

A reflection on one year since election to the Castel Douzaine Jo May

It's hard to believe it is a year ago I was puzzling over whether or not now was the right time to stand for the Castel Douzaine. I'd been interested in standing since someone suggested it to me many years ago, it was just a matter of timing. After much pondering I still wasn't convinced the time was right but, I went for it anyway and am very glad I did. As we hurtle towards the 2022 Douzaine elections, if you are toying over whether to stand, I hope this whistle stop tour of my first year helps. It is based on my experience in the Castel, other parishes may vary in their processes but, I hope this is of some help to all.

The parish elections happen at the beginning of November each year, at the parish meeting. I had been to some previous parish meetings to see how it all worked, it's all quick and painless really. Whilst helping out at the parish polling station at the 2020 general election, I had spoken with Mickey Fooks, the then Dean of the Douzaine, about my desire to stand. Mickey was very encouraging however, I decided to wait another year. Mickey stayed in touch though and, made sure I had a nomination form for the 2021 election. This really helped me because, one of the things making me hesitate was 'what sort of welcome would I get? This team was established, they had mostly worked together for sometime on the Douzaine and, probably knew each other very well prior to that. I wasn't wrong on any count but, I had the warmest of welcomes (I'll expand on this as I go).

Unfortunately for democracy it was not a contested election, there were three Douzeniers up for re-election and, two (Mickey and John Webster) were standing down. The remaining Douzenier up for re-election re-stood and, both the now late capt. Barry Paint and myself stood for the remaining two places. Barry of course, had served on the Douzaine before and, was very helpful in showing me the ropes over the next few months until his passing.

At the parish meeting, I decided to run with a speech I had prepared in case of a contested election, I did however adapt it from a sales pitch to, something that would (hopefully) help the existing Douzeniers and, those Parishioners at the meeting that did not know me, to get to know a bit about me. I was as nervous speaking then as I would have been, if I was delivering the speech to appeal for votes. Again, I now know there was no need to be so nervous, as the meeting closed the existing Douzeniers present all came over to welcome me and, this is where it became apparent they were as pleased about 'new blood' joining, as I was about joining. In the following days I received a welcome from the office and, an invite to coffee from the Senior Constable. The office also let me know what would happen next. The appointment was of course effected from 1st January 2022.

I did also receive an invite to go up to the office for a photo and, that was the photo which was used on social media, to confirm my election.

Next step was an invite from the Law Officers of the Crown to the Royal Court, to be sworn in. I was offered the options of 'swearing an oath' or, make a non-religious affirmation. I chose the former, which was a few words pledging to conduct myself appropriately whilst in office. I received a few encouraging words from the Bailiff, who also thanked me/us for standing. Sadly due to high Covid figures at this time, this was not the ceremony I understand it usually is, I was not allowed to bring anyone along and, each parish was called separately. Fingers crossed, this year it will be back to usual and, I for one will be there watching as new Douzeniers are sworn in.

With that formality completed, I was invited to the December meeting as an observer. This was really useful, not only in getting a preview of what was on the agenda but, it also helped me to start to consider what committees I would like to get involved with.

The Douzaine meet on the last Monday of each month, so the first meeting I attended as a Douzenier was at the end of January 2022. The committee 'elections' were held at this meeting. Prior to the meeting a list of the vacancies had been sent, so essentially this just involves 'plugging' those gaps. I walked out of that meeting on the Liberation Day committee and, the Castel coastal committee. The parish is split into 6 cantons and, there are 2 Douzeniers for each canton. I was allocated canton 3, a straight swap for my cousin John Webster who retired at the election. That's quite nice really and, it certainly pleased Mum. With regard to the committee, I was very happy with the Castel Coastal committee, less so with Liberation Day but, happy to accept my 'fate' as the new girl. I said I would roll my sleeves up and do whatever was asked of me, so it was all very positive from my perspective. I was also handed my badge and, very importantly my fluorescent jacket (just incase I fall under any hedges when inspecting them).

The February meeting saw business as usual and, our formal photos. We new Douzeniers had our photos done and, then there was the group photo that now hangs in the Douzaine room.

Work on the organisation of our parish Liberation Day event took off very quickly and, for my first few months it really dominated what I was doing. That said, the Castel Coastal Committee met in the early days and, agreed what we wanted to do. That is of course out in the public domaine now and, is the 'Castel coastal vision'. As soon as the Castel Liberation Day celebration was delivered, the coastal work really took off, so there's been 'no rest for the wicked' in my first few months. Then of course there was the job the Parishes are known for 'hedge and stream inspections'. Getting to meet some of the parishoners in my canton was a real highlight for me. My colleague John (Cook) and, I managed to choose the hottest day in June to do our inspections. There was a well deserved G&T when I got home at the end of that day, I will remember to have my bathers on me next year! As I write we have selected the date to do our September inspections.....lets hope the weather plays ball this time but, whatever the weather, I look forward to meeting more Parishoners en route.

Those are just the main roles I have been taking on. There's also been a lot of debate around the table on various parish matters, plus plenty of interaction with various States committees/departments as we try our best to service our community and, keep our parish looking beautiful.

I am often asked what drove me to stand and, it was wanting to serve my community and, make a difference in the parish which I love living in. In my case it is not a stepping stone to standing in the general election albeit, for some it could be a great stepping stone. It gives you great experience of debating, working with various states committees/departments and, generally working within rules and traditions. I got involved in a discussion on twitter recently and, the conclusion was, it is a great foundation/very valuable to the person preparing themselves for political life but, with parish elections consigned to history, it is unlikely electors in the general election will place much value on someone having served within their parish.

So to conclude, I would say to anyone considering standing do it, I don't think you will regret it. The skills required for the 'job' are a love for the parish, the ability to work in a team and, the ability to be respectful of other views. I am very happy to speak to anyone who is considering standing (especially in the Castel) to speak about my experience. This will of course vary from Douzaine to Douzaine, as things can be done differently depending on the parish. Certainly what I have experienced at Castel is a very welcoming, friendly and hard working team. I have no regrets. It is a steep learning curve but, I have excellent mentors & guidance.

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