

## **Community Engagement Meeting (3) – 16 September 2021, 7.30pm.**

(Meeting held virtually via Microsoft Teams)

**Present:** Cllr Alison Bennion, Cllr Matt Carter, Cllr Jodie Egerton-Parry, Cllr Tom Egerton-Parry, Cllr Peter Greenhalgh, Cllr Jill Houlbrook, Cllr Gary Hulmes, Cllr Mike Keenan, Cllr Nicki Poulton, Cllr Frank Samuel and Cllr Brenda Southward.

4 members of the public were present at the meeting.

**In attendance:** Suzi Bull – Proper Officer.

(Text in blue, additional information provided by the Proper Officer outside of the meeting).

Summary of topics raised by Upton residents with members of the Parish Council:

- Parish-wide survey
- Playing field drainage
- 'Green' issues
- Chemistry Pits
- Teen survey – pump track
- Youth club
- Next meeting

### **Parish-wide survey.**

**Q.** is the parish-wide survey (previously agreed by the PC) still going ahead?

**R.** Yes, the survey is in progress. A working party has been formed to begin to formulate the survey. The Councillor leading the project has some heavy work commitments and has been unwell.

The survey will help to determine medium term priorities and therefore spending plans for future years.

### **Playing field drainage.**

**Q.** is there any progress being made in draining the playing field?

**R.** The Parish Council is waiting for information to be provide by CW&C Council via a Section 19 report that is due to be published in early 2022. This is part of a wider survey area and not just concentrated on the playing field.

The football pitches have been identified under a 3 year Football Investment Programme. The next 3 year period is to start in 2022 and outline proposals will focus mainly on grass pitches. This programme is joint venture with CW&C Council and Cheshire FA. The QE II Playing Field pitches are included on the list for 2022.

### **Green issues.**

**Q.** CW&C Council has its 'Climate Emergency' project; does the Parish Council have anything similar? Has the Parish Council any plans to deal with green issues?

**R.** This topic will be included within the parish-wide survey to ask residents in Upton what their priorities are in terms of green issues.

The Parish Council is mindful of green issues and specifically included a heat source pump as a green way of heating the new Pavilion. Water sold in plastic bottles is now sold in cans or alternatively, a water fountain in the Pavilion is provided for refills. The Parish Council is to work in partnership with CW&C Council and Mersey Forest to create a small woodland area on the QE II Playing Field.

### **Chemistry Pits.**

**Q.** would the Parish Council consider investing in Chemistry Pits by way of providing some seating and play equipment? Also better maintain the wildlife area and erect some signage directing pedestrians to the area as part of an Upton walking circuit?

**R.** it was agreed that Chemistry Pits would benefit from some work to improve it; the wildlife corner needs to be 'cultivated' even though it remains 'natural'.

3-4 years ago, the PC tried to stoke up some interest in the area and a public meeting of local residents took place, to discuss forming a 'Friends of Chemistry Pits' group that would manage and plan some improvements. Unfortunately, local residents did not wish to take this further and the group did not go ahead.

The Parish Council's Communications Committee is currently looking at signage for the QE II site and will look into some directional signs for Chemistry Pits too.

At the time of the consultation with neighbours and local residents regarding Chemistry Pits, there was some funding available but after much discussion, it was decided (by the residents), that it was not appropriate to provide play equipment in an area that was largely used for dog walking (due to potential risk from dogs and dog faeces).

Some of the funding was used to improve and 'lift' the path so that it remains accessible throughout the year.

There is currently £1,200 in the budget for Chemistry Pits.

### **Engaging with the community.**

**Q.** the turn out tonight is disappointing; how can the Parish Council properly engage with Upton residents? Also, re the planned survey, how can the PC actively engage with residents to encourage them to take part?

**R.** the Parish Council attempts to engage with residents by way of the bi-annual newsletter, social media and the website – this is due to be redesigned shortly. Councillors engage personally with a lots of residents at community events such as the recent Picnic in the Park, when working at and visiting the Pavilion and QE II facilities, and being out and about in Upton.

Many Councillors are also part of other associated groups and working parties on a volunteer basis which also provides an opportunity for engagement.

With regards to actively encouraging residents to complete the survey, the Parish Council will use several platforms such as Survey Monkey, social media, website and the delivery of hard copies. Councillors will assist anyone who needs help with completing the survey and will make door to door calls to make this offer – this has already been discussed and approved by the working party.

**Q.** will the outcome of the survey inform next year's budget?

**R.** no. Budget setting for the period 2022/23 will commence in October; the survey will not be completed and carried out in time.

Again, the survey will help to determine medium term priorities and therefore spending plans for future years.

**Q.** would the Parish Council consider a 'panel' of residents for use as part of the consultation process? (similar to a testing panel for marketing purposes).

**R.** yes.

### **Pump track at QE II Playing Field.**

**Q.** the recent teen survey indicated that teens in Upton would like a pump track (an undulating cycle circuit) on the playing field. Is this likely to be provided. The long timescales for Parish Council projects is very frustrating.

**R.** Councillors understand the frustration with timescales. It is unlikely that a pump track will be added to the playing field in the short term, not least because of cost.

[Everyone becomes frustrated by the length of time it takes to initiate, plan and complete a project. Unfortunately, this is down to several elements by which the PC is restricted – governance: as a corporate body, major decisions \(especially where spending public money is involved\) may only be made at a formal meeting. 'Best value': as a public body spending public money, the PC has to ensure they look for 'best value' when appointing contractors. It takes time to source contractors and for them to provide quotes for work \(and then fit the work into their already full work schedules\).](#)

[Councillor / staff resources – someone has to drive every project. Sometimes there is simply nobody available to do this.](#)

### **Youth club.**

**Q.** what does the Parish Council know about how viable a youth club will be?

**R.** the current Upton youth club project is not a Parish Council one. The working party planning the new youth club is made up of professional youth workers, dedicated local volunteers and councillors.

The group has, with its experience, already identified that a youth club will be well received in Upton.

The working party applied for a £1,000 grant in 2019 which was approved and is being held by the Parish Council until it gains its 'Charitable Status' (much delayed by the Charities Commission's backlog of work post Covid).

The grant is a 'seed fund' to assist with getting the project started. It is acknowledged that considerably more funding will be required to set up, manage and run the youth club. There are many organisations to which the group can apply for financial support but not until its charitable status has been confirmed.

### **Next meeting.**

**Q.** how can the Parish Council and community encourage increased attendance at the next meeting?

**R.** what do you suggest?

**Q.** will councillors consider writing a 'pen portrait' of their interests and activities that will be posted on the PC website? Will councillors attempt to create a higher personal profile. Will councillors knock on doors to introduce themselves to residents?

**R.** some councillors already do some form of this; individual councillors will consider the requests.