

Donhead St Andrew
Annual Parish Meeting
Thursday 9th May 2024 at 7pm
St Andrew's Church, Donhead St Andrew.

Present:

- 9 Members of the Public (inc 5 members of the parish council)
- The Chairman of the Parish Council – Simon Barkham
- Wiltshire Councillor – Richard Budden
- The Parish Clerk – Simon Pritchard

Minutes:

1. Welcome & Apologies for Absence:

The Chairman, Cllr Barkham welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2023:

Last year's Annual Parish Meeting was held on Thursday 18th May 2023, minutes were circulated at the time and have been available on the Parish Council website all year.
It was agreed to adopt the minutes.

3. Report from Parish Council Chairman:

The Chairman gave a brief report as the Parish Council's activities over the last year:

- The council had three resignations in quick sessions, all for different reasons, but all three very experienced councillors.
- The Parish Council's share of the local council tax was frozen.
- A new update to the Village Design Statement was submitted to Wiltshire Council for adoption – have been subsequently told that further work is required before Wiltshire Council will adopt it
- Three more gates on local footpaths have been upgraded to full access pedestrian gates.
- Seeds 4 Success have done some good work on putting hardcore on the very boggy section of footpath DSTA1.
- Wiltshire Council have reintroduced the Tree Warden scheme, the two former Wardens have picked this back up.
- Wessex Internet continue to rollout the first fibre connection scheme in the parish. 38 homes now connected.
- An interment in the Cemetery made the press.
- The local potholes made the press thanks to Cllr Budden continuing to push for action to be taken by Wiltshire Council
- A Septic Tank / Nadder River water quality event was held.

4. Report from Wiltshire Councillor:

Councillor Budden had emailed a written report that formed the basis of his verbal report and is attached to these minutes in full.

Highways:

- 52% of Wiltshire Council budget is spent on Health, Social Care & Schools. The majority of income comes from council tax.
- He presented the statistics to show that the condition of the local roads are worse than the nation average.
- 73% of Highways Authorities match Government highways spending pound for pound, Wiltshire Council contributes almost nothing. This year it is putting in £5m for the first time.
- Bottom line is Wiltshire Council are not putting in enough investment to keep the roads safe.

Road, Rivers and Septic Tanks are the priority. Pleased that Wiltshire Council will be moving towards separating food waste from residential property collections.

- A question was asked if the Parish Council can pay for highways repairs – it was noted that the entire Parish Council precept of around £12,500 would only pay for a few meters.
- Cllr Budden noted that there is no extra capacity within Wiltshire Council to repair roads as this had all been disposed of over the years, while a little bit of extra funding is coming online, not clear who will undertake the works as the capacity need to be built back in. Sure, that in the long-term, the policy of underinvestment in the highways will cost more overall.

5. Reports from local groups and organisations:

Wessex Internet: Nick Martin –

The full report is on the Parish Council's website and on Village Noticeboards

Q: Do you know what is happening with the Church connection?

A: Understand that connection through the churchyard could be problematic.

The Chairman thanked Nick for all his work.

WILTSHIRE TREE WARDEN SCHEME

ANNUAL REPORT TO DONHEAD ST ANDREW PARISH COUNCIL

09-05-2024

The tree warden scheme, originally set up in 1990 following the very destructive storm of 1997, was suspended a few years ago for lack of funding. It was re-launched by Wiltshire Council in 2023 and set up with local, independent networks, free to decide their priorities in their local areas.

The re-launch was accompanied by an online induction and training day, attended by Jenny and George Lisle. The areas it addressed were broadly as follows:

- Setting Goals:
 - Endeavouring to make trees matter to everyone
 - To encourage planting more trees, of the right kind and in the right places
 - To promote better care for trees of all ages
 - To encourage effective action with local communities, e.g. planting, caring and enjoying trees and woodland
- An outline of the value of trees, including to landscape, wildlife and air quality
- Problems caused by trees, e.g. allergies and poisoning
- Areas of work to be addressed:
 - Community grant schemes
 - Research
 - Integration of work with the Tree Council
- Being the eyes and ears on behalf of local trees re tree health, threats and damage
- Limitations to action, e.g. not being safety advisers

We also attended a second online course in March, provided by the Tree Council, titled "Trees and the Law"

Other action undertaken over the last year has been limited, apart from an attempted intervention to save a tree in a conservation area threatened with felling. Wiltshire Council permitted its felling.

