

Minutes of Dorchester Annual Parish Meeting 2024

Wednesday 1st May 7.30pm In the Abbey

Councillors Present Chairman Mike Corran MC, John Taylor, JT, Councillors Mark Williams MW, Mike Atkinson MA, Charlotte Garside CG, Chris Hill CH, Jon Brydges JB.

Approximately 60 residents attended.

Apologies Becky Waller, Jenny Welham

1.2023/24 Annual Report

At last years' Annual Parish Meeting I thanked the departing councillors for their hard work on your behalf. This year it is my sad duty to note the passing of one of their number, Maurice Day, a councillor in Dorchester for 40 years, the local police sergeant in his working life and also heavily involved in the abbey and many other things in our community. We talk a lot about what we can do for our community, Maurice seems to have done it all. Thank you Maurice, for your service to Dorchester.

I would like to start this year's update with some thanks.

Firstly to all your parish councillors who have really got stuck into the realities of governing your parish council. Their attention to performing their role has matched by their energy to make things happen in different areas. And also to Robin Bennet, our district and County councillor who is always a great support to our efforts.

And I would also like to thank two parish clerks, Geoff Russell who has retired after 40 years, and Jenny Welham, who we were delighted agreed to join us to take us forward. We wish Geoff, and Helen, a well-earned rest from the minutiae of making the parish tick. And to Jenny, a highly experienced clerk who is already having a huge impact of how we work after only 3 months with us, a formal welcome to the Dorchester community.

Also deserving of our thanks are the volunteers and businesses that help make us such a great environment to live in and such lively community. So, to our pubs and hotels which have all seen investment in recent times and are offering an excellent range of exciting offers and activities, to our wonderful Coop who continue to be a brilliant example of a local shop despite the recent efforts of local criminals, to the Abbey of course, particularly with the festival looming next week, to Bishops Court Farm which has established itself as a source of music, farm activities and a wonderful café, the museum and tea room, and those who work on our environment, Andrew Clement's Green DoTs team and the Hurst gang as well as the farms in the parish.

As we face increasing pressure on County and District budgets we are likely to have to look to ourselves to add the extra polish to our community's environment and the people I've listed plus those that have helped sort, litter, weeds, playground leaves, you all make such a difference. More of that later.

Now on to what your parish council has been doing on your behalf. It's been a busy year focusing on the priorities the new council agreed.

- I've already mentioned our first achievement, transitioning from Geoff to Jenny as our parish clerk but also transforming how we run the parish council. After 25 years of Geoff's tenure this was always going to be a major undertaking so I'd like to thank both of them and all the councillors, particularly John Taylor who led the recruitment of Jenny and Jon Brydges who began us on the journey of modernising the way we use IT to work as a council. Jenny is now firmly in control and we will, with her help be transforming how we manage your council in the modern age, we've made a good start but we have at least another year's work to do to get us to where we want to be.
- The second major achievement of the last year has been delivery of the playground and other enhancement on the rec, not least the adult exercise equipment which I try and use regularly. A number of people have played their part, from Rob Ballantyne in securing the funding and various councillors and residents with brains and spades but the major thanks this year go to Becky Waller who drove the implementation with ruthless efficiency. The outstanding item for the rec is the pavilion, of which more later.

Last year I reported that we were awaiting implementation of our 20mph speed limit. That is of course now done. I know it's not to everyone's liking and some have offered views on its effectiveness and highlighted those who don't conform. But I see us at the beginning of something which will embed over time, making sure the centre of our village is more a safe environment to live in than a through road. I also know there are unresolved concerns over

2. 2023/24 statutory reporting of Parish Council finances

Mike Corran gave the report from the Clerk;

I joined as Clerk/RFO 8th January 2024, taking over the finances for DPC in the last quarter of their Financial Year which runs April 1st 2023 – 31st March 2024.

I can report that the finances carried forward from the previous financial year were £56,946.56, this was made up of current account funds and reserve account funds, this is money held for major projects including CIL funds received.

There had been no definitive budget set for this FY, 2023-24 however the finances finished the year with a little more to carry forward compared to previous year £57178.71. Again this is made up of funds in the current account (£2664.) and Reserve Account £52787.26

A major project this FY the Playground upgrade/refurbishment completed successfully during this financial year with £72K of grant funds being received from various sources, SODC 22500, 2500RB, (25K) FCC Communities Foundation £47000. Some funds from DPC reserves £5K. A wrap-up of the project costs was completed by myself and the CllrBW running the project, there was a small overspend of £2642 which given the scale of this project was marginal. Thanks to Cllr Becky Waller for steering this project to a successful completion.

For this FY year a budget has been put in place, to be reviewed quarterly which enables the Council to forecast more accurately for the next financial year. The unaudited Annual Account

Return is available on request from Clerk. Email parishclerk@dorechesteronthames-pc.gov.uk or telephone 07444 23077.

3. Questions from residents about the 2023/24 reports

There were no questions raised.

4. Dorchester 2030 priorities and the way forward

John Taylor had publicised to the village what the priorities and the 5 workstreams to concentrate on being;

1. Develop a Nature & Wildlife plan including water quality (MW /CH).
2. Develop solutions to the traffic issues, including noise, safety and car parking (MA).
3. Assess and progress future potential uses of the Pavilion plus refurbishment plans (JT,BW, Chris Smith from Tennis Club already volunteered).
4. Develop a plan for additional 10-20 Affordable Homes (JT, CH, MW).
5. Transform Dorchester Parish Council's operations including governance, finance, grounds maintenance (MW lead), NP quinquennial review(MW/CH lead) & emergency planning. (MC, JT, MW, CH).

The residents present affirmed that they agreed with these 5 workstreams and some had already volunteered to join them.

The meeting then dispersed into the four areas to speak to councillors about the four workstreams the fifth one being for the Parish Council.

Meeting closed at