

Report of the Environment Working Group at 10 February 2021 – Submitted to Councillors

Introduction

2021 begins with the incoming President requiring that the United States rejoins the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and with the United Kingdom holding the delayed The COP26 summit, which will bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. These global initiatives make a real difference to the state of our environment, but grass-roots action continues to make a major contribution to care of our environment and to the development of community commitment and to local initiatives.

Council Environmental Policy

The Working Group has not identified any breach of the Council's Environment Policy and submits that the Council has abided by its Commitment and the Principles set out in its Environment Policy.

The Working Group has visibility of environmental matters in Wilsford, but looks to participation by one or more representatives from Charlton St. Peter in order to cover the entire interest of the joint Parish Council.

Matters Arising

Conditions of Pandemic-inspired lockdown have curtailed environmental initiatives, mostly due to the inability of working parties to gather under mandated restrictions, but the following matters are noted and recorded, many of which the Parish Council will already be aware of:

Roadside Litter – Debris from materials blowing off the open back of contractors' vehicle travelling along the A342 is carried by prevailing winds from the south-west towards the two communities, ending up in hedges and ditches on the edges of the villages. The debris from convenience foods (cigarette packets, coffee cups, drink cans, crisp packets, sweet wrappers) is found in hedgerows along the two access roads between the village and the A342.

Debris from traffic passing along the A342 will in time collect along the hedges recently planted by Wilsford Manor Farm and may require working parties to clear. The scale of development throughout Wilsford has drawn in considerable numbers of contractors, whose litter from convenience refreshments is scattered along our road verges.

- **Counter measures** – The Parish Council might remind residents engaging contractors of their responsibility to address the matter to contractors and to hold them responsible for their actions and for remedying roadside litter.

Roadside Damage – The verges along roads accessing Wilsford and the verges alongside the village street are subjected to damage every week by heavy vehicles. Damage has been observed to be caused by trucks transporting heating oil, construction materials, landscaping and gardening materials, bulk woodchips, by couriers and even by residents' cars. They cause damage ranging from gradual erosion, to compaction and to destruction of drainage gulleys.

- **Countermeasures** – The net effect is caused daily by traffic serving the needs or demands of residents and preventative action is a matter for residents and, in consideration of the range of deliveries and to most households, for all residents.

Environment degradation – Change to the built environment causes change to the environment, whether positive or negative. Impacts that may not be immediately obvious to the landowner/householder or Planning Applicant. Impacts include light pollution (that from development in Larkhill, Amesbury and Swindon, for instance, is a wholly unnecessary intrusion for us and our wildlife), loss of habitat for amphibians and for birds, changes to drainage and run-off into ditches and water-table.

Applications to Wiltshire Council for planning permission will in most cases consider environmental impact, to a degree, but there is need for greater focus on impact;

- **Counter-measures** - The Parish Council might give greater weight to environmental aspects of development when commenting to Wiltshire Council on planning applications.

Rights of Way & Surface Condition – These routes constitute a community amenity and provide valuable opportunity to roam in comparative safety through the winter and during lockdown. They promote feelings of physical and mental well-being. They inspire joy, but their treatment also provokes criticism.

Efforts are made by the community to maintain the surfaces of rights of way and to enhance their appeal through the planting of trees and snowdrops, all with landowner consent and through community action and funding. Unfortunately, unsympathetic planning of essential agricultural maintenance has recently caused such damage to some pathways as to render them unusable to residents and at a time when they most need safe walking space during the lockdown in winter months.

- **Counter-measures** - The Parish Council may remind landowners, and through them any contractors involved, that inconsiderate planning has consequences, that the outcome should not be ignored and that damage should be ameliorated. A community-wide e-mail from landowners planning works likely to disrupt or obstruct rights, setting out proposed activity and amelioration would be helpful.

Rights of Way & Obstruction - Efforts have been made by the County Council to improve access along the Bridle Path between Cuttenham Farm Bridge and North Newnton (and Charlton St. Peter). This involved cutting back obstructive overgrowth and this has been done in an environmentally sympathetic manner.

- The Parish Council might encourage further efforts on the stretch from that right of way into Charlton St Peter.

Reporting Damage / Obstruction - The recent marking of holes in the surface of rights of way, with yellow/black flags and by persons unknown may be sensible, except that these have themselves proven to be an obstacle to pedestrians in the dark hours and have caused legitimate agricultural traffic to avoid them and to damage the edges of tracks and vegetation.

3

The unilateral placement of any sign or unnatural material on a right of way may be for good reason, but where the reason and identity of persons involved are unknown to the landowner and Parish Council, and where signs themselves create new risks then the signs may become additional hazards and constitute litter.

- **Countermeasures** – The Parish Council may seek to establish a dedicated e-mail address for the public to report issues where rights of way, whether these are roads, bridle ways or footpaths or their environs. The Parish Council may then take appropriate action.

Rights of Way & Spoiling – Efforts to maintain the surfaces and enjoyment of rights of way have been compromised by the owners of four-legged animals. Dog shit (small dogs may ‘poo’, but large dogs definitely ‘shit’) is a threat to health. Anyone who fails to clear up after their dog can be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice of up to £100. Horses that are exercised when surfaces are damp ought not to be ridden at more than a walking pace in order to protect the surface for pedestrians. Where (turf) surfaces are cut up during the winter months, the damage continues to inconvenience through the summer months as the divots harden.

- **Countermeasures** – The Parish Council might remind animal owners that inconsiderate action has consequences for the wider community and that rights of way are for the enjoyment of the entire community. “You who do this know who you are, and so do we”.

Summary

The Wiltshire Life magazine Award for the Conservation Project of 2020, is recognition of the efforts and attitude of this community and, overall, it may be said that the community has demonstrated a commendable level of responsibility towards the environment.

The Parish Council has an important role as a focal-point for the reporting of and for the consequent discussion of issues arising in connection with environmental management.

The community has a responsibility to avoid, prevent, report and remedy environmental abuse. Notwithstanding community efforts towards environmental responsibility, it is unfortunate that at the present time, analysis shows that landowners, contractors, residents commissioning civil works, horse riders and dog owners are collectively contributing to environmental degradation. Yes, that includes almost everyone! In short, we are degrading our own environment and our enjoyment of it. We are individually and collectively responsible for reversing this trend.

For the **Environmental Working Group**
Parish Council of Charlton St. Peter & Wilsford