The Chairman thanked Mr & Mrs Lisle (the Tree Wardens) for all their work.

6. Reports from Members of the Parish Council with Portfolios

Rights -of-way / Footpaths – Cllr Maxwell-Arnot

Written report submitted as not at meeting:

As regards footpaths , the good news is that nearly all are negotiable now in walking boots except no 3 where as usual it looks as if some sort of effluent is being discharged in one spot in the middle. I do wonder if Wiltshire Council could put some sort of culvert in the worst spot similar to that at the entrance to DSAno1 which would drain the water into the field.

I was going to report that DSAno14 was now up and running with a very useful entry created near Pile Oak cottage. However suddenly on Saturday tape appeared right across the footpath between the two stiles in the field near Pile Oak Cottage isolating a large area with three jumps for the ponies. This tape is not electrified as far as I know and one can duck under it as I did. Nevertheless the principle that it is an offence to block a footpath is being ignored. Clearly the field is being designated a riding area - the jumps have been lying around under the trees for some time . I would hope the tape would be removed when the jumps are not being used otherwise it might seem as if walkers are being forced to use the unofficial route via the gate.

In the field near Leat House on DSAno6 now has cattle. The entrance by the stile had just recovered as it was exceedingly muddy before.

I hope that progress can be made in installing kissing gates on other footpaths as the recently installed ones are a great improvement. I am sure Simon will have spoken to some of the property owners. The stile on DSAno 5 on the Shaw's land is fairly rickety now.

I wonder whether we could ask Mr Sansom to remove his billboard from the footpath post at the cross of Sans Lane and Scott's hill. He has screwed it into the footpath post and it has been there for weeks when he is no longer working there (although he has left a digger in the field by Pile Oak Cottage). No other tradesman, as far as I know, has a permanent trade sign so far from the site. (Tel 01747 851873) It is unsightly even if it is being encroached upon by vegetation and rather undermines the purpose of the post which is to inform walkers where they are going

Local Highways (Inc The Parish Steward) - Cllr Burrows

Written report submitted as not at meeting:

We were due to be visited by the discretionary gully tanker service in week commencing Monday 11th March 2024. The gully tanker did appear and emptied three selected gullies (one at the bottom of Scott's Hill, one outside Castle View in New Road, and one at the bottom of Pigtrough Lane). Two further gullies (both in Wardour Lane had been reallocated by David Button (local Highways Engineer) to the gully tanker that is based in Wilton. The Wilton tanker also appeared in the same week, and actually emptied eight gullies in Wardour Lane. They did an excellent job, but perversely one gully

outside Watergate Cottage which previously had been blocked and dry, blocked up again after their visit. This explains the water flow outside the Cottage, and the tanker is due to visit again to rectify the situation.

Our Parish Steward was with us on Monday and Tuesday 22nd/23rd April. Stewards are still focusing predominantly on pothole repair/filling. There is not due to be a visit in May, as I think that the stewards are generally allocated other Spring duties in May (such as essential verge cutting).

Parish Flood Warden – Cllr Hartley:

- The website has been updated with more information.
- Has attended Flood Warden training.
- Regular meetings of the Wiltshire Council area Flood Group
- Looking to get the parish Flood Action group back up and running.
- Need to gently encourage people to become more resilient.

7. Open Public Parish Forum:

Residents were invited to discuss any matter affecting the Parish
Nothing further was covered.

Closed 19:57

Agenda Item: 4 – Cllr Budden’s Report:

1. I attended an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet on March 12th that was called to approve the Council’s formal application to participate in the Department for Education (DfE) programme known as ‘Safety Valve’ that supports Councils which have a very high deficit in the High Need Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The deadline for applications was that day.

The HNB is the part of the DSG that primarily supports pupils who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), and approximately two thirds of councils in England have some level of deficit in their HNB. In Wiltshire this cumulative deficit has grown from £2.1m in 2018/19 to £35.2m in 2022/23 and it is forecast to continue growing.

