

Hambleton Village Improvement Working Group (VIWG)

Report to Annual Parish Meeting (notes) May 2019

VIWG established early 2017 prompted by three connected factors which coalesced into the need to plan and monitor activities contributing to village improvements:

- Prior to the 2014 flood there was already established a long-standing objective to declutter the village of road signs and work towards a more visually attractive road signing policy. Post-flood this initiative gained new impetus.
- Then in 2012 there was the production of a Parish Plan which amongst other things signalled the desirability of several environmental improvements - but any progress on this front was impeded by the flooding.
- Finally there was the state of the village itself post-flood - not just the aftermath of the flood itself but the 18 months of flood alleviation and remedial works which while necessary and well-received caused a lot of disruption. So by the time all those were finished in 2016 the village was looking a bit shabby.

However, environmental improvements were always on the village's mind. The Annual Parish Meeting (APM) back in 2014 consisted of a series of workshops which formed an environmental assessment of the village - building on aspects of the Parish Plan this was the genesis of what would eventually become the Village Design Statement (VDS) - covering history, context, landscape and the built environment. (The VDS is by the way, now published in draft form with copies are available to view at this meeting).

One can begin to see that a process of continuity at work as since then the Annual Parish Meetings of 2015, 2016 and 2017 all focused on the needs and wishes of the village to enhance the visual and environmental aspects of Hambleton. Roads, village approaches by road, planting opportunities, road signs, street furniture - suggested improvements have come from all quarters - residents, officers and councillors alike. The Parish Meetings were used as a form of consultation and have helped guide the Working Group in its deliberations today.

Meanwhile, back in 2016, flood alleviations works continued. And even as works progressed the Parish Council (PC), now with a portfolio of possible improvements wished to flesh out a proposed programme of developments while allocating a budget heading to them. The council was already conversing with county council and district council officers about some works which could be linked in with post-flood road works. An example, achieved at no cost to the parish was the county's realignment of some traffic signage and removal of an unnecessary traffic calming measure. At the same time other improvements did have a cost but also directly involved villagers - one of the first achieved in this way was the very successful Green Man flower beds which I'll come back to.

Because of this project list, the VIWG was formed in 2017 to pull some of the threads together with a brief to prioritise, plan and research ways of implementing the list of suggested improvements. And remember this didn't come from nowhere - it evolved over at least three Annual Parish Meetings and consulting with residents as to their approval.

Working Groups are routinely established by Parish Councils but are not formal committees or sub-committees; they do not keep minutes but they report to the Parish Council and are answerable to them. They may be task-and-finish groups or ongoing as looking at specific projects or areas of activity and they may recruit lay members to sit on them. In this case the VIWG consists of four Parish councillors and two lay members of which I am one. We meet monthly with additional site or resident meetings from time to time which may only involve one or two of us.

As a working group we are relatively informal but we keep notes. The VIWG has no budget but we do operate and plan within the parameters of an agreed parish council budget line for environmental improvements with some individual costs allocated to it. We also look to see if proposed expenditure can be augmented by external grants - as with some projects it sometimes can. We research and then submit suggestions and advice to the Parish Council which endorses all expenditure. We may suggest a commissioning brief to include specifications - for example with road signs or the parish noticeboard. We may apply for grants on behalf of the parish council or the PC (the ultimate accountable body) may apply directly itself. Not all projects require group assessment; some which fall under the VI budget such as the War Memorial refurbishment or the new kissing gates are relatively straightforward and an individual councillor may take a lead on progressing them.

Importantly however, - and most recently this was the case with the proposed planters at The George (I'll also come back to these) we do consult directly with affected residents, to ensure they are on board and happy with proposals even if these had already received general agreement at a parish meeting.

When works are undertaken the PC may commission them from an external contractor/supplier; they may be undertaken by local residents or even undertaken by a local authority (or agency contracted to it). Works/capital items may be subject to obtaining several quotes in line with Parish Council codes and guidelines and the VIWG may seek these on behalf of the PC. When considering these: price, quality, ability to deliver on time, testimonials and ability to work to a clear specification are all part the process. Some projects are complicated due to landownership - e.g. a sign on a wall or a planter on public land. The landowner is often a local authority or the premises sometimes privately owned - so we liaise with the land/property owner about these.

The Green Man beds involved all three - local authority contractors (including the removal of adjacent redundant signs), a private contractor who did the planting design, and valiant members of the community (led by the Horticultural Society) in planting out and maintaining the beds. I don't know about you but whenever I drive or walk by those beds I think how lovely they are - even in winter. It's a relatively small project but one with great effect and appeal.

So here's a list of what's been achieved so far under the auspices of Village Improvements and by extension since early 2017 by the overview of the Group:

Projects achieved, undertaken, facilitated or supported to date:

- Green Man beds - these whether one walks or drive past them, are, to me always joyful, even out of season - they work well and attractive much of the year.
- Sign decluttering
- Finger Posts - roundel
- War Memorial refurbishment - led by Cllr Tony Higham - jointly funded with donations from private individuals and from St Peters & St Pauls Parochial Church Council (PCC)
- Kissing gates - still underway - led by Cllr Neil Mason - jointly funded through grant from Hampshire County Council (HCC) Access team
- Noticeboard - funded with contribution by Arts Society (which uses one panel area)

In pipeline or underway

- New/replacement street name signs - provide consistency and sense of place - see letter - these have received significant grants from both Winchester City Council (WCC) and HCC - require match funding.
- Village Entrance signs with Hambledon logo.

- Planters at The George - required, correctly, consultation and meetings with residents as to size, positioning and maintenance of the planters - important residents are happy but also we later found out, HCC would not give approval without it. Incidentally the proposed planting scheme will be by the same landscape designer as did the Green Man beds. Care and maintenance of planters will be included in the costings and forward budgeting.
- The Gardens landscape improvements - The Gardens came up several times at APMs and an outline landscaping proposal (same designer as Green Man beds) presented to WCC officers. The land is owned and managed by WCC who in turn consulted with tenants on two alternative landscape schemes. At the same time, a proposal (approved at an earlier Annual Parish Meeting) to site the village Christmas Tree at The Gardens where the phone box was is also under discussion. Southern Electric have said they will reinstate the power supply terminal (which used to serve the phone box) free of charge should a tree fixture point be agreed. Discussions are ongoing with this.

Proposed, planned or under consideration

- New bus shelter
- New/refurbished benches/seats
- Further planters/beds
- Wooden posts at Lotts Corner adjacent to pipe outlet and to match those on build-out
- Updated/republished village walk map booklet and leaflet - this has come under the VIWG umbrella. Liz Hall has carefully updated the leaflet by hand pending a reprint although the project is temporarily set aside. However, it could be a really worthwhile one considering the number of newcomers and visitors to the village over recent years and the revival of the pub and the Old Forge Tea Rooms.

As with the Hort. Soc. at the Green Man beds there are other village groups who may well play a greater part in developing or enhancing amenities. The new Men's Shed has expressed an interest in making containers and there may well be other projects down the line in which they could play a part so discussions have opened with them on a number of ideas.

In summary, the VIWG does not work in isolation and is answerable to the Parish Council which makes ultimate decisions about proposals and is also the budget holder. Its deliberations hopefully demonstrate one of process and continuity including regular checks and balances and consultative exercises with the ultimate goal of making the village a more attractive and environmentally appealing one for residents and visitors alike.

Mik Norman, May 2019

Members VIWG as at May 2019:

Councillors: Neil Mason, John Thornton, Sarah Wigley, Tom Woods

Lay members: Stephen Crew, Mik Norman