

St. Helen Without Parish Council Newsletter

Welcome to this special edition of the St Helen Without Parish Newsletter. We hope you will take a few minutes to read the items below since we are in a very challenging phase for our parish and face the prospect of considerable change. Your Parish Council have been working hard to prepare for and make certain we are in a position to meet these challenges. It is our aim to ensure that we seize the opportunities offered by change whilst preserving the predominantly rural nature of our environment. We will need your help over the coming months and will keep you updated through further editions of our newsletter and on our website.

DALTON BARRACKS AND ABINGDON AIRFIELD

The proposed development of the airfield has kept us very busy. Judging by the response to our consultation effort earlier this year the majority of you will be familiar with our Neighbourhood Plan (NP). We have developed this jointly with Wootton Parish Council and it would appear to have been a wise move given the development proposals for the airfield put forward in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2). LPP2 is the Vale's strategic planning policy for the period up to 2031. The Neighbourhood Plan is a document which, if adopted, gives residents the opportunity to influence the nature of development (although not the ability to prevent it) in their area. The Neighbourhood Plan is currently at the stage of independent examination by a Planning Inspector following which there will be a referendum in which you can vote for its adoption if you are in favour. Towards the end of its drafting LPP2 was dramatically changed when the Ministry of Defence announced that the Army would leave Dalton Barracks by 2029. LPP2 proposed the building of 1200 homes on the airfield by 2031 and sought approval for the building of a further 3600 thereafter. To achieve this the Vale sought to remove the vast bulk of the airfield, built up area of Dalton Barracks (the area 'behind the wire'), the entire village of Shippon and parts of Whitecross from the Green Belt. The Parish Councils and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group appeared at the Planning Inspectors examination over two days and whilst acknowledging the proposal to build 1200 homes on the airfield, vigorously opposed the removal of any land from the Green Belt arguing that as this was 'previously developed land' such removal was unnecessary. The initial response from the Planning Inspector to the Vale was encouraging from our perspective. He decided that he was going to limit the development on the airfield to 1200 houses in the planning period up until 2031 with any further development having to be considered in the subsequent LPP (from 2031 onward). He also confirmed that the army playing field on Cholswell Road/Long Tow would be retained within the Green Belt, as would land adjacent to Starveal Farm in White Cross. He appeared to intimate that only sufficient land would be removed from the Green Belt to facilitate the building of the 1200 houses.

In a subsequent communication with the Vale the Inspector has, surprisingly, asked them to draw up plans for the removal of the 'built up area of Shippon and the built-up area of Dalton Barracks' to be removed from the Green Belt. We have queried this with his office and received the response that this request is 'without prejudice to his final decision'. We are obviously concerned about this apparent contradiction and have written to our local MPs seeking their support. Should Shippon be removed from the Green Belt it would open the possibility for any landowner to initiate development within the village notwithstanding the proposed development of the airfield. We will let you know the Inspector's final decision and its implications as soon as possible.

HIGHWAYS & AMENITIES

We have now completed the first year of our new grass cutting contract with Aspire, the Oxford based charity. We hope you agree that this has resulted in a dramatic improvement in the appearance of roadside verges throughout the Parish. We also benefit from litter picking, ditch clearance and hedge trimming as well as the clearance of fallen leaves

from footpaths. As part of the deal we negotiated with Oxfordshire County Council to take over this task we receive a grant of c£1300 pa, meaning that the cost to us is less than £700 pa. If you have any concerns about missed areas requiring attention, please contact our Clerk on clerkshwpc@gmail.com or 01865 321555.

Village Gates These were looking quite shabby and in need of repair. We have undertaken a programme of refurbishment to bring them up to an acceptable standard. They form an important part of our attempts to control speeding as they signify entry into a residential area. As a further enhancement we have planted daffodils in the verge on either side of the gates.

HONEYBOTTOM LANE

As a result of concerns raised by residents and with the assistance of Councillor Richard Webber (who provided financial assistance from his 'locality fund') we have arranged for a number of enhancements to improve road safety on Honeybottom Lane. The County have already trimmed back hedges to improve sight lines and allow the verge to be used as a walkway. They will also be improving the road markings and signage to reinforce the 40mph speed limit and will install 'village gates' on the Cothill side of the houses in Honeybottom Lane.

SCHOOL ROAD SAFETY SIGNS

We are engaging with local schools in a scheme where we offer small prizes for the design of impactive speed reduction signs designed and painted by pupils. We have had some stunning results so far and hope soon to receive the remainder of their efforts in order that we can start the installation process around the parish over the next year.

PLANNING

We have received more planning applications in the Parish over the last 12 months than in previous years and we expect that trend to continue into 2019. We have seen a range of applications from small extensions to large new build developments but in every case, we follow the same approach and consider each application on its merits. Not only do we look at each application from the applicant's point of view but also how it impacts on neighbouring properties and, as we are in the green belt, how it impacts on the character and setting of the local area.

We regularly make site visits where appropriate so we can see first-hand what impact a development will have on its neighbours. We also talk regularly to the professional planning officers at the Vale of White Horse for guidance on specific planning issues and points of law so we can ensure we present a balanced reply to each application and marry together the needs of the local community with the planning regulations.

(Possible 3rd paragraph.) Where the timing allows, all planning applications are discussed and responses agreed at the regular Parish Council meetings. These meetings are open to the public and members of the public are welcome to speak if they have an interest in a particular application.

GRANTS

We make a number of grants on behalf of our residents. We have recently reviewed our grants policy, full details of which can be found on our website. Essentially, we will make grants to anybody which can demonstrate that its activities have a direct impact on our residents. In cases where it is considered that a grant should be made which does not meet this criterion the Council may make a grant by way of special vote. Currently we make grants, among others, to Dry Sandford Primary School Breakfast Club, Friends of Shippon and the Citizens Advice Bureau. We limit the total amount of grant money to 10% of our annual precept although this can be varied by the Council, again by special vote. If you are aware of a charity or organisation that you believe warrants a grant, please contact the Clerk on clerkshwpc@gmail.com or 01865 321555.

COMMUNICATIONS

We have replaced the Council notice board situated at Old Faringdon Road at its junction with Cholswell Road and in Lansdowne Road. The old ones were becoming dangerous and the new ones are of galvanised metal construction so should have an extended life. We are currently tendering for a new website that will enable us to fully meet our legal obligations on communication and data retention. We are currently looking for a volunteer willing to act as 'webmaster/mistress'. Training will be available so if you think you could help out, please contact our Clerk.

THE FUTURE

There is much work yet to be done on the Neighbourhood Plan although we are hopefully in the final stages. Whatever the outcome of LPP2 we will need the NP if we are to stand any chance of influencing the nature and scope of development locally. Although most of the work has been carried out voluntarily (and to a very high standard) by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group there have been costs which the Council has so far met from its reserves. We have been informed that Abingdon Town Council are preparing a bid to take over St Helens Without Parish Council. They state that this is because the parish and Abingdon are almost contiguous and that the residents will benefit from being part of Abingdon. We believe they are motivated by the lure of income from the development at Dalton Barracks and that the interests of our residents can best be served by a parish council consisting of residents! Looking at the respective precept rates we think we are also more efficient. If you agree we would welcome your support.

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Councillor Vacancies

The Parish Council has three vacancies for the Dry Sandford Ward. If you are interested in being co-opted as a Parish Councillor, please contact the Clerk.