



Droxford Parish Council strives to improve those areas of the village within its ownership, aiming to provide a high standard of facilities for both residents and visitors whilst respecting and maintaining the beautiful rural setting. It is evident that community pride in the village and cross-community involvement in village life has increased in recent years. Whilst a number of clubs and organisations have been embedded for decades, the post-pandemic lifting of constraints appears to have unlocked a stronger sense of belonging, sparking a number of new ventures which support both those within the community and further afield. The Parish Council and other organisations within the village frequently work together with a joined-up approach to the encouragement of village life. When considering whether Droxford merits entry for consideration of the Village of the Year 2023, it is evident that there is much to celebrate with regard to this relatively small community of approximately 700 residents. This is best illustrated by outlining both long-standing community activities and those that have been initiated within the past year.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES:

The Country Fair has been a fixed event in the summer calendar for 70 years and the surplus raised provides grants for a variety of community projects across all age groups.

Wilfrid's café is a volunteer-run asset to both the community and visitors within the South Downs National Park. Open 5 days a week, high quality refreshments are available to walkers and a number of community-based activities are held to support specific groups within the community (eg the elderly, mothers and toddlers). As a Community Interest Company, all surplus funds after accounting for overheads are ploughed back into the community.

The third bi-annual Scarecrow Festival was held in September 2022 and ended with a community picnic at the Recreation Ground. Funds were raised which were used to host a Christmas Party in the Village Hall for local children, a much-needed way of encouraging children to socialise in the wake of the devastating impact of Covid on the mental health of younger generations.

A Christmas Market is held annually in the Village Hall, showcasing locally produced crafts. This has proved so successful that an inaugural Maker's Market is scheduled in July with an impressive number of local producers.

A successful sale of second-hand books took place shortly after the ending of Covid restrictions and is now a regular occurrence, raising funds to support the Village Hall and contributing to the circular economy.

The bells of St Mary & All Saints Church were largely silent for many years for lack of local bellringers. In the past year, a number of residents have taken up bellringing and joined the nationwide initiative to "Ring for the King" for the Coronation. The band of enthusiasts now regularly ring for services and practices, thereby bringing this centuries old pursuit back to life within the village.

A 'Street Party' was held in May to mark the occasion of the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles. It was organised by volunteers and attended by approximately 250 residents.

The Parish Council collaborated with both Wilfrid's and the Country Fair committee to commission a special commemorative Coronation coin, distributed as a gift to all under 18s in the village and offered for sale to adults.

CLUBS, ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIETIES:

Scouting – Droxford Scouts have met in Droxford Scout Hut for over 100 years and the Scouting Association remains vibrant.

Droxford History Group meets regularly and speakers provide a focus on the rich local history.

The Droxford and District Branch of the Royal British Legion pre-dates the founding of the wider RBL and celebrated its centenary in 2020. It has an annual programme of high quality speakers and provides appropriate welfare support locally.

Droxford Cricket Club plays weekly during the summer months with home matches at the Parish Council owned Recreation Ground.

The Meon Valley Garden Club rotates its meetings and plant sales between Droxford and other local villages.

A newly invigorated Neighbourhood Watch organisation was established in 2019 and provides an excellent service in alerting residents to potential crimes, scams and issues that may affect their safety.

The Parish Council rents land from a local farmer which is divided into allotments for use by residents. The Allotment Association support both the pre-school and Droxford Junior School through assistance with their plots, thereby encouraging young green fingers and assisting in their education regarding growing food and the natural environment. The Allotment Association also lend their expertise to the Parish Council in the provision of volunteer labour for regular planting and maintenance of the Parish Council run cemetery.

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS:

The Parish Council organises twice yearly litter-picks in and around the village. This is increasingly well supported and in addition, a number of residents now collect litter throughout the year.

The Parish Council undertook works to improve the cemetery and its environs, including an informal planting scheme. As a result, an area that formerly had only a utilitarian purpose sits attractively in its rural setting and volunteers now assist in maintaining the attractive planting. A number of the volunteers are allotment holders who further also support the school and pre-school by lending their expertise to their allotments, thereby encouraging young green fingers within the community.

The Parish Council bought the telephone box in the centre of the village some years ago. With voluntary assistance, it has been transformed into a Book Swap and is widely used by residents and visitors and is decorated for special occasions.

The Parish Council has had a programme of capital projects over the past 5 years. The largest of these was the re-surfacing of The Square which lies at the heart of the village. The resulting parking area is evenly surfaced and more in keeping with the rural surroundings, with essential infrastructure for EV charging points when demand is deemed sufficient. The area between The Square and the Church was re-purposed from a neglected, partially grassed space to a Garden of Reflection in which the Second World War memorial to the village's fallen has been re-sited, along with a quiet seating area and flower bed surround. This vast visual improvement has not only attracted much favourable comment from locals and visitors, but has also harnessed the support of volunteers who have carried out regular weeding of the area.

The Rector of St Mary & All Saints Church, Droxford left the parish in the autumn of last year without replacement. This has resulted in a reduction in formal, clergy-led services but local volunteers have organised a monthly All Age Service for and supported by, the community. Regular volunteer groups many of whom are not

regular churchgoers also give freely of their time to assist in maintaining the churchyard.

The Village Hall is run by a committee of volunteers who organise a variety of activities ranging from monthly film nights to an extremely popular annual quiz evening. The Hall is also regularly hired out for parties, exercise classes and many other village activities.

The churchyard is maintained by volunteers, many of whom are not churchgoers but are willing to contribute to ensuring that this ancient rural churchyard that has been central to village life since Norman times continues to be a community focal point.

Residents of the wider Meon Valley assist in the running of the Meon Valley Community Bus and Community Care Group enabling those without transport to travel to shops, hospital appointments etc.

A WhatsApp group was set up in March 2020 to enable the provision of community support in the face of unprecedented disruption to normal life. Initially it assisted primarily the elderly and vulnerable to buy food, obtain essential prescription etc but it has since remained vibrant as a source of information and help. The group is particularly adept at alerting eagle-eyed residents to the loss of a cat or dog, many of which have been located and swiftly returned to their relieved owners.

The WhatsApp group also generated a number of spin-offs as common interests were discovered in activities as diverse as running, a book club and a conservation group.

Many individuals quietly conduct voluntary tasks for the benefit of residents and visitors; these range from ensuring that the bus shelter is adorned with seasonal flowers and poppies for Remembrance Sunday, a 'pick, stick and lick' station for dogs on a footpath, a proposal to encourage rock painting and photo competition for children over the school holidays and countless other initiatives.

ENVIRONMENT:

The Parish Council recognises the need for action to address the effects of climate change and in order to harness community concern and expertise, held a Climate Café in January of this year. As a result, a group of volunteers has formed "Sustainable Droxford" with a remit to examine potential measures that may be adopted locally to combat climate change.

Various initiatives to contribute to the circular economy have taken place this year including toy swaps and a table top sale.

The Country Fair committee provided a tree to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II as part of the Queen's Green Canopy and this now adorns the Village Green as a permanent reminder of Her Majesty's long reign.

SUMMARY

A settlement has existed in Droxford since Saxon times and its proud history is well documented. Droxford today is far more than a collection of buildings that have arisen over the centuries. The number and variety of the range of activities that take place are possibly disproportionately large for the size of the population. The concept of community can be nebulous, but it is clear that Droxford has a thriving, supportive, inclusive and outward-looking community, deserving of recognition as a true Hampshire gem.