

## **DYMCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL** **NEWSLETTER**

Spring 2018

Dear Resident,

This year the annual newsletter takes the form of an options report regarding the council's assets and amenities and the council requires your help to guide it in making decisions that represent the democratic view of its parishioners.

An options report was presented to full council in January, 2018 and an abbreviated version has been produced and can be found below. Anyone wishing to read the full version can access this via the council's web-site on [www.dymchurch.org](http://www.dymchurch.org) or you can request a copy by e-mail by contacting the parish council office on [dymchurchparishcouncil@btconnect.com](mailto:dymchurchparishcouncil@btconnect.com), or telephone 872708.

Would you kindly complete the enclosed survey and return it in the envelope provided to express your views on how you would like the council to act on matters regarding its assets and amenities. Two surveys are attached and more can be requested from the parish council office.

Kind regards,

***Roger Wilkins***

Chairman

### **OPTIONS REPORT**

#### **1. BACKGROUND TO DEVELOPING ASSETS AS FUTURE INCOME SOURCES**

The parish council's priorities are to promote the village of Dymchurch and the welfare of its residents (and visitors). It has an obligation to plan ahead, taking advantage of new opportunities as they arise, and in the process bequeathing a successful council and thriving village to its eventual successors.

In May 2016 the Assets and Amenities Working Group was tasked by the full council to produce a paper on potential asset acquisitions, conversions and sales over a period of ten years. The paper was discussed at its meeting in June 2016, with its recommendations presented to and accepted by the full council at its meeting in July 2016. It was agreed that nothing should be set in stone and that all options should be considered, including any arising through the process of public consultation.

#### **2. THE PRESENT FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE COUNCIL**

The Localism Act (2011) has markedly broadened the potential scope of what can be provided by a parish council. At the same time, the effects of continuing central government cutbacks and mounting financial pressures on local government are being felt everywhere, while more powers and responsibilities, currently administered at county or district level, will be transferred to town and parish councils.

Given that there is unlikely to be any corresponding increase in public sector funding available to parish councils, it follows that Dymchurch parish council (DPC) will need to find new, additional income streams if it is to fulfil its legal obligations and to maintain current service provision, let alone to initiate any future programme of new amenity provision.

### **3. REVIEW OF CURRENT ASSETS, EXPENDITURES AND INCOMES ARISING**

#### **Recreation Ground:**

The recreation ground is a site of over eleven acres and costs £13,000 per year to maintain. Costs include 18 grass cuts a year, weekly play equipment checks, an annual inspection, tree inspection and surgery, repairs and maintenance, CCTV camera maintenance and link to the police response, alarm maintenance, and pavilion utilities. The recreation ground earns no income as such.

#### **Pavilion:**

The pavilion is a decaying asset, and increasingly expensive to maintain and repair. It produces very little income, as it attracts increasingly few users, and currently none at all. Apart from the sum of £600 for electricity, water and waste water allocated for 2018/19, there are no further expenditures budgeted, and the assumption is that the pavilion, which is not fit for purpose, will not be used.

#### **Car Park:**

The parish council's decision to introduce pay and display machines in the Bull's Field car park has proved to be a very wise one. Income now usually exceeds £30,000 a year. Total budgeted expenditure for 2018/19 amounts to £11,500.

#### **Burial Ground:**

Annual income is minimal, averaging £300. The annual cost of maintaining the burial ground is £2300.

#### **Seawall:**

Budgeted expenditure in 2018/19 is £16,650. This sum includes leasing charges and fees, buoy maintenance, repairs, maintenance of the well-being equipment, alarm link and maintenance, CCTV monitoring and management, webcam, grass cutting, bench renovation and summer season children's entertainment. Trading licences generate an income of £6,000.

#### **Council Office:**

It is acknowledged that the council office is another asset that is barely fit for purpose, despite relatively recent cosmetic renovation and decoration. There are issues with access and toilets, and the building is certainly not Equality Act compliant. It is also somewhat small, and cannot accommodate more than a single employee and only a small number of members of the public at its council meetings.

#### **Other Parish Assets:**

Assets that require regular maintenance are: the war memorial, cannon outside New Hall House, three public notice boards, 52 public seats and benches that need wood preserve, preferably annually, the millennium clock, village signs, floral displays, and Christmas lighting.

There is little scope for increasing DPC's income from its existing assets. There might be a small increase in income if car park charges and recreation ground hire fees were raised, but to say the least it would be modest.

