

Parish Council Chairman's Report Annual Parish Meeting April 17th 2019

Welcome to the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting. It is always a privilege to be able to open this meeting and to give you a summary of the work and business conducted by your Parish Council during the past year.

Let me throw a few items at you in no particular order. The OxCam Expressway, Village Greens, Dorchester Flyer, Belcher Court, GDPR, Bishops Court Farm, The mobile Post Office, The Hurst Trust, Highways (potholes road markings dropped kerbs), Freeths and Weller Hedley solicitors, The Land Registry, Bridge End Telephone Box, Waterloo land registration, Drayton Road cemetery, 2018 Battles Over Remembrance Centenary, Dorchester school Playground, Drayton road Fishing Lake, The Village Hall, Speedwatch, Footpaths, Pavilion Showers, the children Play Area at the Recreation ground, The Guy Fawkes Fireworks display, High Street Bus stop shelter, the allotments archaeology dig, Flooding outside the Thames Water treatment plant and Affordable Housing . These have all been Parish Council Agenda items over the past year along with many other regular items like Planning applications, moles and dog fouling. Some of these items have been discussed at length more than once and one or two of the knottier issues seem to continue to frustrate all our efforts.

Because some issues are so important to our village or could potentially affect our village in such a dramatic way they have been given a dedicated place on our Agenda tonight. This brings me to introducing our Guest speakers tonight. I am pleased that we have our County Councillor - Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, our District Councillor - John Cotton who will deliver their annual reports, we welcome Stuart Roberts from Sovereign Housing who will tell us more about the Affordable Housing project, Mark Williams who will be telling us more about the Village Hall Refurbishment Plan, Val Howell will be making an

appeal on behalf of our Village School for a new playground, Rob Marsh, will be giving us an update on the PAGE campaign, and parish councillor Michael Rimmer will be updating us on the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

I do not plan to report on all of the items I have mentioned above but rather to highlight just a few that are of special note. The first of these is the Parish Cemetery.

I hope you have all noticed the improvements that we have made over the past few years within the cemetery. Initially this was to remove the weed laden waste soil that had been deposited over many years along the northern boundary that runs along the rear garden fences of some of the Page Furlong houses. This was followed by sowing grass seed and then planting spring flowers, mostly narcissi along this newly recovered strip. Then we had the planting of a row of young holly plants along the tree line to encourage wild life kindly organised by Miss Bowditch. More recently there has been more intense ground and tree work across the whole cemetery by our contractors. Much of this was to improve how the cemetery looked for the special commemoration of the end of WW1 and Remembrance in November, this was given the title “Battles Over” and incorporated other events in and around the village including the Abbey and the cemetery grounds. There was also poppy making at the school and in the Village hall that were used in displays for the Remembrance service and at the Memorial cross in the High Street. Most of the soldiers killed in the war were buried where they fell but some are mentioned on family gravestones in the cemetery although there remains are not here.

I am pleased to say that partly as a result of this event Keith Russell has started the “Adopt a Grave” initiative here in Dorchester. Adopt a grave is a movement that is becoming popular throughout the country. It requires volunteers to literally adopt a grave that has obviously not been tended for some time. The grave may have been neglected for a number of reasons which includes the family has moved away, or no longer has any relatives fit enough to maintain the grave, or the

family no longer has any living relatives. Those volunteers who offer to adopt a grave usually have some particular reason for doing so which can be because of the persons part in history or some emotional attachment to the person or the family. Of course there has to be a check that any living relatives are happy for the grave to be tended by someone else. Once the initial work to restore the grave area has been done it is a relatively small time commitment to keep it in good order. If you feel that you would like to join this worthwhile venture please let us know. The next item I would like to highlight is regarding Footpaths.

Some of you, especially if you are a dog walker, will have noticed the changes along the Drayton Road to Hurst footpath that runs alongside the Demesne field. A few years ago this footpath was narrow, often daunting in the evening for people returning from the bus stop and prone to becoming blocked during periods of high winds and rain with fallen trees and shrubs. Some of you may know that this had been a narrow farm track. Maurice Day informed me that in the days he was a village bobby he used to use the track as a shortcut to get home a few minutes quicker. But over the years it became overgrown with mainly self rooted blackthorn, ivy and brambles. When trees have fallen on the track it has been a few volunteers, usually with parish councillors, who cut and removed the path to make it passable. More recently we have had the help of Wallingford Green Gym who have visited the village several times a year to work on neglected areas of the village. Encouraged by this activity this led directly to a group of Page Furlong volunteer residents to initiate a wild life corridor project. This has been led by Andrew Clements and Gill Whitten with the help of all their neighbours who have removed much of the low scrub growth in some areas. More details are in the April Issue of Dorchester News "Putting Life into one of our Lanes". In addition to this, but on the opposite side of the village, along Watling Lane, an old disused piece of the footpath has recently been re-opened with the help of a local Ramblers association under guidance from the Oxfordshire

County council Footpaths officer. Again with the help of a voluntary organisation but this time from outside the village.

The Speedwatch initiative has restarted in 2019 and updates have been provided in DNews. I will not repeat what has been written there but simply mention that this is another group of volunteers who are hoping they can discourage drivers from exceeding the speed limit in the village in the interests of road safety.

You may recall that this time last year I appealed to all residents to see if they can devote some time to volunteer. Not just for Parish Council initiatives but also to join the long standing village institutions such as WI and the Lunch club who also need new members. So this year I personally find it very satisfying that the projects I mentioned above have been helped and led by volunteers who between them have all made a real difference to our village. I would like to thank them all very much on behalf of the Parish Council and hope they will continue their good work in the future.

Bishops Court Farm

No annual report over the past 3 years would be complete without some reference to Bishops Court Farm. Some of you may already be aware that the farm is on the market again. It is for sale from Knight Frank and advertised on Rightmove in lots or as a whole for a total of £5.6m. I understand that not all the land that was bought initially is for sale now. So if anyone would like to buy a parcel now is a good time to do so.

The last item I will cover in detail is that of planning. Last year your parish council reviewed some 27 applications. Compared with 40 in the previous year. I use the word “reviewed” advisedly as Parish Councils are defined as consultees just as the Highways and Footpaths officers and even neighbouring householders. This means that we can make comments in favour or against any application we wish but we have no right

to veto an application. It is the District council that is the only authority that can make a substantive decision on house building applications. Of the applications we reviewed we raised no objection to 21 and objected to only two. The other 4 were Permitted Developments applications where we are only allowed to note the procedure.

Finally, I would like to give thanks to all of our councillors who, as you know, are themselves all volunteers and often spend many hours a week working for the mutual benefit of the village. I would also like to thank Geoff Russell for all his hard work to keep us informed and well advised. I will let you into a secret - we often see emails from Geoff that have been sent in the early hours of the morning such is his dedication.

This will be my last year as Chairman of the Parish Council and my last opportunity to deliver a Parish council Report. After four years as Chairman during which we have had some highs and some notable lows, I will be standing down from the Chair but I intend to continue as a parish councillor for the time being at least to see the Affordable Homes project to a satisfactory conclusion and offer any help I can to the new chair. I wish the new chairman the best of luck and can assure them that he or she will have my full support.

This concludes the Chairmans report. Thank you for your time. Are there any questions?

If not I will hand you over to Geoff Russell for the Annual Financial report