

Wilcot, Oare and Huish Annual Parish Meeting Chairs Report April 14th and again on
May 11th 2016

Welcome to everyone.

Firstly I would like to say how lucky we are to live in such a beautiful part of the world, surrounded as we are by a glorious AONB. We have active community hubs in the Churches, Village Halls and the Pub, please continue to support them and make more use of them if you can. The train service from Pewsey looks likely to improve, and spring is well and truly here.

The Parish Council, working with various other agencies and organisations has been very active again this year and I would like to give you a summary of some of the highlights plus cover some of the challenges with which, as a rural community, we suffer from.

Highways

Unfortunately because of the hiatus caused by the change of highways contractors a great deal of general maintenance work has been on hold for several months. Following the appointment of a new contractor and the further cuts to Wiltshire council's grant from central government a new regime is now in place for reporting issues. There is also a new system for prioritising the work and I printed a few copies of the latest highways letter which summarises this. Sadly, I think that yet again rural areas are being given less and less priority so that urban areas do not see a huge decline in their services. However, our local team manager has already been very helpful and I hope that given his understanding of our local issues prioritisation will include reasonable works for us.

Liaising with the school and highways engineer to improve the safety of pupils and parents when going to/from school has resulted in a recommendation that the school is asked to contact the school travel advisor at WC to review and refresh the school travel plan. They need to add the risk of losing the Pub Car Park as a drop off point if change of use is successful and plans for development of the car park taken up. The highways officer made a further recommendation that the police are asked to attend during school drop off times to do speed checks and to monitor and inform parents when obstructing the Huish Lane by parking without due care to residents and emergency vehicle access.

School children walking to the Church - we looked at extending the footway from Rudge Lane to the Church. This is not possible as properties extend right up to the highway. An alternative is to ask CATG for improvements to the footpath from Rudge Lane past the Church to A345. The school could walk past the pub, up round Rudge lane and down the footpath to the Church thus avoiding the main road. This is a much cheaper option and would be considered as cleanings from top dressing roads could be used to improve the footpath to a firmer surface for very little cost.

Finally, if you have property bordering any roads in the Parish please remember that it is your responsibility to ensure they do not cause an obstruction to pedestrians or vehicles.

Speeding

This remains an issue, particularly for the A345 through Oare and the C8 in Wilcot. Both villages speedwatch teams persevere and hopefully at least some motorists will learn a lesson or appreciate why the teams are out monitoring. Speedwatch in Oare could do with some further volunteers, so if anyone has some spare time the training is provided by Wiltshire police and the Team leader is Jon Gaunt, I can pass your details on to him if you wish to consider joining.

We have investigated the possibility of putting village gates at either end of Oare to try to draw drivers attention to the speed restrictions. Unfortunately we cannot get gates at the North end of the village because there is no where to put them, but they can be sited at the South end and we will be getting a quote from Wiltshire council for this work shortly. We will undertake a consultation in whether residents feel this would be helpful before proceeding.

A number of Parishes in the Vale have been working on a collaborative project to take over the running of the Speed Indicator Device (SID) from Wiltshire Council. We have joined this group and hope to have the SID installed in Oare just before the Huish Junction heading North bound on the A345 and also in Wilcot. We hope that this will have some impact especially in Oare where the large number of parents and residents using this blind junction combined with excessive speed of traffic on the A345 is an accident waiting to happen. Our thanks go to Colin Gale and the other members of the team for working so hard on this.

Once again we have worked with the highways engineer to look at improving the design of the A345/Huish Lane junction, one radical solution would be to make Huish Lane one way, given the length and narrowness of the lane I suspect this may not be popular with residents.

Canals

Sadly a few individuals have again been spoiling the canal and its environs once more, including leaving bagged human excrement, abandoned canal boats and now some camper vans/caravans have been parked semi-permanently by the canal in Wilcot. We have asked for assistance from the Police but because they are not causing an obstruction to the highway the police cannot intervene. We will continue to work on this issue. The Canals and Rivers trust have had some staffing re-organisations and I have been asked to co-ordinate future meetings of those of use, live by or on the canal. Unfortunately I have not been provided with an up-to-date list of contacts but will be pursuing this further in the weeks to come. We are still looking for volunteers to come forward to help with maintaining our section of canal – no digger license required! Since spring has arrived this would be an ideal time for us to form a group and enjoy our canals more fully while taking an active part in their upkeep.

Rights of Way

Please could all landowners and residents remember that all footpaths should be clear of obstructions for a metre. Horse tapes and vehicles are just as much obstructions as overgrown hedges, wires and locked gates. There are a number of unsafe stiles in our patch, please could we respectfully ask all landowners to check the state of the stiles and

make appropriate repairs or replacements if these are needed. In addition, with the growing season upon us, please remember to cut back any hedges or re-instate any overgrown paths. If you come across any damage or obstruction please let the Parish clerk know. On the positive side, the Rainscombe Estate have kindly installed a gate from Pound Lane to the path to the Giants Grave and leveled the ground making access easier, thanks to all involved. Nearly all of our stiles and footpaths are accessible and I think we all appreciate the effort that goes in to helping us enjoy our area.

Parish Walks

These stopped over the winter but were resumed last weekend and the intention is to hold them regularly over the summer. They are not strenuous but we do talk a lot and so they can be time consuming – please come for fresh air, exercise and pleasant company.

Current projects:

Bus Stop: The improvements to the bus stop in Wilcot were completed last spring. Many thanks to Councillor Fleet and to County Councillor Oatway, the one for instigating and pursuing the project and the other for helping gain funding for the project which will no include a bench.

Broadband: Improvements in broad speed have been seen in some areas and on some occasions in both Oare and Wilcot. However, in Oare the connection is not to the cabinet in the village but still to Pewsey exchange which at 1.7 km away. This means that for some people it is better not to invest in a fibre contract. If you are thinking of changing suppliers ask them for a clear indication of speeds you can realistically expect. I have got an improvement from about 2 mbps to 13.5 mps but upload speeds have not been greatly increased.

Phone signal: – Vodafone have now installed two sure signal boosters, one in Oare at the school and one in Wilcot at the village hall. Whilst these have undoubtedly improved signal for some residents the coverage is not universal and of course offers no improvement outside the villages. This is an issue we will have to re-visit with all mobile providers and Claire Perry since this was supposed to be one of her key issues for her constituency.

Other events and activities:

Congratulations to Wilcot which won the Best Kept small village award in Wiltshire area. The prize money will be shared equally between the Cricket Club and to the repair of the war memorial at such time as this takes place.

The cricket club have been highly successful in raising the money and building the cricket pavilion which was just in the planning stage this time last year. This is an amazing feat and congratulations to Jane and all her team. The club is now looking for some £4000 to install plumbing, electrics and furniture. Given the amount of youth work the club do for the whole area I hope they are successful

We have had a busy year for planning applications having reviewed over 20 applications.