Previous experience suggests that bids for external funding – in particular, for the construction of a new pavilion – invariably result in disappointment.

It was agreed in July 2016 that DPC should establish a timetable over which any plan should be delivered and should then conduct research into the various options for asset development, using outside, professional expertise where necessary. DPC has therefore carried out feasibility studies, which have included contact with architects, the local planning authority (SDC) and Kent Highways to seek their views on small housing developments at the car park and/or at the recreation ground.

The involvement of local residents is critical, and the council's position has always been that no decisions will be taken until there has been extensive public consultation. This undertaking was stressed by the vice-chairman of the council in his address to the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2017.

#### **4. BULL'S FIELD CAR PARK**

There are potential income streams from developing up to six three-bedroom town houses on Bull's Field grass area or else four such houses and a new parish council office and meeting space at ground floor level, with two two-bedroom upstairs flats for rent. The rents would assist towards the running costs of the parish council office and the upkeep of the building.

The council would also like to resurface and mark out the present Bull's Field car park, though this is a prohibitively expensive option at present, with costs estimated at £160,000. Such an initiative could, however, be financed from part of the proceeds from the sale of any houses built on the currently unoccupied and unused part of the site. The resurfacing and reconfiguring of the car park would also provide as many as thirty additional parking spaces through a more efficient design, and thus generate a very valuable additional revenue stream.

A more immediate option might be to increase the parking capacity by converting the present grass land at Bull's Field to provide an extension of the present car park. This would create up to 30 additional spaces and therefore increase car park revenue by several thousand pounds a year. There would of course be an initial capital expenditure in levelling the ground, ensuring appropriate drainage capacity, covering the area with tarmac or similar material, and marking out the parking spaces.

Any development will also require the creation of a suitable route for fire tenders and refuse collections, as well as the removal and replacement of the present height barrier.

#### **5. THE PARISH COUNCIL OFFICE**

In 1969 planning permission was granted to convert the old, disused fire station to parish council offices, and in 1971 the parish council became the sole owner of the premises, at 13 Orgarswick Avenue. The deeds are burdened with unusual pre-emption agreements which the parish council is trying to resolve.

Once resolved, there will be an opportunity to sell the property resulting in DPC needing to find alternative accommodation, either temporarily (prior to buying new premises, in part from the proceeds of the sale) or permanently. For any period that the parish council has no offices of its own, it would need to rent a central location. Another possibility is an extension of the present building.

#### **6. THE RECREATION GROUND**

DPC's involvement with the recreation ground dates back to November 1927, when it was reported at a parish council meeting that six acres of land had been offered as a gift to be used for sport and recreation in Dymchurch, on the understanding that the parish council undertook the future maintenance and cost of laying out the field in a condition suitable for the playing of sport. Acceptance of the gift was agreed at a parish meeting in December 1927, though the cost of maintaining a recreation ground was contentious and subsequently led to a reference to such costs being made in

the 1929 conveyance at the Second Schedule (C) *'to use the council's utmost endeavours to secure that the property shall be so administered as to be self-supporting.'*

In September 1928, a group called 'the playing field committee' formally offered the land to the parish council subject to approval of the terms of the conveyance, which was then signed in March 1929. The effect was that since that date the recreation ground has been open at all times to sports clubs and to members of the public for their use 'by right'.

In 1933 a small plot of land was purchased to provide improved access to the recreation ground. In 1976, the parish council agreed to purchase additional land to extend the recreation ground to its current size of 11.6 acres, thus providing greater space for sport and recreation. In 2011, play equipment was installed, funded by the Roger de Haan Charitable Trust, at a cost in excess of £120,000, and largely through the efforts of the Dymchurch Parish Plan Action Group.

The recreation ground was specifically acquired on the understanding that it would be self-supporting, and that the ground and the pavilion should not be a burden to the ratepayer.

Recently, a local organisation, The Friends of Dymchurch Recreation Ground (FDRC), produced and circulated to some residents a shopping list of initiatives designed to increase the use of the recreation ground and to produce additional income. Their suggestions include, though are not confined to, boot fairs, outdoor concerts, open air theatre/cinema, food festivals, exercise classes and circuses. As was the case with the Parish Plan Action Group, DPC is of course happy to support community groups with their efforts to provide facilities and to raise funds if their projects are economically feasible and lawful. Such self-help is applauded, though funding cannot of course be provided by the parish council. In this context the decision on the part of the FDRC to apply to KCC for the recreation ground to be registered as a Village Green is perplexing, since the advice given to DPC is that should the application be successful it would then preclude the pursuit of most new initiatives on the recreation ground, as a village green is solely a place for exercise and recreation. DPC has registered an objection to the application on the obvious ground that all residents should have been formally consulted before such an application was submitted.

