

REPORT FROM ANSTY PARISH COUNCIL FOR 2015

BT Openreach work

At the southern end of the village BT Openreach workers power hosed their cabinets and pipes in order to insert fibre optic cabling. Unfortunately, they did not know that many years ago, Post Office workers put in an additional pipe to house telephone wires in Ansty which ran along half the length of the very steep bank down from the road up to the A30. This land belongs to the Manor. No permission was ever gained, no rental paid, nor wayleave was set up or paid by the Post Office to house this pipe containing some of the village telephone wires. After the power hosing, the workers seemed unaware that a subterranean cabinet halfway down that stretch of road would actually lead to water entering this perhaps 30 years old pipe. Under pressure the old joints burst, water exited at high pressure causing a landslip. It resulted in a piece of the pipe being shakily suspended for some metres above ground. They are supposed to lie supported in ground. One could read on it 'GPO', thus showing what it was. It put at risk the wires inside the pipe.

When we realised what had happened, we got council engineers to come out. They identified that it was the GPO pipe, said that it would be the responsibility of BT workers, who had been seen late at night some months earlier working on the edge of the road, after which they put up signs saying that there was a landslip and one had to avoid that area. There was no admission by them to Highways in Wiltshire that their activities had caused this problem.

We obtained the email of the BT Openreach CEO and told him of this problem. He immediately assigned one of his staff who came out to look at it with Mr Morgan. Initially he seemed really unsure what to do about it. He needed to ensure that wires to Ansty conveyed the telephone signals; the other was to stop the landslip and to prevent any others. This was difficult on the steep slope and concern arose from villagers and from the owner of the manor that the possibility existed of instability in the road, particularly if there were further landslips and possible dangers to vehicles and people using it.

There have been further visits from BT staff who have finally decided that the only solution was to re-route the wires from the illegally laid pipe into the pipes on the other side of the road, which had also been cleared for the provision of the fibre optic cable. They would then have to find a way of stabilising the landslip which they started. At least if the pipe no longer fed any wires to Ansty it could be sealed off and there should be no future problem. However, no work has been done on this. They had previously investigated the possibility of buying a wayleave from the manor in order to keep the pipe there, but decided that that would only lead to future problems. The

suggestion was that when they did the work there would have to be temporary traffic lights and single traffic on that stretch of road.

Absty telephone lines remain verly unreliable. At least one phone line was cut off for the ten days leading up to Christmas, and others for varying periods. Others have very poor connections. The PC has since met our local MP, Dr Murrison. We have informed BT of this. We are hopeful now that exerting more pressure, with the assistance of Mr Morgan, and our MP that we may get somewhere.

The milestone

The milestone nearly opposite the 'pick your own' farm shop on the verge of the A30 is one of a series between Salisbury and Shaftsbury. They are all Grade II listed monuments and have been identified as being the responsibility of the council, in whose verge they sit, for their protection and upkeep. They seem to be unaware that they were Grade II listed monuments. However, this has been made clear to them and the Conservation Officers in Salisbury, and Trowbridge have confirmed this. Currently the council, to whom we pay considerable Tax, seems to keep asking local people to take on council tasks. They suggested that a villager could take the milestone under their wing.

The first damage was done to it in the winter of 2014/2015 when Highways grass cutters cut a horrid gash into it, defacing some of the lettering. After this the PC pursued Highways staff to explain this, and asked them how they were going to protect it in the future. This coincided with the council dropping grass cutting annually from twice to once, so the possibility keeping the foliage low and the milestone evident to any grass cutters later doing the whole verge seemed to Wilton workers the way forward. They indented to always keep the grass cut around the milestone prior to any full future grass cutting so the milestone should be evident. The milestone and its lettering was damaged again this autumn.

The PC wrote to the Conservation Office at Trowbridge. The Salisbury Officer started trying to get Wilts to carry out their duty of care to the milestone. It was pointed out to them that villagers are not allowed to cut grass on a verge unless we have permission from Trowbridge to do it outside our own properties. As there are no houses near the milestone it was pointed out to council workers and the local and Trowbridge Conservation Officers nobody else could look after that verge and it would be illegal without council's permission. They kept giving helpful advice about the Milestone Society etc. but did not offer to do any of the work themselves, which is considerable if asking for grants etc.

So a Grade II listed monument is supposed to be looked after by the council and they don't prioritise it sufficiently to have any funds for it or systems in place to protect it. Peter Dalton offered at his own cost to carefully dig out the stone, put a rocky

foundation under it and replace it in on that spot, which shows the number of miles to Salisbury and Shaftesbury. Since a lot of the stone is currently underground, it will become more evident when grass cutting, parking or other activities occur. We thought that the council would jump at the chance of getting rid of their own responsibility. However, they wrote back saying that people could not work on the verges without their permission and they could only use their discretion if they felt everything would be safe and suitable, they would have to check for services first in the vicinity, but then insisted it had to be done by hand; on a Sunday morning, and with PC insurance. I think the Conservation Officer was at this point surprised. I persuaded her to write again saying that, the farmer could comply with all demands and could they therefore give agreement to this process. A week passed before they agreed we could go ahead. Now the stone is handsomely upright and obvious to all comers. Thank you Peter Dalton.

The village website

As villagers may recall earlier this year, all PCs were informed of a new national requirement, which had been placed on them, for a 'transparency code'. This requires all parish councils of any size to make available to anyone in the world, all the documentation that a parish council would have responsibility for. This would include notices about PC meetings, agendas, minutes, items like paying for and achieving third party insurance within the village, and also decisions about precepts, auditing statements, and all such matters.

Previously any parishioner had the right to ask a parish clerk to show any documents they wanted to read and they would be given a time to go and look at them. However, the new transparency edict required that every village had to have a website on which all this information was posted.

Small villages such as Ansty with relatively few facilities did not need websites up to this point. To set up a website for a small village has the same cost implications as for a large one but is based on lower sums being obtained by the smaller population through the precept. The Chairman initially asked officers in Trowbridge and the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils and said surely there must, if the government is insisting on this, either be a government grant or a requirement on Wiltshire to make available part of their own website for any PCs wanted to have a location there, or indeed to pay a grant for small councils to set up such a site.

WALC kept in touch but said, although they had tried to set up a grant system, nothing had been forthcoming but they were hopeful. Eventually in the autumn it was announced that there was a grant option which allowed PCs get a design and annual hosting arrangement, and also for training for parish clerk to learn how to manage the website, upload materials, etc. and also to buy a small printer/scanner which would assist in this whole process. The form was not easy to complete online. At last it was

done and sent in, and at the end of November we finally got the notice from WALC that we had a small grant for Ansty of £430. I was able to go back to the company that I had asked to set this up. However, before Christmas, when I wanted to do this, I found them completely inaccessible; it seemed they had gone out of business.

I had to find another provider, which I did through my CPRE connections. We now have a website set up. It has been far more work to do it than I ever wanted, but we now can post all our documents. I am not proposing historically to go back and find all the original ones. The archive starts now. We can let parishioners advertise free on that site if they want it, and the church is able to put its own notices, messages and information about general availability of services also on there.

About one-sixth of the village, are either not on the internet or I have never had information about their internet connectivity. For the time being we will put messages and notices on the notice board. It is envisaged by the government that everyone will eventually be online and apparently there is a plan to amend the legal requirement to put things on a notice board.

Traffic problems in Ansty.

We have asked for repeat of metro count data on traffic in the High St

I have also sent a general request for highways help for traffic problems through the village to Miss Wharton at Wilton. She met me on site to consider the problems on the 11th March. I showed her all the problems and she will contact me after Easter with some proposals.

Footpaths is our success story

Rob Wilkinson and Tim Martin have continued their very competent work on styles and footpaths and have really shown the rest of Wiltshire the way forward.

Summary

These have been the main activities and outcomes, apart from general response to planning applications. The councillors have now all taken on some specific duties and these are indicated on the website.

Dr Margaret Thompson
Chair of Ansty Parish Council

26-03-2016