

DODFORD WITH GRAFTON PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

Introduction

1. I am pleased to send you a copy of the Council's Annual Report. This sets out briefly what we have been doing in the previous financial year and how we have spent your money. It also indicates what our priorities are for the current year.
2. A new Council took office in May 2007 following the Council elections when we welcomed four new Councillors. They have settled in well and I would like to thank them for the contribution they are making to the parish. The roles and responsibilities of each Councillor are set out at the end of this document along with their contact details if you wish to contact them about parish matters.

Overview of Achievements

3. There have been a number of achievements over the last year as well as some frustrations:
 - The Council completed a final draft of the Village Design statement taking account of the comments from residents who attended the consultation morning in March 2007. However we are still awaiting comments from the District Council before making this generally available.
 - The Council has decided to review the parish plan which was completed in 2003. Councillor Griffin is leading a steering group to undertake this review and we are looking for volunteers to help us with this. We have successfully applied for and been awarded a Defra grant of nearly £1,000 towards the costs of the review. The aim is to take stock of what has been achieved, look at the priorities for the parish over the next 10 years or so, and identify what the parish council and others need to do to achieve our objectives. If you would like to get involved in this please contact Cllr Griffin or the Clerk.
 - The state of the roads in Dodford is a major concern. Despite repeated approaches to County Highways and a meeting with the relevant liaison engineer before Christmas little satisfactory progress has been made. However, recent changes in personnel at County Highways and a recognition there that the service and communication with parish councils have been unsatisfactory mean that the situation should improve this year. The Council will continue to press hard for improvements and regards this as a key priority.
 - In view of the Council's concerns about local roads, the Council has decided to join the Lengthsman Scheme. The Council will be employing a Lengthsman who, whilst he cannot repair the roads, will be undertaking tasks like clearing blocked gullies and drains, cleaning signs, removing vegetation and siding out

footways. The costs of the scheme are largely met by County Highways who reimburse payments made to the Lengthsman up to a fixed amount for the year. We hope to have a Lengthsman in place by the beginning of June.

- Last, but not least, the Council decided to commission some new stationery which would have a distinctive logo for the Council and incorporate the Council's quality parish mark. We asked Dodford First School children if they would like to help us by designing a logo to reflect the character of the parish. We were delighted with the quality of the designs the children produced and are now having the winning design included on our stationery. The Council sent a book token to the winning designer and a donation for the school library to thank them for their help.

Planning

4. The Planning Committee has continued to be very active - meeting on 16 occasions during the year and commenting on 42 applications ranging from replacement windows to the recent major plans for the Dodford Inn. Councillor Caldicott continues to chair this Committee very effectively. The Committee aims to take a consistent approach to planning applications in line with the draft Village Design Statement. Our views do not always prevail, but it is gratifying that on a number of occasions suggestions made by the Committee for planning conditions (for example about materials to be used) have been adopted by the District Council.
5. An area of continuing concern is planning enforcement – which has not been pursued as vigorously as we would like by the District Council. Against this background a current shortage of enforcement officers has caused us further concern and we have written to the Chief Executive and Julie Kirkbride about this. The Planning Committee monitors planning enforcement (this includes for example whether planning conditions are being observed and whether planning permission has been sought for a development) on a regular basis so that issues do not go by default.

Finance

6. The Parish Council's main source of income is the precept – which was £7,500 in 2007/08. The Council's total income was £7,792. The Council's spending was £7,718 about £600 less than anticipated in the budget. This underspend was largely due to the fact that we spent about £700 less than expected on the May 2007 Council election – the election was uncontested since there were seven candidates for seven Council seats. The Council's main areas of spending are set out in the table below. As usual the Council gave maintenance grants to the Village Hall, for upkeep of the churchyard, and towards the costs of the parish magazine. Small grants were also given to Bromsgrove and District Citizens Advice Bureau and the County Air Ambulance.

7. The Council's spending for the year was made up as follows

Administration Costs	£5,143
Training	£292
Grants	£1,100
Audit	£191
Insurance	£264
Subscriptions	£324
Computer equipment	£404
Total Spending	£7,718

The Council started the year with about £7,700 in its reserves and ended the year with the same sum to carry forward.

Forward Look

8. Looking ahead to the current year the Council's priorities will be to oversee the review of the Parish Plan, to finalise the Village Design Statement and press the District Council to take account of it in deciding planning applications, to make effective use of our new Lengthsman and to get some real improvements to our local roads. We hope too that the latest plans for the Dodford Inn will be refused and that we will see the pub re-open this year.
9. Residents are always welcome to come to our meetings and feed in views and comments on what we are doing. Meetings take place on the third Thursday of the month (except August) at 7.30 pm – generally in the village hall. Parishioners are also very welcome at Planning Meetings which take place as and when required – notices of meetings are posted on the village hall notice board. We shall also be organising some consultation events this year to discuss the parish plan – so please look out for those and ensure you give us your views.

Vic Dawson
Chairman