The deficit is held in a negative reserve on the council’s balance sheet while a statutory override is in place to shield the overall financial position of the council from it. However, the statutory override is due to end in 2026, by which time the forecast is that the cumulative unmitigated deficit could be £117m while there are funds and earmarked reserves of £90m.

A Safety Valve Deal is a formal agreement between a local authority and the DfE which offers councils additional funds to help with their historic deficits and in

return the council agrees to deliver a plan to return their DSG to a balanced position over the period of the deal.

2. **On March 14th I took part in the Southern Area Planning Committee that considered planning application PL/2023/05387** concerning Land at Littledown, Shaftesbury, Wiltshire, SP7 9HD for Conversion and Re-use of a Redundant Rural Building for Economic Development (B2/B8) use, that I had called in. The planners recommended approval but the committee supported my arguments and rejected the application.
3. **I didn't attend the regular meeting of the Cabinet that took place on March 19th.** It covered the following matters:
 - Arts Council Music Hub Investment Programme
 - A revised Air Quality Action Plan
 - An update on Community Conversations
 - The renewal of a mail printing and production contract for Revenues and Benefits
4. **On Wednesday 20th I attended a meeting of the Environment Select Committee.** The agenda reports pack occupied 34 Mb of data and 400 pages of text. The main item of business was the
 - **Highways Annual Review of Service 2023.** The text of the report covered 360-odd of the text and as a report it was unsatisfactory in a number of ways, not least the spurious level of detail incorporated in hundreds of pages of schedules.

Just before the meeting there had been a change in the composition of the Cabinet; Caroline Thomas had given up her responsibility for Highways that had been taken on by Nick Holder. I called at the meeting for more clarity on expenditure area by area and for a strategy to rebuild minor roads to cope with the impacts of the increased rainfall and intensity of storms that have been predicted for 25 years as a result of global warming. Holder, new to the job, ducked making any commitments, but has assured me privately that he has asked officers to set out their plans for roads through the Donheads, that I have been highlighting.

I had raised with Perry Holmes, the senior legal officer, the issue of legal liability of landowners to control run-off from adjacent land. At the meeting I argued we should have a proactive policy of holding landowners responsible for damage to the highways that results from their negligence. Apparently, this is a legally complex topic, but I was promised a detailed briefing paper.

In addition there was:-

- **An Update on the Development of the MyWilts Potholes Reporting Functionality.** In essence, the Council accepts the MyWilts app is not working adequately and is re-building it. A roll-out of the new app should happen in the second half of the year.
- and
- **An Update on Development of the Libraries and Leisure services,** both of which are still rebuilding following the huge downturn in activity that took place during Covid. In response to a positive assessment of the return to profitability of the leisure service, I asked whether the numbers included the costs and income held by the Council's Facilities Management, and was assured that that a comprehensive picture is being compiled.

5. **On Thursday 21st there was a briefing for members of the Environment Select Committee on the progress being made regarding allocation of land for members of the gypsy and traveller community** that will need to be satisfactorily resolved before the Wiltshire local plan, currently the topic of review following the recent public consultation, can be finalised for examination.

6. **On Tuesday 26th I attended a meeting of the Stone Circle shareholders.** Most of the discussion was centred on the progress being made by the Stone Circle property company buying up existing buildings to offer for rent. While there were a number of questions to address this is continuing to make progress.

The Stone Circle development company is more problematic. While the development on the former sports centre site in Tisbury (not yet started, though approved) is estimated to make an operating profit of £0.45mn that, together with schemes in Marlborough (also ready to go), Wootton Bassett and Devizes (not yet approved) will total £2.7mn, this is insufficient to offset the loss made on one scheme that has been discontinued plus fixed costs and overheads. The result is currently projected to be in an overall loss of £1mn.

Directors of Stone Circle argue this loss can be offset by a combination of 'tenure changes, cost reduction and value engineering'. I drew attention to these words and sought a commitment that the quality of the building of the Tisbury project would not be compromised, and received a reassurance from the Stone Circle chair.

The broader issue that arises concerns the future of the Stone Circle development company, which will be considered more fully at the next shareholders meeting in three months' time.