

Report from the Chair

Well, what a baptism of fire it has been since becoming a Trustee in September 2018. It's no exaggeration to state that the amount of hours put in, initially with Sheila and myself and then those that were co-opted in recent months is fast approaching a full time job. Often some Plot-Owners forget we are volunteers. It is fortunate that all of the current Trustees are retired and thus have hours to spare.

As you will be aware shortly after I became a Trustee our Chairman at the time Paul German resigned in March due to behaviour of some residents who made life very difficult for all the Trustees at the time. This was quickly followed by the resignation of Andrew Bryson in the same month which meant that we were left with no experienced Trustees to guide us.

The issue of the Trees on DPWW took up an enormous amount of our time for what was essentially a neighbour's dispute. In the end we negotiated with the Plot-Owner concerned to withdraw their threat of court action. We would much have preferred if the people involved had chosen to come and speak to us directly with their concerns and questions which sadly they decided not to. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to say to each and every one of you that the Trustees will always have an open door for you to come and discuss any issue you may wish to share. Simply request an appointment with a time and date and I feel sure at least one Trustee would make themselves available.

During the tree issue we discovered that there were areas of the Park where we do not own the land as, according to the Land Registry it belongs to the estate's developers. Steve Parsons has done an enormous amount of work liaising with the owners of these parcels of land (Wainhomes) who have now agreed to sell these areas to us for a nominal fee. It will still be a long process before the sale finally goes through. So the Trustees would like to take the opportunity to say thank you Steve for all your hard work and efforts in this matter.

Speaking of amenity land. We would like to say thank you to Steve Parsons, Paul Mathews and John Bickley who formed the amenity lands steering group after the 2018 SGM. They have been working very closely with the estate manager and gardeners agreeing a monthly schedule which is now going to be a weekly one and I am sure you will agree they have helped and guided them well leading to a much improved look to the Park.

Just when we thought the problem of the trees had been resolved another issue appeared. Information containing photographs was sent from the group who opposed the removal of the trees. This led to a GDPR complaint being made to the Information Commissioner's Office where once again we had to spend a great deal of time investigating exactly what had happened and supplying information. The ICO ruled that there had been a breach of personal data by DPML staff but thankfully they took no further action and there was no fine imposed on us which of course would have come out of your contributions.

At the last OGM a resolution was passed seeking clarity on how community groups operated with specific concern to DPML's mutual trading status. From this the Trustees established a working party to conduct an in-depth review of mutual trading and how it impacts DPML and the community groups.

The review highlighted that the Inland Revenue first recognised DPML as a mutual trading entity in 1988, granting significant tax relief benefits for DPML (exemption from corporation tax on trading profits from all Plot-Owners). This tax concession has continued ever since. The in-depth investigation established the precise magnitude of the financial benefit over recent years and studied over 25 current HMRC Income Business Manuals and Compliance Handbooks related to mutual trading. Numerous tax specialists were contacted including Deloitte, together with a tax partner who

was an ex-HMRC tax inspector with over 35 years experience. The review also considered specialist tax advice from Grant Thornton UK LLP that had been presented to DPML in an earlier assessment. From this body of information the Trustees unanimously concluded that in line with previous trustee decisions, mutual trading is still the best model for Delamere Park going forward and all attempts should be made to preserve its integrity.

This was followed by a review of how all community groups operate and a new Community Group Framework was created ensuring it was fully compliant with current mutual trading guidelines and will be finalized in October.

I and my fellow Trustees would like to thank Tony Landells, Frank Stewart, Keith Glover and Paul Rogers who have done such excellent work investigating and making proposals on the working of the Community Groups going forward.

You will be aware that our Estate Manager (EM) resigned in July. Unfortunately, as he gave very little notice and took most of that as holiday, we had no handover which has made life very difficult for the Trustees, especially as we prepare for the forthcoming OGM. Then to add to our difficulties our administration (finance) person also went off on sick leave, so we ask you to be patient with the Trustees and the office/reception staff as we also have two reception staff off sick. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the office/reception staff for being so flexible and working all the extra hours they have to cover what was required.

The resignation of the EM has given us the opportunity to take a fresh look at the requirements of the office and the role of the EM the results of which will be notified to Plot-Owners in due course.

One piece of very good news is that DPML now has a bus service again, serving both Northwich and Frodsham. The Trustees would like to thank all those involved for their hard work over many months to negotiate this service.

Lastly I would like to take the opportunity to say thank you to our three co-opted Trustees who have joined at very difficult times but who have worked so incredibly hard and given so much of their time to try and resolve various issue and to produce the information contained for our OGM. Not forgetting Sheila who has worked incredible hard and like myself has had a baptism of fire this last year.

We have gelled very quickly as a team. I am sure I do not have to highlight how important continuity is to any business but especially one as small and unique as DPML. Fortunately the three co-opted trustees have put themselves up for election so there's an opportunity for DPML to have consistency of governance and stability over the next twelve months at least. We have not delivered on the communications such as minutes of meetings as promised because it has been difficult to determine what to report as things have moved so fast. However, we will endeavour to report as things move forward. Finally, it's very important that we all remember why we moved here and do everything we can to encourage good neighbourliness and work together in the common interest of the Park. The trustees give you their word that they will do so.

Mary Long Trustee
August 2019