

Background Report for Parish Council meeting June 2012

60.12 Reports

b. Flood Action Group – nothing to report, there is no risk of flooding at present.

d. Parish Website – Doric has submitted a comprehensive report regarding the updating of the website. Please take time to read it.

f. Parish Clerk's report

- I have attended an exploratory meeting about the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr) by parish councils.
- I have attended the recent Area Board meeting held in Coombe Bissett. The next Area Board meeting is to be held on Thursday 26th July in Alderbury Village Hall, where the review of the local bus service will be an agenda item.
- The next CATG meeting is on Monday 3rd July at Bourne Hill at 6.15pm. There is nothing on the agenda of concern to the parish.
- I have been contacted by a member of the Plymouth Brethren, who advises that they are talking to the planners to convert their redundant school building in Pitton into flats. Parking space is an issue. Mr Diffey has asked if he can give a presentation to the parish council and/or wider public once plans are clearer, probably in the autumn.

62.17 Finance

c & d Annual accounts and Governance statement - I have yet to receive these from the internal auditor, but will make sure copies are distributed to councillors before the meeting.

e & f Financing the website project – the maximum estimated cost for this upto £1028 if the intern is paid at the UK equivalent of £6.41 per hour. As a public body, I recommend that the Council should pay the UK minimum wage of £6.53 per hour, which increases the estimated cost to £1045.

I recommend that the Council applies to the Area Board for a grant of £500, and covers the balance of £550 from its own resources, by transferring £250 from the money allocated to the pump expenses, £50 from s137 expenditure, £150 from the contingency fund and £100 from the subscriptions/membership fund.

g. Calculation of next year's precept – the reduction in Government funding to local authorities and the change in the way that Housing Benefit is paid will affect the calculation of the Council Tax Base figure, which is used to establish the Band D figure. I understand that as a result, if the Council requests the same precept amount next year as this, the Band D figure will be increased by 10% before any other increases are taken into account. Please see enclosed letter from the New Forest District Council

Parish and town council precepts are not capped, and whilst the official line is that the Government will keep this under review, the unofficial line is to encourage parish councils to take advantage of this, as it is compatible with devolving responsibility and expenditure to the lowest authority level possible.

63.12 Highway/Parish steward/footpath matters

a. The Parish Steward continues to visit as and when, fitting in his visits around verge cutting.

b. Work completed – the last report I received was in April for work done in March.

c. Highways Issues – delamination/potholes at junction of Church Road, Pitton Road and Parsonage Hill – this has been inspected, and is now on the major maintenance list for future treatment. The road subsidence of Church road has been inspected, and requires funding for repair. Ditch is on list to be cleaned when digger available to the area office. I have advised Farley Nursery School of this, as the parents have complained in the past.

d. Footpaths initiative

- The last Area Board has developed a footpath initiative in response to its exercise to see what topics/projects it should take on for this year. Parishes are asked to walk their footpaths, identify any problems, ie ongoing maintenance and the need for stiles, gates and kissing gates, compile a report and then forward this to the Area Board, which will pass it on to the Rights of Way Warden, and monitor progress. Various funding streams are available, as are various sources of labour to do the work.
- It is then hoped to produce a series of long and short walks in the Community Area, linking places of interest, shops and pubs.
- The Area Board is also pressing for the Rights of Way Warden delegated authority to serve notice on landowners who unlawfully block legitimate rights of way.
- The Area Board would also like the Parish Council to nominate a Lead Person for footpaths – who need not necessarily be a member of the Council.

64.12 The new Standards Framework

The whole new framework which comes into effect on 1st July is very much “Conduct light, Interests heavy”

- Councillors will have noted the draft new Code of Conduct that Wiltshire Council is to adopt on 26th June, and which is based very closely on the DCLG model.
- The NALC model (enclosed) is more closely modelled on the existing - it includes a specific requirement not to act in a bullying manner – vital for council/employee and councillor/councillor, and a requirement for gifts/hospitality over £50.00 to be declared. The DCLG model does not.

- As at present, it also allows councillors with a personal and pecuniary interest to speak on a topic, if the public are given a right to speak, before leaving the room. The DCLG model does not.
- The declaration of acceptance of office does not need to be signed again, but in future, the requirement to abide by the Code will be implicit rather than explicit. However, I recommend that the undertaking to abide remains.
- The Code is not applicable to a councillor's private life.
- ***Interests – a new Register of Interests will need to be completed by each councillor within 28 days of the Code being adopted.***
- ***Spouses' interests also need to be declared. This is a statutory requirement.***
- ***The Register will be available to view on Wiltshire Council's website, and a link to the pages from the Parish Council's will need to put on the parish website.***
- Once an interest is on the Register, it does not need to be mentioned at a meeting, as at present.
- It will be a criminal offence not to declare an interest, or declare an interest within 28 days if a councillor becomes aware of it during a meeting. The sanction is £5000 fine, and/or imprisonment.
- **Complaints** – these have to be made within 20 days of the incident by a person witnessing it or by the person concerned – there is no time limit at present, and complaints, at the moment, may be made by absent third parties.
- Councillors will also be advised almost immediately that a complaint has been made. At present, councillors may not know until resolution.
- There is more emphasis on mediation rather than investigation.
- There is a timetable of upto 3 months to investigate and recommend sanctions, if necessary. There is no public notification when these are imposed.
- Parish Councils implement the sanctions.
- Parish Councils will grant dispensations to speak where appropriate/necessary.
- Parish Councils may create their own Standards Committee

Wiltshire Council proposes to review the new Framework in the autumn, in the light of experience. Other Councils are also proposing to adopt Wiltshire Council's model, with a view to refining it to fit local requirements in the light of further experience/developments. I strongly recommend however, that the Parish Council adopts the NALC model, as, for what it is worth, it is much more robust and clear about what is required of councillors when in public office.

67.12 Ongoing matters

a. Aymers Pond – I have now asked 3 contractors for quotes, but am still chasing them to provide. I will continue to press. Meanwhile, Wiltshire Council has now taken on its responsibilities as the Land Drainage authority from the Environment Agency, and will advise the relevant department of the Parish Council's intentions.

b. Farley noticeboard – Chris Hewitt has estimated that the cost to refurbish the Village Hall noticeboard is £150. Jamie Latham proposes to obtain at least one more.

c. The Close – grass cutting. I have contacted a local contractor to request an estimate to cut this for next year. Meanwhile, concern has been raised by a Pitton resident about the lack of cutting this year. I did explain the circumstances (excessive rain) but hopefully local volunteers will be able to keep on top of it.

d. Pitton bus shelter – this has yet to be attended to.

e. Pitton siphon – no further news at present.