

Statement from the Parish Council on Website Accessibility

From September of next year new Government Data Service rules come into force seeking to ensure that people with disabilities can fully access online public services. All public bodies, regardless of size and services offered, will have to comply with the new “Website Accessibility Regulations” unless it can be demonstrated that implementing the new regulations represents a disproportionate burden on the public body in question.

Dunkerton & Tunley Parish Council has considered how it should respond to the introduction of the new rules. While the parish council understands and fully supports the intention behind them, we believe that complying with these new regulations would be a disproportionate burden on the parish council. The parish council is therefore not planning to amend the current parish website or Facebook page.

We plan to take no action for the following reasons:

- The parish council doesn't provide any online services.
- The parish website was developed with some external help using voluntary community-based expertise funded by grants. All updates to the site are done in-house. It uses a popular tool called Wordpress: we have not created some strange, awkward thing only used in this parish. We should not expect to find accessibility issues that have not previously been resolved over many years of widespread use of the Wordpress tool.
- Government advice is that smaller public bodies should complete a “Basic Accessibility Check”. That sounds helpful. However, here is an example of such a “Basic” requirement, copied from the www.gov.uk website (and note this is just one part, within one stage, of a 7 stage “Basic” check):

“The way a [website] page looks is controlled by something called a ‘stylesheet’. It defines things like the way a page is laid out and any font colours. Your content should still be usable even if stylesheets are disabled, or are not loading properly.....you’ll need to check your sample pages are still usable when stylesheets are disabled. Test this by copying a URL from your website and pasting it into the [WAVE tool](#). Once you’ve done that, select ‘no styles’ from the panel on the left-hand side of the tool. This should give you a much more basic view of the page.”

The parish council’s conclusion is that neither the Clerk nor any of the Councillors has the technical expertise to implement such guidance with any degree of confidence. Even less does any one of us have the spare time to complete all 7 stages of the “Basic” check for every page of the website.

- Therefore the parish council would have to employ an external supplier to undertake this work. As we don't have any budget for such work we would, next year, have to increase the precept (ie the local element of your Council Tax bill) above and beyond the normal yearly inflation increase to fund it. This is assuming that we could find a supplier willing to help; we have already been told that some local councils have been ditched by their website provider in light of these new regulations! As we raised the precept this year to fund

additional work associated with the protection of rural bus services, we do not believe we should now ask for yet more funding to pay for consultancy work of unproven real value to parishioners.

- The parish council is happy to provide the information posted on the parish website in an alternative format at a reasonable cost to any parishioner who suffers difficulty accessing it through the website.

All that being said, if anyone, either on their part or on behalf of any parishioner who may suffer accessibility issues, believes we should be doing more they should in the first instance contact the clerk or the chairman (contact details below) to register their concern.

Additionally, if we have a resident specialist in the parish prepared to carry out the “Basic Accessibility Check” for us on a voluntary basis then please contact us. We would be very pleased to hear from you.

In this as in many other matters, the parish council is working with the Avon Local Councils Association (ALCA) to seek the advice and guidance of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) about how Government regulations are best implemented. This ensures consistency of approach across the region and the country. In this particular instance, we are expecting further detailed advice, hopefully before the end of the year. If that advice when it arrives materially affects the potential burden on the parish council, either for better or worse, we will review and update this statement.

David Orme, Chairman Dunkerton & Tunley Parish Council

Kathryn Manchee, Clerk to the Council