A more radical option for the recreation ground, and one that would be ruled out if the recreation ground did become a village green, is the eventual construction of about ten houses, with a mixture of two, three and four bedrooms, on approximately two acres of the recreation ground, near the current pavilion area. This enabling development would allow the parish council to pursue a planning application alongside a developer who would then pay a land value to DPC which has been estimated at over £1Million, which would provide for considerable improved facilities at the recreation ground and within the village, and would help to finance a new pavilion. While, naturally, no planning application has been submitted at this very early stage, there have been informal consultations with Kent Highways, SDC and Sport England, with the aim of establishing their views about access, flood risk, amenity provision, social housing and enabling development. The outcome of these discussions has been generally positive.

## **7. THE PAVILION**

In 1929, the recreation ground immediately became the home ground of Dymchurch Cricket Club, funding and a loan of £350 from Kent County Playing Fields enabled the Cricket Club to build a pavilion, which was completed in 1931. At different times, the recreation ground and pavilion have been used, among others, by cricket, football, hockey, bowls and tennis clubs. By 2015, however, Dymchurch football club had ceased to operate, while in 2016 Dymchurch Cricket Club merged with

another local Club and vacated the recreation ground and pavilion. Since this time no clubs or teams have used the recreation ground.

On several occasions DPC and other bodies have attempted to obtain external funding for a new pavilion, though without success. A Dymchurch Sports Association was formed in 1997 with a view to securing National Lottery or other funding, but nothing came of their efforts. In 2013, the council engaged a professional bid writer to write a business plan, and to make applications to funding bodies, including the Kent Cricket Board, the Kent Football Association, SDC, Sport England, the KCC Members Fund, the Big Lottery, the Inspired Facilities Fund and the Roger de Haan Charitable Trust. The rejection letters offer an insight into the failure to attract funding – inadequate evidence of sustainability (how enough revenue will be generated from users to keep the facilities well maintained); insufficient focus on providing a *range* of sporting and leisure or well-being activities for residents of all ages (particularly *young* people) and both genders; and guarantees that the pavilion would keep existing participants playing sport and continue to attract *new* participants, playing a range of sports. The absence of proposals for a gym, and for the promotion of sports such as squash, badminton, netball and basketball was also noted.

The pavilion is a decaying structure; it is currently used by nobody; a small fortune in maintenance and repairs has been spent on it over the years; a recent report has confirmed the existence of asbestos; it is nowhere near meeting current health and safety legislation, nor the various provisions of the Equality Act. The parish council has no option but to address the question of how to proceed. Total expenditure on the pavilion by DPC over the six financial years from 2011/12 to 2016/17 has amounted to £30986. This includes annual utilities payments, general maintenance, roof repairs, repairs after several outbreaks of vandalism, redecoration, repair of showers and boiler, CCTV installation, and unblocking of drains. The Council cannot afford to keep spending ratepayers' money on an asset which is not used.

Professional advice included, though was not confined to, the commissioning of an asbestos survey. The subsequent survey (September 2017) recommends that the asbestos found in various parts of the pavilion should be removed, and that access to the pavilion should be restricted until remedial action is carried out under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. At present, the pavilion is not used at all, and no provision has been made in DPC's budget to adopt the expensive option of removing the asbestos. In the highly unlikely event of the pavilion being hired out, internal notices warning of the existence of asbestos will need to be prominently displayed, while any user must have his/her own insurance cover as DPC's insurers do not provide cover as the building is unsuitable for hire, and does not comply with the required legislation.

The Dymchurch Cricket Club had an historical responsibility for the maintenance of the pavilion, but over the years the burden has instead been shouldered by the parish council. Estimates for the rebuilding of the pavilion vary, though it is understood that any reconstruction, depending on its size and facilities on offer, would cost a minimum of £200,000, and might indeed run to as much as £650,000. The ideal arrangement would involve the construction of a new pavilion enabling changing for all-weather sports and recreational activities, and used to support the multi-games area already located on the recreation ground.

It is sometimes suggested that the council should opt to renovate the present pavilion and, in so doing, ensure that it is more, though still not entirely, fit for purpose; its layout would mean that it would still not comply with all statutory requirements. This is scarcely a cheap option; estimates of the cost of renovation, to include the removal of asbestos, start at £35,000 and reach as high a sum as £125,000; the council does not have anything like the capital funds that would be required; in any event, it is not a sensible approach at a time when the pavilion remains unused; given the huge expenditure already

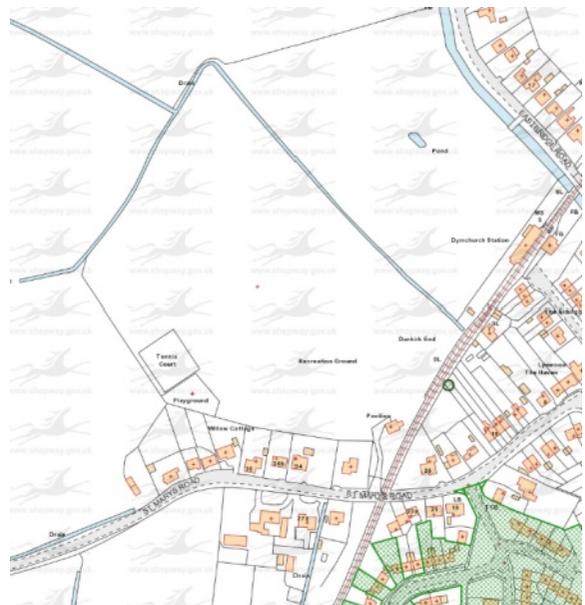
committed to repairs and maintenance in recent years, it would simply be a case of throwing good money after bad.

A more robust alternative is simply to demolish the pavilion: the cost of demolition has been estimated at £14897. This sum could, if necessary, be financed from DPC's capital reserves.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND RESIDENTS' SURVEY

The conclusions arising out of this Report are simply stated. In the present and projected future financial circumstances, the parish council is left with no option but to find additional sources of income. It has a right and, indeed, a legal obligation to explore a range of feasible options, and to then, over a period of ten years, act in accordance with any options that it has chosen.

The parish council is committed to full consultation with all residents of Dymchurch, and will be guided by their views. It must, however, be stressed that there can be no 'do nothing' option; in the absence of public support for creating new income streams, the inevitable result will be some combination of gradual reductions in local services, continuing and appreciable precept increases and the demolition of the pavilion.





## **SURVEY**

Please consider all the information contained in this Report and then return your completed form/s in the envelope provided. The parish council is grateful that you have taken the time to give your views.

### **QUESTION 1**

**Would you support the creation of additional car parking spaces in the Bull's Field car park?**

**YES/NO**

### **QUESTION 2**

**Would you support the construction of new houses on the unused area of the Bull's Field car park?**

**YES/NO**

### **QUESTION 3**

**With regard to the parish council office, do you think the council should sell the present building and relocate, or apply for planning permission to extend the present building?**

**SELL THE BUILDING / EXTEND THE BUILDING**

### **QUESTION 4**

**Would you support the construction of ten houses on the recreation ground as a means of financing the construction of a new pavilion and provision of improved facilities?**

**YES/NO**

### **QUESTION 5**

**What do you want to do with the present pavilion? (Please NUMBER in order of preference)**

- 1. DEMOLISH IT**
- 2. SUPPORT EFFORTS IN THE VILLAGE TO RAISE AN ESTIMATED £120,000 SUM NEEDED TO RENOVATE IT**
- 3. USE THE FINANCE FROM RECREATION GROUND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD A NEW PAVILION AND IMPROVE FACILITIES IN THE VILLAGE**

### **QUESTION 6**

**Which new amenities would you like to see in Dymchurch (please specify a MAXIMUM OF THREE)?**

Please provide your name and first line of address as verification that you are a resident of Dymchurch.

Name:

First line of address:

Return this form in the envelope provide by 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2018



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**YES/NO**

### **QUESTION 5**

**What do you want to do with the present pavilion? (Please NUMBER in order of preference)**

- 4. DEMOLISH IT**
- 5. SUPPORT EFFORTS IN THE VILLAGE TO RAISE AN ESTIMATED £125,000 SUM NEEDED TO RENOVATE IT**
- 6. USE THE FINANCE FROM RECREATION GROUND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD A NEW PAVILION AND IMPROVE FACILITIES IN THE VILLAGE**

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**Return this form in the envelope provide by 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2018**