

# *ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL*

## *Newsletter: April 2009*

**Westward Ho!** Apologies for the absence of a March Newsletter, but the Clerk missed the deadline for publication by taking a recuperative week off in a county to the west of here where the cider apples grow and the magistrates have no sense of humour. For it is in Devon that the diminutive lady Parish Clerk has just acquired a criminal record for the “assault” which was mentioned in the August Newsletter. You may remember that she was addressed, in language such as you never hear on East Enders, by a surly youth whom she had asked to stop messing up the flower-beds around the war memorial; she was provoked into responding with a biff with some rolled-up papers which happened to be the draft minutes of a meeting. Although her sentence was lenient, she is now a convict. Wasn't it a fact that until recently the offence was Assault and Battery, which implied that the assailant had caused some damage to the other party which would hurt rather more than some vigorous language or a roll of paper? And rather than pressing charges, should not the youth's parents have given him cause to reflect on his social skills?

Still, there's a lot to be said for Devon, with its absence of low-flying helicopters, megasheds or universal mobile-phone coverage, though it may be bad news for parish clerks that it has decided to become a unitary authority, thus abolishing District and Borough Councils. Never mind the vineyards, the quality of whose products is causing quite a lot of tooth-gnashing in Northern France; it is still better known for its orchards. A relatively new idea, which has caught on rapidly there, is the establishment of community orchards; a typical one would use some vacant land and be run by a village committee and tended by schoolchildren and volunteers; in the autumn there would be a pick-your-own season and/or the production of a local, and no doubt almost lethal, quantity of cider. Anyone thinking about an Abbots Ann Apple Association?

**The Changing Village.** With the welcome acquisition of an Honorary Archivist we are asking all residents with long memories to dig deep into them and be ready to make the results available to Tim Tayler on paper, tape, disc, pdf or whatever (though please not by telephone), so that the ways in which the village has changed, and the reasons why, may be traceable by future generations. Since change tends to happen gradually - a new house or two, a business moving here, a chapel closing, a shop opening there - we don't get carried away by drama; in time we get used to big developments like Hillside and forget what was there before. In the end even the Megashed might become part of a familiar landscape.

It isn't all that long ago when the majority of residents were connected directly or indirectly with agriculture, with farmyards in the middle of the village and sheep being driven along the Drove on the way to Weyhill. So their work was often well within walking distance from home and rarely in Andover or Basingstoke, let alone London. But we are fortunate, or sensible, in that we haven't turned into a commuters' dormitory or a retirement home, or suffered the fate of places not far to the west of here where up to half the properties are second homes, so that from October to April they are ghost-towns. The building of the new village school, which should start before the end of April, is a very encouraging sign that there are plenty of young people about. Nevertheless there are lots of gaps in the history of their village, so it is up to the older folk to fill them.

**SERFA and SDS.** Talking of older folk, here is a new acronym, which stands for South East Regional Forum on Ageing. This has started, we hear, a debate on how to shape a better future for older people and enable them to stay actively involved in their communities. Topics for debate include active citizenship, skills and employment, health, achieving engagement with older people (sounds like a pensioners' dating agency) and something called “active ageing”. What on earth does this mean? We are badgered by media pundits, plastic surgeons and purveyors of pills,

potions and diets wanting us to stay young, so this looks like a push in the opposite direction. Perhaps some silver surfer with time to spare could find out by visiting [www.gose.gov.uk/gose/publicHealth/improvement/701129/790925](http://www.gose.gov.uk/gose/publicHealth/improvement/701129/790925), and if in the process they discover who or what gose is or does could they kindly let the Clerk know?

As for SDS, this may or may not be relevant to active ageing. It stands for Self-Directed Support, but it surely can't mean a zimmer-frame or a walking stick; rather it seems to be a body responsible for meetings of the SDS Stakeholder Reference Group and asks any organisation wanting to know more about the *Personalisation Agenda* to get in touch. The Clerk is pretty sure what reaction he would get from Councillors if he put Personalisation on the Agenda of the next Council meeting.

### **A Family Record.**

April 10th was a sad day for the family of Vanessa Joy Curtis, who was laid to rest in the Garden of Remembrance. But what an amazing example of continuity in the village is shown by her family! Her grandmother, her mother, she herself and her daughter have all been dinner-ladies at the school. This is surely a part of village history which should not be forgotten.

### **Take Shelter**

And finally... One of the duties of Parish Councils is the provision of bus shelters, which don't come cheap. So when the firm of J.C.Decaux, a French firm, offered to provide a shelter free of charge provided they could display advertising on it, the Council at Nuneaton jumped at the offer and the smart metal-and-glass structure appeared in no time at the roadside, and has been scrupulously maintained by the firm for the last ten years. The only trouble is that there isn't, and there has never been, a bus-route along that road. They do things differently in France.

### **RECENT MEETINGS**

The Parish Council met on March 5<sup>th</sup> and April 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the Annual assembly was held on March 27<sup>th</sup>; details of all the proceedings are available in the Minutes. As always, the topics discussed reflect the rich tapestry of village life from small pot-holes to enormous warehouses.

