

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: April 2008

Footsteps in the Snow

The daffodils do not share the scepticism about Global Warming of those who experienced the glorious summers of the 1930s or remember their parents' accounts of the weather before WW1; out came the flowers in an unusually chilly March, only to find themselves clobbered with settling snow in April. The Powers the Be, from Presidents of mighty nations to Chairmen of (other) Parish Councils have found a Great Cause to feel good about as they go on and on about *Carbon Footprints* - that increasingly noisy buzz-phrase. The postman groans under the weight of consultations, exhortations and conference agendas implying that we all have an inescapable responsibility for the future of the planet, and that we should be hugely grateful for Tesco's promise to power the lights which threaten to extinguish the stars in our night sky by burning woodchips in a furnace with a chimney as high as Big Ben. Meanwhile, on the heels of the daffodils, cherries, plums and pears are busy blossoming too; but unless this part of the globe warms up soon, the bees will stay in their cosy hives so there won't be any fruit at the end of the summer (if there is a summer).

So Parish Councillors nationwide are racking their brains to think of ways of reducing carbon emissions from ancient cottages, whose builders knew a thing or two about the insulating qualities of thick cob walls, thatched roofs and wood-burning fires. Some are contemplating measures to limit the use of petrol-driven mowers, some are running publicity campaigns showing the massive impact of turning down a thermostat by one degree Celsius; some are urging the use of wind-turbines, while others are energetically resisting them as painful sore thumbs. For your own Parish Council the most interesting aspect of the problem (if there really is a problem) has implications for health, and indeed safety, and involves the familiar topic of traffic. The starting-point for their deliberations arises from a survey showing how things have changed from "Lark Rise" days, when everyone, staff included, walked to school. Now 85% of pupils and 76% of staff come to our school in carbon-emitting cars. That really is something to think about.

Expenses.

The news media are having a great time digging up examples of the amazing sums of money which MPs can claim for anything from air-tickets to Agas, and are deeply critical of attempts, by the Speaker no less, to exempt himself and his colleagues from the Freedom of Information Act. Rest assured that the rules which apply to local government offer no such exemptions, and everything that a Parish Council says, does, writes or spends is available for public scrutiny. The spending bit, in particular, is as *transparent (buzz)* as the glasses at the Eagle. Apart from the presentation of the accounts at the Annual Parish Assembly, each Council meeting looks at a monthly statement, and authorises every individual payment, for which two signatures are required for each cheque; then the books have to go through three levels of audit: first there is an independent internal review of the effectiveness of the system, then come several coffee-mugs worth of an external audit in Winchester, and finally the remaining boxes are ticked by the District Auditor for Hampshire whose office, mysteriously, is 150 miles away in Plymouth. So, if you add in the Freedom of Information Act, there is no shortage of belts and braces.

Actually, it was well into the 20th Century that salaries for MPs, let alone expenses, were introduced. It was assumed that they had other means of support, and they had plenty of time to pursue other careers because parliamentary business was only conducted in the late afternoons and evenings. This assumption still applies to your local Borough and Parish Councillors, who are, of course, all unpaid; provision for about £200 worth of expenses is made in the Parish Budget, but an examination of the books will reveal that the amount claimed in 2007-8 was exactly £0.00.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING: 3RD April 2008

Planning

The Council takes its work on Planning very seriously, because the *Built Environment (Buzz)* is so dangerously permanent, whether in terms of the loss or spoiling of an old property or the imposition of an unsuitable new dwelling. Sometimes it involved the tenacity of a terrier on the trail of a rabbit. For instance, since December 2006, the purchaser of Nos 33 and 34 Andover Road, at the Monxton end of Cattle Lane, a Mr. M. Saunders has been seeking permission to build something new there, and the Council has had to consider a series of no less than five applications. They started with a startlingly modern eco-house, with a curved metal roof and timber cladding; everybody thought this was a fascinating design if only it were put somewhere else. Apart from being completely out of character with its surroundings, it also conflicted with our long-standing policy that all houses in Little Park should be basically of single-storey design, meaning that the eaves should not be higher than the tops of the ground-floor windows. Test Valley planners backed us up, so there followed successive modifications to the design; each time the building looked a bit more like what we are used to, but still too tall, and the designers were asked to return to the drawing-board. At last, this month, they came to the meeting and presented not one, but two houses which Councillors liked very much, especially as they fell within the definition of single-storey dwellings; so, with a few misgivings about the fact that the houses will be identical twins, it was resolved to lodge No Objection. So some you win...

Meanwhile conservatory manufacturers continue to thrive, as three more of these elegant extensions were approved for sun-soaked Burghclere Down (turn left at the Hexagon Stores and then pick your way through a maze of floral addresses).

Burghclere Down

Cllr Graham Whyte, presiding as Vice-Chairman, and the Council were delighted to welcome Mr. Colin Teasdale, a Trustee of the Burghclere Down Community Centre, to the meeting and to hear about the Centre's activities. Though not a Residents' Association, the Centre's Hall clearly provides a focus for local people, and they produce a very lively magazine called *The Buzz*. It seems that most residents feel that they belong to Andover, but there is no movement in favour of separation from this Parish. As the Council is quite happy to go on indefinitely approving plans for conservatories, discussion about changing the Parish boundaries was postponed for another day.

Dogs

The topic of dog-problems was put on the Agenda by request, and it was, somewhat wearily, discussed yet again, with valuable contributions from the enthusiastic walker, Brigadier C. Burson. As before, Councillors remain unpersuaded of the value of installing more bins, on the very reasonable grounds that responsible dog-owners already remove the offending material, while clearly nothing will induce the minority of less responsible owners to use them. Bins, which have to be intrusive to be of any use, cost some £200 to install and about £140 each per year to service. It would cost a lot less to provide free scoops or plastic bags, but then the same arguments about responsible owners and others (see above) would apply. With this muck there is no magic, and the Council has no wand.

War Memorial Hall

Mr. Andrew Hayter and Mr. Paul Greenhalgh came along to report on the latest news about the Hall. It is clear that the heating system can no longer be patched up, so it must be replaced for a sum with quite a daunting number of noughts. This gave the Council a bit of a problem, as the Budget, which has to be set in November at the latest, does not include provision for this without digging into reserves; however, heartened by the fact that a new boiler would considerably diminish

the village's *carbon footprint (buzz)*, Councillors made encouraging noises, promised to look into sources of grants and hurried on to the next item, which was rather less expensive.

The Hall Committee was proposing to put a notice on the porch identifying the building as the Abbotts Ann War Memorial Hall so that people could know that they had arrived at the right place. Councillors thought that their sample notice was rather self-effacing, and suggested that, with a little help from their friends on the Council, the Hall Committee should come up with something more ambitious, not unlike the signs at the entrances to the village, to be planted close to the gate. After all, this is a hall to be proud of, so watch that space.

Minutes and Meetings.

The meeting covered many other topics, which can be read about in the Minutes; in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act these are available in the Village Shop, on the Website or from the Clerk.

In line with the Local Government Act of 1894 Council meetings are open to the public, who are welcome to contribute to discussions.

The next meeting will be on Thursday 1st May in the Jubilee Room of the War Memorial Hall.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk