

Harberton Parish Lengthsman Project

A written update and proposal for the meeting of the Harberton Parish Council, 8th February 2022

Context

1. In 2019 the Parish Council began to build reserves to supplement Devon County Highways maintenance of drainage features in the Parish. This was as a result of the reduction of the number of Parish Lengthsman employed by Devon County Council and a reduction in the regularity of checks and associated maintenance throughout the year.
2. £7500 in earmarked reserves has been built up by the Parish Council to pay for labour costs required to increase the regularity of checks and maintenance of buddle holes in the Parish and to reduce the risk of flooding of properties in the villages.
3. In 2019 Cllr Waite with the support of Cllr Bowley conducted a survey of the buddle holes in the Harberton Parish in preparation to draft a contract for services. A map was drafted numbering the buddle holes and drainage features, with a report of the condition of those features. The Parish Council identified a number of higher priority buddle holes for regular maintenance due to the impact that build up of dead leaves and vegetable matter would have on properties downstream. This priority list was shared with Highways to support the DCC annual maintenance schedule.
4. In 2019 Totnes Town Council indicated an intention to create a new town centre maintenance position at the Town Council, proposing that could be possible for that employee to provide maintenance and lengthsman services to neighbouring parishes. When under discussion by the Parish Council it was agreed that subcontracting services through the Town Council would provide a streamlined solution for the Parish Council and should be pursued. Due to the impacts of the pandemic the Town Council did not appoint this maintenance role until 2021.

Paying for the services of the Totnes Town Council maintenance officer

5. Totnes Town Council has now been in touch with the Parish Council to confirm that both a Maintenance Officer and a Maintenance Assistant have now been employed and it would be possible for neighbouring parishes to pay to use the services of the Maintenance Officer on an adhoc basis.
6. The Maintenance Officer's services could be bookable by neighbouring parishes on one set day per week. Based on the Maintenance Officer's current rate of pay with on-costs plus wear and tear for tools Parish Councils would be charged a rate of £20 per hour, including travel time. The hourly rate would be reviewed every April when Town Council staff salaries are reviewed. Costs of materials required to undertake maintenance jobs would be in addition to the hourly rate, and how this would be managed would be agreed between the Parish and Town Councils.
7. The Maintenance Officer is currently undertaking Chapter 8 training to be able to work at the roadside. This is expected to be completed in March, but until this is complete any maintenance works cannot involve working at the roadside.

Proposal for Parish Council consideration

8. Cllr Waite and the Clerk met to discuss a proposal for the Parish Council's consideration. The Parish Council seek to book the Maintenance Officer for an estimated 14 hours over 4 of days beginning **March 2022** to undertake checks and maintenance of the buddle holes in the Parish:
 - o Using the map and report detailing 45 parish buddle holes
 - o Focusing first on the 10 buddle holes identified as being 'high priority' before working through the remaining mapped list in geographical groups, covering approximately 10-12 buddle holes at a time
 - o Undertaking any simple maintenance (i.e. removal of leaves and vegetation) with hand tools. Noting works undertaken through simple reporting and taking photographs of work done.
 - o Making a note of any works that would require specialist equipment, such as hiring a jet wash so that those works could be co-ordinated over one visit. In such circumstances the Parish Lengthsman reserve would pay for the cost of equipment hire.
9. The Parish Council would seek to book the services of the Maintenance Officer to undertake the same task in **November 2022** to clear buddle holes of leaves and vegetation after the majority of trees have shed their leaves.
10. The Parish Council would look to book the services of the Maintenance Officer in circumstances where there has been heavy rainfall and run-off may prevent effectiveness buddle holes and other drainage features. Booking the Maintenance Officer would be triggered by Parish Councillors and the Clerk noting impacts of heavy rainfall and bringing a proposal to a meeting of the Parish Council. It is most likely that this would be triggered by observations of the Flood wardens.
11. The success of the proposals above would be reviewed in January 2023 at the time of setting the annual budget, at which time it would be considered to continue with a similar arrangement in the another year, or consider drafting a contract for services and circulate for quotes/tenders.