

Dear Parish and Town Councils

December is here and the end of the year draws ever nearer.

This Newsletter reflects on the last year and what has happened.

The months seem to slip by so fast and it is good to spend a few minutes just considering all those changes and successes.

Grass cutting

I am sure you remember the challenges of grass cutting in 2014 and 2015. I certainly do and I have not missed the newspaper and radio articles highlighting the long grass in some parts of the county.

In 2016 The Landscape Group, now known as Id Verde, took over the provision and we saw an immediate improvement. The council invested extra funding to ensure more cutting was undertaken and grass maintenance throughout the year ran smoothly. Regrettably the papers lost interest, as I would have liked to have seen some positive stories around how successful the new arrangements were.

Litter Collection

The amount of litter we collect continues to increase. As I write this Newsletter we are just completing another litter pick of the A303 and the A36. If you remember these roads used to be cleaned by Highways England who ceased litter picking a couple of years ago leaving it to Wiltshire Council. Needless to say without any transfer of funds and these high speed roads cause specific problems for us. My hand has only just stopped shaking from signing the near twenty thousand pound invoice just for the traffic management to permit the litter collection for this month. The council spent an additional £500k (not including traffic management or the litter collection of amenity areas) on litter collection this year. Undertaking more litter picking could be seen as a success, but my New Year's wish will be that people stop dropping the litter in the first place.

Community Events and Participation

This has been a year of major achievements. There were simply so many new initiatives and success. Regrettably too many to list here, but just a couple of comments on a few activities, I trust this will represent you all and I thank everyone for all that was done this year.

The 'Clean For The Queen' has to have been the biggest community litter picking event ever in Wiltshire. It was simply fantastic to see all those volunteers working so hard and the improvement they brought to Wiltshire.

The work of the Chippenham BID and Salisbury BID with their street cleansing initiatives and all those other events are an example of how businesses can get together to bring real improvements to their areas.

I always feel I should note that I have not forgotten all those long established services provided by the rural businesses. Where litter bins outside of rural shops have always been provided and continue to be in the future. Your hard work is fully recognised.

Britain in Bloom, Keep Britain Tidy etc. events run and delivered by the local community illustrate just how committed Wiltshire residents are in caring for their environment.

We also cannot forget all those local community groups that week in and week out undertake amenity activities maintaining their areas.

The Parish Steward Scheme

This year saw the reintroduction of the Parish Steward Scheme, following three years of its absence. Brought back at the demand of the town and parish councils I was delighted to see this major investment in the provision of this local priority discretionary service. When so many councils resort to providing statutory level services I feel it illustrates the commitment of Wiltshire Council has in supporting its local communities in delivering their priority issues.

The Public Convenience Service

I have a big thank you to all those local councils who have provided their public conveniences historically. But this year I obviously also have to thank those council's that have taken on facilities previously provided by Wiltshire Council.

I recognise the challenge this caused you, but this has to be a major success. The transition to a new county wide provision of public toilets was never going to be easy, but through all your hard work and cooperation it was possible. I wish you all well with the provision in the future and I have noted that many of you are already investing heavily with improvements.

Play Areas

The council has seen many play areas transfer, or start the transfer to the local council this year. Likewise I thank you all. Special note is needed for Warminster Town Council with their considerable investment in the newly transferred Park. The investment and ongoing maintenance of this park illustrates why these areas are simply better provided by the local town and parish councils.

Community Area Transfers

The Salisbury City Council Memorandum of Understanding has been signed. The size of the proposed transfer is something to be seen. The opportunities for the City to bring real improvements to their area is an exciting prospect. The City Council have a proven record of providing amenity services and I personally look forward to seeing all the new improvements. It is a major achievement to have gotten this far so quickly. I believe the benefits of providing amenity services locally offer a real opportunity for local priorities to be delivered. This year has been a success, next year I am sure will be even greater.

We can now move onto the other CAT areas and ensuring a county wide opportunity for delivering local priorities.

Town and Parish Council Support For Wiltshire Council Services

My thanks to Devizes, Chippenham, Melksham, Pewsey, Salisbury and all those other councils that provided 'top up' services in their areas. This delivered higher levels of provision and I fully acknowledge that without your direct funding these higher levels would not have been possible. It does show that by working together a countywide base service can be delivered, which can then be supplemented by a local service level agreement meeting the priorities of that community. As funding becomes ever more challenging, these types of arrangements can not only maintain services, but bring improvements where they are needed.

I can list numerous other examples of how improvements are happening in Wiltshire. I fully acknowledge that most of these would not have been possible without the support of the Wiltshire community. But as I look forward to the New Year, I see my Highway and Transport Service being in a stronger position than it has been for many years and that the ever enlarging community engagement agenda is delivering real improvements throughout Wiltshire.

I look forward to 2017 with some anticipation. I know there will be considerable challenges, but I have learnt over the last few years that the Wiltshire community is as strong as ever and that together there will be ways to bring improvements, even during financially challenging times.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Philip