

Good evening and welcome to the 2022 Laverstock and Ford Annual Parish Meeting. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Nick Baker and it has been my privilege to chair the council over the last year. This report will mainly look back, but I will also try and highlight some of the priorities we have set ourselves for the coming year as well. We serve five distinct communities, Bishopdown Farm, Ford, Laverstock (including a section of Milford), Longhedge and Old Sarum and so I will start this report by looking at the council as an organisation and our wider work across the whole parish, before looking at some of the key points in each of our communities.

The long term 'big picture' for us as a council has been adapting to growth driven by two key factors. The first has been the building of new housing which has seen the population of our parish grow from around 3,000 in 1990 to over 10,000 today. The second driver for change has been the ongoing financial challenges to the wider local government sector. This led to the creation of the unitary Wiltshire Council, removing district councils, and we are increasingly seeing it withdraw from provision of some local services as financial pressures increasingly force it to focus on core services, leaving parish councils to take on this responsibility. This means that the council is now responsible for the care of over £1.1 million of assets as well as significant areas of public open space such as Whitebridge Spinney, Castle Hill Country Park and an increasing number of areas at Old Sarum and Longhedge. Some of these we manage directly, some in partnership.

In order to cope with these increased responsibilities the structure of the council has had to change. Our staff team now includes five part-time roles (when we have all posts filled) and as a council we have adopted new ways of working, with a committee structure allowing us to cover more ground than we could in a single monthly meeting. This seems a good point for me to express my thanks to the many people whose contributions have been vital to the success of the council.

The new structure has placed increased demands on councillors, with many serving on two committees as well as attending full council and making themselves available to residents in their wards. None of our councillors are paid or receive any form of allowance, and I am very grateful for all the time they give to serve our community. I would particularly like to thank Tom Maskell, Lesley Waller, and Alex Tucker who as committee chairs help share

the leadership responsibility within the council and have all made a significant contribution to the work that has taken place over the last year.

Aside from our councillors there are many volunteers who contribute to the work of the Parish Council. I would like to thank all those who have given their time in one way or another, including those who have done such an excellent job preparing our Neighbourhood Plan, David Law who manages our website, and all those who deliver our Parish News.

This has also been a time of significant change within the staff team. Andrew Prince, stepped down as Parish Clerk after serving in this role since January 2013. We are very grateful for the skill, dedication and breadth of knowledge that he brought to the role, and it is hard to overstate the significance of his contribution to major projects including the development of Castle Hill Country Park and the redevelopment of the boardwalk. We are also grateful for the way that Andrew has supported the transition process by continuing in the post of responsible financial officer while we review the staffing structure and fill other posts.

We are very fortunate to have an excellent internal candidate to step into Andrew's shoes in the form of Trudi Deane who was our deputy clerk for several years. The smooth transition that has taken place is much to both of your credit and we know that the leadership of our staff team will be in safe hands for years to come.

I would also like to thank Rose Whitefield who recently left the staff team after pioneering the role of Community Engagement and Communications officer and to welcome Joe Elder as our new operations assistant. I am very grateful that Amy Cavendish, our operations officer is not going anywhere and for her continued contribution to our work and to Juliet Brain who edits the Parish News with great skill.

As you have heard it has been a year of significant change, and so I thought it was important to take time to recognise all those involved. There are three other parish-wide projects which I would like turn to. The first is our on-going programme of investment in our parish, where we have focused particularly on providing the outdoor play and recreation spaces so important for wellbeing and good mental health for all ages and also on bus shelters which both

promote the use of this environmentally friendly method of transport and tend to particularly be appreciated by older residents of the parish.

The play areas at Partridge Way, Old Sarum and St Jude's Close, Bishopdown Farm were particularly bad examples of the state of disrepair Wiltshire Council had allowed many of these facilities to fall in to. Some were so unsafe they had to be closed off, and all were eye sores rather than places for children and families to enjoy. The next two pictures show the effect of the £50,000 refurbishment which we undertook. Moving forward we have taken St Peters Road and St Lukes Close Play Areas, Bishopdown Farm under asset transfer so now own these. Plans are in place to replace both these later this year at an estimated cost of £100K. We plan to accept management Sycamore Drive and Drake Close probably early next year and will then be refurbishing both of those. In order to prevent this situation arising again in the future, this council has a policy of each year setting aside 5% of the value of our assets to fund their replacement in the future. This does however mean that in addition to the expenditure we are needing to undertake to make up for years of underspending by Wiltshire Council, each time we take on new assets as new developments open, this puts additional pressure on our precept.

