

Puddletown Area Parish Council AGM

Annual report 2017-2018

This is my fifth report as Chairman of both the Puddletown Parish and Puddletown Area Parish Councils and I can truthfully report that this has been the most fulfilling year to date.

The most pleasing aspect of last year has been what I consider to be one of the most important aspects of community life in a rural community and that is the desire by many in our communities to, not only get involved in the community, but to achieve great success and fulfilment in doing so. In my opinion this year has seen far greater community activity in Puddletown than in past years.

My first example has to be the successful opening of the new and substantially improved play park facilities at the Puddletown Recreation ground. The hard work by too many to name came to fruition when the new play park was opened by Mrs Brymer in June 2017.

It goes without saying that none of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication by many in fund-raising and the outstanding generosity of Viridor in making this project finally emerge from the ground.

It was a wonderful day when the park opened with people of all ages enjoying the new landscaped grounds, play equipment and seating. Since then the play park has been well used both on a daily basis as well as bigger events such as the party in August and successful Easter Egg hunt in March of this year.

The play park project has involved and has been supported by a wide range of community groups within Puddletown and the surrounding areas. The First School and Preschool have also given support, predominantly in planting over 150 bulbs last Autumn which looked just magnificent in Spring this year.

Fund-raising and other work still continues in order to maintain and further enhance the play area and, unfortunately, been necessary as there have been a couple of occasions when damage and theft has occurred.

Going forward the play park project team are still working hard to get plans approved and funding for the future phase of development of the skate park and additional equipment still needed in the play park.

The next area I wanted to highlight is the potential development of a Community Cafe in Puddletown. The preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan identified a number of requirements for the village, as communicated by people within Puddletown. One of those identified was to have more facilities where people could meet and socialise

and where community events could be facilitated. Specifically, there was a demand to have a cafe in the village. On this basis the idea for a Community cafe was born. With the approval of the Parish Council a steering group was formed to guide and further progress this idea. This has been the first of, I hope, many practical outcomes of the Neighbourhood Plan.

To date a series of 'pop up' cafes have been held to test the concept. What is even more pleasing is the involvement of other community actions such as Community artists and stalls, as well as traditional cafe fare.

In addition, a partnership with the Community library has been discussed and approved.

The next step in this venture will be to hold further cafes throughout June of this year to further test the concept before reporting back to the Parish Council and agreeing the next step.

As mentioned above, the Neighbourhood Plan process has already identified a number of areas where greater community engagement has been successful. My report last year was a little sceptical of the desire to see a Puddletown Neighbourhood Plan being delivered from inception to completion, but this year has seen massive progress, not without hurdles, to a position whereby a feasible Neighbourhood Plan could be delivered by 2020.

The first part of this year has seen the Puddletown Neighbourhood Plan focussed on collecting and collating the needs and requirements of the people of Puddletown. This was based on a 2016 questionnaire to all households and has continued with 3 public meetings, 4 public events, as well as a Facebook page and a website. So far, excluding the questionnaire, we have had 289 responses from 199 individuals.

As part of this work, a call was put out to land owners and house developers who were considering plans for house development in the parish of Puddletown. 5 land owners/developers came forward. Their first assessment of their desire for development totalled over 300 dwellings, far more than that desired by the majority of the people in Puddletown.

On the basis of the evidence collected, the Working Group established by the Area Parish Council has developed a document that sets out a vision, principles, objectives and actions to guide the Neighbourhood Plan. This addresses a range of issues, from the rate of required housing development through to issues related to housing mix, environment, traffic, transport, and security.

From the beginning of 2018 onwards the focus has been on preparing a draft Neighbourhood Plan. Two supporting documents prepared by neutral consultants, are in preparation to underpin the draft Neighbourhood Plan; a Housing Needs

Assessment and a Strategic Environmental Assessment. These documents will provide an important basis for the Plan.

Once these have been completed the preparation of the draft Neighbourhood Plan can be completed, and the Plan starts the various bureaucratic steps it has to follow towards its completion. It is currently planned that the Neighbourhood Plan will go to referendum in 2020.

This is a long, but I hope you will agree, necessary and pertinent process if we are to control and protect the future development of Puddletown. The steering group work tirelessly towards a successful end target and should be thanked and commended for taking on this valuable project.

As you are all aware our other vibrant village Tolpuddle decided against the need to participate in a similar exercise but as with all of our villages and hamlets development affects us all in some way.

Tolpuddle itself enjoys a wonderful and distinctive community spirit and over the past 12 months has continued to thrive.

June 2017 saw the formal opening of an affordable rent housing scheme developed by Hastoe Housing Association. All units have been occupied by people with strong associations with the village and one unit was specially adapted, using funds from West Dorset District Council, for a young disabled man. The Parish Council strongly supported the scheme which adds to the range of housing in the village and is helping to promote a balanced community locally with a range of age groups.

Towards the end of 2017, a major upgrade to Tolpuddle Village Hall was completed. As a result of a major fund-raising initiative, the Hall has been significantly extended in size and equipped with a new kitchen and toilets. Most importantly, it now has disabled access. The Council have been pleased to support this major project with grants totalling £5000 over the last two years.

As you know, the Parish Council is responsible for Orchard Meadow, the delightful play park in the middle of Tolpuddle, and funds grass cutting and water and electricity charges as well as long term upkeep. Councillor Martin Cooke continues to oversee the management of the facility and, with Rob Brunt, organises maintenance sessions which contributed over 100 hours of voluntary time over the winter and involved people of ages ranging from 5-70.

The community also got together in March to clean gutters and drains on the main road and a further clean is proposed for this Autumn.

As Chairman, I believe that Tolpuddle is well represented with three Parish Councillors. It is pleasing that Council meetings held in Tolpuddle are well attended

as is their annual village meeting.

It is not my aim to go through all the issues that the Parishes currently endure. Some issues such as speeding, and parking continue throughout our Parishes despite best efforts to resolve them. In Tolpuddle, the Parish Council has agreed to fund a speed indicator sign which can be deployed around the village

You will have noticed that I have tried not to name individuals in my report as public and Councillor engagement has been exceptional. I do need, however, to mention the incredible work load of our stand in 'temporary' Parish clerk, Shirley Langdon, who stepped into the position following the untimely exit of our last clerk. I want to thank Nick Ireland, our County Councillor for his regular attendance and support at our meetings and to thank our PCSO Alison Donnison for keeping us up to date about the very low incidence of crime within our communities.

Finally thank you to all of the Parish Councillors for their hard work in making our Parishes such a desirable place to live.

Stephen Baynard

Chairman

15th May 2018