

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

Notes for Donhead St Andrew Parish Council Meeting 14th September

Apologies that I am unable to be with you this evening due to a diary conflict; it is my intention to make your meetings my priority, but I mistakenly entered your meeting date into my calendar as *next* Thursday. These notes are my attempt to summarise the key points that I have made at other PC meetings in the last couple of weeks, together with additions.

1. The South West Wiltshire Local Highways and Footway Improvement Group met on September 6th.

There are three things to share with you:

- a. The application for a contribution of £237 towards the costs of the footpath gates was accepted. There was an expression of gratitude from the Chair (Bridget Wayman) to Donhead St Andrew for making a reduction in the estimated cost, and a suggestion of an additional source of volunteers to assist in installation: Seeds for Success. Along with the other requests that were accepted this needs to be approved at the South West Area Board (SWAB) meeting on 20th September, though that should be a formality.
 - b. The LHFIG budget for 2023-24 was – just - sufficient to meet all the requests (there is little left for further requests this year). So the need for Parish Councils to increase their contribution share was not raised as an issue at the meeting, though it will probably come up again at SWAB.
 - c. David Button made a presentation regarding road maintenance issues. He was blunt in reporting that the new contractor, Milestone, has been heavily criticised for poor performance during the first few months of the contract.
 - i. They have been short of equipment as well as of staff; there is a severe shortage of applicants. Wiltshire Council itself is also short staffed currently and finding it difficult to recruit. Milestone's contract runs for 5 years, extensible to 7 years. Button's opinion is that Milestone's winning bid was costed on the basis that it would run for the full 7 years, so he anticipates that management will work hard to improve performance henceforward.
 - ii. There have also been issues with the performance of Parish Stewards, made more difficult as a result of Milestone management's enhanced focus on safety that some Stewards considered hampered their freedom to do the job. If you have reason to criticise the work of the local Parish Steward I would encourage you to report the matter to David Button
2. A meeting of the Wiltshire Council Cabinet took place on Tuesday 12th. The papers related to the agenda are all available online at: [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday 12 September 2023, 10.00 am | Wiltshire Council](#) .

Beware before you go there: once again there are >400 pages of papers!

There are a number of things to draw to your attention:

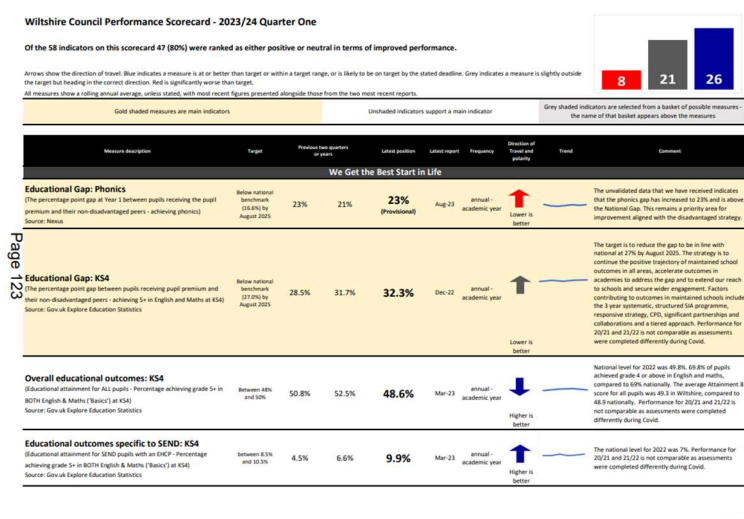
- i. Agenda item 7 (pages 55-108) is a review of the Capital Budget in the year to date. Included in there is the following section on highways (on p71):

"Winter 2022/23 has seen an unprecedented increase in potholes and carriageway defects. The hot dry summer followed by two prolonged periods of freezing road temperatures interspersed with significant rainfall has seen the condition of the highway

*network deteriorate more rapidly than predicted....., it is acknowledged....further investment in preventative maintenance is required at a local level to mitigate risks in the longer term, and particularly over the next winter given the unseasonable weather extremes currently being experienced. Following consideration of a range of options, an **additional investment of £10m is recommended for highway maintenance** focussing on preventative interventions. It is recommended Cabinet approve the allocation of £10m CIL funding for Trowbridge Leisure Centre to release the £10m approved borrowing.*

This is good news and I have already asked David Button who oversees routine maintenance in our area to start work on sharing with me his view of the most urgent priorities.

- ii. Agenda item 8 (pages 109 to 142) is a Performance and Risk Report prepared by the Chief Executive that is the Council Officers' own assessment of the Council's performance in different areas. This is page 1 of 11 pages:



- iii. Agenda item 9 (pages 143 to 162) concerns changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that applies to those in receipt of state benefits to adjust for changes since the introduction of Universal Credit. But tucked away in the text there are plans to take advantage of provisions in the Levelling Up bill currently going through Parliament that will permit increases in Council Tax on 2nd homes and empty homes. From 2025 2nd homes and home empty more than 3 years will be charged a 100% premium on Council Tax.
- iv. Agenda item 10 (pages 163 to 188) is a report on a Peer Review carried out by the Local Government Association on the performance of the Planning Department. I would draw attention specifically to paragraph 9 of the Executive Summary, and recommendations 12 & 13

9. The council recognises that customers of the planning service do not always receive a good level of service and that customer service is not consistent. Feedback from town and parish councils was mixed. Early support for neighbourhood plans was welcomed but there were frustrations with current resource constraints in relation to supporting neighbourhood plans and lack of ability to speak to case officers in relation to planning

applications. We felt that increased training and engagement for town and parish councils could benefit Wiltshire Council as well as the towns and parishes by ensuring a better shared understanding of the challenges that the respective councils face in relation to planning matters.

Recommendation 12: Improve training for councillors and for town and parish councils including regular planning updates, lessons learnt, site visits and webinars.

Recommendation 13: Better use existing mechanisms for communicating with town and parish councils about planning matters – area boards, town centre partnership boards, monthly town and parish council meetings.

- v. Agenda item 14 is a review of the School Places Strategy (p 229-392). After a preamble of the pressures overall there is a review of each locality. There are no great changes in our area – there is no significant pressure to increase the schooling provision. But I you have any interest in this, take a look at pages 363-365.

Please give me feedback on these or any other matters you would like to bring to my attention.

P.S. I should have mentioned the consultation on proposed revisions to the Wiltshire Plan which starts later this month.

The consultation for the Wiltshire Local Plan begins on **Wednesday 27 September**, with in-person event being held across the county to enable you to find out more and have your say. We are holding 16 drop-in engagement events at libraries and leisure centres around Wiltshire and a live webinar-style event on **Tuesday 10 October** on Microsoft Teams.

The online session will feature a presentation, followed by an opportunity to ask questions.

The in-person events are informal drop-in sessions where you can meet officers and find out more about the Local Plan and how to respond to the consultation. The opportunity for residents of Donhead St Andrew is on **Wednesday 4 October from 3pm to 7pm at The Nadder Centre, Weaveland Road, Tisbury SP3 6HJ**

I'd encourage anyone with an interest in the long term evolution of the County to go along.

Best wishes,
Dick Budden

Councillor Richard Budden
Wiltshire Council
E: Richard.budden@wiltshire.gov.uk T: 07944 640 900