We are very conscious as a council of the increased financial pressure we are all feeling at this time of high inflation, and this year we are carrying out a major review of all of our assets to ensure that we achieve best value for council tax payers in the way we manage, adopt and plan to replace assets and steward the funds which have been given to us to care for them.

Another major external challenge which faces all of us today, and which will have a particular impact on our children and grandchildren's generation, is the climate crisis and the related loss of bio-diversity. We live in a beautiful parish, where you can experience a wonderful diversity of nature and as a parish council we want to do more to protect this, both through our own actions and through supporting the work of the many individuals and groups already working on the issue. This year we passed a new environment policy and we are looking forward to setting up an Environment Action Plan Group in the coming months to enable us to start taking action on the environment in our community. If you would be interested in getting involved, then please do talk to Amy, our operations officer.

The last parish-wide initiative I would like to mention is our neighbourhood plan. This is a really important document, which allows local residents to have

a considerable say in shaping the way which development occurs within a parish. Work on the plan has been going on for nearly five years now and has involved thousands of volunteer hours from the steering group and others. I would like to ask Vic Bousserou who leads the steering group to give a brief update on progress...

Thank you Vic, we are all very grateful for the dedication and depth of knowledge you and your colleagues have brought to this process. You have facilitated a listening exercise which allows us to genuinely say this plan represents the views of our community.

I would now like to turn to look briefly at the work that has taken place over the last year and the future priorities for each of our five communities.

People began moving into homes in Bishopdown Farm and Hampton Park in 1992 and so as we reach the 30 year anniversary of these communities we are beginning to see considerable wear and tear on much of the original infrastructure. I mentioned our ongoing investment in play areas earlier in this report, but in addition to these spaces for the younger members of our community, we have also taken over responsibility from Wiltshire Council for the green and the Hampton Park trail. We know that our residents value the semi-rural nature of the parish and the easy access to green space so we will continue to maintain these spaces and hope to be able to increase the number of access points to the Hampton Park trail, working with Wiltshire Highways to ensure that the access routes are safe and meet all legal requirements.

As Wiltshire Council's lease on the pavilion draws to a close we are starting discussions with the landowner and the existing management committee, to ensure that this facility remains available to the community and to understand the best way we can contribute to this.

With a population of over 3,600 people, Bishopdown Farm and Riverdown Park represent around a third of the residents of the parish and are entitled to be represented by five councillors on our council. Currently they are very ably represented by Councillor Lesley Waller, and Tom Maskell my vice-chair and an Old Sarum resident is kindly supporting her. This community is very fortunate to have in Lesley a dedicated councillor who constantly has her eyes open for things that need doing and who speaks up for the community. However there are three vacant councillor positions and I would love to see a new generation of councillors coming on board to represent this community.

Although it does represent a commitment of that most valuable resource, time, it is also an incredibly rewarding way of serving your local community and I would encourage local residents to talk to Lesley, me or Trudi about how to get involved.

Lastly at Bishopdown Farm, work continues on the Castle Hill Country Park, which is owned by the Parish Council and managed by the Land Trust working with Wessex Ground Services and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. I'd like to invite Hannah Boscence from the Land Trust to briefly report on the developments this year and what we have to look forward to.

Turning to Ford, the smallest of our communities, I'd like to flag up one success and one long term project. The success is the installation of our Speed Indicator Device. A digital sign which flashes up a warning when drivers exceed the speed limit and which also allows us to monitor patterns of poor driving. This is one of the major issues of concern which residents flag up to us, particularly in areas such as Ford which can be used as 'rat runs'. Ford is therefore one of three initial sites which the device 'SID' for short will be rotated around to help combat the issue. I am really grateful to Trudi and Amy for the hours of work they put in finding safe locations for the sites and arranging the necessary contracts.

I have already touched on the dangers of climate change and importance of outdoor recreation to health and well being, and long distance cycle paths make a significant positive contribution to both issues. The parish council is working with Wiltshire Council, COGs and other groups to improve cycle routes. This design work has been done to make substantial improvements to this path connecting Ford to Bishopdown. It is part of a wider network connecting outlying areas beyond Ford into the city. The intention is to improve this section to provide a proper 'shared use' path which will link the cycle routes as well as improve the footpath. However, the costs are estimated at £500,000.

A bid has been made for central government funding and investigations are continuing into further sources of funds. This is a long term project and dependent on external funding, but we hope to see progress this year.