**Our Local Environment.** The Parish has steadily supported the STOP the Megashed Campaign, particularly through the efforts of Abbotts Ann Action to show up the flaws in the handling of issues to do with landscaping, noise and light pollution and traffic control. Though unable to stop the application from going through, the campaigners have achieved a good deal of success in measures to mitigate these threats, to such an extent that the TESCO managers seem to be having doubts about the feasibility of running the show within the restrictions imposed. At any rate they have publicly severed any contractual links with Goodman, the developers, who (unless there is some cunning plan in the background) just might have got permission for something they can't sell.

Meanwhile our Borough Councillors, as mentioned before, have been doing sterling work in strengthening our defences against the possibility of Andover housing marching over Little Park towards Cattle Lane. And staying in that area, the good news is that the Planning Service has listened to the Parish Council's views that the design of new houses there should be rural rather than suburban and favour low rooflines, dormers and traditional materials.

To go from the vast to the tiny, it may be remembered that the Chairman has to be thanked for stopping moles from making their underground homes in the Churchyard. It is a little sad, therefore, that two of his traps have disappeared. Are we harbouring an underground cell of Animal Rights activists?

**Roads and Footpaths.** We have been very impressed by the speed at which Hampshire Highways have mended pot-holes and by the relative simplicity of the system for reporting these on the HCC ebsite. Reporting does not have to be left to the Parish Council, so please feel free to report them

directly by phone or via their user-friendly website. Likewise, the Borough reacted pleasingly swiftly, when reminded that the street-name signs at Abbotts Hill were well past their use-by date; bright new ones are in place complete with stout oak posts as requested. Keep an eye out for other improvements, including a replacement for the very shabby sign at the western end of Church Path (which, to be historically accurate, should be called Church Lane).

Unfortunately requests for other types of road maintenance, including unblocking gullies and reducing bone-shaking surfaces which threaten to dismantle any bicycles ridden, for instance, past the Old Rectory, seem to get stuck in an in-tray (or Inbox?); it took several reminders before the raised kerbstone outside the Eagle was rendered safe, and we are still waiting for the levelling of another one outside the village, shop, which has already caused an injured ankle. The County is also strictly responsible for footpaths, but staffing levels at the relevant department at HCC seem to have been credit-crunched years ago, so it is a case of DIY if a finger-post needs first aid.

Still on the subject of footpaths, complaints about dog-fouling have greatly diminished, which indicates an encouraging level of responsibility among dog-walkers. In trying to finalise the long-running discussions about dog-bins, the Clerk researched the cost of having them emptied by the Borough. As a result, the Councillors decided that they could not justify taking the cost out of the precept, which would amount to taxing all parishioners, whether dog-owners or not, for the misdemeanours of a small, and hopefully shrinking, number of less-responsible dogs or their owners.

We are still hoping to be able to implement measures for cutting down the speed of vehicles, but our efforts to acquire the signs which light up to show your speed seem to have slowed down to a halt. The Council is still trying to make progress, and will also be following up suggestions at the Assembly for more speed-reduction by putting in place a “20 is Plenty” scheme, although this is not part of legislation and is therefore greeted with muted enthusiasm by the Police.

**Greenery.** What with *Sustainability*, *Bio-diversity*, *Proactive Ecology* and so on, we can hardly be unaware of the so-called Green issues, and indeed we are actively participating in the promotion, as Jo Dixon told you last month, of the Test Villages Energy Initiative. Meanwhile it is great news that the work on the new Village School is about to start on an airy site, surrounded by greenery instead of jammed in the middle of the village. It will have its own playing-field up there, so it will not need the acre or three of green enclosed by Manor Close and Timothy’s Field and owned by the County Council. At their recent meeting, the Parish Councillors had a look at a century-old map, which showed this area as a farmer’s field, though not apparently an orchard, but with a substantial strip of allotments along one side, some of which many of us remember. H’m... Food for thought, or thought for food? Watch this space.

**Other Business.** “Shabby” is a word which the Council does not want to be applied to anything in Abbotts Ann, hence the nagging about street-name signs, road surfaces, hedges, verges, litter etc. So the Council is working, for instance, on tidy replacements for the fence at the War Memorial Hall, and the “No Cycling” sign on Church Path, while the Chairman has seen to the restoration of the inscription over the west door of the War Memorial Hall.

In line with this policy, the Council will be running a Clean-up day on May 10<sup>th</sup>. Volunteers should meet at the War Memorial Hall at 2 p.m. Strong gloves advised.

An unusual item came up this time, when the Council noted the unexpected appearance of a zebra crossing in Duck Street, appropriately close to where a safari-style Land Rover is often parked. In the course of animated discussion it was established that its creation could be authentically dated to 1<sup>st</sup> April.

**Meetings.** Minutes of the Meetings of March 5<sup>th</sup> and April 2<sup>nd</sup>, plus those of the Assembly on March 27<sup>th</sup>, are available as usual. The next meeting, in the Jubilee Room on May 7<sup>th</sup>, will be the AGM of the Council and will start at the new time of 6.30 p.m.

*Adrian Stokes, Clerk*