the east.

The Parish has for some time supported access to defibrillators at the doctors' surgery and the Memorial Hall but, this year, has agreed to fund an

external cabinet to allow 24/7 use of the defibrillator at the Sherwood Room in Wick Lane. Thank you to the Sports Club for agreeing to this. The Council has also agreed to purchase and install a defibrillator in the disused telephone box in Charlton all Saints which will also be refurbished.

During this year, the Council has approved the commissioning of traffic surveys which, it is hoped, will enable an informed discussion on traffic flow, parking and potential actions to improve safety. It is also hoped that the installation of a Speed Indicator Device in the Borough will improve awareness of speed through the village. With some funding from the Community Area Transport Group, the device has been jointly purchased with Redlynch where it is currently sited.

The Council has also approved a grant to the BWSCA to help fund basic maintenance which will improve the viability of the buildings on the site. The Council owns the site and it is in the interests of the Parish to support the provision of leisure and community facilities.

As usual there has been ongoing liaison with the Environment agency to ensure that drain clearing can safely take place.

Last but not least, the Council's major project to refurbish the main play areas has started this year with evidence of options being obtained from a number of play equipment companies and public consultation and school visits to establish whether support exists to add to existing monies from development with a public works loan. The outcome of the consultation has shown a high level of support and work is now beginning to apply for a loan following which a tender process will take place to establish a provider for new equipment provision and installation.

Council administration

As well as taking due account of risk in the management of all projects, the Council has completed further new policies which underpin the safe running of the Council.

Representation on local groups

The Council continues to represent the community on the following groups:

- Brian Whitehead Sports and Social Club Association
- Downton Moot Preservation Trust
- The Downton Memorial Centre
- Downton Millennium Green Trust
- Downton Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association

Southern Wiltshire Area Board

Southern Wiltshire Area Board – Community Area Transport Group

Chalk Pit Management Committee

The Carver Trust Cottages

Downton Cuckoo Fair

The Downton Link Scheme

Stockman and Woodlands Trust

Thanks

I would like to thank the following people in addition to the thanks I have already made in this report:

My thanks go to Bev Cornish, our Clerk, for the amount of work she has put into preparing the playground equipment consultation, the re-letting of the grass cutting contract, overseeing the work to the external maintenance of the Memorial Centre, her willingness to undertake communication and take actions to prepare residents when local work such as with the bollard painting takes place and, importantly for her high level of knowledge and day to day commitment to maintaining financial and legal compliance for the Council.

My thanks to Alison McGowan, the Parish Administrative Assistant, for her support to our Clerk and her involvement in so many of the practical improvements to the Parish amenities as well as her flexibility in temporarily increasing her hours this year at short notice.

Thanks also to Mr. Rick Ladds for his weekly, voluntary, but mandatory, inspections of the defibrillator outside the Memorial Hall.

Our thanks also to our litter pickers Max Bush who joined the team this year and Ellie Philps who together maintain our village as litter free as possible.

My thanks too, go to two ex Councillors - Becky Cornell and Katherine Hudson Baillie - who have sadly had to resign due to personal circumstances.

Lastly but not least, I would like to thank my colleague councillors, especially Cllr Gareth Watts, Chair of the Amenities Committee and Cllr Chris Hall, Chair of the New Housing Development Committee for all the work and commitment that they have shown over the year. This is despite the Council having been operating with seven vacancies for the majority of the year. So please spread the word that new Councillor applications are welcome.