

Annual Parish Meeting 25/04/16 – PC Chairman's Report

An Annual Parish Meeting (not to be confused with a Parish Council Meeting) is an opportunity for the whole community to take stock, to define what is important to us and how we can work together on problems and projects that concern us all. Looking at today's agenda, you can see that there are quite a number of such projects with detailed reports and opportunities for discussion. Rather than repeating what is going to be presented there, I would like to use this report to highlight some other, ongoing work that your Parish Council has been doing over the past year.

Streets and Open Spaces

As always, the maintenance of our streets and open spaces is a major area of concern (as it has been, apparently, for the past 50 years, as documented in older council minutes). This is not only due to ordinary wear and tear, but also quite often through inconsiderate behaviour by road users and fly tippers (coming from nearby Bristol). While we do not have direct control over budgets in this area, we keep reminding NS officers of urgent work to be done and are in discussion with them about longer-term solutions.

With the help of our district councillor Nick Wilton, it was finally possible to clear up the long-standing road works in Broadoak Hill. Unfortunately, this good road has now become a speeding hotspot again, so further work is needed.

Coming to street furniture, a set of 3 new litter bins has been provided and installed in strategic locations, to be used by walkers who may pick up some litter on their way. This will hopefully improve the appearance of our area.

We have a number of historic, cast iron finger posts which over the years had deteriorated quite badly. It took some persuasion of NS from the PC and concerned parishioners to have them refurbished last year and they now look nice and fresh again in their black and white colours. Sadly, one of them, at Hairpin Bend, has been vandalised and damaged in a road accident shortly afterwards and NS does not have any funds left for renewed repairs. The PC is looking to have this done out of our own budget.

I will not go into details about speeding and traffic problems at this point as we had a comprehensive discussion about this subject at our APM today.

Planning

Over the past year, Dundry Parish Council was invited to comment on 24 planning applications and we did so, taking both planning regulations and local circumstances into account so that NS planning officers could make informed decisions.

In addition, we have been and are currently involved in a number of larger projects:

During the course of last year, Bristol Water plc. has built a new reservoir, which was the cause of much discussion in the parish. We tried to maintain close contact with Bristol Water and work with them to achieve the best possible outcome for this necessary development. I am pleased to say that the work has been completed to a high standard.

Looking to the future, Dundry is located within the Green Belt and we are pleased that NS places a strong emphasis on the protection of this valuable asset. We have been assured that under the current Core Strategy, to be finalised later this year, there will be no development permitted outside already built-up areas until 2026. However, pressure is mounting in the West of England area to find room for an additional 85,000 homes and the Green Belt is likely to be reviewed. Last month, we

already heard from a developer who hopes to benefit from such changes. This shows there is no room for complacency. We need to make sure that we familiarise ourselves with all implications and make our voice heard on behalf of Dundry.

As an ongoing concern, Dundry Parish Council is working closely with NS Planning Enforcement Officers and other authorities to ensure that adverse developments are dealt with appropriately. These do not only concern breaches of building and planning regulations but also reviews of HGV traffic arrangements in our area.

Representation

Dundry Parish Council is represented on various panels and committees to take part in discussions concerning the wider area. Examples of these are the PCAA, the Town and Parish Workshops, ALCA and the Chew Valley Forum.

One local project we were invited to take part in much too late to give meaningful input was the setting up of a new community bus to serve Dundry, Winford and Felton with a connection to the airport. Unfortunately, we were not able to get across that this would not be best received by people of Dundry who need to get into Bristol and consequently, the bus link was discontinued earlier this year due to lack of usage.

Community

Last year, we used our APM to discuss improvements to Dundry's broadband connection, which is woefully inadequate at a time when this is considered a basic utility such as water and electricity and when many businesses and households cannot function properly without a good Internet connection. I am sorry to say that not much progress has been made in the past 12 months. BT Openreach have postponed our update for yet another year and our talks with alternative providers have not led to any usable results. However, today, we have Evan Wienburg from Truespeed Communications with us who can hopefully shed some light on a way forward. We can also draw some hope from the government's plans to introduce a Universal Service Obligation which might allow us to demand a connection from a chosen provider.

In previous years, there had been some discussion whether it would make sense to install a defibrillator somewhere in the village, which could be a helpful tool to save someone having a cardiac arrest. Due to our geographical layout, it was decided that this would not be very efficient and instead, the Parish Council opted to offer First Aid Hearstart sessions free of charge to anyone interested. Last year, we had our second annual session, which was again very well attended. It proves that it is not only technology that can save lives but basic medical knowledge is just as important.

We were quite alarmed to learn that Dundry Primary School, after recent changes to become an academy, has hit another set of problems, though not through the fault of their very committed staff, students and parents. The Parish Council has offered its help and support but understands that the school's administration has first to be brought back on track before outside links can be re-established.

Our clerk had, together with two other volunteers, set up a youth network called Forward Activities and organised a number of exciting activities for young people. Despite some well-attended events, this project has not been able to take on a life of its own and it was with regret that the network had to be dissolved and remaining funds passed back to North Somerset to be re-used in other youth projects.

On a more positive note, there are two new initiatives involving a Parish Recycling Scheme and a

Footpath Survey that we hope to get the community interested in. Councillors A Scott and Armitt are going to present these to you today, so I will not explain any more details here.

Dundry Parish Council continues to run the Dundry Web site and e-mail newsletter as a community resource, information channel and as means to fulfill its obligation to openness, transparency and public scrutiny (In addition to minutes and agendas, many more documents, in particular of a financial nature, will be published here in the near future.). Please make as much use of the Web as you can, let the editor know if you think something should be published and spread the word to anyone who is not aware of it yet.

Thanks

And finally, it is time to recognise the work everyone has done and to thank them for their involvement.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my fellow councillors who each bring their unique expertise to this team and make our work a joint effort. There have been some changes in the makeup of this council over the past year and at times we felt slightly stretched being reduced to only 8 instead of 10 councillors. After the departure of Cllrs. Thomas, Pellowe and Murphy, we had Cllr. Amanda Scott join us as an enthusiastic representative of the younger generation and – most recently – Cllr. Jim Scott and Cllr. Thomas Armitt whom I would like to welcome again officially. I am pleased and relieved that all seats are being taken now.

This council would not be able to function in any way without the tireless work of our clerk Judith, constantly reminding us of deadlines to be met, meetings to be attended, being busy writing minutes, researching information and keeping our finances in order. So, thanks, Judith, your work is much appreciated.

In last year's election, Nick Wilton has become our new district councillor. He was instrumental in pushing the Broadoak Hill road works to a conclusion and is always happy to help us find the right contacts and connections at NSC. We would like to thank him and look forward to continued good co-operation.

I would also like to thank our police officer and PCSO, whose report we heard earlier on. We realise that financial cuts meant police work had to change dramatically and that the times when our friendly officers found the time to attend every parish council meeting plus a number of community events have long gone. However, we are assured that the police are as approachable as ever and will continue to support us. Please do not hesitate to call them on 101 or 999 (in case of an immediate emergency). We also find their regular crime updates and general advice very helpful, which you can find on the Dundry Web site.

As you know, the Parish Council employs Jody Fairish as our village orderly to keep certain areas tidy. And although he cannot and is not expected to attend to the whole village and parish single-handedly, we would like to thank him for his good work.

Finally, I am looking forward to working with this council and the whole of the community throughout the coming year and am happy to answer any questions you may have about this report.

Holger Laux
Chairman