In Laverstock and Milford, much of our focus has been on the Church Road area. The issue of traffic on this road, particularly at the start and finish of the school day have been one of the most frequently raised concerns by local residents for many years. Not only does this lead to delay and pollution, but we sometimes see the frustration it causes leading to dangerous driving with cars driving along pavements which are being used by school children. This council has therefore been working with Wiltshire Council and the three schools to both try and reduce car use through long term strategies and also look at ways of reducing the worst of the parking problems directly around the schools where the pavements are most used by children. After extensive consultation with local residents we have therefore recommended an experimental traffic regulation order that will introduce a single yellow line preventing parking or waiting between 2 and 4pm on Church Road between Bishop's Mead and The Green and the first section of Elm Close.

We hope that this regulation will reduce the problems immediately outside the school, and improve the safety of those using the pavements. We also hope that alongside the other work that is being done to promote active travel, use of buses and of the London Road Park and Ride car park, this will reduce the total number of cars parking in the village centre. However the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, and the important thing to remember is this is an Experimental traffic regulation order which will cease effect in 18 months unless it is renewed after further consultation. We will be monitoring this closely to evaluate how much it improves the situation and to identify any areas which are negatively effected as parking habits change. In around a year there will then be further extensive consultation with the community to decide whether we want to retain the regulation.

The already congested state of Church Road is just one of many reasons why there was almost universal opposition in our local community to the proposal to build 135 houses at the foot of Cockey Down. I won't rehearse all of the other reasons for why this area is grossly unsuitable for development, but the much loved local landscape and the proximity to an important site of special scientific interest are two other key reasons. All has been very quiet on this application for over a year now as the developers carry out further

consultations with Natural England on the issue of the impact of the development on biodiversity. At the moment they are not pushing Wiltshire Council to resolve the application. However I am concerned that I recently received confirmation that Wiltshire Council has for a second year failed to meet its Five Year Housing Supply allocation from central government. This creates a presumption in favour of developments as long as they can meet certain requirements including bio-diversity net gain and is a worry sign. This council will continue to campaign against this unwanted development if there is any movement on the issue.

If Laverstock and Ford are our two most established communities, Longhedge is our newest, and it is really exciting to see not just houses being built, but community starting to take shape, and to be able to contribute to this process. I know how much local residents have appreciated the opening of the shop and café in the community centre this year. As a parish council we have worked with Abri to create a community growing space, and are looking forward to continuing this partnership to create an outdoor gym area.

We have continued to engage with and sometimes challenge Vistry on their wider contribution to the community their customers will live in. Having seen that the group made a profit of £346 million pounds this year, I was disappointed with the slow pace of development of the country park and that there was no flexibility within their budgets to respond to a community request to enlarge the changing rooms by the football pitch to provide a space for youth and community groups to meet.

Instead they are continuing to push ahead developing the existing changing rooms, with no sign yet of a pitch to play on, nor clear agreement on who will maintain and manage these spaces. Although the parish council will continue to engage with Vistry on the issue and look to see whether it can support the running of this facility, there is a real danger that a white elephant could be created, under used and left to be maintained by the management company at the expense of local residents. Another issue which I know is a concern to many local residents is lack of mobile phone reception, and I will ask Councillor Patrick Schneider to say a few words on the issue.

Last in among our communities only alphabetically is Old Sarum. I have already mentioned the investment in the Partridge Way play area. Another significant project to be completed this year was the Skate Park, a project which was

supported by input from many local residents including Lee Jackson and Matt Bryon.

As we approach the celebration of the Queen's jubilee it reminds us how important our history is to all of us. Old Sarum Airfield is an important part of that heritage, and it is pleasing to see a local business, Guyatt's now making good use of one of the hangers and the Boscombe Down Aviation Collection continue to grow and add exciting new exhibits. It is a shame that another of these listed buildings continues to deteriorate and I hope that Wiltshire Council will continue to monitor this carefully.

Development continues in Old Sarum, and in the medium term we saw a positive application for the development of land behind Westfield Close which has always been scheduled for residential development, and a less welcome application from Persimmon to turn land set aside for employment and community use into houses and flats. I see that Persimmon's profits before tax last year were £966 million, and I do find it disappointing how little they have done to promote other uses for these spaces, while claiming there is no demand for them.

We all know the challenges that small business and community groups are facing at the moment, yet Persimmon have not made any effort to fit out the spaces intended to be shops and community facilities or otherwise reduce the cost of entry to those who might want to use them. We will continue to oppose these proposals. Looking forward there is the prospect of further strategic development between the existing houses of Old Sarum and Monarch's Way. We will continue to ensure that local voices are heard if this progresses.

I hope that you will agree with me that last year was a year of considerable achievement for this council, and we have much to look forward to next year, as well as some potentially significant challenges for our community. As a council we are at our most effective when councillors, officers and volunteers work effectively together and engage with our wider community and I hope this will be the hallmark of all we do in the coming year.

