

Toller Porcorum Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting – May 7th 2008

Chairman's Report

This is my first report as Chairman, and my first year as a councillor in Toller Porcorum. As Chairman I have 3 main duties to perform: 1) to give a report of the council's activities over the past year, 2) to make sure that the activities of the council are legal – and in this respect we are a most law abiding council! Should I have any queries I have 2 sources of help, firstly, the DAPTC (Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils), and secondly the small tome entitled 'Local Council Administration' by Charles Arnold-Baker. (Recommended bed time reading!!).

My third duty is to run an orderly meeting and in so doing keep my eye on the clock – we try to complete business by 9pm., and to ensure that all councillors have their say, expressing their opinions freely.

Referring back to the DAPTC, I am grateful to David Webb, the former Chief Executive who was always most helpful, whether on the telephone, in person, or by emails. I would like to include in my thanks a mention for his secretary Vanessa who has always been most helpful and prompt with her responses. Unfortunately David retired at Christmas and his role has been taken over by John Parker who I know will be just as helpful in the future.

To this end I would like to thank my fellow councillors for all their work, time, commitment and enthusiasm over the past year. The council has met 6 times – and although the meetings seem to come round very quickly, their actual infrequency makes for slow administration, many items are carried over for further action to the next meeting, and sometimes this does create an air of frustration!

My fellow councillors' enthusiasm can be measured in 2 ways, one by the lengths of our meetings and the discussions that ensue, and secondly by their record of attendance – there have only been 3 apologies for absence during the year.

I am also most grateful to County Councillor Peter Gregson – who has given up time in his busy schedule to attend our meetings on 4 occasions and thanks also to District Councillor Nick Patmore of West Dorset District Council, who has given up his time to attend on 2 occasions. Their support and guidance has always been most welcome. It is also very reassuring that we are represented in this way from higher levels of local government.

While I am in thanking mode – I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my Vice Chairman – Cllr Judy Miller for her wise guidance on all matters local, and to the council’s clerk Mrs Shelley Collins – who efficiently deals with administration: accounts, budgets, insurances, letters, telephone calls, emails, agendas and minutes. I would like to thank them both for their time to attend extra meetings to plan agendas.

I also wish to thank Mr Mike Boardman for being our auditor. Mike has attended a number of meetings as a member of the public, and given his time freely for carrying out this work.

Representatives

Cllrs Goodwin and Miller have been DAPTC representatives. Our Village Hall representatives have been Cllrs Miller and D. Billen. Cllr Janet Knowles volunteered to take on responsibility for footpaths, working with the Footpath Officer Tara Hansford.

Mr Paul Comer and Mr David Walbridge have continued as the parish’s emergency contacts. To my knowledge they were called upon once in the Winter, and I would like to express thanks for their work, I was there to witness part of the action – and was most impressed that despite a broken leg and in plaster, David was still willing to oversee the filling of sandbags!!

Summary of actions over the past year

1. In June we welcomed onto the council Mrs Janet Knowles as a co-opted member, making the council up to 7 members.
2. The Revised Code of Conduct was the first piece of legal legislation to understand, approve in terms of accepting its contents and apply in all future meetings. This took a number of hours of private study by all councillors, as

well as time at the June and August meetings. We had until October to adopt the code. To summarise, it detailed 10 Principles of Public Life, namely: selflessness, honesty & integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, personal judgement, respect for others, duty to uphold law, stewardship, and leadership. A lot of the content was common sense and the type of behaviour one would expect from someone involved in public life. One of these 10 principles stated that we had to declare personal interests – especially anything included within the content of agendas. This also included the legal requirement of any gift or hospitality over the value of £25 made to any councillor. Sadly, we have had no such declarations all year!

