



Background Information on the Village Improvement Working Group and the George House Area Project

Over a period of time (approx 2011 - 2016) the Parish Council had been identifying aspects of the village that could be improved visually, to the benefit of both residents and visitors. Making the village more attractive is a worthwhile aim in itself, but it also brings subtle safety benefits as drivers show more respect for their surroundings when they are clearly cared-for. This culminated in the overwhelming support shown at the 2016 APM to increase the precept specifically to fund these improvements.

Subsequently, the Village Improvement Working Group was established to take this forward. That group identified dozens of issues, large and small, general or localised, that could be improved. Some were already underway or had been completed, for example replacing modern direction signs with fingerposts and the design and planting of the Green Man beds. Others have been initiated since. The improvement of the street name signs is underway. The improvements at the foot of Cams Hill are also in progress - the fence has been reduced in height and the plastic bollards replaced with oak. All that remains is for the new "Cams Hill" and "West Street" signs to be put in place.

The regeneration of the area at the foot of The Gardens is still at the discussion stage with WCC. This is a comprehensive plan which will see new planting (shrubs), re-paving the two quadrants, a new sign to replace the two present ones, a socket (hole) for a Christmas tree along with a power supply for lights, and moving the salt bin. The original intention was to install a bench seat overlooking the Down, but that would not be required if we can get agreement to site a new bus shelter there.

The area around the Old Forge Tearoom, the Green Man junction, and the foot of The Gardens are all focal points in the village which give a "sense of place" and can make the difference between the village being viewed as a "tumbledown, rubbishy place" (William Cobbett) or the jewel in the crown of Hampshire (Cllr John Thornton!). Another such place is the highway in front of George House. So, as with all the other key areas, the question was "what can we do to make this look better?" The Parish Council employed Green Zone Design to advise us, based on the enormous success of the Green Man beds (also their design).

The first plan was to place two large planters (three feet by ten feet) close to the carriageway, along the line of the existing bollards. That meant that one or two bollards were in the way while others then became an impediment to walking between the planters and the house. One view was that the bollards were no longer required as the planters would serve their purpose of keeping traffic off the area. George House residents felt that they should stay in case the planters were ever removed. So, the plan was to move the bollards to a position where they could protect the planters. This also had the advantage of them being symmetrically placed in keeping with the surroundings (not random as they are now).

That plan was approved by the Parish Council in October 2018 but delayed because we couldn't find anyone to move the bollards at a sensible cost. (We hadn't discovered JK Engineering then.) New ownership in George House suggested we consider alternative plans. With the planters now placed close to the building the bollards were once again required both to keep traffic off this piece of highway and to protect the new planters from traffic. In addition, they assumed a much greater prominence and thus importance in the overall aesthetic of the plan.

The old bollards are badly placed and would need to be moved. They are also (to many people's mind) nasty imitations of cast iron made from tube steel with mouldings stuck on (some of which have fallen off). The opportunity arose to provide new cast iron bollards within the same overall cost as the original plan thanks, in no small part, to having a more reasonably priced contractor in JK Engineering. (It's worth noting that it's very difficult to find contractors willing to undertake such small-scale work.) So the new plan was agreed in March 2020.

With this background in mind, the short answer to why it is considered necessary to replace the existing bollards is "because they are vital to the success of the overall plan". In other words, if it doesn't look good we've failed in our primary aim to make the area more attractive. And to leave the existing bollards as they are now would negate much of the benefit the new planters will bring.

Other options were considered: oak bollards (consistent with elsewhere in the village but not appropriate in this location); cast iron bollards with linking chains (vetoed by HCC); or move the existing bollards (ugly and broken, and HCC had no matching ones in the depot). So, new cast iron bollards were agreed to be the best option.

In late 2016, the Parish Council adopted a vision statement, following the vote at the APM earlier that year to support and fund village improvements. Inter alia that document had a purpose "... to record the Parish Council's commitment to improving the village environment for the benefit of all residents and visitors." The George House plan is one manifestation of that vision.

[Provided by Cllr John Thornton; Chair, Village Improvements Working Group.]