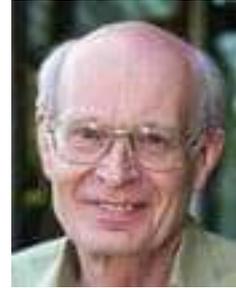


From the Parish Council



Once again we are in lockdown. With the new variant of the Covid 19 virus transmission rate being seventy percent higher, we must keep to the rules, especially wearing masks, not mixing and keeping our distance when outside. Our local neighbourhood groups are well established, and thank you to all who run them, but there are gaps, people who may have become more vulnerable or isolated and remember those who have recently come to live in the Valley. Please keep a lookout for these people. For those who need special help please see the information provided in the report from our County Councillor Jackie Porter on page 19 (IV News February 2021).

With the uncertainty as to when lockdown will end and what restrictions may be in place afterwards, it has not been possible to fix a date for a Litter Pick this spring. We will have to wait and then act on any guidance given by the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign who oversee this event. In the meantime you can help when out walking by taking a rubbish bag and picking up litter on the way. Please be careful, wear gloves, use a litter picking stick if you have one and do not pick up anything that looks unsafe or too heavy. If you see any results of fly tipping, please report it using the Winchester City Council website.

Following much thought and discussion, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wild Life Trust, which is the tenant responsible for the fields to the north of the river at Cow Down, has decided that it will not fence in the Right of Way (part of Footpath 31) along the northern boundary of the field adjacent to the river. Many will be pleased to learn of this decision and enjoy the uninterrupted view of the Valley floor and the river. However for this to remain the case it is dependent on everyone behaving properly. Please keep to the line of the fence and do not wander down the slope. Keep away from the trees and river bank. If there are cattle in the field, please make sure your dog is on a lead. Remember it is a right of way for people to walk along, not a cycle route nor a place where you are entitled to stop for a picnic. This may seem draconian but, if people fail to behave sensibly, it is possible that the present decision will be reversed and there will be no alternative but to install fencing. The other aspect of Cow Down is the work that has been carried out to enable the river to recover to a healthy

state. Having chaired the Fact Finding meeting held last year, it is clear that this work was needed. A great deal of money and effort has been put into it. The River Itchen is both a SSSI and a Special Area of Conservation. That means that its owners and everyone else has a duty to see that it is protected. The branches that have been fixed in the river's edge at Cow Down are an essential part of the restoration work. To allow recovery in this area it must not be disturbed. A decision from Natural England is awaited but the only way to see that it remains protected is for the bank to be fenced. However while it is not fenced people and their dogs must keep out of the river. Two reasons, first because of the damage they will cause to the restoration work and second because with the increased flow rate and restriction of the branches to access the river quickly, if a person or dog gets into difficulty, immediate rescue will not be possible and the consequences are likely to be serious. Staying with the environment, it is proposed to plant some trees at Couch Green this autumn. Please see Steve Percy's article on page 8 (IV News February 2021) for details about this project.

Footpaths remain a major topic for the Parish Council and the first meeting has been held to form a committee that will focus on this subject. Denise Rosewell has agreed to chair the committee and will become the Footpath Portfolio holder. Chris Jeffes will now concentrate on work to improve a number of specific paths in need of attention.

January is the time when parish councils have to set their budgets and precepts (the share of Council Tax they receive). Despite the difficulties and extra costs caused by the pandemic, it is pleasing to report that we have managed to keep the increase in precept to one percent. Keep safe and let's hope the vaccination programme over the next few months will get us somewhere back to near normal in the not too distant future.

Patrick Appleby
IVPC Chairman