3. DAPTC are part of a national pilot scheme to boost communications and efficiency within local government to equip parish councils and village halls with computer, screen, and internet connections. This council took up the offer and were included in the phase 2 installations. We now have this equipment at the Chairman's home, as our clerk is fully equipped on line, and I believe, wireless as well! The placement of the equipment at the Chairman's home was a council decision, and the Chairman pays the council for the connection. There are no costs for the council.
4. Through DAPTC we have had the opportunity of attending courses for the clerk, Chairman and councillors. Peter Davies has attended one councillors' course, he also attended the NALC conference on our behalf. The Chairman has attended 2 Chairmans' seminars at county hall.
5. We have discussed the possibility of having a village website run through the parish council. I have to thank Cllr Peter Davies for all his time investigating this matter. He has experienced a number of frustrations with this initiative mainly through finding a reliable body to host the website. I must thank Mr Don Bowman for his support and advice, and his offer of using his expertise to host the website locally. This remains a possibility. At council we have spent time discussing the contents of a village website, in terms of pages for local groups, overall content and access. We remain excited by the possibility, and will continue to press ahead with this venture.
6. In February, we held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the possibility of compiling a parish plan. The meeting was held at the Chairman's house, and Cllrs Miller and Davies as well as the clerk met with Mr Simon Thompson

from Dorset Community Action. At the April meeting it was unanimously decided to invite Simon to this Parish Meeting. Simon is here tonight to explain what is a parish plan, its advantages for the community, and how it is devised.

7. Regarding footpaths, we invited Tara Hansford to give the council a presentation on Rights of Way. This included the maintenance and upkeep of footpaths. As a council we are grateful to Tara for her support, and to Cllr Knowles for being our footpath representative. Very recently we had a member of the public mention to a councillor that garden rubbish had been dumped in the path behind Church Mead. This was discussed at council, and a working party was organised to clear it. We are very grateful to the villagers who gave up their time to clear away the mess. They have all been thanked formerly by the council.
8. Since last Summer we have been in frequent contact with the highways department over the junction at the top of Toller Hill with the A356. The lack of visibility at this turning is a real danger, particularly with the restricted view towards Maiden Newton in the growing season. We did manage to get the hedge cut and grass cut, but in the long term, during the growing season, when plants gather round the telegraph pole restricted visibility will remain a real danger. The council has even looked into the possibility of having the telegraph pole moved. The costs are too high and could not be managed on our present precept, but we shall continue to pursue the matter during the coming year.
9. Cllrs Penny Goodwin and Debbie Billen have become involved with the Greenwood Tree Project, attending a course, and they have taken on a responsibility to survey and map veteran trees in the parish, as a contribution to the project.
10. The council has been active in improving, what has locally been called 'The Track'. The clerk was involved in contacting all the landowners to request that they cut back the plant growth, which had almost changed its character to the extent that it was likely to be renamed 'The Tunnel'! The track surface has deteriorated recently, particularly at the end nearest the church, and we continue to pursue this matter with the Highways Department.

11. At our February council meeting a member of the public representing the local group 'Save our Swan' (S.O.S.) requested support from the council in terms of us writing an open letter to support their actions in their aim of re-opening our local public house. The council approved this and S.O.S now have this letter on file.
12. To conclude I list a number of other actions approved by the council. We have commented upon 16 Planning applications; liaised with Mr Martin Wilson to carry out a number of jobs to improve the appearance of our village – and, latterly, have compiled a list of jobs that we would like him to carry out continually through the year. The council has been in regular contact with the Highways department over the condition of roads, drains, including a drain cover adjacent to Mr & Mrs Cheffy's farm. The salt bins were filled, and the Cattistock Hunt were contacted requesting that their vehicles did not block the local roads in future.
13. Finally the audit was carried out by Mr Michael Boardman (mentioned earlier), and was then forwarded to the external auditors. Everything was found to be in order.

As my closing remark, I would like to say that Mrs Jennifer Rolfe, the former Chairman of Toller Porcorum, in her closing remark that was minuted last year, said, 'To the new council, keep up the good work and I hope that you will continue to ensure that the best interests of the village are upheld'. I hope that all on the electoral roll will feel that we have done this, but also that electors feel that you have a council who is responsive, committed and keen to embrace local and national initiatives to the extent that our future decisions, and use of your monies, will not only be used to better our lovely village, but also to strive to build a stronger sense of community among us.

With this as an intention I wrote to the representatives of 12 village groups, inviting them to this meeting to summarise their groups' activities, as I feel we should be mindful, as a council, of the aims of other local bodies, in the hope that we can support them when necessary, but also to engender a sense of community that is becoming more and more important in our present political and economical climate.

I close by thanking my fellow councillors and Mrs Shelley Collins, Clerk to the Council, for all their support, time and enthusiasm, and I look forward to being involved in our work on behalf of our community in the coming year.

David Ennals,
Chairman,
Toller Porcorum Parish Council.

May 7th 2008.