

From the Parish Council



As predicted we are back in a second lockdown. Some things are the same as the first but there are some differences. One difference this time is that our playgrounds remain open. The Covid 19 rules though still remain and it is most important that not only in playgrounds but everywhere, we keep to them. We must also, as before, look out for one another, be aware of who may be isolated and help where you can. Remember the Winchester City Council Helpline Number for Covid 19 is: 0333 370 4000.

2 December may bring an end to the present lockdown but may not. If it does, there are still likely to be rules, restrictions and advice. Please follow them, we need to avoid the mistakes of last summer.

Work on the river between Cow Down and the bridge at Itchen Abbas, on the SSSI on the north bank and in the adjacent field has created a great deal of interest and comment. Firstly, please remember that the river, the SSSI and the adjacent field are all privately owned. Any decisions are the responsibility of the owners, their tenants and those who advise and carry out work for them. In the case of the SSSI and river which is both an SSSI and a Special Area of Conservation, there are legal requirements to see they are properly maintained.

The Parish Council's role not only in this case but in general, as part of its remit as a locally elected body, is to engage with residents and groups on a wide range of issues, to represent the Parish and the people who live in it, to respond to their enquiries and investigate their concerns. We therefore, realising the significant interest and the feeling for more information, requested a Fact Finding meeting with the owners and their expert advisers. This meeting was held (by Zoom) with a small number of Councillors asking the initial questions with all present following with their input. In the words of one of the Councillors who took part in the meeting "it was really valuable, really informative and helped my knowledge and I wished that everyone in the Itchen Valley could have heard why the restoration project is so important and why we need to protect the SSSI." When the record of this meeting was agreed by all who attended, it was

circulated to all the Parish Council and discussed at our November Full Council Meeting with several members of the public attending.

At the end of that discussion it was agreed to send a letter to the owners expressing the Parish Council's views, concerns and proposal for ways in which we might be able to help. In brief these are: we see the need to protect and restore the river and the SSSI and support the long term goals to improve them but also recognise concerns within the community. We are offering to work with the owners and their associates to help with communications and education, by signage, information boards, promoting talks and guided walks, we will try to increase the number of bins available for collection of litter and encourage car parking at Couch Green. We understand the need to protect the public from trees near the river bank that are in a dangerous condition. However, there is concern over the present fencing plan and we would like reconsideration of a more equitable solution to the current proposal. A general observation to make regarding the above and other events in the past, such as when some of the bus shelters were replaced, is the way a small number of people have spoken in an aggressive manner and verbally attacked those who are carrying out the work. This is wrong and not helpful. The workers are carrying out the tasks they have been given. They are in a vulnerable position, are not the ones who have made the decisions and are unlikely to be able or have the time to give a full explanation. Therefore, when talking to them, please be polite and friendly, do not waste their time and if you need to find out more, please ask one of your Councillors. We may not have all the answers immediately but if not, we do our best to find them out for you. Please ask us directly by email, telephone or even a letter. As has been said so often and written even more often before, the Parish Council is not permitted to post answers to your questions on the Itchen List. Meanwhile other Parish Council work continues. Budgets for next year are in preparation. Plans are being discussed by our Environment Committee. Please see the separate article on page 13 of the Itchen Valley News, December 2020, regarding allotments.

Once again we had warnings of travellers heading this way and closed the car park at Couch Green. It has now been reopened. The barriers there are in need of repair and on the other side of the bus shelter the notice board fell over. Its posts had rotted. Given a bit of time and a spell of dry

weather it will be put back up. That may be an in-house DIY job. One frustration has been to see the road drains near the Village Hall in Itchen Abbas cleared and then to see them blocked again by debris from a burst water main in Northington Road, not for the first time either. Debris that did not find its way to block the drains ended up all over the road. And so life and events in the Valley go on. From all the Parish Council we wish you a Happy Christmas and look forward to an interesting New Year. We may have to plan for the worst but let's hope for the best.

Patrick Appleby